

A feminist perspective on
domestic violence, bodies, and
battered women's coping
strategies in Mauritius.

Abuse and suffering

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Prologue and acknowledgements

I believe any anthropologist who recounts his or her stories from the field will agree with me if I describe the fieldwork situation as ever so joyful, but also frightening and lonely at times. Even though fieldwork might leave us awe stricken and numb in different corners of the world, we still need to try to grasp the routines of reality which takes place in front of our eyes, despite that we all know how others might feel us intruding or imposing. Still, I believe it is primarily when we try to *transform* the richness of human life and thoughts, waving sugar cane fields and corrugated tin shacks, the smell of sweet vanilla tea and the burning sensation of fresh and hot squeezed green chilli into a sterile, computerised language which knows no colours, no smells and no emotions, that most difficulties are encountered. The conversion of the empirical field into a written text can necessarily only give a glimpse of a 'world' that in all its complexities has become so dear, and so much a part of ourselves that even such a small peek by outsiders might feel as a betrayal upon those narratives which have been trusted in our care. We know we will never be able to do justice to those individuals who have opened up their hearts and their homes to us for the duration of our brief visits. At best we can try. To recognise and express my sincere gratitude to all of those who has made this dissertation a reality is thus a humble attempt.

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Textual expedients

- All direct quotations which consist of *more than three lines*, whether from academic- or fictional literature, from field notes or from citations from informants, are written “*in double quotation marks, own paragraphs, language size ten and cursive*”.
- All quotations which are *less than three lines* are also written “*in double quotation marks, language size ten and cursive, but are implemented in the text rather than being own paragraphs*”.
- The use of *cursive* on words which are integrated in the text are done so in order to give *emphasis* to the word.
- Specific expressions and terms which stem from various books and articles by particular authors referred to throughout the text are all written in “double quotation marks” *the first time they are put to use*. “Book-and article titles” from which the expressions or terms have their origin are also written in “double quotation marks”.
- Expressions used in empirical examples, hence terms which have clearly identifiable sources, and are utilised in discussions in the text later, are also marked by “double quotation marks”.
- ‘Single quotation marks’ on the other hand, are put to use when both the source- and the meaning of the expression or term, is disputable.

Abbreviations

CEDAW	The United Nation’s Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women
CWPU	Children and Women Protection Unit
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
LP	Labour Party
MLF	Muvman Liberasyon Fam
MMM	Mouvemant Militant Mauricien
MR	Muvman Républicain
MWRCDFW	Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PM	Parti Mauricien
PSM	Parti Socialiste Mauricien
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UK	United Kingdom
UN	The United Nations

Prelude

“Then there was the rape of Mantee. Mantees’s family was poor, and having difficulty getting her off their hands, or as they put it, getting rid of her. The family of a man from Triolet in the north came all the way to Surinam to look at her, bringing their young man in a tow. No one in the north wanted to marry him. Which was strange because the family had an arpent of land under sugar cane and only this one son to inherit it. They brought him for Mantee to see. She could not stand him; it was hate at first sight, she told Sita later. “Do you find him to your liking, Mantee?” Her family was poor, so she said, “Yes (...)”. The young man said, “Can I take her to a matinee next week?” Yes”, they said, being progressive. So he came on a motorbike, and took her off to the matinee. Only he stopped on his way, “at the house of a friend”, he said. It was a deserted house, and in it he raped her. She cried, and when she got home, she told her family. The menfolk of whom made up a posse, and caught a bus up to Triolet in the north. An ultimatum was put out. If he did not marry Mantee within one month (what, they said of a possible pregnancy?), they would come around again by taxi this time, and they said it frankly, kup so greenn, cut his balls off (...). So Mantee was married off to her rapist”.

“And why, I ask in the name of all women, is the shame ours?”

(Collen’s “The Rape of Sita” 1995 [1993]: 165).



Introduction - Contextual, theoretical and methodological framework

Setting the scene of the field and the thesis

My proper “rites de passage” field work, into the wonders of social anthropology was conducted from March to September 2003¹ in Mauritius, a small island east of Madagascar and home to around 1.2 million individuals of different regional and religious ancestral origins. Most of that time I spent in a shelter for battered women run by a feminist oriented non governmental organisation; the *Woman’s Aid*². The shelter was the only one of its kind on the island.

The first time I found myself facing the enormous metal door of the shelter, I was soaking wet from a sudden outburst of heavy Mauritian rain, and in frightened awe of what I might find when I was finally behind the gates. As I had missed the small road surrounded by bamboo hedges where I was supposed to turn left when I got off the bus, the social worker Miranda, her gentle ‘manner’³ and a colourful umbrella had come to my rescue. It was Miranda and Amina, the talkative daily leader of the shelter, who was on duty together that day. The gates were surprisingly easily opened when facing Miranda’s key, and as the doors slid to the side the yellow house which had been partly hidden by high barbed wired walls did no longer seem such a threat. Directly facing me was a children’s crèche, and as small children started to pour out from all imaginable corners of the courtyard asking for ‘gato’ or snacks, what had previously seemed imposing and scaring was soon forgotten. A little later

¹ I have also spent two months in Mauritius in 2001, and an additional two months summer 2004.

² In Great Britain Woman’s Aid has been at the forefront of the refuge movement during the 70s and 80s, whereas Woman’s Aid is a pseudonym in the Mauritian context.

³ Way of acting and behaving, manners.

Amina had me seated in a deep and flowery couch in the living room and gave me my first vanilla tea. It was served with substantial amounts of milk powder and sugar and poured into a small Chinese porcelain cup ornamented with pale pink flowers, similar to the Woman's Aid's own emblem. Amina explained to me that this house was not solely a refuge for battered women, but was also supposed to function as a temporary home. At that moment I knew I had found the locus for my research. Then again, as I enjoyed the sweet sensation of my first sip of the tea, I had no idea what would await me in the future. All the residents were at work when I arrived to the shelter for the first time, and their uncomfortable stories of abuse were postponed. Still, reality hit me soon enough.

The first night I was to sleep over at the shelter, I spent sitting in on a counselling session with Anita; a 37 year old Creole who lacked front teeth. They had been knocked out by her drug addicted husband. Only a few days later I also found myself visiting the children's ward in the capital Port Louis's hospital. Anista, 24 year old Ratna's 1 year old daughter had been weak, pale and shivering for days. When I cuddled her in my arms she felt light as a feather. I soon learnt that she had almost died because her mother had given her too much medication. Still, I would never have changed the locus or the focus of my research. Part of the field work situation also consisted of the sun shining through the windows during early mornings, the smell of hot and fresh bread, watching children's cartoons with a child under each arm and one on the lap or dancing 'sega'⁴ to the radio. I will also always remember nights filled with pillow fights, stolen moments of smoking and whispering on the patio and late night talks, tea and biscuits with 60 year old Sophie; a social worker with a spicy past as a 'sega' singer and a night club star. All of that somehow made up for dark brown eyes which would fill up with tears, husbands' insults and threats from outside the gates, and the indifference of legal offices which kept the women waiting for hours on end to receive the slightest bit of help. The shelter was not only a place of pain; it was also a place of hope and laughter.

The shelter which is briefly described above plays a central role throughout this dissertation. As the locus of my fieldwork, the shelter was where my informants were 'found', and the site from which data was gathered. Still, it is not the shelter *per se* which forms the *main* contents and topics of this thesis, but rather the phenomenon *domestic*

⁴ 'Sega' refers to a particular traditional and very popular style of music and dance which has emanated from the African slaves brought to Mauritius.

violence as the reason for the shelter's existence in the first place. At the same time the focus of this dissertation is primarily oriented towards those women who utilise the shelter's facilities as a refuge from violent husbands. Through the battered women's own experiences and narratives of violence, a wider contextual and thematic field is opened up as the narratives do not only relate to the violence, but just as much portrays specific Mauritian gender patterns- and relations. In accordance with Foucauldian argumentation, the thesis argues that both normative gender structures and not the least abuse can be understood as inscribed on the surface of the women's bodies, and embodied by them. Additionally, due to the women's experiences with violence and pain, their bodies become the centre of their interaction with the surrounding, sheltered world through the development of a somatic contextual discourse. Nevertheless, no matter how difficult the conditions for the women might be they rarely completely lack agency. By expressing both psychological and physical pain corporeally, the women can also be argued to interpret their specific situations so as to be able to handle their 'ill fortunes'. What might appear as illness, hence passivity, can also be understood as the employment of resistance or coping strategies. All in all, this thesis concentrates on how the battered women manage their victimisation to domestic violence, and how this handling is shaped at the shelter and in interaction with the Mauritian macro context and the "state's"⁵ dealings with domestic violence.

Definitions, theories and understandings of domestic violence

As mentioned above, it was the women's own experiences of violence which was both my cause of concern and the focus of my research. As the readers of this thesis have themselves not been able to participate in the actual fieldwork situation, it is necessary to explain the phenomenon 'gender-based and domestic violence' more thoroughly than only referring to individual experiences with violence. Generalised theories will always be reductionist in form, but at the same time they are useful tools with which to grasp complex 'realities'.

Gender-based violence can be any type of violence which is in some way influenced by or influences gender relations. Domestic violence is but one example, whereas rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment, prostitution, trafficking and violence against homosexuals

⁵ Whenever the term "state" is used throughout this thesis, I follow Trouillot's (2001) understandings. Trouillot claims that states can neither be perceived as fixed, defined and identifiable entities nor solely the state apparatus of national governments as the state just as much functions through various state practises and state processes, recognisable through their effects on individuals.

are others (Skinner, Hester and Malos 2005). Violence against women has also been commonly applied to the field, hence specifying gender-based violence even further:

“Violence against women is the manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women. Domestic violence is gender-based violence perpetrated by an intimate partner and which include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse. It is considered to be a global epidemic that kills, tortures and maims women all over the world” (The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1993 in a publication by Woman’s Aid 2001).

Although domestic violence manifests itself in various forms, the most common ones are identified and mentioned above: Physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse. They often co-exist, or are put to use in close succession. The category *physical abuse* ranges from for instance a slap to severe injuries due to knives, sticks or boiling water, including beating, kicking, pushing, choking, biting, burning, hair pulling etcetera. Only the imagination of the abuser seems to limit the means of violence adopted by the aggressor. *Psychological abuse* is often less visible to the outsider as the scars of the victim are not blackened eyes or broken arms, but rather depressions, low self esteem and self respect. Verbal harassment such as swearing, insulting, degrading and humiliating are examples of psychological or emotional abuse. Threatening to hurt, molest or kidnap children is also a method commonly employed by domestic abusers, and in some cases children also become targets for violence. Still, as the shelter was a refuge for battered women, this thesis will only focus upon the abuse of *women* by intimate partners.

Another example of intimate violence is *sexual abuse*. Sexual abuse includes sexual relations without the consent of the woman such as unwanted sexual touching and rape. *Economic abuse* is another. When income in the family is low, and the man in the house is perhaps the only one employed at all as has been the normative tradition in Mauritius (Gunganah 1997), to stop buying food, pay for the rent, electricity and water becomes a serious problem (Woman’s Aid 2001).

At the same time both gambling and alcohol (and any other type of substance abuse), together with unemployment, adultery, jealousy, and intervention of in-laws in matrimonial relations are understood as factors which can aggravate domestic violence in the contextual Mauritian reality. Although all of the above mentioned factors might contribute to escalate the situation of violence, they should still not be understood as the *cause* of the abuse. For instance men who drink or take drugs do not solely beat their wives or partners when under

the influence of rum or 'brown sugar'⁶, but are just as likely to be violent when not. Alcohol or drugs are never the abuser. At the same time, substance-abuse can be closely linked to unemployment. A man might drink because he loses his job, or he might lose his job because he drinks. Adultery on behalf of the husband is also a so called violence 'instigator'. As the husband's emotions and sexual attention is with another woman than his partner, he might use violence as a means to rid himself of the burden his wife ('s accusations) causes him. Still, it is often the 'other woman' which is blamed by the wife or the girlfriend in such circumstances, and as rivalry is created between the women, the man is able to walk away practically scot-free. An abusive man might also be excused for his violent behaviour if the violence is considered a result of his parents, and especially his mother's interference in the conjugal relation. Although most families in today's Mauritius have replaced the traditional extended family household and are rather based upon a nuclear foundation (Gunganah 1997), it is still common amongst all the ethnic groups of Mauritius to live in close proximity to the man's side of the family. Due the extreme density of the population, scarce resources to land and a traditional social structure which values close connections to kin and relatives, Mauritian households are still to a certain respect made up of extended families which are patrilocal (Woman's Aid 2001). The newly founded nuclear family commonly builds on the same plot of land, or literally on top of the square concrete house of the husband's parents. Although such a pattern of living might be more prevalent amongst the Indo Mauritian part of the population, it is common amongst the Afro Creoles as well. Still, it is not the physical proximity per se which makes the interference of in-laws an aggravator of violence. As the relationship between particularly mothers and sons are highly treasured in the island (ibid), the mother in-law might consider the household, and her son as her responsibility. As a consequence she might continue to set down codes for conduct, and dictate the running of the household. If her daughter in law refuses to succumb, the mother in-law might take it upon herself to physically correct her or leave the punishing to her son.

Still, all these domestic violence aggravators are not the *explanation* for men's abuse. In general, there are three existing theories which aim at enlightening our understandings of the occurrence of violence. They roughly correspond to psychological pathology models, social-psychological theories and feminist explanations (Sev'er 2002). In short, *individual pathology models* explain violence as stemming from personal weaknesses, failures,

⁶ As a former sugar colony, rum is both cheap and easily accessible. At the same time brown sugar (heroin) is the drug that has been referred to the most when women have told me about their husbands' drug addictions.

abnormality or disorders of the perpetrators. Such pathological tendencies are also often perceived as related to substance abuse, which as mentioned previously can be an aggravator of violent behaviour. *Social-psychological theories* on the other hand do not solely focus upon biology as explanations for aggression, but rather recognise violence as a gender specific socially learnt behaviour. Social-psychological theories typically argue that men who beat their wives either do so because they have been targets of parental abuse as children, or that they might have experienced their fathers abuse their mothers and are therefore inclined to repeat such a violent patterned practise in their own adulthood. The same logic also believes that female children who experience their mothers being beaten might end up in abusive relationships themselves.

Although social-psychological theories *do* refer to gender, they only do so as illustrations of learnt conduct. Both of the descriptions above can still be considered gender neutral as they aim at explaining violent behaviour in general and not the specific phenomenon of domestic violence (Sev'er 2002). As for *feminist causal theories* of domestic violence, differing theoretical or political orientations within feminism might differ. Feminism is not a homogenous point of reference. Still, just as the violence is not gender neutral, so are not feminist understandings of the phenomenon either. Feminist theories focus upon the oppressive character of what is perceived as universal, structural and hierarchical inequality based on gender. Gender itself is also understood as a social construction which colours all aspects of men's and women's relations to the surrounding world through specifying gendered conduct. Men's repression and domination (patriarchy) over women is therefore the result of women being ascribed a "status"⁷ as minor(s) to men in male modelled or patriarchal logic. When such an unequal and hierarchical social structure is reproduced in the private domain of the home, its most extreme consequence might be a situation of domestic violence. According to feminist theories conjugal violence is seen as a means for men to exert power over women, and thereby control that their wives (' actions) obey their wishes (Abane 2000). Violence is used as a corrective measure to ensure the upholding of male authority, and is considered a functional, and not dysfunctional, affirmation of a patriarchal social order (Green 1999).

⁷ All references made throughout this thesis to either "status" or "role" is done in accordance with Goffmanian understandings of the two terms. Whereas status is a social trait which is ascribed or achieved, accordingly giving the individual specific rights or duties, role can be perceived as the dynamic aspect of an individual's status; more specifically what the person does (Goffman 1992 [1959]).

This thesis will be based in the tradition of feminist thought. As domestic violence most commonly take the shape of men beating women, gender neutral approaches to the phenomenon such as the above mentioned psychological and sociological theories seem insufficient to explain the highly gendered reality of the problem. Additionally, feminist explanations of violence against women seem situated in the very junction of micro and macro relations; individual men beat individual women, but they do so according to contextual, but discursive gender structures. Still, it is important to notice that domestic violence is always the result of both individual choices *and* social forces (Green 1999), and as such, all the theories above highlight different aspects of a global, yet contextually expressed problem.

Theoretical and analytical approaches

Narratives

So as to be able to grasp the well-known anthropological question of ‘what is going on’, anthropologists continuously look for entrances into informants’ “life worlds”⁸ by employing various methodological approaches to the field. The use of narratives which can be described as ‘stories people tell about themselves’ are therefore considered particularly informative as they describe situations, phenomenon and experiences made and articulated by informants. Anthropologists do of course not have direct access to peoples’ feelings or thoughts unless they are given social expressions. To people themselves, narratives function as tools for making sense of events in their lives, and can take the shape of short or long, written or oral, relatively straightforward or confusingly complex phrases, statements or stories. As already mentioned, what seems to need to be ‘made sense of’ in reference to the informants in this dissertation, is the battered women’s experiences with abuse. When the women arrive at the shelter they are for instance asked to recount the situation which made them decide to leave their homes. By Woman’s Aid this is considered to be a means for the women to ‘write out their pain’. The women do tell, but many of them do not only give an account of the immediate reason for their arrivals at the shelter, but narrates various abusive experiences with their husbands on several occasions. Some even talk of specific childhood events or concerns and hopes for the future. Hence the temporal tenses past, present and future becomes

⁸ Husserl’s phenomenological concept of “life world” includes human life and experience, and implies that all individuals form entities in larger systems (micro-macro relations) (Good 1994).

mixed. For the anthropologist, such time upheaval does not necessarily represent a problem, but rather opens up the possibility for understanding the historical and social relations in the wider (macro) context in which informants find themselves. Additionally, questions such as how, when and why some Mauritian men beat, rape or verbally insult their partners are all raised and reflected upon within the women's narratives. Through narratives *both* informants and anthropologists relate subjective experience and meaning to a contextual 'reality'.

On the other hand, narratives are not only the product of subjective, individualised efforts at meaning production. They can also be manipulative efforts at self presentation. The experiences described are often recounted, reorganised and represented so as to fit discursive patterns of storytelling, but also to evoke empathy and understanding from an 'audience'. The 'text' is given meaning in interaction with the 'reader' (Knudsen 1990). On the other hand, why, what and how narratives are communicated is not necessarily solely a *conscious* choice and strategy of self-presentation, but also a result of over arching macro structures and models in which we all form parts, and which determines the manner of meaning-production and articulation. Narratives might be understood as prior to, but never independent of contextual, and in some cases, hegemonic discourses (Bruner 1986). Narratives also function as patterns for the unfolding of future events, and influences and shapes discourses to come. To what extent then, do narratives describe events or experiences as they occurred, or conversely; to what extent do narratives *construct* events and experiences? (Good 1994) Is the event that which happened, or is the event that which can be narrated? (Feldman 1991) Or are the two differing processes rather irreducibly entwined? Answering such questions is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the reflections these questions lead to are essential in understanding narratives as both personal (micro) and contextual (macro) 'realities'. Although the topic of domestic violence might be conceived as a universal problem, it is also individually and contextually formed, expressed, experienced and perceived.

Bodies

"It came as a great revelation to him to learn, by way of medical anthropology, that humans live in bodies, whereas previously he thought they lived in communities" (Frankenberg in Scheper-Hughes 1994:229).

As discussed above, narratives and the person who tells them is always a product of both micro- and macro relations. Macro relations leave their traces in the body, and although people embody societal structures, these structures are still expressed through their narratives

(Good 1994). Through focusing upon 'the person' as a comparative category, the anthropologist is therefore capable of gaining access to the individual's surrounding 'society', while additionally being as true to informants' experiences and own articulations of these experiences as possible.

One of the most prominent characteristics of daily social interaction and individuals' narratives in the shelter was the *body*. The body always seemed to make its presence known, and this did not only make me aware of my own body and its implications on my surroundings; it also made me aware of others' bodies and their relation to them. Bodily functions, needs and problems were frequently being referred to by the women at the shelter. As a social anthropology student being academically 'brought up' in a European philosophical discourse, Descartes and his Cartesian dualism had early on separated my knowledge about myself in a strict mind: body dichotomy, thus I considered my personality to be situated in my mental capacities. The body was of second interest when I came to realise that although these women's bodies might not be the *only* reference point which constitutes their life-worlds, the body was still extremely crucial for how they experienced themselves and their immediate environment.

As an anthropologist practicing our proud qualitative methodology, one is always surrounded by existent people with actual and experiencing bodies which make their presence known through for instance illness and recovery, birth or death. By its very research methods social anthropology is therefore well equipped to describe individuals' perceptions, representations, practises and experiences of lived bodies, and also their relations and interactions with the collective, or other's bodies (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). Social anthropology can never be solely on a metaphysical or epistemological philosophical level as it is always based in empirically gained knowledge. With the focus of the body 'in mind', *medical anthropology* has contributed enormously. Medical anthropology has for instance made the rest of us realise the *contextual* reality of the body; meaning that the body as focus does not entail a return to biology (ibid). Rather than to look at the body only in its organic concreteness, anthropology argues for the importance of understanding the body in its historical meaning. The body is never solely a natural given. Even the corporeal body is discursively and contextually situated. On the one hand the body is a material reality, but at the same time its very actuality and certainty is always culturally and historically produced.

The body can therefore also be understood as a “*sign*”⁹ as well as a physical reality, something which opens up the possibility of perceiving the body as a medium through which we communicate.

At the same time I experienced that *emotions* and the body seemed to be elementally interwoven in every corporeal reference made by my informants. One of the most prominent examples of this was expressions of human afflictions taking the form of physical pain such as *illnesses*. Psychosomatic complaints were common, and are well-known phenomena which reflect how someone who suffers from a psychological condition such as a depression might experience physical symptoms which are hard to explain from a pure medical approach. Such afflictions might be understood as being neither *in* the body nor *in* the mind, but rather always both mind *and* body.

In this thesis I have therefore chosen three understandings of the body in medical anthropology as my analytical tools with which to make sense of my material. In combination I believe they can provide the fullest and most complete picture of bodies as signs and materiality, focusing as they do on the body as a *personal*, *social* and *political* construction and constitution.

A perception of the body as consisting of personal, social and political entities represent three separate, and thereby comparative, but also highly overlapping units of analysis. At the same time they all characterise theoretical approaches. Whereas the personal body is the body understood in phenomenology, the social body is first and foremost to be found described in structuralism and symbolism, and the body politic in post structuralism. All in all *the personal body* refers to the experienced individual body-self, *the social body* as a natural symbol for thinking about nature, society, culture, and the *body politic* as an artefact of social and political control and agency (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). The *personal body* is the body which is ‘created’ in the early stages of human development. All people reach a stage wherein we start to experience ourselves as entities different from that of others. We discover ourselves as *subjects* distinguished from what has become everything else, or surrounding *objects*. Inherent in such thinking is also a realisation of one’s own body as forming an important part of one’s personality. There might of course be ‘cultural’ or

⁹ According to Peirce a “sign” can be just about everything. At the same time Peirce's triadic approach to signs differs for instance from structuralism (and post structuralism for that matter) as it does not only focus upon the object and its description, but also the “*interpretant*” which is the individual's subjective experience, reading and understanding of the sign (Singer 1984).

contextual differences in the individual's socialisation process which eventually determines the perception of one self as first and foremost an individual or a social being, but although the body-self or the personal body might not be a strongly articulated or important conception in all areas of the world, the personal body can still be argued to be somehow individually experienced.

On the other hand is the body never a self-produced entity. Foucault even claimed that bodies are only 'tabula rasa' for inscriptions of socio-symbolic codes and values, which means that bodies do not exist outside the discourse of power relations (Feldman 1991). The personal body is necessarily and at the same time a *social* and a *political body*. Just as the individual is always part of a larger, surrounding 'society', so is the personal body always and at the same time socially embedded, and it is through interaction between the individual (micro) and the social (macro) levels, that the bodies' meanings are negotiated and defined. This is a universal and ever on-going process, although the results are contextual. The *social body* also represents various and contextual understandings of the body as symbols 'good to think with' in differing 'societies' (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). Perceptions of the biological sex; its function and meaning, is for instance commonly used throughout the world to determine proper, social gender conduct. Our social constructions of gender are therefore often explained as natural truths. For example are men in the west often believed not to express emotions *because* they are men, at the same time as women *do* express emotions precisely because they are women.

Still, the relationship between the personal and the social bodies concern more than individual experiences, or metaphors and collective representations of the natural and the cultural (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). Bodies also relate to such notions as power and control, submission and resistance, or the *body politic*. The body politic involves bodies in the interaction between the more institutionalised state apparatus and their regulatory, disciplining and legal bodies. Foucault has contributed extensively in illustrating how the role of for instance the criminal system or medicine has served the interests of the state's production of docile and obedient bodies. Such a controlling process is largely a means to dominate those bodies that might differ and revolt the state's interests. Women are often perceived to be the very image of such rebellious bodies, and conceived as potential (natural=female) threats to the upholding of (cultural=male) stability and order, something which in many cases seem to legalise every mean necessary to keep female bodies under control, including violence. Abuse and the manner in which violence against women is dealt with institutionally, is also of enormous importance in how battered women in respective

societies perceive themselves and their means of opportunities to either break out of or continue staying in abusive relationships.

Organisation of thesis and preview of chapters

Throughout this thesis I try to represent the phenomenon of domestic violence as articulated through the battered women's own narratives, life at the shelter, the personal -and the social body, and body politics according to a certain organisational logic. Instead of following a classical novelistic composition of tension building- tension climax and finally tension dissolution, the choice of structure is an effort to sensibly put building blocks (in the shapes of chapters) on top of each other.

Hence *chapter one* of this thesis portrays geographical, historical and cultural traits of multicultural Mauritius as both my site for field work and as of importance to understand the macro processes and structures which my informants are part of. As Mauritian history (and many other countries' historiographies for that matter) have largely been written both by and for men in positions of power (Eriksen 1998), the focus of this chapter is largely on Mauritian *women's* positions within the island's past and present. Studying the statuses and roles of women throughout the times is an approach often believed to be indispensable in feminism as it aims to understand the historical processes which have led to women's subordination in patriarchal 'societies' (Sawicki in Sand 2000). To be able to understand the present situations within which the abused women of my research find themselves, knowledge of contextual 'realities' can then be argued to be absolutely necessary. Hence this chapter does not only deal with the colonial past in the island and the development of an independent nation state, but also with such issues as kinship structures, settlement practises, the effects and consequences of women's participation in the paid labour force (especially in the Export Processing Zone), and Mauritian women's involvement in political life on the island.

Chapter two contextualises some Mauritian women's situations further as this is the chapter wherein the door to the shelter for battered women is opened. Hence, the first part of chapter two is a description of shelter(ed) ecology. The goal is to present Woman's Aid, and both the staff and residents of the shelter. As residents commonly pass through the shelter at various intervals, some come whereas others leave, many various residents will be introduced throughout this entire dissertation. Some of the women mentioned in this chapter, will also be part of chapter 3, 4 and 5 of this thesis, whereas others will only be remarked once in either

one of the chapters. This might entail that readers do not necessarily ‘get to know’ informants, but on the other hand; such was also shelter life.

The second part of chapter two is a Goffmanian institutional approach to shelter life which describes and discusses the impact and expressions of shelter ideology and practice expressed through staff in relation to the shelter’s residents. Hierarchical difference between staff and residents of the shelter is not only marked in accordance with various institutional regulations and routines, but also in the division of space in the shelter. As institutional life implies both a disciplined and controlled every day environment and life, and a specific mode of being (Goffman 1962), “underlives” seems to have developed amongst residents. The previously mentioned focus upon illness can for instance be argued to be one of them. On the other hand, the hierarchical difference symptomatic of social worker-resident interaction seems absent in interaction between the residents.

Chapter three is first and foremost dedicated to the battered women’s own narratives of abuse. As already mentioned, the staff of the shelter recommends the abused women to articulate the events which have led them to seek the help of the shelter, as it is believed that by giving their pain a language, the battered women might start to heal the wounds inflicted through abuse. Additionally, many of these narratives raise specific questions in relation to the phenomenon of domestic violence as expressed in a Mauritian context. Despite the threats of generalised reductionism, I have therefore still chosen to present them under various thematic ‘umbrellas’, followed by short analytical comments. All in all, chapter three is still a highly empirical chapter. As I believe these narratives of abuse are so strong, they deserve to be told uninterrupted.

Chapter four utilises the analytical concepts of personal and social bodies. As a substantial number of the battered women who resided at the shelter commonly complained about suffering from various ailments and maladies, this chapter aims at discussing how and why such a somatic discourse might have been constructed. To be able to do so, chapter four focuses upon the violent situation per se, as I believe it is in the interaction between the perpetrator and victim that the contextual focus upon the body in the shelter has its origin.

Additionally, for anything to be rendered an act of domination there is also necessarily resistance (Foucault in Patton 1998). By *not* objecting to the violence, and thereby challenge their partners’ control, the women seem to be able to avoid or reduce the severity of the violent outbursts and as such cope with or simply survive the abuse. When the women at the shelter fall ill, such ‘passive’ coping or survival strategies seem reproduced even in the shelter context as illness might be perceived as something which happens *to* the body, thus defying

sanctions (Scheper-Hughes 1992). On the other hand, as the staff at the shelter does not seem to recognise these physical complaints as psychosomatic illnesses, misunderstandings arise between residents and staff, consequently leaving some of the battered women to feel that no other option is left them than to return to their abusive husbands.

Chapter five of this thesis discusses the Mauritian *body politics* with reference to its interference in these battered women's lives. This chapter therefore focuses upon the Mauritian state's handling of victims of domestic violence, and the battered women's encounters with the state apparatus or the body politics. Of particular relevance is Mauritian legislation on domestic violence such as The Protection of Domestic Violence Act, other family (related) laws, and meetings with the very image of state control in the island; the police. Still, chapter five does not only discuss individuals' encounters with the state, but also the relations between Woman's Aid and the Mauritian state in their dealings with domestic violence.

Finally, the concluding chapter titled *Final Remarks* in this dissertation is an effort to put the final metaphysical building block in place. This chapter is therefore primarily theoretically oriented and discusses the relations between anthropology, feminism, phenomenology, violence and suffering as key aspects of this dissertation and with references to various academic debates on the subjects.

Managing the field and methodological reflections

"*Science, since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity*" (Gould in Keller 1985: 145). So how has this thesis come about? After all, this dissertation is not a sole theoretical exercise and the contents are all based in empirical data 'gathered in the field'. Hence to give an account of methodology applied while doing fieldwork gives the readers of a work a necessary entrance into the 'mind-set' of the written material. At the same time it should also be possible for the reader to follow the data gathering process in any work which claims to be scientific, as to be able for others to falsify statements is a general requirement in social and human disciplines. On the other hand, as social anthropology is based in empirical material, information which is given in the field often takes the form of communication with the field worker, something which makes the anthropologist's personality traits, choices of questions etcetera an influence on what is communicated by the informant. This implies that meaning is (un)consciously constructed between the informant and the field worker through their communication, and the information given and knowledge obtained in their interaction becomes contextual and

difficult to falsify by other anthropologists. On the other hand, most qualitative researchers share a methodological and ethical heritage, and to question a researcher's previous claims with new findings should therefore still be achievable. This might be easier done with access to the field workers methodological movements in the field.

Participant observation and status

My means of accretion of data was mostly conducted through the pride and joy of qualitative research; participant observation. I officially occupied a position as a voluntary social worker at the shelter, but as I in the beginning was dealing with language related problems, there were practical tasks I could not perform well. Answering the emergency hotline was for instance not an option. I would still perform other tasks which were part of the social workers' duties, such as accompany the women to the hospital, the police station and the courts. Still, I enjoyed considerable freedom in my interaction with the residents of the shelter, and I do believe that my informants perceived me more a confidential than as associated with Woman's Aid per se. No one referred to me as 'Mis' which is the 'appropriate' term to address the social workers, and although I initially struggled with residents addressing me in French with the polite *Vous*¹⁰, I managed to break the habit off by first refusing to speak French, and secondly by not using *Vous*, but rather the informal Kreol *to* (you) as a term of reference when I answered back. Whereas the jargon between the social workers and the residents was one of such politeness (but in Kreol), it was not used between the residents. Although my move might be considered impolite, it proved tactical and successful towards achieving my preferred status as just being 'Karine', something which for instance meant that I was eventually invited into the residents' rooms at night.

Language and interviews

The nights I spent in the residents' rooms improved my language situation radically. After a few months of hard concentration, 'sweat, blood and tears', I managed to start partake in, understand conversations and move the field work situation up from pure observation to actual participation. Still, both the pre- and post language situation proved useful for information and data gathering. Whereas most of my empirical material has derived from

¹⁰ Whereas French is perceived a high status international language by many Mauritians, Mauritian Kreol is often stigmatised as a local 'patwa' unintelligible to anyone else but themselves.

interaction, being able to focus on the ‘unspoken’ aspect in every relation such as for instance body language, tended to be easier lost in the noise of words. To not know the language provided one type of knowledge, whereas managing the language provided another. Together I believe they complemented each other.

At the same time, to learn Kreol was a developmental aspect of my field work situation, and one not possible for me to change. Instead I tried to “follow the loops”¹¹ this ‘language-development’ provided methodologically and changed my approach to the field accordingly. After I had completed roughly two-thirds of my 6 months in Mauritius conducting participant observation at the shelter, I changed my approach to a try at Mitchell's “extended case method”¹² by following up my informants after they had left the shelter. By now I had worked up a respected Mauritian Kreol vocabulary, and I finally managed to do interviews without the assistance of a translator, a goal I was thrilled to achieve as the topic of my research became more and more intimate throughout my field work. I truly believe the use of an interpreter could have damaged my research. I worked hard to be able to gain my informants’ confidence, as I had realised that without it I would be completely lost. None of my informants were forced to discuss their problems with me, but they still chose to do so. All of my interactions were therefore on a personal basis. How could they not be? The topic mostly up for discussion was the abuse these women had suffered, a topic personal per se and which not only occasionally required a tough stomach on my part, but also for my informants. While in conversation with me, there is no doubt that some of my informants had to relive experiences they would rather forget. I am forever grateful that they still chose to talk.

Most of these interviews were conducted in a semi structured manner. I had prepared certain questions in advance, but at the same time I let my interviewees do most of the talking and directing the conversation in a manner suitable for them. These meetings either took place in their homes (sometimes with the abusive husband present), working place or an agreed upon venue such as a café. At the same time I conducted interviews in a similar fashion with the social workers at the shelter and prominent members of Woman’s Aid. I also visited several governmental run institutions concerned with domestic violence, very often with the

¹¹ The expression is Bateson’s, and is comparable with Vayda's progressive contextualisation (1983), Barth's procedures of discovery (1994) and Grønhaug's network analysis (1972) where the field worker more or less lets himself be ‘led’ around in the field as new elements presents themselves. The field worker follows the circuit of motion, so as to be able to map the connections between people’s actions.

¹² Extended case method employs case studies as a starting point, and by following informants through different situations the social anthropologist is capable of tracing interrelated events (Mitchell 1983).

aim of falsifying or ‘verifying’ statements made by representatives from Woman’s Aid concerning the government’s role in the combat of domestic violence, and to be able to further learn about the processes and practises which coloured the relationship between Woman’s Aid as a non-governmental organisation and the state¹³. Some of these encounters took on a more structured form concerning interview technique, with me being the one guiding the conversation along in reference to my already prepared set of questions. At the same time these more formal interviews were often conducted in English.

All in all, interview techniques were adjusted to the differing situations. One of my many concerns before actually ‘entering the field’ had been with the asymmetrical relations inherent in any interview, me being the one with monopoly of the different forms of “capital” (Bourdieu 1991). This did not really seem to pose a problem. As I knew very little about the phenomenon domestic violence when I first arrived in Mauritius, and everything I now know was taught me by individuals far more skilled than me on the topic, the asymmetry was rather in their favour. At the same time my initial struggles with the Kreol language made a good ‘apprentice entrance’ to my informants.

Secondary sources of information

Although most of my material is based on interaction in the field, not all of it is. My primary sources of information have been complemented with secondary sources. I have read anthropological literature, Mauritian pamphlets, surveys, research rapports and made a scrap book of relevant newspaper material. I have watched the news and popular Mauritian programs on television, and I have read Mauritian novels. Still, the most important secondary source of information is probably the already mentioned files of the *hébergée* which forms the contents of chapter three. On the other hand, narratives are not necessarily written down. Most narratives are probably *told* to the anthropologist. Many of the narratives used in this thesis was the result of such direct interaction, communicated to me over a cup of tea in the kitchen of the shelter, in the residents’ rooms at night or in a more ‘formal’ interview situation.

¹³ Part of my anthropological heritage is to for ever look for and at micro-macro relations.

Ethics and anonymity

I have also had to be concerned with more ethically oriented problems in the ‘writing phase’ of this dissertation. My data has not only needed taming to be able to make an anthropologically valid analysis, but has also required sensitivity concerning ethical aspects such as for instance anonymity. I was granted access to confidential material on the different residents at the shelter, and the trust that was shown me by Woman’s Aid is one that I do not take lightly. Mauritius is a small island, but also one of the most densely populated areas in the world. ‘Someone always knows someone’, and the threat that any of my informants’ identities will be recognised, is present. This is a great worry, and one that I can only hope I have managed to avoid. All names of informants are therefore pseudonyms, although information such as age, religion and ethnic belonging, years of marriage and not the least their narratives have not been changed. On the other hand, descriptions of geographical areas operate by their real names. As Moka for instance is quite a large area which does not refer to one specific identifiable location¹⁴, I have not thought it necessary to replace its name with a fictitious label. Then again, as Woman’s Aid is the only organisation and shelter of its kind on the island, I do realise that it will almost certainly be identified, but at least Woman’s Aid is capable of securing itself. That is what the shelter does on a daily basis. The problem is rather concerned with the ex-residents of the shelter and especially the ones that have returned with their abusive partners. If the women’s husbands realise that their wives have not only left them once (or twice *or* thrice), but at the same time have spent some of that time discussing intimate aspects of their relationship with someone who happens to make it public, the reaction and following reprimand will in almost all certainty be a violent one. I will not be the one to suffer, but I will be the one to blame. On the other hand, the risk that anyone is able to make the connection between my material and the informant who has provided me with it is small. Most of the information which has been told me is quite intimate, and something many of my informants have said me they have neither talked to relatives, friends nor neighbours about ever before. Mauritians often claim that *other* Mauritians (of course) are prone to gossip, and to talk to someone foreign might therefore be considered a safe harbour for letting down one’s guards.

¹⁴ See map of Mauritius in Appendix One.

Concluding remarks

Scattering remarks on conjugal, domestic, everyday violence might be found in several anthropological monographies, but there are few which describe or theorise the subject in depth or as a primary research topic. The reason might be that the matter is ‘ugly’, but then again, anthropologists have dived into the muddy waters of uncomfortable areas of research before. The problem might rather be how our “Noble Savages” become disturbingly similar ourselves instead of an exotic ‘Other’ with the key to our own ‘salvation’ within the subject matter (McClusky 2001). Violence against women rather has a universal character which reminds us that the events which take place in our informants’ lives might as well happen to ourselves, or in this case, be perpetrated by someone close to us. Simultaneously domestic violence as research focus tend to fuse, sometimes cross, the well guarded boundaries of the anthropologist’s objective, cultural relativism and his or her subjective (ethnocentric) concerns and aversions. It is not only the ‘ugliness’ of the topic which might be hard and frightening to handle, but also the uncomfortable sensation of anthropology as objective science slipping through your fingers the more you hear, the more you learn, the more you can not sustain yourself from getting involved in informants’ lives.

As briefly mentioned in the prologue and the acknowledgements to this thesis, struggling to represent chaotic real life into an academic, anthropological framework is probably something which is experienced by everyone who ‘returns’ from the field, but when submerged in an ‘anthropology of difficult questions’ the problem might seem even more taxing. At the same time as I want to tell my informants’ stories in all their horrors, and deliberately shock the reader into realising the severness of the abuse which takes place, a certain amount of analytical distance is necessary to put my points across within a valid anthropological and academic discourse. To be able to grasp phenomenon, we naturally and pragmatically generalise events into structured forms despite the threats of reductionism. ‘Translations’ of ‘real life’ into text, every day to academic, Mauritian to English language, will always falter as the text will never be able to catch individual variations or subjective forms and practises which do not fit the theoretical ‘formulas’. Writing might therefore seem at times to have a somewhat exotifying effect on data as even anthropological theories, despite its basis and emphasis in an empirical reality, become slightly removed and altered in the domain of the text. Such a result might become particularly evident if working in the field of violence as the violence itself might seem unreal; neutralised due to (tabloid) media headings; stories having become stories to sell, not tell.



Chapter one -

Multicultural Mauritius; facts, fictions and a feminist focus

A guide and a glimpse of Mauritius

The smell of urine reaches the nostrils briefly, but enters violently and forcefully before it just as rapidly disappears again upon descending the rattling tin bus at the bus station Gare du Nord in Porlwi, the capital of 'Paradise Island' Mauritius. This square of pure asphalted jungle, crowded with the 'bus beasts' of city life, foam exhaust and growl for attention as I try to thread my steps carefully between them without actually being run over. At the same time is it necessary to scrutinise the ground carefully as my green plastic flip flops are of no great comfort if I step into someone's thrown away and left over 'roti'¹⁵ lunch from the day before. Vendors and their merchandise have occupied parts of the ground level, and if I do not pay attention I might walk straight into the woman in the twinkling red and yellow sari (but dirty and fringed at the edges) knocking down both her and her 'chou-chou'¹⁶ for display and sale in huge straw trays.

Gare du Nord is my port of awaking in the mornings. If the Ricoffy instant coffee mixed with chicory extract¹⁷ does not get me up, this bus station never fails. The bustling and buzzing of Porlwi everyday life can wake one up from any dream. Still, it is a good morning. I greet the wrinkled man who sells small, colourful Muslim cakes from his glass display, and I realise that I am humming as I walk, feeling safe, sound and at home.

¹⁵ Indian form of bread.

¹⁶ A common vegetable, but also a derogatory term for the female genital organs if the pronunciation of the word is slightly altered.

¹⁷ Despite the insistence and constant efforts of neighbours and friends to make me sugary and sweet, sweet coffee, I was always insisting on my bitter, Norwegian one, not wanting to fall prey neither to cavities, diabetes and other remains of the colonial sugar plantations.

I am going to the shelter. First I need to run some errands, and I head in the direction of China Town. If there is anywhere one can find everything the heart desires, it must be here. Small shops line a busy street, shops filled with both imaginable and unimaginable items of every kind; small porcelain soup-bowls, saucers and pans, fake Nike backpacks, Mauritian souvenir key rings, make up, colourful plastic thermoses, locally made sandals and various Chinese medical ointments for sore backs and headaches. These shops do not only cater for the needs of busy everyday life, but just as much to needs securing entrance into the next one by displaying small plastic snow balls with Ganesh, the crying Virgin Mary as a lamp-post, stickers in green and white with Muslim symbols and small, fat Buddhas smiling broadly. A religious shopping utopia.

Although most of the shops seem run down with dusty, overloaded shelves, paint coming off the walls in huge flakes and signs prohibiting spitting within the shop's premises, many bare witness to and tell stories of a past with two storey wooden houses and winter gardens in glass. The street itself is crowded with vendors who sell clothes, fruits in season such as huge local, green grapefruits, whereas others cater for the more immediate needs of forthcoming lunch time, and tempt by passers with boiled or fried noodles and carefully cut pineapples dipped in red chilli sauce. In the midst of it all is the ever-impressing white Jummah Mosque, and not far from the Jummah is the carcass of the burnt down Chinese L'Amicale casino with its huge hollow and sooty dice, a result and a reminder of the riots which swept the island in 1999. Although China Town is marked by two bows at either end of the street, it is still difficult to tell where it begins and where it stops. It is all enmeshed into urban life; a mixture of people, colours and smells.

To be able to reach China Town I usually pass half of the vegetable market first. Right after Gare du Nord, when either Bollywood music, the latest r'n'b hit or local sega, is blasting in one's ears, you know you are at the right place. This is the entrance from the bus station, and soon the shouts of the vegetable sellers for potential buyers' attention will overdo that of the music. It is partly open air, long and narrow, dirty and muddy. Still, the brilliant and colourful display of the fruit and vegetables is what catches one's eye first. If one claims the likes of the Mauritian tourist propaganda portraying the island as 'une société à l'arc en ciel'¹⁸, maybe this is where it is to be found. But then again two images present themselves duly; one can either choose to see the different fruits and vegetables as separate entities, one

¹⁸ 'The rainbow society' is a well used cliché which refers to Mauritius and the Mauritian population as a colourful display of ethnicity, religions and languages.

basket for salad, one for lady fingers, and one for green beans, all with different price tags in hierarchical order which mark them off in different classes, *or* one can choose to see both the tomatoes, the sliced orange pumpkins and the green spinach as literally enmeshed together in a brilliant mixture of colours. Sometimes one might have to squint to be able to actually see them all as forming one entity, sometimes one might have to look in the darkness under the vendors' tables where the vegetables have been accidentally dropped and are now flat from being stepped on throughout the day, and what they used to be is no longer of such a big importance. They are all eventually going into the *fruit salad* or *fruit compote*¹⁹ recipes. On the other hand, there are Mauritians incapable of even visiting the market place; the battered women at the shelter being examples. As such, this thesis is not occupied with neither fruit salads nor fruit compotes, but rather the 'weeds' which are avoided being put on the fruit vendors' tables.

Mauritian history and muted women

"Mauritian historiography remains largely the history of men in positions of power" (Eriksen 1998: 144).

My initial intention with this chapter was a female biased approach describing traits which relate to the everyday lives of Mauritian women, but after I had scrutinised most of the few classics concerned with this small island, the resulting outcome was rather meagre. The above-mentioned statement by Eriksen is undoubtedly true, a sad realisation indeed. To trace the descent of ideas by studying history through the analysis of discourse²⁰ is often argued to be indispensable to feminism in describing the historical processes leading to an understanding of women's subordination in patriarchal 'societies', and at the same time be able to give a voice to women as part of marginal and disempowered groups (Sawicki in Sand 2000:16). I believe no differently. Despite the substantial lack of literature relevant for a contextual macro analysis concerned with a feminist based approach, I will still at least try to do *some* of the wrongs right by gathering the different threads identified while focusing upon Mauritius as situational context.

¹⁹ The fruit salad or the fruit compote metaphors are well known and commonly referred to by scholars who work on and with Mauritius. It was originally used by Mauritian Father Souchon in an effort to describe two possible scenarios confronting the island in terms of identity construction (Eriksen 1998).

²⁰ Foucault's genealogical method of analysing the constitution of the subject within a historical framework so as to be able to trace the descent of ideas through time.

Colonial ‘discoveries’ and first settlements

Oval Mauritius²¹ with its 1865 square kilometres does not take up much space in the otherwise vast, turquoise Indian Ocean, and is usually only a peripheral pinprick on most maps. Despite that one is able to travel on comfortable motor roads all the way from the south to the north in approximately one and a half hour maximum by car, topographical and climatical differences make the small island seem much bigger when you are actually there. Besides, if one travels the same distance by public bus, the means of most Mauritian women anyway, the journey might take you half a day. The island, which is of volcanic origin, consists of green mountains, vast, wavering sugarcane fields and white beaches encircled by coral reefs. It enjoys a tropical summer climate and a subtropical one in winter, something which makes the island a luscious goal for European tourists unaware that vicious cyclones might rampage Mauritius from October to April, destroying crops and the small shacks in Roche Bois which they might have gotten a glimpse of travelling from the airport in the south to one of the foreign ally owned hotels ridging the sea shore in the north. At the same time Mauritius is one of the most densely populated areas in the world and home to around 1.2 million people, which take up whatever left over space there is after the sugar plantations²², the huge hotels and other tourist oriented industries have claimed their lot. The Mauritian population is also a pluralistic one, and consists of people of various ethnic, religious and regional origins. All of the states in the Indian Ocean might be considered a ‘globalist utopia’ as the most characteristic traits of the islands in the southwestern part of this ocean is complexity and heterogeneity. The Seychelles, the Comoros, Madagascar, Reunion and Mauritius’ populations are all multicultural and made up of diasporic individuals with origins from Africa, Asia and Europe (Vergès 2000).

There was never an indigenous population in Mauritius as the island was uninhabited by humans prior to colonisation. Despite the island’s appearance on seventh-century Arab charts (Simmons 1982), it is the Portuguese who are generally considered to have ‘discovered’ the island en route from Cape Town to Goa at the beginning of the 16th century. They gave Mauritius and its neighbouring islands the name Mascarenes after the captain Pedro Mascarenhas. Neither the Arabs nor the Portuguese ever settled on the island, but used

²¹ The Republic of Mauritius consists of the main island Mauritius, its dependency Rodrigues and the Chagos Archipelago which comprises five groups of coral islands, the biggest of which is Diego Garcia (Miles 1999). If not stated otherwise, I am only referring to the main island Mauritius throughout this thesis.

²² Over 52 percent of the total land area are reserved sugar crops according to Eriksen (1998).

it as a refuel port to obtain water and food (Selvon 2001). It was the Dutch who in 1598 claimed the island and renamed it after their ruler Prince Maurice van Nassau. After the Dutch had managed to kill off and literally eat up the now famously caricatured dodo bird, two tries at Dutch settlement also failed due to lack of food, inefficient administration and their main interest areas being South Africa and Indonesia. In 1710 the Dutch abandoned the island to pirates. When the first French settlers claimed the land five years later, it was therefore uninhabited. It was renamed Île de France, and governed by the French East India Company which in 1722 brought in French colonists from the nearby island of Reunion (then Bourbon) occupied by France since 1654, and still is a French Department D'outre-Mer. More settlers from the mainland followed, probably encouraged by the opportunity to obtain sugar plantation land which had been introduced by the Dutch, and not the least the promised slaves to cultivate the cane. These slaves were first and foremost imported from East Africa²³, Senegal and Madagascar. Due to slave revolts, maroon-escaping and food shortages, the initial years of life on the island was apparently fraught with difficulties for the French settlers. It was not until the arrival of Mahe de Labourdonnais, the appointed governor of the Mascarene Islands in 1735, that the plantation system became well established, the port improved and forts, barracks, stores and ships were built. Labourdonnais is also considered responsible for bringing the first Indians over from the French colony of Pondicherry to work as artisans and domestics (Benedict 1965). Even school education was introduced, but exclusively reserved the French elite's male children (Benoît 1985). Girls would have to wait until 1846 when a school for girls was set up by the Loreta sisters in Port Louis (Lam Hung 2003).

The reality of life was unimaginable cruel for both slave women and men. The Code Noir which had come into force in the colony in 1723 defined the status of the slaves and authorised severe punishments. It did acknowledge certain rights to the male slaves; both masters and slave husbands were allowed to corporeally punish *female* slaves (Lam Hung 2003). There was for instance a French agent who wrote:

“The French woman should not go and see the graves that are dug in order to bury the bellies of pregnant negresses which had been torn by the muleteers' whip” (Mannick 1979: 34)

²³ The slaves to have been captured off the east coast of Africa are in general referred to as Mozambicans despite that their body markings, language etcetera indicated that they were a heterogeneous group (Alpers 1999 in Laville 2000). Even today the term 'Mozambique' is sometimes used pejoratively when referring to an Afro-Creole of dark complexion.

Despite that the Code Noir forbidded sexual relations and marriage between settlers and slaves, men greatly outnumbered women in the early years of settlement, and many children were born to mixed parentage by African or Indian mothers and white European fathers. Although Benedict (1965) claims that these women were the mistresses of their masters, there is absolutely no doubt that several of these relations were forced from the point of view of the women; the latter most likely to have been raped by the former. Some of the *male* children from such unions was freed from slavery and sometimes even given some education and a little property. They were seen as free, but not equal, coloureds, and their numbers gradually increased (ibid). Later they come to make up the ethnic category *gens de couleur* (Eriksen 1998). The only reference made to *girls* who was born into such a situation is Mannick who mentions that they must have been in an untenable situation somehow (Mannick 1979).

In spite of uncontrollable forces such as cyclones destroying sugar cash crops, and an epidemic of smallpox killing thousands of people, Île de France prospered for the French settlers in the late 1700s (Mannick 1979). Although the evolvement of a French based creole²⁴ language originally communicated between slaves, and slaves and their masters, now had evolved into the lingua franca and mother tongue of the slaves and the free coloureds, by the 1800s the *tone* of the island was distinctively French. The French settlers had for instance established their own system of government, successfully introduced the French legal system and the prevailing religion was Catholicism. Although the time of slaves is still referred to as the 'tem margoze' by some Mauritians of African or Malagasy origin because of its resemblance to the bitter vegetable by the same name (Eriksen 1998), life for the wealthy, white population was considered to be rather pleasant (Simmons 1982). Despite that one of the 1789 French Revolution's recommendations was the freeing of slaves, the practice continued throughout the island, and did not officially end until 1835; 25 years after the British conquest of the island as a result of France's defeat in the Napoleonic wars. The surrender was a rather peaceful transition and exchange of positions of power between the two colonial forces, and did not make much of a difference in the lives of the 'ordinary' slaves. The British administrators failed to bring about any improvements in the slaves' situation in anxiety of antagonising the economically powerful French settlers. The former French inhabitants were rather promised in the treaty of capitulation, the Code Napoleon, that

²⁴ Creole is in linguistics considered to be a *mixed* language which originates from at least two various languages.

the new administration would “preserve their Religion, Laws and Customs”, despite that the population of Mauritius consisted of about 80 000 inhabitants among whom only 11 500 were settlers at the time of the British conquest (Benoît 1985). This secured a continuing French ‘cultural’ hegemony which still has its impact on contemporary Mauritius (ibid) through the French settlers’ descendants’, the Franco Mauritians, monopoly of the island’s economic and symbolic power. At the same time and of great importance for Mauritian women; the Napoleon Code imposed the status of a *minor* on a married woman something which was not officially changed until 1981(Lam Hung 2003).

Although the rulings of the British Parliament had made the slavetrade illegal in 1807, 12000 slaves were brought to the island during the years from 1827 to 1835 (Mannick 1979). The Franco Mauritians seem to have kept the Brits on a leash, and even when the abolition of slavery was finally and completely introduced, the Franco Mauritians received a cash compensation for the slaves they would have to let go off. The slaves also had to remain with their former masters for another four-year period. This was legitimised by the slaves' new statuses as ‘apprentices’ who supposedly received pay for their work. When this forced ‘apprentice-period’ was over, the slaves fled the estates to never return. Very little was done to help them re-settle and find new modes of livelihood²⁵. As the sugar crops had developed into the sole export and income crop of the island by now, the planters were faced with a serious shortage of field labour, and new workers were desperately needed so that the affluent life style of the former French could continue to prosper (Benedict 1965). They turned to India, where British agents were only too anxious to help with recruitment and transportation of a new work force (Simmons 1982).

Indentured labourers and political awakening

Mauritius was presented as “the Promised Land with streets paved in gold” (Mannick 1979) to Indians of various lower castes in an effort to persuade them into leaving their ‘Mother India’. Many had aspirations of moving up on the social ladder, and therefore believed there was little to loose and more to gain, if they left their country of origin. A grand scheme of labour migration took place, and four years after the first indentured Indian immigrants arrived in Mauritius in 1834, their numbers had surmounted almost enough to replace the

²⁵ Of the very few who made an effort to help, Father Laval is without doubt the most well known one today. Every 9th of September there is a pilgrimage to his shrine, locally famous for its capability to heal the ill.

slaves when their apprentice-period ended in 1839 (ibid), and enough to change the whole island's demography drastically in the years to come. These immigrants, or *coolies* as they were commonly known, were employed on a five-year basis. This immigration saga was not one to turn out as neither promised nor imagined. Life on the ships and later on the plantations was rather just a "new form of slavery" (Tinker in Bowman 1991) better disguised. Still, however harsh and cruel the system was, the coolies managed to resist the injustice and gradually change their conditions in various ways. They would strike, revolt, desert and return to India. They would put the sugar-crops on fire²⁶ and even go to the extreme of committing suicide.

The more fortunate and often high caste *sirdars* who were elected by the planters on their arrivals to oversee the labourers' work, managed due to their strategic positions between the planters and the workers, to start to buy and lease small plots of land. Not long after the embarkation of the indentured labourers, various Indian *traders* also began arriving on the island. Whereas most of the coolies were Hindus, these traders were Muslims who successfully managed to partake in the economical sphere of the island through their dealings in textiles and food (Simmons 1982). Although there was and is a considerable interdependency which colours interaction between the Franco-Mauritians and the Indo-Mauritians²⁷, ancient differences that have been accentuated by modern events such as the creation of Pakistan in 1948, have shaped the political climate with respect to the relation between the Hindus and the Muslims on the island. At the same time a number of linguistic and religious minorities such as Telegu and Tamil differs in the Mauritian social strata, maybe even more so than caste (ibid).

The work contract system was ended 75 years after the arrival of the first indentured labourers. The sugar prices had declined radically internationally over the years, with the effect of eventually forcing upon the island both economical and political changes. Although the work contract system was over, the working conditions for the Indo-Mauritian cane cutters were appalling. Despite that associations and unions of labourers were deemed illegal by the British authorities, more organised political opposition started to slowly evolve during

²⁶ It is a woman slave, Ana de Bengal, who is the first one known to have used fire as a means to express resistance against oppression in Mauritius. She burnt down the entire colonial head quarters in 1695, and was later publicly tortured and executed (Muvman Liberasyon Fam 1988).

²⁷ Although the rules that govern this relationship have changed, the planters still need labour to bring in their crops, and the labourer naturally needs an income (Benedict 1965).

the early 1900s. An example was the rise and popularity of Dr. Curé, a *gen de couleur*, eager to change the labourers' situations. During the 1920's and 30's his Labour Party (LP) flourished, culminating in violent riots in 1937 to later be followed by a dockers' strike in 1938. The dockers' strike had grave economic consequences for the island. As Western countries were stockpiling sugar in fear of the Second World War, the strike was by all means a very effective means of pressure (Simmons 1982). The port was closed and the cane fields burned. The wind was changing directions. Mauritian authorities were in the years to come forced to constitutional revision and reformation.

Pre- and post independence

One of those who had by now vigorously entered the political life was a young Seewoosagur Ramgoolam who became a prominent member of the Labour Party during the riots in 1937, and was to become the leader of the party in 1953 and the first prime minister of independent Mauritius in 1968. He has later been acknowledged as the 'Father of the Nation' by a Mauritian population which is otherwise portrayed by scholars as an extreme pluralistic and diverse 'society'. In the aftermath of the Maoist Revolution of 1949, Chinese immigration was also substantial and added to the heterogeneity of the island, and the problem in Mauritius as in other colonies with plural societies, was to reconcile majority rule with minority rights. The basic principle of the Labour Party was therefore based upon a non-communal²⁸ approach to politics (Mannick 1979). One of their main combat areas during the 40s was the introduction of *universal* (meaning male) suffrage; well familiar with the effects such a reform would have on the outcome of the 1948 elections and the total political set up in the island due to their vast support amongst the Indian agricultural workers. Ironically perhaps, it was the dominant Franco-Mauritian elite, and not the socialist Labour Party, who were responsible for the introduction of women as forming part of the electorate. The motive was rather concerned with upholding own dominance than any true devotion towards changing women's inferior position as minors.

“Whereas the Franco-Mauritians insisted that the women who could meet qualifications (age over 21 and passing a simple literacy test in any spoken language in the country), Indians opposed it. Arguments about women's ability to make political decisions were carried on at a high plane, but it was evident that on a more

²⁸ *Kominalism* or communalism refers to the categorisation of people into religious and ethnic groups. Its critics (See for instance publications by Lalit; a Trotskyian based political party) equates it with racism due to what they argue is the classification's inherent negative and racist consequences.

practical level each community had its own interests at heart. If literacy tests were to be retained as a minimum requirement, few Indian women would qualify- but nearly every Franco-Mauritian woman would" (Simmons 1982: 99).

Despite the Labour Party's claims of non-communalism, their electorate was first and foremost made up of the above mentioned Indian field labourers. The Franco-Mauritians and the Creoles, believed the party to have the Indians' interests at heart, and greatly feared that Mauritius would become 'a small India' under Hindu dominance. The Muslims would also join in on and off. This fear had its out-spring due to the Hindu Cultural Revival movement of Basdeo Bissoondoyal which gained considerable support and popularity through Bissoondoyal's founding of schools for Indian 'culture' and language. Still, the Labour Party swept the polls in 1948, and 23 % of the votes in the election belonged to women for the first time in Mauritian history. As a response, alliances between Franco-Mauritians and Creoles were formed in the years to come towards the next elections in 1953 and the coming of independence in 1968 (Simmons 1982).

One of the results of this common Franco-Mauritian and Creole antagonism towards Labour Party politics was the emergence of *new* political parties, and alliances between old ones. In the early 60s it was the conservative right wing and capitalist *Parti Mauricien* (PM) which was to form the main opposition to the ruling Labour Party, especially under the very charismatic leadership of Gaetan Duval. Duval was later to be known as *King Creole*²⁹, and the *Parti Mauricien* was clearly based in communalism, courting the Franco-Mauritian and the Creole electorate for votes in fear of Hindu hegemony (Selvon 1991). When the day of the 1967 election for independence arrived, 44 % of the electorate voted against it, including women who had gained universal suffrage in 1959 (Gunganah 1997). Uproar swept the capital Port Louis and the country's second state of emergency since the riots in 1937 was declared. Calm was restored within weeks. The Union Jack was lowered, and Ramgoolam and Duval started to discuss the possibility of a coalition government as the necessity of *nation-building* seemed to be essential if this small island state was ever to succeed.

It was therefore somewhat paradoxical that this coalition government at the same time was responsible for a comprehensive ethnic identity census in 1972. Every inhabitant was to declare their ethnic identity with respect to the already defined categories; Hindu, Muslim, Sino-Mauritian and a 'General Population'. The Creoles and the Franco-Mauritians were

²⁹ Amongst women Duval was also known as 'King of the Amazons'. Several times he organised for women workers to carry him on their shoulders through the streets during protest demonstrations for better work conditions (Muvman Liberasyon Fam 1988)

thrown into this last basket together. This categorising has had a substantial impact on political participation in Mauritius ever since. The political system in Mauritius is modelled on the British Westminster system in combination with what is locally known as the Best Loser System. 8 remaining seats after elections in Parliament are to be distributed and reserved on the basis of ethnic and party ‘membership’ to the runners-up so as to ensure all the above mentioned ethnic categories are represented in the Legislative Assembly (Eriksen 1998). As the Franco-Mauritians and the Creoles share an ascription of ethnic status according to this 1972 census, Franco-Mauritians are often the ones to be reserved seats according to this system due to their already mentioned economical and symbolic power, a fact even in today’s Mauritius. The marginalisation of Creoles economically, socially and politically which is locally known as *le malez Kreol* (le malaise créole), derives from the exclusion of their participation in civil society during le tem margoze and is still upheld due to amongst other things, this Best Loser System (Miles 1999). At the same time its critics have fiercely argued that it contributes to entrenching ethnic divisions and communal politics, and hinders the Creoles to define themselves as an ethnic group proper³⁰.

During the 70s there was a new political force which made itself highly present in this atmosphere of national sentiment based on a ‘Unity in Diversity’ approach. Paul Bérenger, a Franco-Mauritian who had recently returned from his higher education in Paris inspired by Marxism and his participation in the Student Revolts of 1968, claimed an entry into the Mauritian political arena with his Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM) formed in 1969. He strongly appealed to the youth and the workers of the country, irrespective of ethnic identity; a completely new phenomenon to the political life on the island. Frustrated by the alliance between the economically powerful Franco-Mauritians and the politically powerful governing Hindus, the Mouvement Militant Mauricien was responsible for organising a general strike in 1971 with the support of 11 unions. They pushed it too far. The government actively repressed their actions by detaining party leaders and declaring a state of emergency. It was not until the 1982 General Elections that the party under the leadership of Anerood Jugnauth, would reach a position of formal power when they gained office through an alliance with left-wing members of the Labour Party who had formed the Parti Socialiste Mauricien (PSM) (Meisenhelder 1997). As the Westminster model favours a two-bloc system, coalitions have been frequent throughout the Mauritian political history (Eriksen 1998). At the same

³⁰ See also Laville (2000) for a more substantial understanding of the processes having led to Creole marginalisation in Mauritian ‘society’.

time these coalitions seem to have had a somewhat modifying effect on the initial agendas of the differing parties. Today most of the parties which have formed governments are experienced as implementing 'middle of the road' policies (Selvon 1991) and of helping in keeping up reciprocal dependence between the different ethnic groups in order to avoid what could otherwise have been a continuance of earlier communal conflicts (Simmons 1982), as these various groups are generally believed to be corresponding to economical classes (Bowman 1991). Today the Mauritian population is made up of 68 % Indo-Mauritian of which 51 % are Hindu and 17 % are Muslim, 27 % Creoles, 2 % Franco-Mauritian and 3 % Sino-Mauritian. The main languages are the official English but which is hardly known and spoken outside bureaucratic offices, the 'cultural' French which is very much used in the Mauritian media, and the lingua franca 'Kreol'. The country is a member of both the African Union, The New Commonwealth and La Francophonie, and the legal system is a hybrid between the French and the British (Lam Hung 2003). It is a complex nation indeed.

The newly industrialised Mauritius, the Export Processing Zone and women's roles

At independence Mauritius was still fully dependent on sugar for foreign exchange. After independence this economical mono-crop culture changed radically and eventually became responsible for Mauritius' achievement of a position as a newly industrialised country in the 1990s.

In 1971 an industrial 'zone', the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) was founded (Eriksen 1998), and which gave birth to the 'economical miracle' Mauritius is known to be today. The Export Processing Zone is modelled on similar projects of export-led industrialization in East Asia, and the idea is to attract foreign investors through incentives such as duty-free imports, untaxed operations and cheap labour. The most common items produced were and are textiles, and by 1985 the EPZ products had replaced sugar as the island's largest earner of foreign exchange (Meisenhelder 1997) with help from the Structural Adjustment Program introduced through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in 1979 (Bunwaree 1999). Particularly women responded to the new unskilled job-opportunities created through the Export Processing Zone. Despite the fact that men and women were given equal rights to primary education in 1959 (Gunganah 1997), women's education has always lagged behind that of men's. The official literacy rates for adults were approximately 90 % in 1990, with that

of women only 65 % (Bunwaree 1999)³¹. The low-skilled requirements needed to apply for a job in the EPZ therefore attracted many young women from working class families who up until then had been concentrated in the domestic service and agricultural labour. The impact of this industrialisation has first and foremost been discussed with reference to economical changes on a macro and micro level, such as how this ‘economical miracle’ have led to greater individual freedom, but also excessive consumerism and ‘westernisation’ of lifestyles. Despite the role of the Export Processing Zone as indispensable to the growth of a relatively strong welfare-state and a high development index in Mauritius; many Mauritians have also voiced scepticism to some of the effects of the EPZ:

“While women were increasingly employed, men had been increasingly sacked. This meant that women’s bargaining position in the home had been considerably strengthened. It also meant that men workers could resent women workers” (Muvman Liberasyon Fam 1988: 13).

Little research has been done on how the EPZ, which up until today utilises almost exclusively female labour³², has influenced the construction and constitution of gender identities- and relations in Mauritius (Gunganah 1997). Still, there is no doubt that it *has* had an impact. Mauritian women might for instance argue that due to the financial benefits of employment, they have managed to strengthen their negotiating powers both within and outside political arenas. On the other hand, as male unemployment is on the increase in the island, men’s traditional roles as sole breadwinners are threatened. In a context which expects men to be powerful, such a change might be interpreted by men as a loss of personal power. According to Green (1999) it is in such cases that wife battery is most likely to occur, hence women’s negotiating powers within the family does not necessarily increase as she starts to work, but rather *decreases* as her partner tries to re-establish a gendered status quo. Then again, an effect of women’s increased participation in the paid labour force has also been the development of women’s awareness of themselves as autonomous individuals (Gunganah 1997). Whereas women were previously primarily confined to the household in their daily activities, the factory floors have created new arenas for female inter-ethnic interaction.

³¹ I have seen several different numbers concerning the literacy rate in Mauritius from various sources. An example is for instance to be found in Lam Hung (2003) who claims it to be 84.8 %. The discrepancy is probably based upon differing understandings and definitions of the terms literate: illiterate without me believing it important to specify this any further with respect to this thesis’ purpose.

³² Statistics published by the Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare (Women and men in figures 2001: table 4.5) shows that there were 40.2 % women employed in the EPZ sector of the total female working force, in relation to only 8.8 % men.

Although it was mostly Creole women who took to sewing jeans in the 70s, as the Export Processing Zone has grown so has the proportion of Hindu, Tamil and Muslim employees. At least in the larger industrial estates, women from all these ethnic categories work together, transcending ethnic boundaries. One can possibly even argue that work in the EPZ has created “new fields of shared meaning” (Eriksen 1998). At least it was in the aftermath of the major economical changes which started to revolt Mauritius in the 70s that Mauritian women for the first time took to the barracks and publicly demanded acknowledgment of their different contributions in Mauritian ‘society’, denounced their status as minors and actively fought for changes. Women participated for instance in organising the trade union The Textile and Clothing Manufacturing Workers’ Union and together with the work of various non-governmental organisations such as for instance the very active *Muvman Liberasyon Fam* (MLF), and governmental women’s associations, various labour laws were adopted in 1980 to better working conditions for women. Examples are maternity benefits- and allowances, and the removal of wage discriminations in the EPZ in 1983. The Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare (MWRCDFW, and as of 2005 also Consumer Protection)³³ also became a reality in 1982 and was headed by a woman; Shirin Aumeeruddy-Cziffra (Lam Hung 2003).

At the same time it seems that an additional result of the consciousness-rising concerning women’s capabilities to actually ‘make a difference’, extended in some cases to include issues not necessarily directly related to a feminist fight. Still, women would gather, having found common ground to voice their opinions in public space. It would for instance be an insult to Mauritius not to mention the international conflict concerning the islands of Diego Garcia, a topic which in 1981 led to a three day long hunger strike in the Company Gardens initiated by members of *Muvman Liberasyon Fam* and women from Diego Garcia³⁴. Diego Garcia is part of the Chagos Archipelago, and is therefore officially Mauritian. However, one of the conditions for gaining independence from Britain was that Diego Garcia would be ceded to the UK. At the time of this agreement, Diego Garcia was populated by some 1200 *Ilois*³⁵ who were expelled from their homes, and forcibly moved to the main land of Mauritius as Diego Garcia was leased by the British Government to the United States. The American

³³ Today Consumer Protection has also been added to the Ministry’s name. During my fieldwork in Mauritius 2003, the Ministry was headed by the Hon. Mrs Arianne Navarre-Marie. Today (2005) it is headed by the Hon. Mrs. Indranee Seebun.

³⁴ The *Muvman Liberasyon Fam* (see publication 1988) claims that Diego Garcia was a matriarchal ‘society’.

³⁵ The inhabitants of Diego Garcia and their descendants are commonly known in Mauritius as ‘the islanders’.

interest was due to the islands' geographically strategic positions, and is today an American naval base most recently used in the war against Iraq. It has been established that the ceding to Britain was illegal according to international law, and the Ilois have never received proper compensation for the loss of their land. At the same time many Ilois have had problems integrating into life in Mauritius as they have been widely regarded as a social problem. They have been subject to prejudicial attitudes and behaviours from both formal and informal sections of Mauritian 'society', something which has led most of them to the bottom of the economical, social and political hierarchy on the island (Eriksen 1998). The Ilois gained the right to repatriation in 2001, but their case is currently further treated in international court.

Consequences of the Export Processing Zone for women's situations

Up until now I have largely focused upon the positive aspects of the changes brought along by the integration of women in the paid Mauritian work force as they have been manifested in consciousness-rising and active participation in public life. Many women found their voices throughout the 70s, and many women were even capable of making their voices be heard and counted for. This was not a sole event in Mauritius, but a global phenomenon spreading even to the outer islands of the Indian Ocean. Women all over the world took to the barracks throughout this decade, and 1975 was for instance the onset of the United Nation's Decade for Women. Still, there is also another side of the coin:

"The price of participation in the labour force is heavy for women. Their workload goes well beyond that of a full day in the factory, as they also have to continue to take all responsibility for domestic work and care of their children. The stress and fatigue involved in coping with the daily double shift, the anxiety about child care arrangements, and working conditions in the new manufacturing environment have given rise to several health problems. Among the major ones are defective nutritional status leading to anaemia, back ache and psychosomatic disorders such as migraine" (Gunganah 1997: 24).

The double work load women experience according to this statement is not a locally specific phenomenon, and I therefore find that this assertion more or less only helps to state the obvious, despite its *necessity* to be repeated over and over if change is ever to happen. Still, it does help in understanding gender in today's Mauritius. In spite of women making an entrance unto the public stage in the 70s, particular expectations concerning gender roles exist in Mauritius even today because of certain overarching structures which specify appropriate gender conduct in the Mauritian context. Working is not necessarily one of them as it steals time away from what should be the woman's proper and *natural* devotion; her home and her family. That does not necessarily entail that women who work are not acknowledged as

economically important contributors in today's Mauritius, but inherent in the male: female dichotomy on the island there seems to be a tendency not to pose any questions in relation to the traditional and 'true' gender roles of society. A lot of women in Mauritius have never taken up paid work and do not necessarily intend to do so either. Many women also stop working when they get married as their duties are now understood to be tied to their homes. Housework is for instance widely accepted as women's work as it is believed to undermine male power (Gunganah 1997). There is even a Kreol turn of phrase which refers specifically to this issue, and which is used in communication between men only. If a man is believed to help too much with house chores, he might be mocked with the saying "To en fam nwar"! meaning "You're a black (slave) woman".

Mauritian kinship and social organisation of the family

The reasons for the maintaining of customary conjugal roles and practises in the family as conventional norms, can be explained with the established Mauritian kinship structure and the social organisation of the family. Benedict (1965) and Eriksen (1998) claim that the structuring of the family differs between ethnic groups. Whereas Franco-Mauritians, Creoles and Sino-Mauritians usually live in households composed of elementarily and nuclear families, Indo-Mauritians tend to live in patrilineal and patrilocal joint family households. After marriage, which is often organised by the men in the respective families, the Hindu and Muslim women leave their paternal homes to live with their husband's family. It is therefore first and foremost Indo-Mauritian women who are associated with the private sphere in the island, whereas for instance the Creole's neo local and more flexible, non-hierarchical family organisation, leaves Creole women with more options open to manipulation of 'traditional' gender roles- and practises. Still, to have sexual relations outside of wedlock are frowned upon by many, and in all ethnic groups the man is most likely to be considered the head of the family. There is even a tendency amongst *all* segments of the Mauritian population to live in close proximity to the male side of the family's 'community' to be able to keep up the close-knit family structure. Additionally, each of the ethnic groups is considered to be more or less endogamous.

On the other hand, according to a sample survey conducted by the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare in 1994 (in Gunganah 1997), 84 % of Mauritian households are nuclear, while 16 % are extended. This survey contradicts the above mentioned claims that most Indo-Mauritian households are necessarily joint ones, as

most households in fact are elementary in today's Mauritius. The discrepancy might be due to differences in the applied definitions and understandings of nuclear- and extended household units. As already mentioned, many newlywed Mauritians set up their homes in the immediate neighbouring area of the husband's parents' residence. In practice this often entails living in a separate house, but on the same plot of land. As mentioned in the introductory chapter to this thesis, many even build their homes in attachment to and in continuance of the residence already there. Such a manner of living can be understood as both forming an extended family, *and* as being a separate entity. In anthropological terms it is also an example of patrilocal housing patterns. My own empirical data confirms such an understanding as many of my informants live in family based compound housing arrangements. Then again, this did not seem to differ with respect to ethnic categories such as is regularly implied, but was rather a general tendency. The same concerns the creation and preservation of the gender based power relations both in the domestic unit and in the public sphere. Whereas Creole women are generally considered to benefit from more personal freedom than their Hindu or Muslim neighbours, something which might make it easier for them to take up paid work, enjoy various leisure activities, or even engage in pre-marital sexual relations, this is not necessarily so. Possibilities might present themselves more duly to the Creole woman due to the lack of a strong patriarchal family structure, but expectations concerning sexuality, morality and appropriate behaviour in accordance to gender, are still the same. There is a difference made between *good* (moral) *women* and *bad* (immoral) *women*. The overarching structures of conduct mentioned previously do not seem to differ much between the various ethnic groups.

As it seems that most Mauritians are sensitive to the up keeping of 'traditional' gender roles and expectations wherein women are referred to the private domain, there is clearly a stigmatising of women leading their lives in a different manner. According to the same 1994 census mentioned above, there were only 10 % of private households that were composed of 'single parent families'. 59 % of these were female, either widows (42 %), divorced (6 %) or single (5 %) (Gunganah 1997). Benedict claims that one frequently finds *matrifocal* families amongst the Creoles, which are families composed chiefly of a mother and her children in which the husband and father role is peripheral, and a woman during her child-bearing years may have children with several men (Benedict 1965). I believe both my data and the numbers from the 1994 census clearly show that this is not the reality today. I rather believe that marriage is a general 'rule' and that to live alone as a single woman, especially with children, is both economically and socially taxing. These women are often experienced as crossing normative boundaries for appropriate gender behaviour because they are perceived as

challenging, maybe even threatening to the male dominated status quo in both the domestic- and in the public sphere by living alone *and* by entering the paid labour force. As governmental financial support to single mothers is rather meagre and is not by far enough to cover basic household expenses, any woman with the sole responsibility for her children will necessarily be obliged to take up paid work to be able to make ends meet. Many perceive this sarung, or in my case “sari to jean movement” (Ong 1987), to degenerate ‘traditional values’, and the consequence has in many cases been a try at trivialising women’s work by claiming economically independent women and perhaps specifically women in the Export Processing Zone, to be bad, immoral, disrespectful and of ‘loose’ sexual morals. This also seems to make many women legitimised targets for sexual harassment. It is widely believed in Mauritius that there are first and foremost Creole women who are single mothers, and it is also therefore mostly Creole women who have had to struggle against being perceived as sexually uninhibited. According to Laville (2000) the association of Creole women with such ‘unrestrained sexual behaviour’ also has its origin in the stereotypes created by the powerful in Mauritian history. Certain physical features such as black curly hair are assumed to accompany particular stereotypical conduct. At the same time women’s work is often deemed inferior basically just because it is women who do it. Women workers carry their subordinate status with them into the factory, and this status defines the value of the work they do (Moore 1988). Ong (1987) also claims that male supremacy is upheld, maybe even intensified, on the factory floors. Most of the Export Processing Zone -factories are owned and run by men, and the male hierarchy is therefore rather reproduced than changed in the capitalist industrial sector. In Mauritius today there are also many women employed in the EPZ who are so called ‘out-workers’, something which implies that they work in their own homes, but with materials provided by the enterprise. This does not only reduce the overall wage bills for the respective factories, but serves patriarchal interests by keeping the woman tied to her household (Green 1999).

Female participation in the paid workforce has also had an impact on reproductive patterns in Mauritius. The Titmuss rapport “Social Policies and Population Growth in Mauritius” which was published in 1960, predicted a catastrophic population-increase on the island, but was fortunately a Malthusian nightmare that never occurred. A decline in fertility might have various explanations. Successful family planning programs³⁶, high health

³⁶ According to a survey, 75 % of married women were using *some form* of contraception in 1991

standards and relatively high literacy rates for women are often put forward as reasons. One can also argue that the feminisation of the work force has contributed to decrease the birth rates. Women have had to control their fertility to ensure participation in the labour market, and many have chosen abortions (Bunwaree 1999). Voluntary abortion is not permitted under *any* circumstances in Mauritius, and many women therefore succumb to ‘back street abortions’ or other crude or self-induced methods. It is estimated that there are 15 to 20 000 abortions each year against 19 000 live births (Ministry of Health Statistics 1996 in Gunganah 1997). This suspected high number of unsafe abortions is primarily prevalent amongst women from lower classes. It is a well-known fact that there are private clinics which conduct safe abortions for fees on the island. At the same time women from upper classes can choose to go to either South Africa or Reunion where the medical procedure is legal.

Economical decline and communalist surge

The development and prospering of the Export Processing Zone and the increase in tourism has been largely responsible for the economical success of independent Mauritius in the last three decades. It is not up until quite recently that concern has been voiced as unemployment has been steadily rising, as has various commodity prices. Several sugar factories have been closed since the onset of the millennium, and employees in the textile industry have suffered from factory closures and job losses as guaranteed quotas have been increasingly replaced by free commerce and globalisation of markets as dominant features of world trade (Selvon 2001). Due to the feminisation of the manufacturing work force, it is women who are first and foremost sensitive to such fluctuations in the market, and are amongst the first to lose their jobs in periods of recession. The unemployment rate for women jumped from 2.2 % in 1991 to 12.3 % in 2000 (Lam-Hung 2003). The Government has embarked on ambitious projects to be able to change the unemployment trend, and create a new ‘pillar’ for the economy. Cyber City at Ebène might be a monstrous architectural construction, but it is also the ultimate symbol for the new economical directions of the state; namely information and communication technology (Selvon 2001). Only time will tell whether it will be successful, but already now one can see the contours of particular problems. There is for instance a

(Gunganah 1997). Still, very many of these contraceptive methods are quite unreliable, and some even completely useless if the man does not comply. At the same time the law does not define rape within marriage as rape at all. I will both discuss rape and abortion further in chapter 5 of this thesis.

possibility that women will be bypassed as a lot of women lack the educational background necessary for employment in this sector.

During the late 90s the island experienced an upsurge of social unrest as well. As mentioned previously, Creole complaints about what is perceived as unjust Hindu dominance in politics and the state apparatus has been common since before independence. A tendency towards Hindu nepotism, something which is claimed by Eriksen (1999) to be well documented, has not benefited Creoles. In the latter half of the 90s, a new social movement and later a political party, the Mouvement Républicain (MR) under the leadership of the barrister Rama Valayden, emerged on the Mauritian political scene. It had a strongly liberal, anti-government and Afro centric rhetoric, and quickly gained support amongst young, poor Creoles insisting on a share in the 'Mauritian miracle' (ibid). One of the fights taken up by the MR was a decriminalisation of cannabis (*gandia*), demanding that penalties for the use of *gandia* should not be prescribed on the same basis as hard drugs. In February 1999 a mass meeting in favour of legalisation was held, and among the participants was the island's most popular singer, the Rastafarian Joseph Reginald Topize, known as Kaya. Although there were many attending the meeting and according to media reports the next day, many who smoked cannabis, Kaya was the only one not to deny it. The police had not deemed it fit to arrest anyone for smoking at the meeting, and it was only later under political and media pressure, that the police started inquiries. Kaya was detained, and brought to a high security cell at Line Barracks Detention Centre in Port Louis, a prison which is usually reserved for notorious and dangerous criminals (News on Sunday 26.06.03). The next morning Kaya was found dead in his cell due to head injuries, and as rumours spread like fire in the sugar plantations in the hours to come his death was blamed on police brutality. In the following days, uproar swept the country. Violence against the police, which is perceived as largely Hindu (Caroll and Caroll in Laville 2000) broke out, and police stations were set on fire. As the police answered the rioters back, another Rastafarian, Agathe Berger, was shot dead. Violence escalated both between demonstrators and the police, and between Hindus and Creoles. Six people had died, over a hundred had been injured and the material damage was substantial when peace was restored a few days later following appeals by religious leaders and the then President of Mauritius, Sir Cassam Uteem. Although the initial resentment on behalf of Creoles was targeted towards the police and the state, the violence took a communal turn (Eriksen 1999). According to Laville (2000), many Creole *women* experienced attacks as well, as they were perceived as the physical 'producers' of Creoles.

During my fieldwork in 2003, Kaya's final autopsy rapport was completed. Whereas there had been an independent autopsy carried out by a foreign physician not long after his death which concluded that he had indeed died from head injuries which could not have been self-inflicted, the newspaper headings stated this time that there was "No foul play" involved, but that he had rather died from a fistful seizure of some sort (L'Express 04.06.03, Le Défi Plus, 07.06. 03, Week-End 08.06.03). I expected that new disturbances might occur, but to my knowledge nothing happened whatsoever, except Kaya's late wife demanding a new autopsy as she has always claimed Kaya was healthy when he was detained. After I had left Mauritius in September, the Muvman Liberasyon Fam together with Kaya's widow formed a human chain outside the office of the National Assembly. It might seem as if the voices found by many Mauritian women throughout the 70s are still there to be heard.

Concluding remarks

Despite all this being said, great improvements have been made concerning the situations of Mauritian women since independence. In 1995 for instance, the Mauritian Constitution was amended to prohibit discriminations on the grounds of sex (Lam Hung 2003). Mauritius has also ratified several important international resolutions such as the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984. Mauritius is also party to the Platform of Action, a result of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender and Development and recently signed the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Declaration of Gender. The Government has also developed a working document; the White Paper on Women and Development which promotes gender equity in all spheres of life (MWRCDFW National Gender Action Plan 2000).

Still, gender awareness is only slowly starting to gain ground. That women have the same legal rights as men, does not necessarily entail that women do not suffer from various forms of discrimination. As social anthropologists are well aware of, there is a difference between *social structure* and *social organisation* (Firth 1967), and I believe a qualitative analysis between the two is of uttermost importance to be able to understand everyday life of Mauritian women. Through my experience in the field I got the impression that many Mauritian women apparently enjoyed considerable personal freedom, but I also realised that this freedom was often defined and determined within a patriarchal structure. At the same time gender can not be understood as a homogenous and static category, nor can anything

else. Neither 'society' nor 'gender' are integrated and stable unities, but are rather processual, fluid and continuously evolving. Because the world is understood in such a manner, it is important to situate and contextualise particular historical and spatial junctures, wherein the negotiations of gender-meanings take place. Gender is always submitted to interpretation and at the same time intersecting with- and constituted by other hierarchical domains like the family, civil society, the government and transnational and global arenas as even larger hegemonic contexts (Ong 1995). Throughout this thesis the focus will be upon a small island in the outer Indian Ocean, because as I continue my journey through the Mauritian landscape to finally reach the closed gates of the shelter, there is no doubt that discrimination against women in Mauritius is by far over. The two storey yellow concrete building surrounded with high fences and barbed wire seems like a bleeding wound, a symbol of female oppression in its crudest and most violent form; domestic violence.



Chapter two -

On the contextual and social situations of battered women and other inmates; the “underlife” of a shelter for battered women in Mauritius³⁷

To the shelter

The bus from Port Louis to the shelter for battered women in Moka leaves from Gare du Sud. The noise of the bus station is extensive, and can probably only compete with the shouts of various vendors at the nearby Victoria Street Market, as they eagerly try to secure today’s income from boxer shorts, laced or padded bras, jeans, various vegetables or porcelain girls on swings with the purpose of decorating corner cupboards in Mauritian *cité* homes³⁸. Line Barracks which is more popularly known as the Alcatraz is close by. It is without doubt the most reputed police station and prison on the island. This was where the seggae³⁹ musician Kaya died in police custody in 1999, and which triggered off the only recent riots in Mauritian history. Most of the prison is hidden from the public’s view, just like Kaya’s autopsy rapport which apparently explained the 32 bruises achieved within a few hours at the police station (L’Express 04.06.03, Week-End 08.06.03, News on Sunday 26.06.03), by the cold, grey, secluding brick wall which makes reality within them almost invisible.

I take my seat in the bus, and try to avoid the sun blazing through the windows. There is a woman in her forties sitting next to me. She has carefully combed down her naturally

³⁷ See Goffman’s “Asylums” (1962).

³⁸ In the late 1970s and early 1980s housing estates were built in order to re-house victims of cyclones belonging to the poorest segments of the population who due to lack of insurances were unable to re-house themselves. Such housing estates are called *cité ouvriere*, and it is commonly known that these areas contain a disproportionately high number of families with unemployment and alcohol problems (Gunganah 1997), and they are therefore often referred to as ghettos by Mauritians. Examples are Roche Bois and Cité Valijee outside Port Louis.

³⁹ Seggae is a type of music which combines the rhythms of sega with the Jamaican reggae.

curly hair, and pinned it up with small colourful hair pins⁴⁰. She wears a beige skirt, a red top and has a small golden necklace with a cross around her neck. Her basket handbag is placed on her lap and she holds it tightly with both her hands, absorbed in thought. The conductor comes to collect the bus fares, and I tell him where I am headed while I give him the 16 rupees he requires. By now I have become familiar with the curves of the road, the Moka range of deep green mountains on my left hand side and the men and women who wear black rubber boots and broad rimmed hats working in the waving sugarcane fields which fold out in front of me. The bus struggles its way upwards the hill, and leaves Port Louis and the vastness and splendour of the turquoise Indian Ocean behind. We slowly make our way up to leafy and sedate Moka. I am almost there. The woman who sits next to me is getting off the bus as well. She steals a glance at me and I nod back. We are heading in the same direction, and I realise that although I do not know her yet, I soon will.

I need to walk for around 5 minutes following the main road before I reach the shelter. Cars pass by at incredible speed, and I am grateful that I am safe and sound on the pavement. The opposite side of the road is the sugarcane's domain. What might seem as deep, emerald green waves from a distance becomes powerfully detailed, thick and tall so close by. I somehow sense that if I am not careful, the cane might actually cut me, eat me alive with their sharp edges. I remember Sandra O'Reilly, the girl who was raped by three men in the deepness of the sugarcane fields. It was her second rape in one night. The first time was when her house was broken into. She managed to escape, and stopped the first car she saw and asked for help. She was never taken to the police station; she was raped again and by three men this time. 5 rapes in one night (Week- End Scope 02.07.03, News on Sunday 04.07.03, Le Défi Jeunes 08.07.03, Le Défi Plus 19.07. 03, Week- End 27.07.03 and several others), and history turned upside down. Descendants of Indian immigration workers raping a white Franco-Mauritian girl, whereas as we all know 'traditionally' it was the white colonial power who raped coloured slave women. 'Paradise Island' Mauritius was unintentionally born in this manner.

My side of the road is reserved residential houses. Most of them are big and imposing, with white polished cars and barking watchdogs in huge gardens inside high security gates. Still there is life. Behind and between the rich houses a Mauritian neighbourhood like any other is hiding. Houses partly finished, awaiting potentially new additions to the family with rusted steel spikes on every roof top to be able to continue building. At the moment the roofs

⁴⁰ The importance and manipulation of hair as an ethical marker in Mauritius is well described by Laville (2000).

are only used to dry clothes on steel wire or on ropes stretched across their wide surfaces. The houses are square and concrete, some are painted white, and others are still the muddy grey colour of cement. There are also homes which are made of rusted tin shields. Some houses have small Hindu temples in their gardens: Lakshmi, Ganesh or The Holy Cow in small glass containers on painted poles above the ground, whereas others have dark green mango trees with sweet and yellow fruits, coconut trees or bushes with beautiful red Hibiscus flowers. Sandra and Camille, two former residents of the shelter, live in this neighbourhood. The house was found them by Woman's Aid. In their garden there are small children's clothes left to dry on the bushes and papaya soon to be ripe, and whereas the house itself has a leaking roof and a bathroom outside; it also has two beds (to fit one adult and two small girls), a refrigerator and a television.

I continue to walk, but turn into a side road when the bamboos get thicker. I soon find myself facing the gates of the shelter. The huge neighbouring houses are not quite as imposing here, the mountains and vegetable fields make their presence seem more humble. Maybe it is just because I know the stories which await me behind the gates as well. Everything outside them seems unreal and of no importance sometimes. In that respect there is perfect asymmetry colouring the relationship between the inside and the outside of the shelter. In the public discourse it is rather the lives lived inside these walls one never encounter.

Shelter(ed) ecology⁴¹

The shelter is a two storey yellow concrete building surrounded with high fences and barbed wire. The concrete is blackened due to rain, and gives the house a somewhat dirty and weary look. The massive metal door which marks off its inhabitants from the threats of the outside world is grey and somewhat threatening. Still, there is a door bell and it *can* be opened. Although Anita on her first day as a resident told me that this is what she imagined a woman's prison would look like, children's laughter lurk in the corners and reaches a peak on the swings in the worn out outdoor playground. Besides, and as already mentioned, many of the shelter's immediate neighbouring houses easily matches both the shelter's size and security systems as they belong to some of the most well off population in Mauritius.

⁴¹ See Appendix Two for a map of the shelter.

There are two entrances into the house; one at the office, and one through the crèche which used to be a garage. The crèche is lined with red children's tables and chairs on one side of the room, whereas the furniture on the opposite side is for adults; two straw chairs and a large wooden table to clean rice or lentils, peel ginger and garlic on. The room is sparse. An old Christmas greeting painted directly on the wall and three posters make up the only decoration. There are not many toys scattered around. There are not many toys to speak of in the shelter at all. Behind a flowery curtain is the shelter's washing machine and ironing board. The washing machine is only in use for sheets, towels etcetera which belong to Woman's Aid, whereas the women wash their clothes outside on a rock in the "traditional Mauritian manner" as Amina once said.

I walk the three steps up and inside the hallway of the house before I enter the social workers' office. In the hallway there is a poster with the achievements of Tennessee women throughout the times, whereas the walls in the office are decorated with the Woman's Aid's own "Vre zomme pa bat fam" (Real men do not beat women), a poster with emergency numbers to a rape crisis centre in South Africa stating that it can happen to YOU, and the quotation "Being a woman is not a state, but a process" by Simone De Beauvoir, elaborately embroidered on a piece of cloth and pinned to the wall. The office also contains two desks, a tall metal closet in the corner which contains files of all the past and present residents, and two chairs purposed to make the women in for counselling at least a bit more comfortable.

Amina is the daily leader of the shelter and one of the 15 founding members of Woman's Aid. Her sisters Razia and Manda are two of the others, and all of them still work closely together. Razia is the president of Woman's Aid and a prominent barrister in Mauritius. Manda is her legal secretary. According to Savita; Woman's Aid's book keeper, accountant, secretary and Razia's right hand, Woman's Aid has around 50 members, but very few are active. The decision making body of the association is the members' General Assembly. Policies are defined by the Executive Committee, but are ratified by the General Assembly every second month. Turnout at these assemblies is low. During the time of my field work there were only about 15 steady members present at these gatherings, and the practice of monthly meetings was changed to one in every second month.

Woman's Aid was born under a banya tree in Razia's garden in 1989. After Razia completed her law studies in England and had set up her practice in Mauritius she simultaneously opened a free legal advice centre. It was a particular incident that triggered off the legendary 'banya tree meeting' in the history of the organisation. A woman had sought Razia's help to be able to leave her husband. The woman's husband had melted candles and

poured the boiling wax over his wife's chest while she was asleep with their two weeks old baby at her side. The woman's left breast had been completely mutilated and was now gone. Although this story might have been a particularly cruel one, this woman was not the only one who sought the advice of the legal centre due to abuse. Many women came with similar stories to tell, but they had all been sent back home again after their sessions were over although Razia had come to realise by now that what the women needed was not primarily legal advice, but somewhere safe to stay. The 'banya tree meeting' was scheduled, and there were women present who later spent the night in Razia's house. The idea and concept of the shelter had been formed, and with the financial assistance from the German Fraun Stif and the Frederich Ebert Foundation, the World Council of Churches in Switzerland, the American Global Fund for Women and a South African feminist organisation and various smaller donors, the present shelter became a reality. At the same time as Woman's Aid offers protection and counselling in the vicinity of the shelter, the founding principle of the organisation is feminism⁴², and their aim is to empower women in general and campaign against gender based violence. Woman's Aid therefore also runs a women's library and information centre in one of the island's larger towns.

Amina is the only one with a diploma in social work of those who are employed at the shelter. She works weekdays from around 8-15, or 9-16 whereas the other social workers work shifts from 8-17, and 17-8 every second day including weekends. There are four full time social workers, or "Miss(es)" as the residents call them; soothing Miranda, critical Marianne, strict Joanna and gentle 'grand mère' Sophie. Their salary is around 5500 rupees which is a fairly reasonable salary in Mauritius as textile workers for instance normally earn around 3000 a month. Two part time social workers are employed at the shelter as well. They usually work night shifts which pay 175 rupees per night. Normally their sleep is not disturbed despite that the emergency phone is answered 24/7. Otherwise, Irish Sister Marion with the Loretta Sisters works at the shelter as a volunteer and a driver.

The woman I encountered on the bus is in for counselling with Amina and Miranda. Whether she will leave immediately after the session, not ready to leave her husband just yet, or if she will have supper with the rest of us in the kitchen later is too soon to tell. Except that she is crying, there are no other tell tale signs of her history of abuse. Counselling is only one part of the social workers' job. Besides organising and supervising a smooth running of the

⁴² Without further ideological specifications.

shelter, their other most important tasks are to accompany the women to the police, the hospital and the courts⁴³.

After the counselling session is over I move on towards the kitchen. The kitchen is big and spacious, and contains all necessary equipment; a gas stove, kitchen benches in white tiles to prepare food on, dark brown wooden cabinets for plates, glasses and cups (divided and separated social workers/ residents), a refrigerator (with a post it note which state that only the social workers are allowed to open the door) a huge freezer, a kitchen table with boiled water for the children, a big dining table, a corner cup board with porcelain figures and old Christmas cards by various members of Woman's Aid, and a crib for babies and toddlers. It is soon three o'clock, and it is soon tea time. Nina, a resident in the shelter, is wearing dark blue tights, a huge T-shirt and slippers. Self-consciously she excuses her outfit: "*Why bother to put on clothes for going out when all I do is hang around here anyway?*" Nina has already prepared the custard with rasped coconut for tea time, and placed the tray under a bright red plastic cake cover to let it cool off and protect it from flies. As a 52 year old Creole without any formal education Amina claims that it has proved difficult to find Nina a job. Although Nina has told me that she wants to work as a maid, no one is willing to hire her according to Amina:

"She is too old. She will just wear herself out. Besides, I don't think she should leave her home to look after someone else's children when she still has a minor at home. Her son is only fifteen and still in school. Sometimes these women get so caught up in their own problems that they forget that there are also others' interests to take into consideration".

On the other hand, the small lines around Nina's eyes seem deeper now than when she arrived a month ago; 23 lines for 23 years of marriage, and the second time to the shelter this year. Although Sandra's Nadine and Camille's Natasha, both 1 years old, are not letting Nina out of their sight Nina often seems distanced in her interaction with them. Whether she cleans up left over crumbs from breakfast before the small brown sparrows venture through the open windows, or she comforts Natasha who has been subject to one of Di's boisterous tries at affection, she feeds the two girls lunch or change their diapers, her look seems glassy and her mind occupied elsewhere.

⁴³ As my status was officially agreed upon as a voluntary social worker and student, this was part of my job as well. This ascription of an in-between status seemed to work perfectly throughout my entire stay. Being a social worker meant that I could sit in on counselling sessions, and that I had access to all the resident's files (with their consent of course). At the same time I would spend my evenings chatting in the residents' rooms. I worked my share on a 24 hour basis; night and day shift in one, then having two days off which I usually spent writing up field notes, conducting interviews or visiting places and people of relevance to my field work.

Although Sandra and Camille have moved out of the shelter, their children are still using the shelter's crèche. Sandra works as a maid, as she is only 21 years old and still 'capable' of such work according to Amina. Besides, Sandra has told me how she desperately needs the money to be able to pay for rent, electricity, water and food. Although she shares a house with Camille, Camille is out of work and struggles to contribute her part to the living arrangements. The textile factory she was working in had to let people go. The once booming Mauritian textile industry is losing its roar. Camille is looking for a new job, but although she is experienced with a sewing machine, she has no education and can neither read nor write. Still, she is young, 21 as Sandra, and hard as a nail. There is no doubt in my mind Camille will manage somehow.

All the practical tasks at the shelter are divided by a roster put together by the social workers. Nina might for instance be occupied with preparing tea today, but tomorrow it is Anita's turn. From Anita's first remark concerning the shelter's resemblance to a women's prison, she now seems well settled in. She is tough, bright and sarcastic, and she continuously makes up jokes on the expense of the shelter's anthropologist. While smiling a one toothed smile, she makes suggestive scissor movements and threatens to cut off my well guarded dreads while I am asleep. She is 37, has been married to a drug addict for the last 14 years and somewhere along that long road he knocked her teeth out and put her in hospital with amnesia.

The social workers also put up a list of the week's 'food schedule'. Although breakfast usually consists of the same ingredients every day; tea and fresh bread with lots of butter and a thin covering of Sungold guava jam, lunch (for the children at 11, the women at 12) and dinner (18 for the children, 19 for the women) is more sumptuous. Both lunch and dinner is hot; huge quantities of rice served with the likes of black lentils, fish in tomato sauce, pieces of fried meat or chicken, chou chou, aubergine, or a carrot salad.

The radio is on, playing sega. One and a half year old Di throws off a show as usual. She is wearing huge flip flops for such small feet, obviously belonging to some of the women (Di is a clever shoe stealer) and sways her hips the Mauritian way. Despite that her mother Arianne is Nicaraguan; Di is already at the mercy of the sega's rhythm. Arianne met her Mauritian husband while they worked in the same firm in Nicaragua, and left her homeland to settle in 'Paradise Island' two years ago when she was 21 years old; "an adventure" she once said, and a fresh start for her husband who had been in prison in Nicaragua due to drug possession. Still, her stay in Mauritius might not have turned out like she hoped for. All she now wants is to go home to Nicaragua.

I have a peek through the door to the salon. It is a homely and cosy living room with two sofa groups, a chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and a wall-to-wall carpet. There are more posters on the walls which advocate women's rights. Ginette is the only one there. She is resting on the deep seated flowery couch while she is watching the daily matinee, a Bollywood production from the seventies. I greet Ginette by kissing her cheeks, and ask her how she is. Whereas the response outside the shelter is usually *pas mal*, Ginette tells me that she is ill; her head *fer mal* (hurts). Her response does not surprise me. Ginette often complains about not feeling well. She is 51 years old and has been married for 17 years, but this is her first time to the shelter. She does not have any children. I know she wished she had, but all the 5 times she was pregnant her husband forced her to have an abortion. As abortion is illegal in Mauritius, the methods used are haphazard. I leave her to enjoy her movie.

I go upstairs to deposit my bag. I have been provided with a small room with a bunk bed, a closet and a view of the mountains. "A room of one's own". Just opposite this room is the social workers' bathroom and their bedroom a little further down the hall. There are also 4 dormitories for the residents and another bathroom (Women only. The children have their own downstairs) on this floor. Most of the beds in the dormitories are bunk beds, but there are also cribs for the children. Apparently the dormitories can fill up to 40 people if supplied with extra mattresses. When there is a will, there is a way. Space in the big closets for clothes, creams, baby powder, baby nappies, toys and other personal belongings are divided between the women. Most of them came without anything but the clothes they were wearing, but have later gone back to pick up their personal belongings with the help of court orders, the police and a social worker. Sometimes even children are part of such a pick up; "Immediate control and custody of a minor". Up until then, it is Woman's Aid that provides the newly arrived residents with all their basic necessities; clothes, tooth brushes and tooth paste, cloth diapers, milk powder etcetera. The residents at the shelter pay 300 rupees each per month for food. Although the official time limit for 'hébergement' is three months, some spend up to a year, and others keep returning.

The shelter can be quite empty during the day. Woman's Aid takes pride in finding the women work, and most of the residents are therefore out during work hours. There are only toddlers in the crèche as well, the older children are all at school. It is quiet. When Nina or Ginette are finished with today's assigned chores, there is not much to do but wait for time to pass. There is always someone who sits in one of the straw chairs in the crèche; absorbed in thought and with blank eyes staring at the wall on the other side of the room. Although Amina expresses surprise at this apparent lack of activity, I do not anymore. There is comfort to be

experienced in immovability, silence, a monotonous every day life I have been told. 'Les letan fer son travay'. Let time do its work.

The shelter is usually livelier at night. Nina and Beatrice enjoy a quiet discussion in the living room. Beatrice is 38 and her husband 56. They have lived together for 17 years. Beatrice is a Creole and a Roman Catholic who was married off to her husband at the age of 13. Despite that legal age for marriage in Mauritius is 18, many couples marry twice; first religiously and then civilly.

Most of the other residents are in the kitchen. They talk loudly to each other, their children and the social workers something which tends to make the atmosphere somewhat hectic. Not many conversations last long and every encounter seems brief, sporadic and easily interrupted. After all, there are always women coming and going through the shelter gates, and all relations formed within the shelter has a distinct aroma of temporality. On the other hand, the dormitories upstairs are frequently filled with women who lie on the beds or sit on the floor with children in their laps. The atmosphere is relaxed and conversation flows easy, only interrupted by spontaneous bursts of laughter at the latest crude joke. In other rooms the lights are switched off, and the silence is complete.

Shelter residents and shelter staff; rules and routines

"A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (Goffman 1962:1).

Goffman's classic study "Asylums" (1962) portrays life within the walls of an American psychiatric hospital in 1955-56, and has come to stand as a sociological and anthropological landmark. Although some of the characteristics on total institutions briefly outlined in the definition above might fit the shelter in Moka, not all of them do. Except the daily chores of cleaning and cooking, most of the women work *outside* the shelter, even in jobs found by the institution. Hence the shelter functions as place of residence, but not a place of work. On the other hand, the walls which surround the shelter do indeed give the impression of the shelter's seclusion to the world at large. Still, as the residents spend most of their days outside the shelter, the walls as fixed architectural barrier and symbol of its exclusion from surrounding 'public life', can not be perceived as absolute, and the shelter can perhaps better be described as a 'not-so-total institution' rather than a total one.

Nevertheless, the shelter is run on a rational plan of action promoted by a unified supervisory staff and rules, regulations and time schedules govern at least parts of the residents' daily activities; all of which are always done in the presence of others. When I visited women who had left the shelter, either to return to their husbands (Arianne) or to start completely anew somewhere else (Sandra), their stay at the shelter was commonly described as regimented although there were various opinions on whether such discipline was beneficial or not: *"I didn't like staying at the shelter at all; all these rules and regulations, and someone always telling you to do this or to do that"* (Arianne). *"My time at the shelter was alright, they provided me with all my basic needs and their discipline is good. But I'm in charge here. This is my house"* (Sandra). The poster "Reglement du centre" ("Rules of the shelter") was pasted on the wall in all of the rooms in the shelter:

"We are a group of women who try to help all women and girls who have been battered, raped or sexually abused

We want to assist all battered women to stand up on their feet again

We need you to give us a hand if we are to succeed

- 1. In the shelter, all women and children receive equal treatment*
- 2. There is no difference to be made on the grounds of community, religion, social class, political views, race or education*
- 3. To ensure the well-being of all the women resident at the shelter:*
 - You need to help take care of the shelter*
 - Assist in the cooking*
 - Help out in the crèche*
 - Do your own laundry*
 - Tidy your room*
- 4. As a woman, you should/must not talk cruel to or about another woman*
- 5. We need to be supportive of one another. We are all SISTERS in the shelter*

THANK YOU"

Life in the shelter is disciplined. Beds are made and dishes cleaned. As the shelter can house up to 40 women with children, the implementation of certain rules and routines are of course absolutely necessary if the shelter is to be able to function at all. On the other hand and as noticed by Bjelland (1989) while she conducted field work in an elderly home in Norway, these routines might at times seem to be the very rationale of the shelter's existence. The shelter's real purpose as refuge and advice centre for battered women seems at times somewhat forgotten. Every now and then it might seem as if the social workers put more effort into ensuring the up keeping of the shelter's various routines and regulations, instead of offering the residents care and counselling. Such practice also functions as a marker of

hierarchical difference between the social workers and the residents. Every request posed by a social worker to a resident is for instance always dutifully met with a “Wi Mis!” (“Yes Miss!”). When I asked Veronique who was staying as a resident at the shelter for the second time why the women refer to the social workers as “Mis”, her answer was short and simple: “Out of respect”. In Mauritian Kreol the term “Mis” is seldom used outside school children’s classrooms and the Diksyoner Kreol Angle (Mauritian Creole- English Dictionary) translates the term as woman teacher (Ledikasyon Pu Travayer 2004). Both social workers and residents at the shelter are adult women, still the residents are expected to use terms normally employed by children and in reference to someone whose hierarchical authority is expected as a natural part of child-adult, pupil- teacher relations and *not* in interaction between adults.

The establishment of such a hierarchical distinction also becomes apparent at meal times. As already mentioned, the residents of the shelter are responsible for the cooking, but when the food is finished, it is left on the kitchen bench. At the appropriate meal times the residents line up to be served by the social workers, whereas the social workers rather help themselves to food. Tea time offers a similar example. The social workers do not have tea with the residents, but usually make their own or has one of the residents make the tea for them. At the same time they eat from different plates, and drink out of different cups to the residents, and whereas the residents (and me) enjoyed our meals seated around the huge kitchen table, the social workers usually brought the food with them into the office.

The intention with the practises mentioned above might be to indicate that the roles, and not necessarily the statuses, of staff as distinct from residents. Such a division of roles might also be perceived by Woman’s Aid and the social workers at the shelter to have been developed for the benefit and protection of residents as the residents thereby know with whom they can expect objectivity, professionalism and confidentiality. Still, the problem with these practises is that they might also be perceived as a continuance of a public discourse which stereotype and stigmatise battered women (Hague, Mullender, Aris 2003). When the residents are expected to refer to the social workers as “Mis”, the implication is an ascription of a status equal to that of a dependent child, and *not* of competent, decision-making and adult women. In a study conducted in Great Britain, women survivors of domestic violence commonly complained about experiencing that various helping agencies made them feel *victimised*; bordering on pathological (ibid). Rather than being treated as independent individuals who happened to have been subject to violence, the battered women in this study rather described that they felt patronised, pitied, patted on the head, and believed incapable and passive; “*as helpless paralysed victims who can’t manage daily life*” (Hague, Mullender, Aris 2003: 81). Although

Woman's Aid and the social workers who run the shelter in Mauritius, might not intend for the residents to feel victimised, the consequence of the residents' use of "Mis" might still have some of the same effects on the residents at the shelter in Mauritius as on some of the battered women interviewed in Great Britain.

The practise which surrounds meals might also strengthen the residents' feelings of belittlement; maybe even stigmatisation and "spoiled identity" in Goffmanian terms (Goffman in Hague, Mullender, Aris 2003). When the social workers utilise different cutlery than the residents, the signal that is given is not only one of hierarchical difference between the staff and residents of the shelter, but can also be perceived as an indicator that the tableware used by the residents is somehow believed by the social workers to be contaminated, as if to be a victim of domestic violence is contagious and spreads through the use of the same (although clean) crockery. Through such a practise the social workers' (unconsciously) imply that the residents' experiences with violence have somehow *tainted* the battered women, or spoiled their (unpolluted) identities. The stigmatised identities ascribed battered women in the public discourse in Mauritius might therefore be experienced by the residents in the shelter as *reproduced*, although the intention of the shelter is to offer the battered women an unprejudiced and comforting space.

Shelter residents and shelter staff; division of space

Although the shelter might not fully fill the characteristics of a Goffmanian total institution, the rules and regulations which govern every day life within the shelter, still makes it a clear cut institution. Besides the rules and routines discussed above, there is also a division of space in the shelter. Life is enmeshed, and the division might not be a complete one and rather abstract, but it is still there: The spheres of the "Misses" and the residents. It is roughly divided between upstairs and downstairs, or more specific between the office and the dormitories. The women knock on the closed door of the office before they enter, the television control is on the social workers' desk and the fridge and food store can not be opened without a key provided by one of them.

On the other hand, the dormitories are the residing women's domain. Although the social workers have access to these rooms, they only come in if they have direct requests to pose either one of the women. While climbing the stairs from the ground floor to the first, the social roles of the shelter therefore seem to be somewhat turned. The manners in which the residents of the shelter behave *downstairs* are rather conducted by the social workers *upstairs*.

If the shelter can be described as a Goffmanian backstage area in comparison with the 'public world' outside it, the residents' dormitories can be perceived as the *changing rooms* in dramaturgical notions. Although both the shelter as such and the residents' rooms make up a 'behind the scenes' location, the common rooms in the shelter, such as the kitchen, lounge and the hallways, can perhaps more accurately be described as the area immediately behind the closed velvet curtains, whereas the residents' rooms are where the battered women take off their costumes and make up. The dormitories are where the residents retreat after a long day and where they talk their problems over with the other women, and where they ridicule their incompetent and surprisingly often, *impotent* husbands. This is where they eat 'gato' and sing popular Bollywood songs, Caroline and Venita throw off pillow fights, and Ivana cries because her husband has not yet come to shed his tears for her outside the shelter gates. 24 year old Caroline and her 3 year old son Kenneth, 28 year old Venita and 23 year old Ivana share a room. Both Caroline and Ivana are Catholic Creoles, whereas Venita is Telegu. Still, Ivana carries a small Buddha in her purse and a caste mark on her forehead, much to the dismay of Caroline who is a devoted Catholic who has lived together with her boyfriend for the last 3 years without being married or him being the biological father of her son. There are also three other members of this small group of women. There is Nazira who is a beautiful, quiet and calm 37 year old Muslim woman, married for 4 years and with two small children, Rajni who has been in and out of the shelter 6 times, 42 years old, Hindu and married for 17 years, and a 24 year old Norwegian anthropology student, who is neither married nor have any experiences with abusive relationships. If one claims the likes of the Mauritian tourist propaganda which portrays the island as "une société à l'arc en ciel", Caroline, Ivana, Venita, Nazira and Rajni, can probably be utilised as its very image. Although Eriksen (1998) has for instance argued that Mauritian factory floors represent new and largely feminised arenas for intra-ethnic communication, none these women work together. On the other hand, they do of course share the context of the shelter. Still, to describe the women as friends does not seem accurate. As mentioned previously, as the shelter is a temporary space, all relations formed therein seems provisional and slightly detached; consisting of companionship rather than devotional friendship.

The dormitory rooms can be characterised as a 'backstage within backstage'. There can be a marked difference in the manner in which some of the women behave in their rooms, versus in the more 'public' common rooms downstairs. The demarcation of practice in the dormitories is also noticeable by the change of roles (Goffman 1992 [1959]). When the

women retreat to their rooms, shoulders are lowered and expressions of underlives seem to substitute “impression management” (Goffman 1962).

“Whenever we look at social establishments, we find that (...) participants decline in some way to accept the official view of what they should be putting into and getting out of the organisation, and behind this, of what sort of self and world they accept for themselves. Whenever worlds are laid on, underlives develop” (Goffman 1962: 304).

When Venita called Nazira into the room she shared with Caroline and Ivana, and Nazira answered with a “Wi Mis!” all three of the women bent over with laughter. That Venita, Caroline and Ivana thought Nazira’s answer amusing might be an illustration of a hidden rejection of the hierarchical difference which is signalled by use of the term “Mis”. Whereas the world as presented and laid upon the residents through the utilisation of the term “Mis” might be respected in the kitchen, the lounge or the social workers’ office, it is rather subject to laughter in the residential space of the shelter. Despite the poster with the “Reglements du Centre” pasted on the wall of their rooms, the women gossip, lie, make faces, talk behind other women’s backs and might even trick and deceive both other residents and staff:

“Caroline offered me 200 rupees and insisted that I buy something nice to Di with it. She knew I didn’t have any money. I accepted, but what I didn’t know was that Caroline told Amina that I stole the 200 rupees. Amina was furious with me!” (Arianne).

Some of the women have also been caught by social workers while they have beaten their children, something which is considered an extremely serious offence according to shelter policy.

“I heard crying and whimpering from upstairs, and went up to check if everything was alright. It’s a good thing I did! Camille had Nadine pinned down to the bed and slapping her face. The girl is one year old!” (Amina).

These activities take place within the vicinity of the residents’ dormitories, and I believe it is unlikely that some of them would ever occur in areas also frequented by social workers. On the other hand the residents are often well aware that they violate regulations and rules put down by the shelter; at times the disobeying even seems to be an expression of rejection of the “worlds laid upon them” in themselves.

Still, the dormitories are not necessarily equitable to the “free spaces” portrayed in Goffman’s *Asylums* (1962). Despite that they are areas where ordinary levels of surveillance and restriction seems to have been reduced, as the dormitories are shared by many of the residents simultaneously they can not fulfil the functions of complete personal territories

(Bjelland 1989). Privacy is rather impossible; the residents of the shelter will always share space with ‘strangers’. There are no keys to the doors and at least in theory all the social workers do have unrestricted access to the residents’ rooms. Personal belongings on the other hand are securely locked away in closets, and the keys to open them carried around the different residents’ necks at all times. Hence the lockers which contain one’s personal possessions can perhaps be understood as a substitute for a lack of privacy and personal territory.

The shelter as feminist space: Failed fulfilment of institutional expectations and good versus bad residents/ victims

“Every organisation, then, involves a discipline of activity, but our interest here is at some level every organisation also involves a discipline of being- an obligation to be of a given character and to dwell in a given world” (Goffman 1962: 188).

The rules, routines and division of space in the shelter can all be understood as symptomatic of staff-resident relations. In opposition to some of the more hierarchical differences signalled through these various practises, various forms of underlives are expressed. Still, not all expressions of underlives can be related to a rejection of institutional rules and routines, some might rather be understood to have developed as a result of the shelter’s expectations of the residents “to be of a given character” in the words of Goffman (1962). One of those characteristics seems to be the previously mentioned staff’s ascription of the battered women as *victims*. As such the residents might also be expected to behave in a certain manner in accordance with presupposed ideas about specific victim behaviour, one of them being *helplessness*. The residents who do not fit the social workers’ victim category are therefore also often those of the women most active at various underlife activities. Hence those residents are not only conceived as disrespectful and disobedient as they commonly break rules and regulations, but when they do they are often also considered to be bad (hence not helpless) victims, and the consequence might be that the shelter’s social workers might be reluctant to provide them assistance.

On the other hand, as the women *are* considered victims in the shelter context and the shelter itself is a helping agency, the most important part of the shelter’s duties is to aid the women ‘back on their feet’ as it is commonly put forth. This is also mentioned in the “Reglements du Centre”. Still, entailed in ‘getting the women back on their feet’ is an anticipation of improvement and progress. Not only are the residents perceived by staff as victims in their current situations, but the staff of the shelter is also supposed to be able to

make sure that the abused women leave the shelter as ‘non-victims’. The social workers’ distinction between good and bad victims can therefore also be made on basis of the staffs’ experiences of a resident’s capability to become a ‘non-victim’, more specifically meaning the resident’s potential *not to return to an abusive husband* in line with the feminist founding principle of Woman’s Aid. If provided with the right rules through the teachings of shelter ideology, every woman should be able to cope on her own. If the social workers believe a resident will not return to her husband she might therefore be perceived as a good resident and victim versus the ‘impossible’ ones who do go back. Still, the numbers work against the social workers on this subject, as many of the women do in fact return to their husbands, even the ones who might have claimed that they are “finished with him” or “want a divorce” up until the very moment of their return. It might seem that when some of the women claim to never return it can be a result of impression management. Through their stay at the shelter they have learnt what is expected of them by Woman’s Aid, hence they put on the roles as strong, independent women in the common rooms in the shelter, whereas they cry and talk about how much they love and miss their husbands in the dormitories:

“Caroline came to tell me that Ivana had asked for me. Ivana was upstairs in her room, crying. “No one has come to visit me while I’ve been here Karine. Maybe he doesn’t love me anymore, he hasn’t been to see me even once!”

Hence part of the expectations laid upon the residents of the shelter “to be of a given character” (Goffman 1962: 188) also becomes apparent through the spatial division of the shelter previously discussed. As the founding principle of female empowerment is implemented in and expressed through the staffs’ work, the women often comply with feminist ideologies in the common rooms of the shelter, whereas they express their disagreements in the dormitories. Despite that they are fully aware of the advantages of a job as imprinted in them by Amina for instance, in the dormitories the women rather express their lack of want to work. Although expressions of lack of want to work will be thoroughly discussed and compared with falling ill in chapter four of this thesis, it might be worth noticing that whereas the women fall ill in the common rooms of the shelter, to openly complain about being forced to work is rather reserved the dormitories. Hence falling ill may be understood as a form of impression management. Instead of explicitly ‘disobeying’ shelter ideology, the residents in the shelter might try to avoid the label ‘bad victim’ by falling ill.

Being ill might therefore possibly be argued to be an expression of an underlife activity. At the same time falling ill might be more concomitant with the battered women’s own self-concept of themselves and their gendered status, as the women’s socialisation and

personal experiences with their husbands may have taught them that speaking up or against (shelter) authority is not feminine behaviour *and* have previously only lead to misery. Hence instead of openly challenge shelter ideology, they might resort to indirect resistance consistent with their contextually ascribed female statuses (Ong 1987). As mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, some of the residents have perhaps learnt that taking up a job might increase the problems they experience with their husbands. If the woman in the relationship works and the man is unemployed, he might feel himself loosing face. If so he might try to establish a traditional Mauritian gender role equilibrium through violence. As many of the women do intend to return to their partners, they might therefore try to avoid taking up paid employment.

It is also in their dormitories that the residing women at the shelter explicitly and desperately desire the affection and love of the husband just left behind as was the case for Ivana. If Anita had told Geraldine that she is leaving the shelter to go home *upstairs* instead of *downstairs*, she would probably not have claimed that the Magistrate had forced her to go home with her husband, something which left Geraldine upset and worried. Geraldine was herself soon to be ready for court, and the prospect of being forced to return back with her husband, was immediate and threatening. In the dormitories the women do not have to be aware of their rights nor their equality, and they therefore seem to rather act in a manner concomitant with their own gendered socialisation in a public Mauritian discourse rather than displaying their commitment to the shelter's feminist policies through impression management (Goffman 1992 [1959]). In the women's 'changing rooms' it is enough to just be oneself, and it is okay to miss one's husband.

In an effort to help the women get away from the violence they suffer at home, the social workers at the shelter spend their days trying to present the women with other options than having to return back to their husbands. Some social workers might therefore be disappointed when the women still do. The residents' 'recidivist practice' can thus at times be perceived to be a personal failure of the individual social worker's ability to successfully achieve the goals of her work. Hence she might also feel that she falls short of fulfilling the institution's expectations of her, meaning that she is not a good social worker. As a result of that, to ascribe the residents roles as good or bad might be a defence mechanism employed by the social workers so as not be judged inadequate at their jobs by the leadership of Woman's Aid.

On the other hand, as the shelter offers abused women a secure and protected space and place to stay, some of the social workers may consider the most important part of their jobs already done when the newly arrived residents are led up the stairs to their respective

rooms. If so, some of the social workers' might expect some form of reciprocity from the residents such as gratitude. Gratitude can be displayed through the residents' commitment to the shelter by putting "sincere effort" (Goffman 1962) into becoming 'non-victims' in line with the Woman's Aid's feminist ideology. Such 'obligatory' engrossment in the beliefs of the organisation might be taken as a symbol of the residents' commitment and their acceptance of not only the ideology behind the shelter's existence, but also its rules, regulations, practises and ascription of resident and victim statuses (ibid). When residents *fail* to show such reciprocal means of exchange, for instance through various expressions of underlives and 'recidivist practises', the staff of the shelter is commonly either angered or disappointed:

"Marianne was working herself up in frenzy. I had just visited Ratna in her new home; a tin shack which had not been 'approved' by the shelter as suitable accommodation for Camille, Sandra and their children, but which now housed Ratna's fragile family consisting of two small children. I had just challenged Marianne with a why. "How can we help someone like Ratna?" was Marianne's response. "We have scolded her about her behaviour, but she doesn't respect it. She doesn't show up for work, she doesn't tell anyone where she is and lies when she is finally confronted. Camille and Sandra both went dutifully to work every day, and called if they needed to work extra hours. They managed to save up money and do some planning for themselves. So we helped them find a house. This is a give and take process and as Ratna hasn't done anything for us, why should we help her with her house now?"

Whereas Camille and Sandra are sometimes invited for Sunday dinners, Ratna is not. Still, according to Bjelland's study; when residents *do* show gratitude, the aim is often to establish more equilibrium in the hierarchical relationship with staff, as the residents often lack other reciprocal means of exchange and not because they are necessarily grateful (Bjelland 1989).

Relations between residents

Whatever traces there are of hierarchy colouring the relationship between the social workers and the residents, it is nearly non-existent in interaction between the women. They are all in the same boat, dealing with the same problem, something which even seems to make such 'public' differentiate principles as ethnicity and religion (Eriksen 1998) of no real importance. The reason might be that the shelter can be perceived as liminal⁴⁴, or their stay as a non-

⁴⁴ Liminality is a term first used by Turner (1969) and can be understood as a phase within which individuals are both inside and outside 'public society' at the same time; or "Betwixt and Between" as part of various societies' initiation rites.

typical, transitory phenomenon in these women's everyday lives. On the other hand Little (in *ibid*) argues that "community feeling" between women can function as a "countervailing force", and that women from different ethnic categories might therefore have more in common, or share life worlds men do not due to similar experiences in male dominated surroundings. Being abused by husbands, and as a result of that living together under one roof with women who share that same violent background, can be an example. So can also the factory floors in the Export Processing Zone (*ibid*). Still it is vital to notice that such a statement does not necessarily entail that women communicate over ethnic borders just because they happen to be born the same sex.

Alternatively the *raison d'être* for such non-communal approaches to shelter life amongst the residents can once again be explained through the tools provided in Goffman's dramaturgical approach (1992 [1959]). As is stated in the "Reglements du Centre" paragraph two: "*There is no difference to be made on the grounds of community, religion, social class, political views, race or education*" in the shelter context. The residents at the shelter might therefore agree with, respect or accept this rule. On the other hand, the respect or accept shown might be a result of impression management; ethnicity might for instance be down played as the residents put efforts into being deemed good residents by shelter staff. As Miranda, one of the social workers once put it:

"We don't allow the women to openly express religious belonging, and we don't normally celebrate any of the different religious holidays in the shelter. Razia doesn't like it, I think she's afraid of tensions between the women. The women are allowed to go to church, the temple etcetera, but we stop the ones who pray loudly in the living room or in any other way talk or practice religion openly".

In line with impression management explanations, one would think that when the residents return to their backstage changing rooms or dormitories, they would still 'talk or practice religion', but that seldom occurs. Caroline, Venita, Ivana, Rajni and Nazira; the shelter's own 'rainbow' functions as an example.

Except the non-communal approach within the shelter walls, no matter what the underlying reasons for such a practice might be, all interaction between the residents seem to mirror any other 'real life' situation. Ratna makes for instance faces to me behind Arianne's back, whereas Arianne claims that Ratna always gossips. Carol, 29 years old and the mother of four girls complains that Arianne lets Di do whatever she pleases, and that Arianne does not even scold Di when she once again has pinched Carol's daughter Lucia's arm. Carol is well familiar with the unwritten rules of conduct at the shelter by now as this is her eighth stay. On the other hand, Arianne claims that Di is her responsibility and she does not approve

that the other women reproach Di. Ivana helps Rajni with supper as Rajni has overslept her mid-day nap, and Caroline and Venita occupies Nazira's jealous daughter while Nazira gives her baby son his milk. There are both comrades and enemies, and fleeting moments of conflict or empathy within the shelter walls. When Ivana was sitting alone in her room crying and missing her husband, she later became both a subject to the other residents' teases and sympathies:

"Ivana still had tears in her eyes when we went down for tea. Sandra who was picking up Emma and Nadine from the crèche, asked Ivana what was wrong. When Ivana answered that she missed her husband, Sandra laughed and told her that that was no reason to cry. "No one came to visit me while I lived in the shelter either. I don't even have a family. There is no reason to cry over such matters Ivana, you just have to let it go".

The shelter inhabits a liminal position in its residents' lives. Everything which takes place behind the walls seems temporary, no one is to stay and comradeships fade away.

Concluding remarks

The shelter for battered women in Moka might not be a 'complete' Goffmanian total institution, but rather a 'not so total' one. Still, the shelter is run on the basis of a specified feminist founding principle and rules, regulations and routines are implemented by a unified supervisory staff which governs all the residents' daily activities. There is therefore still a strong atmosphere of institutional life which colours interaction between the social workers and the residents of the shelter. There seems for instance to be a division of roles, statuses and space in the shelter according to whether one is a member of staff or whether one is a resident. Some of the shelter practises can also be understood to mark a hierarchical difference in the relation between staff and residents. Examples can be the obligatory use of the term "Mis" as the appropriate form in which to address the social workers, and the various procedures which surround meal times. At the same time the staff's apparent victimisation of residents seem to legitimise the shelter's own feminist founded healing approaches or empowerment, as the goal of the staff is to make the battered women leave the shelter as *non-victims*.

On the other hand, various forms of underlives seem to have been developed within the vicinity of the shelter. Some of these can perhaps even be understood as expressions of disagreement of both shelter ideology and practise, such as breaking the "Reglements du Centre" by for instance speaking badly of other residents. These examples of underlives are first and foremost expressed within the residents' 'backstage in the backstage' or the residents' dormitories. The reason might be that some of the residents are wary of being ascribed a status as 'bad resident' by the staff of the shelter because they fear reprimands in

the form of not being offered the assistance they desire. Hence various forms of impression management seem to be conducted in the common rooms of the shelter. Putting on the roles of strong, independent women 'never to return' to an abusive husband is for instance common. As such the residents act in accordance with shelter ideology, hence also the staff's expectations of them. Still, the women complain about being forced to work and cry over 'lost husbands' when they enter the bosom of their partly private spaces, and most of the women who leave the shelter do in fact end up returning to their husbands.



Chapter three -

Violence, suffering and narration; understanding domestic violence in Mauritius through battered women's own tales of abuse

Narratives of abuse

"The women at the shelter are told to write out their pain" Miranda told me. "If they are illiterate one of us will write down their stories for them". The narratives I have selected as entrance points to my informants' experiences with domestic violence and abuse are written in files kept securely locked in a tall metal closet in the office at the shelter. Some of these red paper folders only collect dust, whereas others are repeatedly taken out to rapport new events and re-admittances. They are all written with a specific purpose; to help the women articulate the events which have led them to seek help at the shelter. Not for the sake of Woman's Aid, but for the sake of the abused women themselves. By giving pain a vocabulary, a language, Scarry (1986) argues that one can slowly start the process of healing the wounds that have been inflicted upon individuals' bodies and minds, and start to reconstruct a world shattered and unmade by violence and suffering. At the same time each and every one of these women's files function as introductions to my informants' abusive backgrounds, and they thereby present the topic and reality of domestic violence through the women's own words; the language of experience. As mentioned in the introductory chapter to this thesis, it is (unfortunately) necessary to somehow 'label' their experiences into valid (anthropological) theoretical frameworks. The language of experience does not use the same idioms as the language of representation. These narratives might primarily be means through which the women communicate their individual experiences with abuse, but the narratives' contents do at the same time illustrate specific Mauritian social dynamics. Despite that the narratives are powerful histories of experience in themselves, in the following I will also use them as openings to exemplify particular aspects related to more general understandings of the phenomenon domestic violence on the island, and as illustrations of a contextual social

structure which determines gender conduct. At the same time all the short anecdotes which follow the narratives are done in line with the feminist theories outlined in the introductory chapter. Most of the narratives could easily be used to demonstrate several of the factors, and it is only due to pure pragmatics that I choose to focus upon one particular topic in each of them. As almost all previous literature on Mauritius have been written with ethnicity as focus, the brief comments which follow the narratives are short due to a lack of comparative literature, and are therefore only brief remarks on a field which needs further inquires. Then again, the topics only represent frames for understanding, whereas the narratives can be perceived as the real, non-replaceable and invaluable pictures. In other words; the tales told, and the people telling them are 'real', whereas the theoretical categorised topics are not.

A portrait of domestic violence and gender practise in Mauritius through narrations

Sexual morality and the case of Anita⁴⁵

First stay March 2003

"When I married my husband, everything was fine. After 6 years he began to change. He had a mistress. And then he became a drug addict, and life was a nightmare. Because of that I lost my second child. I was very sad because on that night I had to walk looking for him. I had to go and take him from another woman's house. He hid himself in a box so I couldn't see him. He was bringing these ladies in guest houses. 5 years ago, when she was only 9 years old, my eldest daughter made an attempt to commit suicide. She tied a rope around her neck. Her father saw her and brought her to hospital. She was in coma for one day. After that she was safe. The doctor told us to give her a lot of attention and affection. Since that day, her father has let her do whatever she wants to and I can't object. I can't even talk to her about the proper way to live. Now she is working and gives money to her father so that he can buy drugs. I never gave him money to buy drugs. He say's I'm mauve (bad). He swears at me, ill-treats me and beats me. Once he beat me, I was upstairs and he pushed me down the stairs. When I woke up, I was in hospital. I lost my memory. It took time for me to recover. For nearly 5 months, I couldn't recall anything, especially what had happened to me. Mo ena en gros sagrin lor mo leker (a big sorrow in my heart) because the doctor informed me my daughter wasn't a virgin. He took everything from the house and went to sell it. Better to take it from home than to steal it from others because then he could end up in prison he said. When he works he buys some provisions, but after some time he will go and sell it to buy drugs. For 2 years, he hasn't worked at all. He brings men into our home to take drugs. While I'm working he accuses me of having affairs with other men. He put love bites on me, and then say he hasn't done this, but the other men. Then he begins to quarrel with me and break things in our home. He told me I'm a putain (prostitute). All this has happened because when he got to know me I was not living at my mother's place. I was living at some other

⁴⁵ Anita is 37 years old, a Roman Catholic Creole and married for 14 years with 2 children. This was her first time to the shelter.

person's place because my step-father raped me. After this he would still want to have me again. Everywhere he saw me, he wanted to touch me. My breasts, everywhere. I decided to leave my mother's place. I never told this to my mum. When I met my husband and he told me that he was in love with me, I informed him that I had been raped. He told me it didn't matter, and we decided to marry. On the evening of my marriage, a son of the family where I was living wanted to kiss me. I told him; all this time I've been living at your place and nothing has happened. Why are you trying to do this now? He turned his back and went away, but after that people were gossiping that I was sleeping with that boy. Now my husband always comes back to all this. He tells me I'm a prostitute, and that he will tell this to my daughter. Mo ena en gros sagrin lor mo leker. My life has finished, he has ruined my life. I never informed my mum what my step father had done to me. When my mum was dying, I told her. When the doctor told me my daughter wasn't a virgin, it was a big shock to me. I don't know who had done that to her. When I asked her, she got angry. She said this had happened when she was a child, when she was only 9 years old. When I sit down and think about my life, I see that my daughter will have the same destiny as me. I'm very upset. I don't have the drive to do anything in life. Now my husband has told me he wants to take a revenge on me. He said he paid for all the expenses for the marriage, with all his money, I have nothing, all is his. He reproaches me with a lot of things. Li dire li pu bour mwa (He says he will fuck me). He says that Stanley is not his child. He says he is a stupid child. Afterwards he says it's the drugs that make him say it. He always quarrels with me, and says that he will tell his daughter that when I married him, I was not a good woman, that I was a putain. He beats me with the dust pan, and I had to go to hospital because I was hurt on my forehead. Life was martyrdom with him. I have decided not to return to him at all. When I think about what I have lived through there, I don't want to go through the same again. He told me I was a big hole. He must have his revenge. My husband has tried to electrocute me. He has beaten me and broken my teeth. Then he has told me to sit down and look at my face in the mirror. He told me I am not good enough for him, that I'm nothing to him".

Before the happy event of marriage was to take place, Anita thought it necessary to tell her future husband to be that she was no longer a virgin, knowing that as the boundaries to her body had already been broken, he might refuse her and being in his 'right' to do so as well. Although the trespassing had occurred against her will, she knew that not being a virgin before the night of marriage had shamefully stigmatised her as a 'bad woman', her body had not confined to the rules and norms of proper Mauritian sexual conduct. As she had not been married previously, she knew she was supposed to have been sexually untouched. Still, her husband to be did not object, he even told her that it did not matter. After 6 years of marriage, it seems as if he might have changed his mind. "My husband always comes back to all this" Anita writes. He tells her that he wants revenge. As he paid for the wedding, her body should also have been his to own, but as the body he 'received' upon marriage had already been in someone else's possession, it/she was not his (to take) in the first place. Additionally he threatens to bring further shame upon Anita by telling their daughter whom Anita herself is trying to teach "the proper way to live", that her mother was a "prostitute" when they married. As their daughter has herself been sexually abused, Anita worries, afraid that the situation she

is in with her husband might eventually befall her child. Although expectations concerning pre-marital sex and gendered morality might have become more open for manipulation since Anita married, she knows that they still form parts of Mauritian social structure. There is a reason why her husband threatens to tell their daughter what an immoral woman Anita was, and according to him, still is.

Accusations of infidelity and the case of Ratna⁴⁶

First stay December 2002

“I have no parents. Since my birth my mother has been mad. My father was beating her very much. She stayed in a psychiatric hospital. When she was discharged she went to her brother’s place. They cared well for us. I was still a baby when my uncle’s wife had her first child, a girl. My uncle wanted me to leave with my father. I don’t remember where they put me. Since childhood, I have always been miserable. I was born in a psychiatric hospital. When I met my husband who was a friend of my cousin we lived in D’Aggotiere. I thought that I could live happily from now on. At least I could have a house on my own, and live peacefully. My mother in-law met me, and brought me to her son. Afterward she said that I had done sorcery to her son. She says that I’m not a good girl, that I’m a prostitute, and that I’m having an affair with the husband of my neighbour. She doesn’t like it when my husband buys things for me. When I was 1 month pregnant she quarrelled with me, and when my husband came back I told him about the incident. He scolded his mother. She put us out of her house. We went to live at some relatives place in D’Agottiere. We moved around until we found a house to rent. One day my mother in-law saw me on the street with my baby. She gave my son 1000 rupees, and told me that she could help us. I was sorry for her, and I went to her place to show her my baby. She was very happy, and we returned back to stay with her. In the beginning, everything was fine. Afterwards, everything changed for the worse. She told many false things about me to my husband, and my husband didn’t believe me. He was so angry he beat me. I couldn’t say anything. My husband humiliates me in front of his family saying that I’m always begging things from him, especially when he’s drunk. Everything that I ask him, he must ask his mother’s permission first. He will always reproach me although he has already given it to me. I’m fed up with that life. He beats me in front of his family, he broke my ear rings, and he always swears at me and ill-treats me. One of his relatives who came from abroad told me that my husband couldn’t take the responsibility of a family. He will always rely on his mother. I was so upset with these problems, especially when my husband told me to leave with my 2 children, and go begging to earn my living. He didn’t even want to look at me. He told me to find a place in a convent and go and live there. All this they said about me, they even said my daughter was not for them, but by another man, supposedly a cousin who works in the hospital. How can I live in a family like that? Even my husband doesn’t want me. My mother in-law is ill-mannered. In the morning, she will ask me about my sexual relations with my husband. She even questioned me on what date I had intercourse so as to know when I got pregnant. All this was asked in the presence of my husband. They say they will go and have a DNA test. All the while my husband remained quiet. 2 weeks ago he beat me. Then I went to the police station. He raised my dress in front of the

⁴⁶ Ratna is 24 years old, a Telegu, has two children and has stayed at the shelter one time.

police officers to show that I didn't have any scars or bruises. I was very ashamed. The police at Riviere De Rempart police station didn't take account of what I was telling them. They were on the side of my husband and mother in-law. They told me to listen to my mother in-law. My husband is very bad. He ought not to accept how his mother treats me. One day we went to Cap Malhereux at the place of the cousin of my husband. His cousin proposed me to go out with him. He was drunk. I didn't tell my husband about it. I told immediately the cousin that how can you talk to me like that when I consider you my brother-in law? Later when I told this to my husband, he told me that I'm not a respectful woman, that's why he approached me. My mother in-law has told my husband that one day when he gets back from work, he will see me dead. Very often my mother in-law threatens me with a knife, saying that she will kill me. My husband told me it's better for me to leave the house".

Although Ratna had never trespassed any boundaries for proper sexual conduct as the case was for Anita, she has still been labelled an immoral women, a prostitute, in the eyes of her mother in law, and thereby consequently also in the eyes of her husband. When Ratna is sexually approached by a cousin of her husband, it is Ratna who is blamed. It seems to be Ratna's or the female body which tempts the man to adultery, and it is therefore Ratna that needs to be reproached and put in place, the male cousin's actions seemingly being deemed a 'natural' response to Ratna's behaviour. Additionally has Ratna been accused of adultery on several previous occasions; there was the neighbour, and apparently also someone who works in a hospital.

Jealousy, domestic confinement and the case of Rajni⁴⁷

First stay June 1995

"I was only married religiously⁴⁸ with my first husband. I encountered many problems over there. Then I separated from him, and I married my present husband. I thought I would lead a pleasant life with him, but unfortunately I am miserable with him as well. He drinks a lot. In the beginning, I was seldom ill-treated by him, and I had two daughters. I wasn't working, but I was given food and everything else I needed. But now I can't stand it, life now is beat up. He drinks nearly every day. In the beginning of our marriage it was only when he was drunk that he ill-treated me. I am very nervous about it. When I sleep, he comes drunk home late at night, wakes me up and begins to speak. This irritates me and I'm fed up about it. I try to speak to him the next day when he's sober. He says he regrets what he has done, but later he will do exactly the same thing again. I'm tired of all the rubbish he talks about. Even the doctors told me that if I don't leave him I will go mad. I have

⁴⁷ Rajni is 42 years old, a Hindu, married for 17 years with 3 children, and have stayed at the shelter 6 times.

⁴⁸ In 1981 the Mauritian laws regarding marriages were amended. Previously it was possible to only marry religiously, and not civilly. As the religious marriage was never registered, the legal aspects of matrimonial life were not protected, something which in many cases turned out to be detrimental for the female part of the union as some men contracted other marriages and left the first woman and her children without any financial support. However, religious marriages in Mauritius still continue to this day (Gunganah 1997).

sustained all this because I wanted to save my marriage, but when he stopped working he became worse than before. I couldn't bear it any longer, and now he has begun to threaten me with a knife. I was very frightened that day. Then I decided to go and see Madam Razia because I had seen a program on the telly. My husband doesn't beat me, but he insults and threatens me. And the way he talks to me hurts me a lot. I think I will go back home, but with conditions”.

Second stay July 1999

“On Saturday the 25th of July he came back drunk and began to beat my daughters. When I was crossed with his behaviour he went outside and came in with an old water pipe. He wanted to beat me with it. I ran away with my 3 children to my mother in law. My mother in law looked for a taxi for me. She kept the 2 girls with her and I left to my sister's place with my son. Yesterday, Sunday, I went for a statement at Medine Camp de Mars Police Station. Then I returned back to my sister's place in Castelle. This morning my husband came to my sister's place and started to argue with both my sister and my brother in law. Then I phoned the Okely Police Station, but when the police went away again, he came back and threatened my family. I phoned the shelter for advice, and came to the shelter in a taxi”.

Third stay February 2001

“I left the centre with a Protection Order. My husband changed certain ways, but not entirely to my satisfaction. For example, he doesn't let me go to my relative's place, even if they are ill. He doesn't let me go to their place, and they are not allowed to visit me at our house either. He changed our phone number and he hasn't given the new one to me. So I don't have any contact with anybody. I don't have any leisure. If I don't finish my house chores he will ill-treat me. He often says that he will stop drinking, but he continues. And when he's drunk, he always speaks badly about my family. I often suffer from head aches, but he doesn't want me to go and see a doctor. When I felt as if I would lose my memory because of my suffering, I decided to go and visit a doctor. When he learned about it, he quarrelled with me a lot. He said that I was not ill, that my nerves are not ill, and that I'm only pretending. I had blood profusions all over my face. The doctor said I'm too stressed. I stayed in hospital for 10 days. Even in the hospital he came and threatened me. He told me that if I come home, I will have to do it quietly. If ever I go to the shelter again, it will be cyclone class 4⁴⁹. He said he would make me a cripple. The nurse had to call the police, and the police put him out of the hospital. On Monday the 5th of February I was discharged from the hospital and decided to come to the shelter. I also decided not to live with him again. He threatened me too much, and I want to divorce him”.

Fifth stay December 2001

“This is the fifth time I have come to the shelter. Once again I have had problems with my husband. And because of my children as well, he threatened them. He said he will kill my eldest daughter. He imposes a lot of restrictions on me. He doesn't want me to go out, not to see my relatives. They are not allowed to come to my place either, and he continues to drink and threaten us with a knife. He also speaks a lot and we have to listen to him. He swears a lot as well. I am upset about all this. He bought a pair of shoes for my eldest daughter. She

⁴⁹The cyclone warning system in Mauritius ranges from one to five.

told him she didn't like them, and that is why he was crossed. He began to insult the child. He told her how she would have to wear rubber boots⁵⁰. He said he would kill her. For three days he was drunk, and he fought with us. We had a very hard time, both the children and me. Then I left the house. I took my children with me and I went to St. Pierre Police Station, made a statement, and then the police van dropped us at the shelter".

Sixth stay June 2003

"As usual, the last time I left the shelter I went back home. I gave him another chance. Unfortunately he continued as he did before. He didn't change at all. He continued to drink, threaten me and didn't allow me to work. He ruins my life. I was depressed and I was ill. I was thinking that if I was working I wouldn't be too stressed, but he doesn't want me to work. He doesn't get me anything for my personal needs either. I can't stand this life any longer. He ruins my health. I even stayed at Flacq hospital as I suffered from a depression. I stayed for one week. I can't stay in that situation any longer. I have decided to leave him. I came to the shelter to have peace. I feel very sorry for my children, but I have no choice".

There is a manner in which it is possible to control the woman's 'overly sexual and potentially rebellious natured' bodies. One can confine it/her to the home and refuse her any contact with the temptations of the outside world by for instance changing phone numbers and refusing family and relatives to visit as is the case for Rajni. As a woman Rajni's duties are to take care of her house and her family. A substantial percentage of women in Mauritius have never worked, and quite a few stop working once they get married as their roles are now perceived of as tied to their households (Gunganah 1997). Still, Rajni *wants* to work, whereas her husband refuses her to. So she has replaced the confinement of her home in exchange for a confinement behind the barbed wired walls of the shelter six times now.

Adultery and the case of Nina⁵¹

First stay November 2002

"When I was married I stayed for 15 days at my in law's place. Then we went to stay at our place. After 2 months I was pregnant and I was not well. I could not do all the house chores. As I had no kitchen I had to wash the vessels outside. When he came home he told me that if I can't do the dishes, he will break everything. Another day I couldn't cook because there was no oil. When he came home in the afternoon, I explained to him why I couldn't cook dinner. Then he beat me violently for the first time. I left his house and went to my mother's. But my mother took me back to him and said that "Life is not as if when you have a problem you can just come back to me and leave your home". I had a child of 5 from a previous relationship. But it wasn't a problem for

⁵⁰Rubber boots are only worn by sugar cane workers, and to be a sugar cane cutter is considered to be of low status in Mauritius.

⁵¹ Nina is 52, a Roman Catholic Creole, married for 23 years with 4 children, and has stayed at the shelter 2 times.

him that I had a child from before. But his parents were opposed to the marriage. One day he came back late I asked him why. He told me it was his right to go out, that he had gone and watched TV at a friend's place. I told him I will leave him. Then he burnt all his clothes outside and told his parents that he will commit suicide. After 2 days I came back. 6 months after I delivered the problems began again. Then I went to my sister's place. I came back home after the probation officer had a reconciliation session with us. Then I went to work in a factory. I was working during the day and he was working at night. When I was pregnant with my third child I stopped working. After that I had problems with him again, and I left him for my father's place. I stayed there for 3 months. Then he came to see me and he promised he would change his behaviour towards me. I told him to move to another house and then I would come back. We had another house and I went back. He went to Saudi Arabia to work. I had a good and peaceful time when he was not there. Then in 86 I had enormous problems with him again. And in 87 I left him and went to work for and live in the house of a Chinese woman in Soudnac. When he learnt where I was he came and begged me to come back. He told me he had gotten a job in Rodrigues. I believed him and came back. When I came back I looked for my jewels. They were not there. He told me that he had sold everything, and admitted to me that he had another woman in his life. Then I took all the pills I had in my possession at the same time. When I collapsed, he went to call the neighbours and they brought me to hospital. Then I was pregnant with my fourth child. After my delivery the doctor sterilised me. After that I have been having gynaecological problems and the doctor had to do a strectomy. In 1990 I had problems with him again and I left home for my mother's place. Then he went to his father's place and broke everything. He broke a large pane of glass and he was wounded and had to go to hospital. After that he found a job in General Construction. Then he bought a motorcycle and began going out as usual. I 1997 he beat me again and I was wounded in my eyes. In 1998 he locked me in the room of my son and it was my nephew who opened it. Then I went to my sister's place. He came to pick me up and I returned back home. Very often he didn't come home to sleep at all. He told me he had been sleeping at a friend's place, but when I checked with his friend he was not there. After that he didn't give me single cent. He earned about 20 000 rupees a month, me he just gave 8000 for the running of the house and for the 4 children. I can't bear it any longer because I have asked myself what he does with his money. He told me it was his money and that he doesn't need to give me account of it, and that he can use his money as he wishes to. I couldn't bear it any longer and went to my sister's place, and after that to Rose Hill police station. They sent me to the shelter”.

Second stay April 2003

“Since I left the centre last year, in the beginning everything was okay. He told me that he would change, but he only did so for a month. After that everything was like before. On the 8th of January 2003, he went out and told me that he was going with a work mate. They were going to the seaside, but I learnt that he was not with this friend at the sea, and he returned home the next day. He promised to change and lead a family life. But he couldn't keep his promise. For New Year we didn't go out at all, but he went out with his parents. After that we had a quarrel about money. He gave me 10 000 rupees to put into my bank account, but later he told me that I had to use that money for expenses for the children, and I had to pay the telephone bill. He told me that it's his money, that I have taken his money. I feel that I can't bear him any longer. I'm very miserable with him. Now I've decided to live separately from him, I won't live with him again. I will look for a job and a place where I will be able to live and work. I don't think I will go back. I have suffered too much with him”.

As the case of Rajni shows there are different manners in which a man can ensure that his wife is his, and only his. As the cases of Anita and Ratna have illustrated, the logic of such behaviour might be found within an overall Mauritian gender structure which 'legitimate' men's rights to be watchful guard(ian)s over women, and ensure that their wives' actions do not bring shame upon themselves. To punish women through beating or other forms of abuse can thereby be understood as a corrective measure and an enforcement mechanism which husbands conduct towards 'disrespectful' and 'uncontrollable' women (Green 1999) such as both Anitas and Ratna's 'adulterous' conduct; imagined or not. At the same time both Anita's and Nina's husbands are engaged in extramarital sexual relations. As Anita's husband thought it necessary to "hide in a box" when confronted by his wife, and Nina's husband only most reluctantly admitted his adultery, it might seem as if they do realise that they themselves are not confining to proper 'marital conduct' neither. On the other hand, the faithfulness they expect from their wives is not necessarily a norm they deem it necessary to confine to. After all *they* are men, and part of their masculinity is to be sexually active.

Patrilocality, interference of in laws and the case of Arianne⁵²

First stay March 2003

"I married Dani on the 11th of April 2001. He came to work in my country (Nicaragua). He came to work as a mechanic and I was working as a supervisor in the same firm. Then we fell in love and I became pregnant. Dani went to visit his mother in Mauritius, and at the same time to tell his family that he was engaged with me. After some days Dani told me he was going to a dance, but he was going out with another girl. Then I told him: "You are going out with other girls, and I am pregnant for you!" He told me that he would give me money for an abortion. I accepted, but after having thought about it, I told him no. He lied to me; he told me that in Mauritius he has his own land and house. In fact he has nothing, everything is his parents. If I knew his family was so mauve (bad), I would not have come to Mauritius. I married in April, in June I came to Mauritius. I went to stay at my sister in-law's place. When I delivered my baby, it was not at my mother in-law's place, but at my sister in-law's place. After I had had my baby, I had problems with my sister in-law as well. She told me I had to obey everything she said to me as I'm not Mauritian. In fact, she was exploiting me. They gossip to everybody about the problems I have with my husband. Then I left her place and went to my mother in law. When I speak Spanish with my husband, she doesn't like it. She told my husband to speak Kreol so that she can understand. When my husband came back from work, she reported to him that I speak badly to her. Then my husband beat me, dragged me by my hair and run after me with a knife. I went to some neighbour's place. He didn't find me, and he went with some friends to drink. Another problem I have had with my mother in-law is that she told me I have

⁵² Arianne is 23, Roman Catholic, married for 2 years and has one daughter. She has stayed at the shelter one time.

no right to use her belongings. She told me Mauritius is like that, you don't touch other people's things. Life was very miserable at my mother in-law's place. My husband believed all that she told him about me. At night, my mother in-law puts me and my daughter out of the house. In the morning, my sister in-law will also beat me. Then I told my husband "Let's go and rent a house" as he has a very good salary. Unfortunately, he lost his job after some time because the secretary said that he had stolen. Then my father in-law continued to pay the rent, buy food etcetera. After some time he said he is a pensioner and can't continue doing it. He was talking a lot, and at this stage I was fed up about all this. Then my husband went to work as a construction worker. When he had his salary, he went to drink with his friends. He came home late. When I asked him where he had been, he didn't answer. He came home very, very late. When he was back, he wanted to have sex with me. I said no, that I didn't want to. I told him I was tired. He replied I had no right to be tired as I didn't work. Sometimes he doesn't come home for a whole weekend. I remain on my own with my daughter. When I talk to him, he will push me and say that I should go and prostitute myself. As I have no where to go, I am forced to go to my mother in-law's place. She told me that she didn't bring me to Mauritius, and that I should go back to my husband. My husband has beaten me twice. I went to the police station then. I don't remember the date he beat me. I told him to change his life, he told me he can't. My mother in-law has put my daughter's cot and all my clothes on fire. Then she told our neighbours that I did it. My mother in-law is very mean. She doesn't like me at all. Neither my husband, nor his friends. Dani told me that my place is not in Mauritius, but in my country. He said he is in love with another girl who is his ex-girlfriend in my country. My husband has been in prison there as drugs were found on him. Then he was forced to come back to Mauritius, but his parents don't know that. My mother in-law says that I have an affair with my brother in-law".

Just like Ratna, Arianne lives on the same plot of land as her parents in-law, and in an apartment which is their property. Just like Ratna she is also subject to violence not only perpetrated by her husband, but also by her mother in-law. Still, it is not only the physical proximity which can be blamed for what Arianne might label as interference in her conjugal life, it is also a result of Arianne being conceived of as intruding in her mother in-law's relationship with her son. The ties between mother and son in Mauritius are said to be closely and intimately knit (Woman's Aid 2001). At the same time the wider family's interests come before that of the couple and at least before that of the in-married outsider to the family. In the case of Arianne she is even a foreigner to Mauritian values and norms, so it might seem as if Arianne's mother in-law has doubts whether Arianne has the best interests of her family or of her son at heart. As a mother she knows she herself does, and by trying to keep a watchful eye on her daughter in-law's relation to her son, she is only being a good mother. As Arianne's mother in-law has run this household almost all of her life; it is probable that she thinks she knows how it ought to best be done. If Arianne does not confine; such as touching her mother in-law's things for instance, her mother in-law might deem it necessary to put Arianne straight, sometimes even through physical corrective measures.

Use and abuse of children and the case of Marie⁵³ and Carol⁵⁴

Marie's first stay May 2003

“My husband slept around a lot before our marriage. I didn't know about that. When I was pregnant with my first child, there was a night he just didn't come back. I knew there was a dancing party at Chemin Grenier. I went there to catch him in surprise, but a friend of his saw me and my husband escaped through a window. He continued to have a second life outside the home, even after the delivery of my first child. But the worst was that by then he had begun to beat me and swear at me. He even took my child away from me once, and brought it to his mother's place, but she didn't want the baby. Then he took the child and went to sleep under the veranda of a shop. When my aunt saw it she took the child from him and returned it back home. I have 6 children with him. I have gone through many, many problems with him and it's been very hard. When my third child was to do his first communion, I was beaten violently again because I asked him for money to buy his clothes. There is so much to say that I don't know how to continue. Last year he decided that I wasn't allowed to go and do my prayers once a week. He ill-treated me, swore at me and threatened to beat me. My daughter defended me and forbid him to beat me. Then he told my daughter to give him back all the money he had spent on her marriage. He put us out of his house, and told me that he will bring his mistress and their son here. But we didn't leave the house, and since then life has been a nightmare. He told me that for 33 years he has been living with a snake. Besides, before I came to the centre on the first of May 2003, the police came to have a further statement on the case that he had beaten my daughter. I wanted to tell my daughter not to make this a police case, but my husband forbid me, and started to beat me. At noon the same day he came back very drunk. I was serving food to everybody. He began to swear and threaten me and following me where I was going. I was very scared when he said “Today you will learn who I am”, because I know he always carries with him a sharp knife, and he said that no one would prevent him from hurting me today. I didn't want my son to mingle in my problems because I knew that he would have killed him if he had prevented him from beating me. That's why I decided to come to the shelter”.

Although Marie- and her husband's children are all adults by now, Marie still mentions violent episodes from the past wherein her husband used her children as a method of abuse against her. When one of their children was still only a baby, Marie's husband even took the baby with him, without Marie knowing their whereabouts until her aunt accidentally run into Marie's husband who was sleeping with the child under the terrace of a shop. Marie also mentions how she was beaten when she asked for money for their third child's communion, and that her husband has been physically violent against their daughter. There are still many children of abusive fathers who are not physically mistreated, but many

⁵³ Marie is 57 years old, a Roman Catholic Creole, married for 33 years and has 6 adult children. She has stayed at the shelter one time.

⁵⁴ Carol is 29 years old, a Roman Catholic Creole and has been married for 7 years. She and her husband have 3 girls together whereas Carol's eldest daughter is from a previous marriage. Carol and her children have been in an out of the shelter 8 times since 96.

children are commonly used as means to threaten and frighten their mothers. As children are used as 'tools' of violence, many children experience verbal abuse in supplement to the psychological distress of having to witness the violence against their mothers. Marie even believes that her husband is capable of killing his own son if he intervenes when she is beaten. As Marie knows she will most likely be beaten again, she decides to leave for the shelter. Not so much to protect herself, but to protect her son.

Although many of the battered women state that they leave their homes "for the sake of their children", many women use the exact same argument when they return to their husbands as well. On Carol's sixth stay at the shelter in April 1999, she wrote the following *historique de l'hébergée*:

"Since I left the shelter December of 97, life was soon the same as before. He works when he wishes to and he just sits and plays cards with his friends all day. I use my widow pension from my previous husband to buy food and I am forced to give him money with it as well. He doesn't buy anything. I have taken furniture on credit because I didn't have anything when I came back home. He broke everything. After all that I have done for my family, even then, he put me out of his house, he beat me, he forced my daughter Lili who was 7 years old to go to the shop at all times to buy cigarettes and rum for him. If she refused, he beat her. When I refused to let her go, he beat me as well. I have been afraid of living with him. I left the house and came here because of Lili. I cried because one day when I died, I thought that Lili would have a family, but now I see that she is so miserable. Sometimes when he comes home drunk, he pushes Lili violently against the wall, and says that "Ta lere mo pu kas ton liki!" (Later I am going to break/ destroy your cunt). I thought as the child is not his, he can hurt her one day. My child lives in constant fear. When I don't let him ill-treat Lili, he beats and kicks me. I am very miserable with him. One time I tried to burn myself after I had drunk petrol. I've never known my mum. I don't want to be miserable all my life".

Carol later returned to her husband and then back to the shelter two more times, her latest stay was in March 2003. When she left the shelter a few months later, she and her children once again returned to her husband. She said it was for the sake of her children, that they needed a father.

Unemployment, alcoholism and the case of Venita⁵⁵

First stay August 2002

"3 months within my marriage I became pregnant. There was a marriage of a good friend, but I was not feeling well. I suffered from headaches and vomiting, and I told him I wouldn't be able to attend the marriage. My husband didn't believe me. He said that I was well, that I was only pretending because I didn't want to attend the wedding. He told me that if I don't want to come, he will come back at 23.30 at night. He left home at 19.

⁵⁵ Venita is 29, a Telegu, married for 12 years with two children and have stayed at the shelter two times.

Before he went, he brought his father who lives downstairs up to our place, and told his father in front of me, that although I married him, I want to be the boss here. After 2 or 3 months he began to drink every day. When I asked him what the problem was, he began to insult me. He told me to go to sleep and that he would talk to me the next day. He went to see the doctor, and when he came back he went to his sister's and his parent's place to tell them that he was diabetic. Then his parents came to my place to inform me what he was suffering. I asked them why he went to see them first, and why they came to inform me. Then my sister in-law said that that was right behaviour for a son to conduct towards his parents. I needed to follow an antibiotics treatment. When I asked my husband if he could call the doctor to ask him what I could take, he was furious. He told me that they should give me something which would kill me. When I went downstairs to tell my family in-law that my husband was furious with me, they ignored me. His father told me that he was ill, and that he has no time to listen to me. Then my husband came and told them not to listen to me as I am crazy. When I was about to deliver my child, my mother came to pick me up. 10 days after the delivery he came to my mother's place and forced me to come back home. Before that his sister had come and told me to come back as well. My mother told her that I was not well. I knew it was his sister who told him to force me back home. My sister in-law always pokes her nose into our business. I had to put them out of my place. Since then they have always spoken against me with my husband. They told my husband he must give me a good correction. They told him that he must make me shut my big mouth. Even my father in-law told me that I pretend to be 'above' them. My husband's way to correct me is to beat me. One day he told me he was going to buy wood. When he came back he was drunk. He threw his wet jacket on the bed. When I told him what he was doing was wrong, he told me I had no right to talk to him like that as the house was his. He took me by the neck and brought me to the toilet. He took my head and forced it in the toilet bowl and flushed. When I asked him what he was doing, he took the shower hose and tied it around my neck. I managed to escape from his hands. Once I left him for 2 months and went to my mother's place. He came over there; he beat me and broke my eye. Then I went to the police and he had to pay a fine in court. Then he came to see me and beg for forgiveness, and I forgave him and returned back. Then I brought him to the Brown Sequard (a psychiatric hospital which also treats drug and alcohol addicts), and he was admitted for one week. He doesn't have a good relationship with us, he always screams at us. By the time my second child was born, he was worse. He was drunk a lot. He didn't work, and when he drinks he has diarrhoea. Even in bed he defecates. When he wakes up he will spread it all over the floors in the house and I will have to clean it up after him. I can't bear it any longer. Everyday is the same scenario. When I talk to him he is so nervous that he beats me. Now he is not on good terms with his father either. His father has put him out of the work shop. It's because of a plot of land, because of heritage problems. As they are not on good terms, I am alone with him. My mother in-law is also diabetic. Every time I was beaten I went to my mother's place, but my parents told me that they can't do anything for me any longer. All throughout my marriage I have been coming and going. They told me it was time to make a decision now. I went back to my husband. When I was beaten again, I didn't have anywhere to go and made an attempt at suicide. As he knows that I can't go to my parents any longer, he exploits me even more. He told me that he will kill me. He won't let me get out of the house alive. I pretended that I had forgotten what he had done to me and my children, and then yesterday I escaped from the house when he was not there. I am scared because he threatened me with a knife".

Second stay June 2003

“In 2002 I came to the shelter. That was the first time. I came because my husband insulted me, and beat me and my 2 children. The problem was about money. My son came to tell me that my husband had taken 1000 rupees out of the cupboard. When I asked my husband about the 2000 rupees I had had in my cupboard, and the 1000 which was now gone, he said he hadn’t taken it. I said that my son had seen him take it, and asked him why he was lying. My husband then began to beat him, and when I forbid him to do so, he beat me. He lifted up the sofa and threw it at me. My son told me that my daughter had also seen him take the money. Then my husband beat my daughter as well. My husband is a very violent person, and he doesn’t want to take any responsibility. He doesn’t want to work, he works only occasionally, and he is also an alcoholic. When he is under the influence of alcohol, he becomes very aggressive. Nobody can speak to him. We must let him do whatever he wants to. Life is very difficult with him. For 12 years I have been married with him, and 12 years of nightmare. The 3rd of May 2003 is the second time I have come to Woman’s Aid. One week before my husband beat me. When I wanted to run away he closed all the doors. He doesn’t let me go out. He told me he will kill me. He always does this. He locks all the doors, and beats me so that nobody can hear anything. He sits all day long and drinks. Sometimes he will go out at 7 in the morning and tell me that he’s going to work. But when I phone over there, he is not working. He comes home at half past 16, sometimes at 18. When I asked him why he hasn’t been to work, he told me that it’s his right to do whatever he wants to, and he screams at me. It’s the same scenario each time. I am also a human being, and I have a life. And he can’t treat me like that. That’s why I have come back to the centre, to have some peace of mind. And then I will decide what to do with my husband”.

Venita’s husband does not only become violent towards her when he is drunk, but when he *is* it might seem as if there is no escape for Venita. Besides, his unemployment has also intensified his drinking habits. As a Mauritian man he is supposed to be the one to put food on the table and as his financial power clearly deteriorated when he became unemployed, so did his personal power, and thereby perhaps parts of his masculinity as well. Although Venita works, something which seems to comfortably suit his alcohol problem, it might seem as if he wants to make sure that although Venita might be in economical power, she is not ‘above him’ or ‘the boss’ in the marriage in any way. Through Venita’s active economical contribution, he might feel himself face to face with his own lack of personal power everyday, something which might be most troubling when living in a ‘society’ that expects him to be powerful. Maybe that is why he wants Venita to shut up, and successfully does so when forcing her head in the toilet bowl. By degrading Venita, he might feel himself the man in the relationship again.

Gambling, economical detriment and the case of Sandra⁵⁶

First stay November 2000

“Since I was 16 years old, I had a bad time with my husband. I was pregnant with Emma. He began to beat me with a fist in my face and with a piece of wood. He brought me on the road at night, and now I remember the day when his cousin got married. He lied to me, said let’s go for a walk. Then he began to beat me on the road. He pushed me and dragged me, he beat me and he ill-treated me. I was exhausted, he treated me like a dog. He said a lot of things that ought no to be said. Then nearly every day, my life was like that. Aller, aller. (Meaning life passes by). Then he said I had an affair with my brother in-law, everyday I was beaten. Linn manz mo lavi (Literally, he ate my life, he took my life away). But I know I have not done anything wrong because I do not have such bad manners as to have an affair with my friends. One day his father was ill, and my sister in-law who lives in Rodrigues was there. His mother told him to bring his father to hospital. He went and came back at night while I was asleep. He began to beat me when his sister, who was on my side, began to swear at him. On this day his family told me to go to the police station and leave him. I went on the road with my sister in-law, and at the same time, a police car passed by. They took me and brought me to the Stanley Police Station. There they told me they will bring me to the battered women centre. But I didn’t want to, as I didn’t know what it was. When I went back home, I explained this to his cousin. He told me I should go over there, as I would be in peace there. Then came New Year 1998. Emma was born. He said he didn’t want to recognise her. I was still a minor, and couldn’t go by myself for the declaration. Some ladies came to visit me and I explained my problem. They told my husband to come to the office the next day. He told them that he would accept the child. Then after some time, the same thing began again, he began to quarrel with me. Once again with his father as well, he broke a bottle and hit his father on the neck. Finally, the police phoned me and told me to come to the police station. They told me to look for a house, but when I went there, I should give the police my address. I went to stay in L’Esperance. Over there, once again the same scenario. He was quarrelling with me and put me out of the house. Then I went to sit in front of the house. While I was sitting there, he hit me on my head with a piece of wood. Once my aunt Anita gave me curtains to sow. Unfortunately it made me forget the meal on the fire. I was taking my bath. When I came out, he beat me, and I was wounded on my head. He hit me with a stone. I went to Flacq hospital. He continued to drink, the money we kept to buy milk for Emma, he took that money as well. I had to look for him everywhere. When he came back very late, I asked him for the money. I looked for the money in his pocket. Then he began to beat me. I went to phone my sister in-law who told me to come to her place. Finally I went back to my mother in-law’s place. It was the same thing over there. He drinks, he doesn’t want to go to work. Then I went to work. I had to pay the electricity, water bill, buy food etcetera. After 3 years of living with him, he didn’t change. He even told me he will never change. He is not scared to beat his mother and father, and therefore it is easy to beat me. On the second of November, he beat me and then I left him and asked him for my divorce. I didn’t tell him anything. I said that if he continues to beat me, I will leave him and never come back. On the 6th of November he beat me again and threatened me with a knife. When he is drunk he

⁵⁶ Sandra is 21, Roman Catholic, married for 6 years with 2 daughters, and have been to the shelter 3 times.

complains about all the food I have cooked. A wife like me he will never have again, and I will never go back to him. I will give him a divorce, so I can leave and live with my child”.

Second stay June 2002

“When I left the centre and went back with my husband, everything was okay. He was working, I was pregnant already. After 4 or 5 months he began to give me trouble again. Every day he went drinking with his friends, and came back at 22-23 at night. Then he began to swear. When I asked him to remain quiet, the situation worsened. He quarrelled with his mother, he doesn’t have any respect for anybody. After my delivery, the situation was very, very difficult. He stopped working. He applied for an unemployment benefit, and I went to work. With 2 children, life was not easy. I had to work the whole week. He didn’t beat me, but he swore and ill-treated me. He took my money. Without my salary, I could hardly do anything. Then I stopped working. With my salary I had to do everything, pay school fees, buy food and give him money. The only thing he was doing was quarrelling. Every day he was drinking and when he was drunk he quarrelled with his family. He swore at me and quarreled with me as well. On Thursday he beat me and dragged me out of his house. Then I went to the police station, and they dropped me off at the centre as I told them I had been there before”.

Third stay July 2002

“Since I left the centre the 16th of July 2002, everything was okay for one or two weeks, but after that my husband began to drink again. Swearing and ill-treating me as he was doing earlier. After that he had a job with his brother in law, but then he left the job. Every week when he had his salary he went gambling in Jambo in Rose Hill. He didn’t think about the fact that he has a house and two children to look after. Finally he had a pension, a social aid. It was the same thing. I must go with him on pay day so that I can have something for the children. I must stay behind him like a dog to beg for something for Emma and Nadine. After the last time, I was fed up with that life. When I spoke to him, and tried reasoning with him, his mother was crossed. One Sunday his sister brought his salary. Then I asked for some things we needed. I will never forget what he has done to me. It will always be on my mind. That very Sunday he drank, and I didn’t care about it. I was speaking with his sister. I hadn’t prepared dinner yet. He came and he began to make up excuses to beat me. He began to beat me although I had a Protection Order. He was not scared about it. In the afternoon, his sister was packing to go back home. I went to drop her off at the bus stop, when I came back he began to swear at me in front of my two children. I told him that if he continues, I will go to the police station. I started preparing dinner, but by then he was swearing so much I had to stop everything. Then I gave the children their baths, and he continued to swear, but I couldn’t hear it anymore. I also began to argue with him. I thought that I had a right to speak as well. He began to beat me with his left hand, and in his right hand there was a knife. Then I ran away. When he saw me going out, he stabbed me. When he did this, I didn’t feel anything. I just saw the blood on my clothes. I had the courage to go back in again, take money, my protection order and my 2 children. I was only able to take Nadine as he kept Emma with him. His father called a taxi for me and I went to hospital. I could hardly talk so the police officer there told me to return the next day to give my statement. Now I’m very sad as I have nobody. A long time ago I began a first step forward. I ought to continue in that direction. Now I’m very sorry that I have stopped everything before. Now after what has happened I will move forward and apply for my divorce. Now I won’t give him a new chance. I must think about the future of my daughters. He made me suffer a lot during 4 years. 3 times

I have given him a new chance. Now I won't give him a new chance. I've taken a good decision. I'm on a good road. Little by little I will be able to get me and my daughters out of it".

At least Sandra does not have problems with her in-laws like Arianne, Venita, Ratna and Rajni do. Although a substantial amount of the women cite interference of in-laws as a significant contributor to violence by their husbands, not all do (Woman's Aid 2001). On the other hand, all of their husbands, including Sandra's, drink. Sandra's husband gambles as well, and as all his money is spent in casinos, the little money Sandra earns as a maid needs to be enough to support the two of them, his drinking habit and rent, electricity, food, milk, clothes, school fees etcetera for their two small daughters. If she does not manage she has to beg him she says, and "stay behind him like a dog on his pay day". At the same time she puts herself at risk for his wrath.

Concluding remarks

All the narratives above are deliberately put into specific theme-boxes to raise topics typically referred to within literature concerned with domestic violence. At the same time I have tried to show that even though adultery, intervention of in-laws, substance abuse, unemployment etcetera are factors which might aggravate violence, they are not their cause. Most aggressors are for instance only violent at home (Woman's Aid 2001), and only towards their partners, and sometimes children. Violent men, just like abused women, orient themselves within contextual and particular social structures and discourses which determine gender roles, statuses and practises, and whether for instance beating your wife is commonly exercised, frowned upon or legitimised within a specific context, is a result of those very same gendered discourses. I have for instance more than once been confronted by Mauritian men that claim that "to beat one's wife is not illegal, it's normal".

Although domestic violence is generally believed to be a global problem rooted in the social fabric of universal unequal and hierarchical gender power relations, its forms, manifestations and expressions still differ, and the problem needs therefore to be discussed and analysed in its particular social, cultural, historical and geographical context. For instance are expectations of women's non premarital- or extra marital sexual relations, and women's roles and duties as naturally tied to her home (which is also patrilocally situated) structures which result from a Mauritian patriarchal- and male modelled discourse (Gunganah 1997). When a woman crosses, or at least is believed to cross the boundaries and expectations of her status as a Mauritian woman, she might be sanctioned or 'punished' for her failures. The

violence then becomes an effective mechanism and means to force her into an agreeable, or in other words; a subordinate position again.



Chapter four -

Claiming and reclaiming bodies; subversive agency expressed through personal and social bodies

Bodies and pain

We are all aware that our bodies are somehow *there*, and forming part of our identities as subjects distinguished from all surrounding objects. Still, in normal, everyday life our bodies' presence seem to have disappeared from our awareness and it is only under certain conditions such as the experience of extreme physical delight or misery, that the body reappears and reminds us of its existence (Csordas 1994). Whereas physical pleasure is usually ephemeral; fleeting, fluctuating, intense, but sudden and short; distress, dysfunction and disease can evolve into more than sharp piercing moments stopping time, and even inhabit one's body chronically. To the individual who occupies a body filled to the rim with (psychological or physiological) pain, the body is always a body *present*, agony never relieving it from the aching person's mind. Through pain the body becomes as much part of the individual's subject-self as it has ever been before, and the perception of one's personal body, and thereby the experience of one self, and one's life world might change temporarily or even eternally (Good 1994).

Living lives filled with violence, as is the case for my informants, can easily be equated to lives lived in bodies which suffer chronic pain. The women have not only been forced to live in agony, but also in fright and despair. When they have escaped, and when it is finally safe to talk and thereby start the slow process of healing the wounds inflicted through the abuse, the women might experience that verbal words lack them as their painful bodies have colonised their very mindful beings, and have left their bodies as main reference points for their orientations in the world. When I in this chapter choose to use personal and social bodies as an entrance to understand life within a shelter for battered women, I do so based on

an empirical context and reality in which the body played the main character on the (shelter) stage. Even bodies talk, and have stories to tell.

The objectification of bodies through abuse

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, according to feminism domestic violence can be understood as the outermost manifestation of phallic patterns. Additionally, abuse can also be perceived as the extreme consequence of an objectification process. Not only is the female body rendered utterly passive through the violence per se, but whereas the battered woman's body might be constructed as an object within a male modelled discourse, female bodies are constituted as objects through the means and methods of the very violence mapped by their partners on their body templates. At the same time the act of objectification might be understood as an act of control and domination (Feldman 1991), and as a practise through which the violent body claims the abused body as his own property. In Mauritius raped within marriage is for instance not deemed an illegal offence (Lam Hung 2003):

“What is even more painful than the beating is that he wants to sodomise me every night. Because he speaks loudly, my mother in-law heard one of our arguments on the matter, and later came to tell me that I'm in the wrong to refuse him his wishes. As he is my husband I should accept what he's asking of me, because how can I be happy eating his food, but not make love to him? But to me that's not love, it's perverse” (Carol).

Although Carol's mother in-law might consider her son's behaviour non-violent, or at least think that Carol should succumb to her husband's wishes, it is apparent that Carol is of a different opinion. Although Carol's experience of the situation is another than her mother in-law's, Carol's and her husband's outlooks probably differ even more radically. As Carol's husband acts through the codes of domination and violence to fulfil his own sexual desires, Carol's body is a body *acted upon*. Feldman (1991) claimed in his narrative analysis of the body and political violence in Northern Ireland that the creation of 'faceless' and dehumanised victims through objectification is a necessary method to legitimate own ferocity towards another (human) being. On the other hand, women who are subject to abuse by their husbands can not fully be equated with bodies which are created as political commodities as was Feldman's argument, as neither perpetrators nor victims of domestic violence are strangers to each other. Whereas violence in conflict areas or war zones is highly diffused, and commonly with no obvious perpetrator or victim, subject and object of intimate violence are normally unambiguous and clear cut. Still, in the very moment of the violent act itself, the formation of body as object does not necessarily differ:

“After he had finished defecating on the floors, he started to spread it around before he demanded that I clean it up after him. When I did, he was only sitting on the bed watching me. Then he forced me down on my knees, held me tight and defecated again. On me. At that moment it became apparent to me that he didn’t even see me as human being; I was only a thing to him, or better yet: I was nothing” (Venita).

At the same time such objectification is just as much a linguistic as a practical practise (Feldman 1991). Passive, docile and submissive female bodies can also be produced through language synchronised with psychological and emotional abuse. As the narratives in chapter three illustrate, many of the men told their partners that they “were not worth them”, that they were dogs and prostitutes. The implicit imagery in the word prostitute should not be bypassed. Not only does it refer to gender roles and accompanying moral expectations as portrayed in chapter three, but as the prostitute is a woman selling sex, thus at least in the eyes of the buyer she has made her body into a commodity and consequently an object. Similar to how the prostitute’s body is understood as a passive recipient of male desires, the abusive husband can perhaps be perceived as creating his wife’s body into a commodity by both name calling and battering to legitimate own abuse. Although the abuse is usually part of recurrent and repeating patterns of violence, the logic of objectification, even to the assailant himself, seems only temporal and lapsing with time: “He didn’t care that I was pregnant with his child, he beat me violently, and he beat me as if he didn’t know how to ever stop. Afterwards he always cries” (Nadja)⁵⁷ When the beating, choking or name calling is over (for now), Nadja apparently regains her face and becomes more than a mere object to her boyfriend again. Nadja’s partner and many men with him, act regretfully after a beating; crying, pleading and begging for forgiveness.

Embodiment of violence and subjectification of bodies through pain

Although the abusive man might be claiming and possessing his wife’s body through violent objectification, for violence to occur at all there need to be no less than two people present, or two bodies interacting. Without Carol’s body within instant reach, her husband would have no, at least immediate⁵⁸, outlet for his sexual preferences and ‘needs’. At the same time a necessary part of any interaction and relation is also (silent and verbal) *communication*. Although communication is normally a means through which people produce, exchange and

⁵⁷ Nadja is 28,, and has two small children. Catholic Creole, cohabiting for 3 years and first time to the shelter.

⁵⁸ Rumours at the shelter had it that Carol’s husband had been imprisoned for rape. As the rumours were whispered and first and foremost spread amongst the social workers and behind Carol’s back, Carol herself never verified or falsified the beliefs.

establish common meaning (Singer 1984), violence as communication between two individuals, and hence between two bodies, is rather meaning production which has utterly failed as there is rather perfect *asymmetry* between the perpetrator's and the victim's experiences of abuse. Whereas his violent actions might make sense to him through the very logics of the objectification of her and her body, comparative literature which deals with for instance violence and torture argues that in the very explosive moment of pain the victim who suffers will rather experience her body becoming an overwhelming situated *presence*. At that specific time and space she somehow *is* her body's agony; her bodily torment having turned into her very subject-self, pain shattering the very (life) world as she knows it (Scarry in Good 1994). As a process outside individuals' consciousness, such an understanding might be difficult to demonstrate empirically. Still, when informants tell their horror tales of violence a hypothesis of subjectification through agony does not seem improbable in any way. To believe that individuals' life worlds do not consequently change after they have experienced severe violence, might be more implausible.

"Everywhere on my body he beat me. My left cheek was hurt, and my nose was bleeding (...). When I asked him why he was beating me, he ripped the belt out of his trousers and whipped my head and face. I started bleeding from the head as well. Then he spat me in the face and on my feet" (Veronique)⁵⁹.

Hence there are two differing processes which take place in the communication between perpetrator and victim of violence. Whereas he objectifies her body, she rather subjectifies it. Although her body is his object (violence) and her very subject (pain), the body is still the medium through which they communicate. Even if their experiences of the violent act and situation might differ radically, through the language of violence the body is constructed as a common reference point for interaction, thus meaning or a "com-mens"⁶⁰ is created and agreed upon. Although a battered woman's life world might be transformed due to pain (Scarry 1986), other's experience with and perception of one's body is also part of the altering reconstruction of an individual's life world. As the abuse is part of every day life within the husband-wife relation, both time and brutality might socialise her body into materialisation in opposition to how socialisation teach 'normal' bodies to rather disappear from consciousness (Csordas 1994) as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. When the

⁵⁹ Veronique is 22, has one daughter of one years of age, Catholic Creole, married for 3 years, and second time at the shelter.

⁶⁰ Peirce's semiotics argues that the aim of all communication is to develop common understanding and meaning, something he refers to as the creation of *com- mens* (Singer 1984).

body functions as communicative tool its emergence from background to centre in a battered woman's life might therefore be the result of embodiment of violence. Through the idioms of violence the contextual importance of the body is established.

Staying passive as individual coping or survival strategy

Domestic violence objectifies women's bodies, consequently rendering them passive as well. On the other hand, if the women are perceived as passive; they might also be believed to lack agency. If so, abused women's efforts to change own situations might not be recognised, at least not as *active* and conscious protesting tactics, but even a battered woman's body is never solely a mere passive, victimised topographical site (Scheper-Hughes in Borofsky 1994). "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault in Patton 1998) according to Foucault, and if power (relations) arise whenever there is "action upon the action of others" (ibid) or *body upon body* as I have argued above, power might be understood as all-encompassing, but also as not to exist without a defiant negation. No matter how stringent battered women's conditions might be, the women rarely completely lack agency (Green 1999). As feminism argues, as women have been marginalised by formal power structures, women rather tend to put alternative and informal structures of resistance to use instead of organised or institutionalised ones (ibid). Scott (1986) has for instance illustrated that amongst contract working peasant women in Malaysia, expressions of discontent towards the replacement of manual with mechanic labour, and uneven access to resources such as wealth and property, took the shape of foot dragging, pilfering, sabotages etcetera; all non-organised and rather a form of self-help than resistance with revolutionary intentions. Scott labels these dissident articulations as "everyday forms of resistance" and sees them as "weapons of the weak" formed in accordance with the terms provided the peasant women by their restricted situations, and as a result of a manipulation of the very few means they have access to.

Even if the contextual realities of peasant women in Malaysia and battered women in Mauritius differ, I do believe that the women's strategies for resistance might be equated. My hypothesis is that abused Mauritian women employ strategies which aims at changing own situations to the better as well and expressed as individual *coping* or *survival strategies*. Although the abuse is understood as a means to render her an object, the transition from object to passive might not be absolute. It rather seems that several of my informants have learnt that by complying with their partner's efforts to turn their bodies into passive commodities, they might at least temporarily manage to avoid or reduce their husbands'

aggression towards them as it appears that the brutality tends to escalate when the women object to their husband's abusive behaviour.

"I started preparing dinner, but by then he was swearing so much I had to stop everything. I gave the children their baths, and he continued to swear, but I couldn't hear it anymore. I also began to argue with him. I thought that I had a right to speak as well. Then he began to beat me with his left hand, and in his right hand there was a knife. Then I ran away. When he saw me going out, he stabbed me. When he did this, I didn't feel anything. I just saw the blood on my clothes" (Sandra).

At first Sandra's husband was 'only' cursing her, but when she openly decided to object: "I thought I had a right to speak as well", that is when he first raised his fist. When she ran away, he stabbed her. Although no analytical interpretation and explanation can claim a single authorised meaning, several of my informants tell similar tales: *"I had a card for a family counselling service in Goodlands in my pocket. When he saw that he began to beat me, drag me by my hair and kick me on my head"* (Arianne).

"He didn't want to have a child. Each time I was pregnant, he made me abort. 5 times I've been forced to abort. If I don't comply, he will beat me" (Ginette)⁶¹. Through hard learnt experience these women might know that by actively objecting abuse, and thereby (un)intentionally threaten their husband's sense of control, they will probably be subject to even more brutality. If a woman keeps her body immovable and her dissident words silent, the violent outbursts might come more seldom. If so she might manage to endure, perhaps even survive her abusive relationship.

"I was married off very young, at the age of 13⁶². We lived together for 5 years before we could marry civilly. For 25 years I stayed with him, enduring everything. I never left the house. The first time I left the house was to come here, to the shelter" (Beatrice)⁶³.

"When he woke up, he told me that I smelled. He told me to go and have a bath. I didn't argue with him, I went quietly to go and have a shower. When I was finished, he excused himself. I still didn't say anything" (Veronique). Both of the women remain quiet, but that does not necessarily mean that they have surrendered to the abuse. Is it not possible to rather understand their passive submission as *avoidance*? After all, if time has taught a battered woman that his violent behaviour decreases when he believes to be in control of her, she might consciously be playing a silent and acquiescent part in the violent drama of her home. The decision not to act can be a significant act in itself (Green 1999). According to Scott (1986), submission is often no more

⁶¹ Ginette is 51, a Hindu, married for 17 years, and this is her first time to the shelter.

⁶² Organised marriages are still common in Mauritius, at least amongst the Indo-Mauritian population (Eriksen 1998). Then again, Beatrice is a Roman Catholic Creole.

⁶³ Beatrice is 38, married for 25 years, and this is her first time to the shelter.

than a pose and a necessary tactic, or at least in this case, a hopeful effort to avoid violence. As I have previously argued; through violence men are able to produce passive, docile and obedient bodies, and thereby preserve for instance hierarchical gender norms-, structures and practises. As Veronique so simply, but eloquently put it: “*The way I am living with him is as if I married my father*”. To purely manage suffering might be considered passive, but on the other hand, to evade violence might also be perceived as something which requires active pursuit on a daily basis. None of the women referred to above openly challenge male dominance, but how could they? And at the same time keep safe or even alive? Maybe the women can rather be understood to manipulate the objectifying process of passivity installed in their bodies by the abuse? Although the initial intention of the objectification of her body was to leave her body passive, when the women use passivity as survival or coping mechanism, they somehow *actively* try to change the abusive process. Each woman must necessarily shape her strategy in accordance with the terms provided her by the realities of her contextual situation, and although employing passivity as a subversive statement might not be a highly politicised expression of resistance, nor radically alter her situation, it might be that by complying she survives.

“Fleeing the house of horrors”⁶⁴

All the women referred to above have managed to *leave* their abusive relationships, either temporarily or for good. Passive avoidance approaches to domestic violence might be understood as active individual coping or survival strategies, but conforming to abuse is still radically different from choosing to physically run away from it as leaving can be seen as an undeniable politicised expression of non-compliance. On the other hand, it is when the women either threaten to leave, or actually manage to, that the batterer’s quest for control becomes most acutely violent and potentially lethal, a phenomenon identified as *separation assault* (Green 1999). According to Green (ibid) nearly 70% of abused South African women reported that violence increased after they had managed to leave their husbands, and my empiricism leaves no reason to believe that neither the numbers nor the phenomenon of separation assault to be drastically differently played out in Mauritius. Sandra who was

⁶⁴ Sev’er 2002.

stabbed when she tried to run away is an example, and so are Geraldine and Nadja: “15 days ago he beat me because I left the house after an argument” (Geraldine)⁶⁵.

“Although I hadn’t said a word, he started beating me. I escaped to my mother’s house, but he came to get me. He asked me to come back home with him, but when I said no, when I refused, he beat me violently. I fell to the floor and he continued to kick me. He broke my mother’s bed, and put the entire house upside down. That’s why I came to the shelter. I needed somewhere safe. If I go to my mother’s again, he will only come back there and beat me” (Nadja).

Not only does Nadja’s boyfriend beat her *despite* her silence, but as Nadja refuses to return with him, he beats her even more violently. As a battered women’s separation from her husband might be conceived as an ultimate challenge of his control over her, his response usually corresponds to the severity of what he perceives as her defy. According to Sev’er (2002), in the most extreme situations women who are murdered by their partners are usually killed when the women prepare to leave, or shortly after they have left. Despite the husband’s decreased access to his wife, numbers in Canada show that separation presented a six-time increase in the risk of lethal consequences compared to abused women who continued to reside with their partners (Sev’er 2002). Although murders fortunately do not make everyday newspaper headings in Mauritius, separation assaults with lethal outcomes do occur. The case of 27-year old Nadine Résidu who was frequent news paper material for a few weeks during my field work is an example: “*Je pense qu’il avait prémédité le meurtre de ma sœur car il lui en voulait de s’être séparée de lui*”⁶⁶(5-Plus Dimanche 24.08.03, interview with the victim’s sister). Even the shelter has been targeted and threatened by desolate and desperate husbands:

“He threatened to throw a cocktail Molotov at the shelter, a revenge for keeping his wife away from him, and a lesson to teach all us social workers to stop breaking apart families. It turned out that there was nothing inside the bottle though, so he only ended up spending a few days in prison instead of the months he deserved” (Marianne, social worker at the shelter).

When the women flee what Sev’er (2002) refers to as the women’s “houses of horrors”, such escapes seems only to become more than pure plays of the imagination when the women are capable of avoiding direct confrontations with their partners, as many of them might have learnt from previous experiences that to leave when he is present might pose a tremendous danger for both her and her children. If a passive and avoidant approach does not help to yield the violence, and the situation has rather become utterly intolerable, for many

⁶⁵ Geraldine is 38, a Catholic Creole, has been married for 15 years and has 3 children with her husband. This is her first stay at the shelter.

⁶⁶ “I think he planned the murder of my sister because she wished to separate him”.

battered women the only manner in which they are able to flee is in his physical absence. It is an active flight, but although it might be planned and calculated, it is at the same time also a result of learnt passive behaviour; the code being never to openly challenge him.

“One week ago my husband beat me. When I wanted to run away he closed all the doors. He didn’t let me go out. He told me he will kill me. He always does that. He will lock all the doors, and beat me so that nobody can hear anything. After some days I pretended to have forgotten what he had done to me and my children, and then yesterday I escaped from the house when he was not there” (Venita).

Venita waits. She remains passive and pretends that she has forgotten his beating. When he starts to relax again, even letting her on her own, she flees to the shelter, and avoids a violent climax. So did Carol:

“I didn’t say a single word about leaving. I remained in the house for the entire night. The next morning, I fled with my children while I thought he was at work. I ran into him in the street though, so I pretended to bring the oldest children to the school, and the youngest to the doctor. I’m fed up with that life. I only want to find a house where I can live alone with my children, a house where he won’t be able to find us”.

On the other hand there are also quite a few of the women who end up at the shelter who have not decided to leave their homes themselves, but have rather been forced out by their partners.

“He put my clothes outside and told me to go, to leave his house, but to leave my son behind with him. But I couldn’t leave without my son. He opened the door and saw that I was still there. “When you tell a dog to go, it goes, and you are still here? You have no dignity”! I was just standing in front of the house. I didn’t know where to go to, and I couldn’t leave without my child” (Caroline)⁶⁷.

To throw a woman out of her own house⁶⁸ is in most cases just an idiom of the violence itself, and a remarkably effective one as such. Many women have nowhere to turn, and have long ago realised that their maternal family and kin might not be supportive as it is generally believed that a woman’s rightful place is with her new family. When an abused woman turns for help, she might therefore experience that it is not there. The first time Nina was beaten by her husband, they had only been married for around 3 months. She was 29 years old, fled to her mother’s and recounts the event as follows: *“I left his house and went to my mother’s. But my mother took me back to him, saying that “Life is not as if when you have a problem you can*

⁶⁷ Caroline is 24 years old, a catholic Creole, has one child and has lived together with her partner for 3 years. This is her first stay at the shelter.

⁶⁸ Most of the battered women who have been forced to leave their residences naturally think of their residences as their own property. In most cases the house belongs legally to her husband or her family in-law. See for instance chapter one and three for references to Mauritian patrilocal habiting patterns.

just come back to me and leave your home” (Nina). Although Venita’s parents have housed their daughter on several occasions, at one point they told her that ‘enough is enough’:

“Every time I was beaten I went to my parent’s house, until they finally told me that they can’t do anything for me any longer. All throughout my marriage I had been coming and going. I went back to my husband. When I was beaten again I didn’t have anywhere to turn any longer, so I made an attempt at suicide. As my husband knows that I can’t go to my parents any longer, he exploits the situation and abuses me even more. He told me that he will kill me. He won’t let me get out of the house alive”.

Although an abusive husband might throw his partner out of her home does not necessarily imply an intention of *keeping* her out. When a woman take the initiative of leaving, her partner’s anger might be triggered, perhaps even resulting in separation assault, but when *he* has been the one to force her to leave, he rather tend to act regretfully. There have been several men outside the walls of the shelter, crying and begging their partners to return back to them⁶⁹. In most cases she will as well. Of a total of 17 informants at least 9 returned to their partners for sure. There are of course several reasons for such ‘recidivist’ practise. The women might have nowhere else to go, they believe in his potential to change, they might be afraid of the stigma attached to leading life as single women with children⁷⁰, and they probably also know that to live alone is extremely economically challenging, something I will come back to in chapter five. The most common reason cited amongst my informants for choosing to return back to their abusive husbands is, as stated in chapter three, ”because of the children, they need a father”. At the same time recidivism can also be understood as a consequence of her previous ‘passive’ survival strategies. Although the logic of her return might seem erratic to the outsider, it might make perfect sense to herself. If she has previously been subject to separation assault, she might deem it safer to return home to him, than to have him find her wherever she might try to hide. As mentioned throughout this chapter; by obeying him, remain silent and stay passive, she might have learnt to cope with the violence, and perhaps even deem endurance her only chance of survival.

Unfortunately, there is another manner in which a battered woman might escape her husband’s abuse. She might make an attempt at suicide. I was confronted with the problem as early as my first night at the shelter when 19-year old Catherine and her baby daughter arrived at the shelter. Catherine had wanted to kill herself by jumping off the roof of her own house,

⁶⁹Despite that Woman’s Aid has tried to keep the address to the shelter a secret and inaccessible to anyone but the women who seek their help (as in Norway), but as there is only one shelter which house battered women in Mauritius, this has proved unattainable.

⁷⁰ See chapter one and three.

but had somehow been hindered. Both Carol and Venita have tried committing suicide by drinking petrol with the intention of putting themselves on fire. I was visiting Venita at her job in an elderly home when she first told me about her suicide attempt. While stirring a hot pot of custard for the resident's tea time, she also talked about the circumstances which triggered her attempt in the first place, and also her current outlook on those very same problems:

“After my parents refused me to continue escaping to them when my husband beat me, I drunk petrol and wanted to put myself on fire. I just felt so utterly alone. I had nowhere to go. I ended up in hospital. In the hospital corridors there were posters for Woman's Aid though, and one of my nurses told me that I should contact them as they provided a shelter where I could stay both securely and tranquil as she said. So I did. I went directly from the hospital to the shelter in Moka”. Venita noticed my concern even before a single word was uttered. “No Karine, I wouldn't attempt suicide again. My family is more supportive now, and besides now I know that I have somewhere to go if it becomes necessary. I now know that I'm not alone with my problems; other women are struggling with the same issues as me”. I asked her why she experienced her family as more supportive now than back then. “Well, I was 18 when I married my husband. I didn't want to marry him, I didn't like him at all, but my parents insisted. They were the ones who found him for me. He had a job and a house. I refused for a long time, but then they told me that if I don't marry him, they will throw me out anyway. So I didn't have a choice. I had nowhere else to go. After all my problems I think they have realised that they might have made a mistake though. They have even provided me with my own room at their house now so that when I'm off work, I can come and visit my two children who are staying with them. But on the other hand, they still want me to remarry. They have even found me a new husband! And I'm not even divorced yet! This man has apparently offered to pay for a lawyer to make the process quick and painless. My parents haven't forced me to accept his offer though; they have just asked me to think it over. They say as I'm still young, I should make myself a fresh start in my life. But you know I don't want to remarry. I'm afraid my whole abusive story will just be repeated. What do you think I should do?” I came face to face with what might be labelled 'the anthropologist's dilemma'. As a researcher one always wish to try to stay objective. Venita had become a friend though; her charming, funny and empathetic manier had caught my friendship from the first moment we met. I told her to do what she thinks best. She should make her own decisions this time. She smiled gratefully. After all, all she really needed was a confirmation concerning a choice she had already made”.

If Catherine, Carol or Venita had managed to end their own lives they would no longer be manipulating the passivity ascribed their bodies, but would rather have accomplished to make them into the ultimate silent and docile objects the violence and the process of objectification intended. Luckily, they did not succeed.

Making sense of the world again; transference of individual coping strategies to shelter(ed) reality

Whether it is a result of chronic illness, or sudden violence through torture or abuse, bodies which experience shattering physical pain, are as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, said to face a threat of their very life worlds (Scarry 1986). As previously stated, their bodies are no longer objects to themselves, but rather becomes their very subject-self and “being (in the world)” (Csordas 1994). The common human response to such a dissolution is to find or fashion meaning capable of reconstituting the world ‘as we know it’; reversing the de-objectifying work of pain by forcing pain itself into avenues of objectification (Scarry in Good 1994). All such strategies are necessarily individual, but due to similar abusive experiences, and perhaps also because of the close(d) context and relations of the shelter, it seems as if the process of ‘making sense of the world’ again to heal the wounds of violence, becomes similarly articulated in the shelter space. The body seemed to play a significant part even in the shelter context. Not only was there always someone sitting apparently immovable, absorbed in thought and with blank eyes staring at the wall; letting time do its work as I was told, but someone was always complaining about being *malade* (ill), *fatigue* (tired) and *fer mal* (hurting).

“I’m malade. I have a sore throat. I think it’s because they put too much pimo (chilli) in the food here. I’m not used to eating pimo. Maybe I need to go to hospital. I’m not happy” (Arianne).

“I was visiting Arianne and Di in their room when Ratna walked in. “Do you still have the eardrops you gave Di for her infection? Could I borrow them? Anista is getting ill. I don’t really feel good myself either. I think I might be coming down with something”.

Most of the women at the shelter frequently complained about being ill or in pain. There were several conversations held in similar manners as those cited above. Many of the women were regular and steady customers at the local pharmacy and the use of various painkillers was normal rather than exceptional. In the case of Ratna’s one year old daughter Anista the extensive use of medicine commonly employed in the shelter might even have had potentially lethal consequences had it not been discovered:

“Despite the illnesses and despair contained in the walls of the long, narrow buildings of the Porlwi hospital, fresh air is breathed through the many trees in the green court yard, giving the hospital an aura of tranquillity. I was visiting Ratna and Anista, bringing them plastic containers with rice and curry, their tooth brushes, diapers and soap as it seemed they needed to spend the night in the hospital. Amina had admitted Anista to the children’s ward earlier in the morning. The girl had been seriously ill for days. She neither ate nor drunk; she could hardly move and did not open her eyes. She struggled to breathe.

Ratna had for several days refused to take Anista to hospital. Finally Amina had decided that enough was enough. They were afraid the girl might die Amina told me. Although Woman's Aid claims never to conduct any action on behalf of the women who stay at the shelter unless they agree to it themselves, Amina thought taking Anista to hospital was their responsibility. The case was extreme, an emergency. And so it was done.

Now Ratna and I were standing bent over Anista's crib. We were watching her silently, hoping that it was still not too late for her to fight off whatever it was that was tormenting her small body. "I have seen several doctors you know" Ratna told me. "I have only given Anista medication that they have prescribed". I believed her. It had turned out that the child was intoxicated due to extensive use of medicine. A social worker had brought a whole plastic bag full of various ointments, ear drops, nose sprays and pills with her when she had taken Anista to the hospital. Apparently Ratna had given Anista all of the prescriptions.

Later, and seated comfortably in the office of the shelter with a healthy Anista on my lap, the incident was brought up again. Amina's verdict on the issue was clear. "Ratna is obsessed with medicine. She goes to the doctor or the pharmacy every day, even for minor things like coughs and running noses. The children are not even ill! And if they are, I think it's because Ratna have destroyed the children's immune system by making them resistant to medicine when they really need it". Ratna herself was of a different opinion. "It's the shelter that makes them ill. They don't handle it very well here" she said before she showed me her newest medical attainment. "It's for Ravi. I think he might suffer from asthma".

The case of Ratna and Anista is extreme. Still, what seemed to pass Amina by, is that Ratna's "obsession with medicine" can not necessarily only be understood as one individual's personal problem. Ratna's fixation with medicine and illness, or her fixation with the state of her and her children's (health and) bodies, had not been created in a vacuum. Although Ratna's daughter was the only one who ended up in hospital due to intoxication, Ratna's focus upon everything concerned with the body can just as well be perceived as due to the body being the main conversational focus in the shelter amongst almost *all* of the residents. The reason might be found in the women's common histories of abuse. If violence has created the body as reference point for interaction, as I have previously argued in this chapter, can it not also be that the body's contextual importance and meaning is reproduced in the shelter context, even colouring interaction amongst women who have left their husbands? Again I believe the 'answers' might be found in the very violence mapped on and embodied in these women. Not only do concrete illness signs such as for instance head- and stomach aches, the flu and fevers function as the expressions of objectification mentioned previously, but as specified, located avenues for pain, and thereby easier communicated to others (Good 1994). At the same time such symptoms might also be a consequential continuance of the passive survival strategies previously employed by the women in their homes. Falling ill is something which happens *to* the body, without and outside individual consciousness, hence becoming ill would also normally defy sanctions.

“A sick body implicates no one. Such is the special privilege of the sickness as neutral social role, its exemptive status. In sickness there is (ideally) no blame, no guilt, no responsibility. Sickness falls into the moral category of bad things that “just happen to people” (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 174).

By assuming the sick role, a battered woman can not be blamed; therefore she can neither be believed to openly challenge her husband’s control. Her ‘passive’ strategies of survival employed in the domestic sphere might be perceived to have turned into silent knowledge which tells her how she is capable of continuing her life, strategies which seem to be reproduced and played out even in the shelter context. Scheper-Hughes (in Borofsky 1994) argues for instance that “the language of suffering” or the communication of symptoms can also be an available “weapon of the weak” and a creative articulation of resistance in opposition to what one’s body has been put through. Scheper-Hughes (1992) exemplifies this with reference to the symptom of “nervos” in the shanty town of Alto Do Cruzeiro in Brazil. Nervos expresses itself as fainting, seizures and paralysis of face and limbs, something Scheper-Hughes claims to be a means for agricultural wage labourers to express resistance towards exploitation and unstable democracy in the country.

As violence has made the body emerge as the main site for all interaction, Ratna, Arianne and many other residents of the shelter might perhaps express their distress, agony, anger and sadness; in short their *emotions*, through their bodies. At the same their bodies are not only templates for violence, but also for resurrection and healing. I do not believe these women to neither have given up nor to finally have been defeated when they fall ill. I rather believe their illnesses to be means employed by the women to try to *repossess* their bodies from their partner’s strokes and blows. To be able to reconstruct the life worlds which have been deconstructed by the violence, the objectifying abuse might rather be perceived as *mirror-imaged* through idioms of illness and pain. The invasion from the outside and into the body is expelled to the *outside* again as a means of bodily reclaim and resurrection. Although the violence rendered her body *object* to him, her experience was rather one of pain, leaving her body her very *subject*. When language is regained, when it is finally *safe* for her to express suffering, she reverses the subjectification process and puts her pain into a language which is known and secure to her, namely through her body as she has learnt through years of staying passive to try to avoid or reduce violence. Putting pain into actual verbal words might take her a longer time. After all she has just begun her journey towards healing, and the outcome is still not to tell.

Expressions and responses to passivity as coping strategy and illness as healing approach

Although the personal body as reference point for interaction is reproduced in the shelter, the body's meaning is also re-altered. The personal body is also always a social body, and through communication the women do not only reclaim their bodies, but also articulate them anew. As mentioned several times; through illness the process of subjectification, hence pain, is reversed and forced into avenues of objectification again, thereby reconstructing the body as the distant presence we all normally know it as (Scarry in Good 1994). If such a process is left to untangle, the wounds and scars left after abuse might slowly start to heal. 'Less letan fer son travay'. On the other hand, the articulation of illness which can be perceived and analysed as indicators and causes of distress and agony relating to the violence and suffering experienced by a battered women, can also *not be* identified as such.

The meaning of the symptoms *fermal*, *fatige* and *malade* are not necessarily obvious in any way, and might be unclear, hazed and ambiguous to both the women living such problems, *and* to the onlooker.

"And don't start complaining about head aches or stomach cramps to be able to stay absent from work. It's only when you're really ill that you should stay at home" (Amina to a newly arrived resident just about to start her new job).

"I went with Ivana⁷¹ to the dispensary in Moka. She was wrapped up in a huge scarf, and complaining about a flu. We took our seats on the hard wooden bench, moving slightly closer to the doctor's office every time someone before us in the line went in for their examinations. The queue went steadily away, and when it was Ivana's turn I was surprised at how quick she was out again. "Well, do you know why?" she told me. "The doctor didn't even examine me. She didn't even look at me, but kept her head in her papers the whole time, writing out prescriptions. It's the same at the shelter. They don't know anything about being in pain".

Emotional pain communicated through the body is not necessarily recognised or identified by an individual's surroundings. Ivana is indignant when she tells me that she thinks she does not get the help she, or her body, asks for. According to Scheper-Hughes (1992) the language of the body has been silenced and denied expression as the middle classes have defined distress to be expressed psychologically rather than physically, a somatic thinking which, according to her, is unfamiliar to working classes extracting their basic subsistence from physical labour. Although most of the women at the shelter do in fact come

⁷¹ Ivana is Catholic Creole, 23 years old and has been married for one year. This is her first stay at the shelter.

from labour class backgrounds⁷², as previously argued I rather believe the violence and the avoidance approaches undertaken by the battered women to be the reason for the ‘choice’ of illness symptoms. In the shelter it might seem as if the social workers do not share the residents’ understandings of these illness symptoms, as they have first and foremost been constructed and articulated amongst the residents of the shelter themselves, and not so much in communication with the representatives of Woman’s Aid. As mentioned in chapter two, although almost invisible, there still is a line drawn between the residents and the social workers in the shelter. It might be professionally necessary, but as none of the social workers will or can for instance visit the women in their rooms at night, the residents non-verbal communication of pain might be lost. I was myself only made aware of the ‘somatic culture-or discourse’, which seems to have been created in the shelter context, when I was directly challenged by a friend *outside* the shelter with what had become my own tendency to constantly reflect and complain about my health. After I had ended up in hospital due to a bad, but not serious, allergic reaction to penicillin prescribed me for an ear infection, I still continued to buy whatever medication I thought I needed. While I had had coffee with a friend, I complained about the poor economic situation I was in, a topic unrelated to the state of my body. The reaction of my conversational partner caught me by surprise: “*Well Karine, have you ever thought about how much money you spend on medicine?*” I had not, but now I started to. When I arrived at the shelter the next day I found Arianne and Di in the crèche. Arianne was cleaning rise, whereas Di was running around in her usual boisterous manner. I asked Arianne how she was doing. She looked at me with enormous, sad brown eyes: “*My entire body fer mal, I’m cold and I have a fever. I think I might have to go to hospital. Di is ill as well, vomiting*”. When I looked at 2 year old Di who was laughing and running back and forth the small court yard, the connection between the contents of my daily conversations with the residents at the shelter and my own constant complaints about being ill started to slowly dawn on me.

Illness as reactions to violence and symptoms of distress might not be fully recognised in the shelter due to the symptoms vague and imprecise nature. At the same time the consequential behaviours and practises by battered women who continue to employ passive coping or survival strategies in the shelter does not correspond to Woman’s Aid’s *activist*

⁷² Although all women can experience battering, newer research has shown that there are more frequent occurrences of domestic violence amongst the working classes, also in Norway (The Oslo Rapport, Stefansen and Pape in Dagbladet, Magasinet 28.02.04). Such a relation is by many activists against violence against women deemed simplified, and is hence believed controversial.

healing approaches. As Woman's Aid is founded on feminist principles, their intention is to teach these women that if they choose to, they can make it on their own. They do not have to return to a life lived with an abusive husband; there are other options and possibilities even in 'patriarchal' Mauritius. They can choose independence. So the shelter tries to find the unemployed women work. As most of the women come from labour class backgrounds, and with little, if any education to speak of, the most common jobs proposed the women are as private maids or as Export Processing Zone factory workers. These types of employment offer little money and limited prospects for the future. At the same time they are both stigmatised in the Mauritian context; the first as a reminder of the island's colonial history, and the second of gender practise as many women employed in the EPZ sector are believed to be of loose morals. Work in the Export Processing Zone might therefore be shunned by women who all their lives have perhaps aspired to become dutiful housewives as has been expected of them. On the other hand, economical income is of course absolutely necessary if the women do choose to make it on their own. Although there are many women at the shelter who were active parts of the Mauritian work force even before their arrivals, and many who gladly accept the offers made at the shelter, there are also many who rather refuse to work. It is also these very same women who seem to fall ill most frequently.

"Arianne doesn't want a job" Ambal told me. "When I told her it was time, that she shouldn't sit and stare at the wall the whole day, she started to scream at me". A little later I sat down to have a chat with Arianne myself. "All I want is to go home to Nicaragua" she said. "So are you thinking about starting working then? And save up money?" I asked. "No. I don't want to work. Isn't there some other solution?"

Illness expresses itself differently, but its most common expression is passivity, often articulated as refusal to work (Scheper-Hughes 1992). Although such passivity might be a result of individual coping strategies, if the passivity is not acknowledged by the surroundings as such, the staring at the wall for hours on end, perhaps even neglecting children and the shares of the housework in the shelter, refusing to work hence decline to comply with help offered, might rather make the woman prone to negative views and sanctions from her shelter(ed) surroundings. The women might rather be conceived of as lazy and ungrateful by the social workers. As mentioned in chapter two, this was particularly evident in the case of Ratna.

Self evidently all the residents of the shelter inhabit other statuses than only 'battered woman'. Some of the women are of course much more difficult to cooperate with than others, and Ratna might be one of them. Still, it might also seem as if women who do not employ the activist, Western, feminist approaches preceded by the shelter do somehow not receive the

same help as those who apparently do, as has also been discussed in chapter two. If so, that might also be the reason why the residents of the shelter primarily seem to cry over missed love in the protection of their own rooms, and rather ridicule their husbands on the shelter stage. Although the women who reside at the shelter might be taught an alternative to the existing gender practise in the island, Mauritian gender socialisation *and* the embodiment of the violence they have experienced, might make the transition towards the shelter's activist healing approaches extremely difficult. After all, the battered women do employ means to change own situations, but as these means are rather consistent with, instead of challenging their subordinate female statuses, the shelter fails to recognise the potential of these strategies for healing. If the hypothesis of passive coping strategies is 'correct', the problem might be, at least the outermost consequence, that the battered women is no longer offered any help, consequently also rendering them with no other choice than to return to abusive husbands.

"Carol had just quit the job found her by the shelter, and was now leaving to return to her husband. "It's the same scenario as always" Amina complained. "Carol just doesn't want to work. Every time we find her a job, she quits and returns to her husband. The next time she shows up at our door, she won't be let in. She has stayed at the shelter 8 times now; we have done everything we can for her. It's time she takes responsibility for her own life. Besides, the shelter is not to be used as a temporary good time.

"Ratna has stayed at the shelter for 8 months now, but because she always quits her jobs, we have to start all over again as she never saves up any money or plan for her future. I have already told Ratna that the day she quits this one, is the day that she will have to leave the shelter" Amina told me".

"Ratna is too comfortably settled at the shelter" Sister Marion complained. "After all it's just a temporary refuge, not a home. Besides, Ratna doesn't want to work. She has quit all her previous jobs after short periods of time, she quit her job in the restaurant for instance because they had asked her to clean the back yard or something, and she had refused to get the dirty. I just don't get it! Why do so many of the women at the shelter either refuse to work, or quit their jobs? Isn't the logical thing to do to work, save up money and live independently instead of returning to a dysfunctional family?"

One would of course think so. But years of abuse might have taught Arianne, Carol, Ratna and many of the other residents in the shelter that by working they do not only challenge Mauritian gender norms, but also their husbands' control over them, and that they might thereby subject themselves to further and more severe beatings. If their husband find them they probably also know that they can end up as targets of separation assault, hence they might think it safer to remain passive, or ill, in the shelter. As the prospect of separation assault normally elapses with time (Sev'er 2002), so might their illnesses, and consequently also some of the women's refusal to work. When I asked Ratna why she had quit so many jobs she answered that her back was "mal". *"I'm ill again. And you know Amina is not happy about that at all. She is always asking me why me and my children are ill all the time, but I'm trying my best to get well*

quickly". Apparently Ratna's healing process evolves in a slower pace and in a different manner than what is recognised as proper curative efforts by the social workers at the shelter. It might seem as if the women's personal needs correspond with a somatic discourse which has been created amongst the residents of the shelter, but not with the views held by social workers who have been taught activist approaches for redemption. The almost invisible hierarchical line between social workers and residents seem at times to have created two different spaces for healing; one pocketing an activist, and Western based feminism and the other a passive and somatically expressed approach which is a result of both Mauritian gender practise and embodiment of violence. As the aim of all those involved at the shelter, both the residents and the social workers, is to cure physical and emotional sores, the challenge might therefore consist in erasing the boundaries between these two approaches. At least the battered women might need recognition of their own efforts to deal with own violent histories. If so, there might be a few more women who do not choose to return to their abusive husbands.

Concluding remarks

Everyday in the shelter I was surrounded by women who were ill, and consequently I became ill myself as well. Even as an 'outsider' and someone who was only spending so many nights in the shelter per week, I seemed to have commenced experiencing and communicating my body in a manner previously unfamiliar to me. My personal body was clearly influenced by the bodies surrounding me, despite that I have never had to experience an everyday life filled with violence as my informants had.

The bodies' humans inhabit, are personally experienced, but socially constructed and constituted. At the same time specific circumstances in individuals' lives may occur, wherein the normal distant and objectified understandings of our bodies might evaporate and be replaced by an overwhelming physical sensation of a body's presence, changing our life worlds and colour all interaction. To live with violence and hence (chronic) pain can be an example. Although domestic violence per se aims at objectifying the victim's or the woman's body, for anything to be rendered an act of domination, there is also necessarily resistance (Foucault in Patton 1998). Through experience, it might seem as if battered women learn to manipulate the objectification of their bodies by using one of the same idioms as their perpetrators, namely passivity. By not objecting and thereby challenge his control, but rather remain silent and endure, they might be able to avoid or reduce the severity of the violent

outbursts and as such cope with or even survive the abuse. As the body has become the main focus and site of all communication between husband and wife, the body's contextual meaning, and also such passive coping strategies, might seem to be reproduced even in the shelter context through illness-symptoms. The problem is of course that passivity as choice of subversive agency is ambiguous and blazed to the onlooker, and as illness becomes refusal to work, the passive approaches which underlie the expressions of illness seems to be ignored by the social workers at the shelter, hence the women's efforts to change their own situations are misunderstood as they do not correspond to Woman's Aid's activist approaches to healing.



Chapter five -

The battered women- and Woman's Aid's encounters with Mauritian “body politics”

Introducing body politics

Domestic violence is ultimately a question of (re-) gaining control over women perceived by their male partners to violate and defy the status quo of proper gender conduct. In the tradition of Cartesian thought, female bodies might be seen as crossing the boundaries to nature⁷³, hence their very biological concreteness and abilities become an image of rebellion, and their bodies conceived as potential threats to the upholding of cultural, male stability and order. Through violence men are able to produce passive, docile and obedient bodies, preserving for instance hierarchical gender- norms, structures and practises in respective ‘societies’, Mauritius being but one example. The abusive act functions as a graphic illustration of the subordination of an individual’s body to another’s; hence domestic violence aptly portrays realities and notions of power, control and dominance, surrender and resistance, or the *body politics* in Foucauldian vocabulary (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1987). As an individual (micro) is always part of societal surroundings (macro), the personal and social body discussed in chapter four are not produced in vacuity, but rather in a larger Mauritian hegemonic context and discourse. The body is also always a *political body*; and a part of the Mauritian *body politics*.

Body politics builds on Foucault’s argument that the body is the primary target or object of discursive power strategies first and foremost utilised by the state and its regulatory institutions in an effort to control and discipline citizens’ behaviours (Patton 1998). Body politics refer to the inscription of state power on bodies (Ong and Peletz 1995) expressed

⁷³Female bodies are often believed closer to ‘nature’ due to their (mystified) capability to bear children and give birth. See also introductory chapter.

through for instance the criminal- or medical systems as first discussed by Foucault (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1987). Body politics can therefore be conceived as the inherently political nature of symbols and practises which surround human bodies (Ong and Peletz 1995), and the body as the vital nexus in the interaction between micro and macro. Hence, body politics is an essential part of any analysis concerned with the body, as it relates the personal and the social bodies to their contextual discourses. Battered Mauritian female bodies are of course no exceptions. Through economic, legal and political practises the state influences gender ideology amongst its population (Moore 1988), hence the state also plays a part in determining the legitimacy of domestic violence as means of control. This also affects how battered women are perceived and treated by for instance legal instances and governmentally run institutions which function as representatives of the Mauritian body politics or places of power (Foucault in Feldman 1991) often encountered by the abused women in their pursue of protection. The first part of this chapter does therefore not only portray such encounters, but also illustrate the usual process of the procedures undertaken by my informants after their arrivals at the shelter, whereas the latter part of this chapter relates to the state's handling of domestic violence.

Securing children

"It was a blazing hot Monday morning. Arianne had arrived at the shelter on Saturday, but had had to leave her home without her one year old daughter Di. The girl was still breast feeding, and Arianne was desperately checking her blouse for signs of wet stains in the mirror in the hallway. She told me that all she wanted was to have Di with her again.

We had a long day ahead of us. Arianne would both need court papers from the Supreme Court in Portlwi confirming her immediate control and custody of the child, and another court order from her district court in Pamplemousse stating that she was to gain access to all her personal belongings. Without these papers the police would not be obliged to help her, and with no representatives from the law present, her desolate husband might file a complaint of entering and stealing, even kidnapping, against her.

We left for the Supreme Court in Port Louis. And we waited. And waited. We were in what seemed like an endless line outside the Legal Aid Department. Anyone earning less than 3500 rupees a month is entitled to free legal advice and Arianne was staying at home taking care of her daughter. The sun was midday hot, and the air seemed to let off a slightly pressured and nervous aroma. As if a thunderstorm was building up; sticking the clothes to our backs and making our heads heavy. The beauty of the Supreme Court was still hard to ignore; old colonial white and grey wooden buildings with iron brass terraces, surrounding all sides of a green and shady court yard with neat and colourful flower beds, elaborately decorated urns and huge trees.

Arianne was finally called in. I was surprised at how fast the encounter was over, considering how long we had waited. A name of a solicitor was written down for her on a piece of paper. When we finally found the

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small office, we were asked to take a seat. And wait. Again. We obediently did what we were told, until Arianne was called in. Another quick encounter, and off we went to the Judges Secretaries Office at the Supreme Court. Same procedure; we wait until called. At least we could sit on a bench under the leafy tamarind tree, resting our heads for some time. "I'm nervous to go home again" Arianne admitted. "My heart is pumping. What if he's there?" She was abruptly interrupted. A man with a costume, walk and posture worthy the formality of Mauritian bureaucracy, led us up the stairs outside the enormous Court house, and we entered the bosom and domain of the law and the judge's chambers. Arianne grabbed my hand. The judge let me come in with her, and the papers for her temporary control and custody of Di was quickly produced and signed, ordering her husband to come to court to finalise the issue a month from now. Few words were exchanged. Up until the hearing in court, Arianne would have the temporary custody of Di. We could go and pick up her daughter.

Off we went. It was already late in the afternoon, and we would not be able to make it to the District Court in Pamplemousse. Manda, Razia's legal secretary and sister had shown up at court to tell us that whatever Arianne managed to get with her she should take. Next stop was therefore Arianne's local police station, a concrete building which contained a reception room with a tall wooden desk and a few hard benches. There were posters on the wall, mostly various notices, but also one very familiar one; "Vre zomme pa bat fam". Somehow, it made me feel more at ease. Arianne presented her errand, and a thick statement book was produced to take her declaration; distant, but correct.

Finally a long day seemed to reach its end. Arianne went to the house with three officers in a police van, whereas I followed in a taxi. The resemblance to a sequel in an action movie was striking to me, and I hoped the outcome would be just as happy as any Bollywood production. Besides, whatever to take place next would happen without my participation. As an outsider and a social worker I had been told by Amina to never enter the house of the woman one is accompanying. First of all because the husband might turn violent, second because legally you might be faced with charges of trespassing and entering. Just like at the cinema, I would have to watch and wait.

An old woman opened the gates to the house when Arianne arrived. It was Arianne's mother in law. A beautiful, little girl with huge brown eyes and short, curly hair eloped from her arms and cried "Mama!" Arianne was swift; she kissed the girl quickly but handed her back to her grandmother again while she run inside the house. Only a few minutes later, she was out with two huge green suitcases. Arianne's husband arrived, but he was calm, composed and quiet. His mother was the one throwing a ball. She had gone into a fist in the street and loudly complained that there had only been problems with Arianne ever since she arrived to Mauritius. We left.

Arianne was breastfeeding Di in the backseat of the car, crying and laughing, all at the same time. We were off to the shelter again".

There are few women who arrive at the shelter without their children, as most of the battered women's flights have been carefully planned in order to avoid confrontations. Women who arrive at the shelter without their children have usually left their husbands for the first time, perhaps still not having embodied passive coping strategies, and rather flee a violent situation which has become unbearable. As they arrive without anything but the clothes they are wearing, to obtain immediate control and custody of children, and access to

personal belongings, is usually the most important priority by the women, and hence also the shelter as security has already been provided. The case of Arianne offers an example. To leave one's children behind is seldom an option, not only due to the women's embodiment of a gender practise which claims that children are first and foremost the responsibility of mothers, but also because such behaviour might be legally sanctioned:

"Beatrice is having problems with the Ministry because she has fled without her children. Someone from the Child Intervention Unit have called her several times, saying that if she doesn't return to her conjugal life, they will file a case upon her for abandoning her children. She was also badly received by the police; they refused to file a complaint against her husband" Marianne told me".

Beatrice might face a charge for abandoning her children, despite her husband's continuing residence in their conjugal home. In line with gender role patterns in the island, the welfare of the family is often believed to be of more importance than the welfare of the individual (woman) (Woman's Aid 2001). Due to a constant feedback mechanism between micro and macro, body politics often reinforce the status quo of gender ideology (Green 1999). In the case of Arianne, as she is of foreign origin, her options were extremely limited, even up to the point where she was advised by Woman's Aid to return home to her husband:

"The date for settling Arianne's custody issue had arrived. It was early in the morning, and Arianne and I were once again seated under the tamarind tree, soothed to silence by the sunrays venturing through the leaves. The court was due at 09.30. Manda arrived, and strengthened the feeling of déjà vu. Arianne's husband Dani and his father was there as well, but Dani was instantly refused when he tried to approach Arianne. "I don't want to talk to you." she said. He looked devastated, and turned to me "I just want Arianne and Di to return home with me. What am I to do if Arianne decides to leave with Di to Nicaragua? Am I never to see my little girl again?" Manda interrupted him, told him to calm down, and turned to Arianne. "At least consider returning to him Arianne. With a protection order you should be safe. I have explained the problem with your situation to you earlier. As your husband has shown up here today, he will without doubt claim Di as his own. According to the law, he has a right to be with his child, there is no such thing as a full custody. Besides, Di is a Mauritian citizen, she was born here. If you choose to return home to Nicaragua, it's not only your responsibility to pay for your tickets, but you also have to make a deposit at the court so that if you fail to return Di to her father on the agreed dates, he can come and get her himself. That's a lot of money Arianne. And you don't even have a residence permit in Mauritius yet. Dani has already made clear to us that if you file for a divorce, he will tell Immigration that you're staying illegally in the country as you're not married to a Mauritian citizen any longer. And that means that they will deport you from the country. You will be able to go home, but without Di as she is legally a Mauritian". "But I've made my decision" was all Arianne responded. "I've finished thinking. I will talk to Immigration myself". Manda just shook her head. "She just doesn't want to listen" she complained to me. "We have already contacted all the governmental offices there are concerning this issue, even the Prime Minister's Office. The interview with Arianne in La Gazette⁷⁴ was an attempt to raise

⁷⁴La Gazette the 11th -17th of April 2003.

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public concern of similar problems like hers, but all everyone tells us is that it's not their responsibility. No one can do anything. Besides, Arianne needs to start to look for accommodation. She has a job now". We followed her into the court room, resembling forlorn children walking into the lion's cave.

The court room was crowded. People were seated on wooden benches which faced the podium with the judge and her secretaries, whereas others kept running in and out. We managed to find available spaces. Dani had found a seat some rows back. We had learnt the procedure by now. We wait until Arianne's name is called.

It was Arianne and Dani's turn. I watched their backs as they stood in front of the judge. I could hear Dani talking, but not what he was talking about. Arianne remained quiet. Once again, it was over tremendously quickly in comparison with our anxious waiting. Arianne grabbed my hand and we left hastily. She was watching over her shoulder to see whether Dani followed her. I asked her what had happened. "I don't know Karine. I didn't understand what they were saying, they were talking too quickly. I didn't dare to ask them to slow down...Do you really think I will have to leave Mauritius without Di? How can the system work like that? Isn't a child first its mother's and then its father's?" She had tears in her eyes".

Arianne returned to her husband a few weeks later. As I visited her and Di in their apartment she told me that Dani was not beating her anymore, but that her mother in law was still troubling her.

"Still, I'm happy to have returned home with Dani. My place is here in the house. I have everything here" she said and showed me the washing machine. I asked her whether she had stopped working. "Yes. I don't want to work again either. I didn't really have a choice at the shelter now did I? It seems that if you're not ready or want to work, they throw you out. All in all, I didn't really have many options to choose from I guess". She smiled sadly, and I knew she was probably right".

A most dramatic case of 'securing children' presented itself later in my field work as well. Although Caroline had already obtained temporary custody of three year old Kenneth, her boyfriend decided to literally take the matter in his own hands.

"Caroline was picking at her dinner. "Kenneth is gone you know" she said. "His father ran away with him". She started to cry and left me in confusion. Miranda told me what had happened. "Kenneth's father came to visit on Sunday, and although Caroline refused to talk to him herself, she allowed him to see Kenneth. She didn't want Kenneth to go out to him though, and told his father that if he wanted to talk to Kenneth he would have to do it from outside the wall. Apparently he told Kenneth to come to the far end side of the wall, you know where the rubbish disposer is, and climb on top of it. He's a huge man Caroline's borlom (man), and while they were talking his arms were hanging over the wall. All of a sudden he grabbed Kenneth, and he run away. It was too late for us to do anything about it when we realised what had happened; by then he was already way up the street". I went into the kitchen again. Caroline had calmed down, but her eyes were still red. I hugged her. "I'm so scared Karine" she said. "I have absolutely no idea where he's taken my baby. What if he leaves the country with him? I went to see a solicitor today, but was kept waiting from nine in the morning until two o'clock in the afternoon. Doesn't she realise how important this is to me? All I want is to find him". She started to cry again.

Caroline, Sister Marion and I left early to head down south the next morning. We were meeting the local police at Caroline's former residence at ten. We were all hoping that Caroline's boyfriend would still be somewhere in the area. Two police officers brought Caroline with them in their van. Sister Marion and I

followed swift, but knew we would have to wait in the car when we reached her house. At least we were there I thought. Caroline came quickly back to the car, and she could not be comforted. Silent tears streamed down her cheeks. "He's not there. No one has seen him. What am I supposed to do?" All we could do was return to Port Louis to see her solicitor. Caroline had already made an appointment, but when we arrived at the solicitor's office, she was not there. She had left for Mahebourg, and would not be back for hours. The gato (snack) Caroline had saved for Kenneth remained unopened in her bag.

The next morning I called the shelter to find out whether there were any news. Miranda was bubbling. "Kenneth is back Karine! I picked him up myself. In the middle of the night! His aunt called the shelter at two o'clock in the morning, and said that Caroline's boyfriend had finally returned home with the boy, and had left him with her. She said that I should come and pick him up as soon as possible, so I called a taxi, and off I went! And Kenneth was fine, nothing wrong with him at all, and Caroline was ecstatic of course. All is fine". I hanged up, and sighed relieved".

Encounters with the police

"Once again Rajni was off to the police station to make a statement against her husband. Once again she had left him. It was her eight time to the shelter. "He normally doesn't beat me" she said, "but he is verbally aggressive; he threatens to beat me, and he talks vulgarly to me. He's very jealous, he wants me inside the house at all times, and doesn't let me work. He's making my life miserable. I'm on anti-depressants because of him"⁷⁵.

The police station in Moka is situated at the District Court. Somehow all police stations on the island seem alike, even the furniture. A wooden reception desk, a couple of hard chairs for the visitors, a telephone which constantly rings, and a poster on the wall marking problem related areas in the island. Rajni knew the procedure well, and explained her situation to a young female officer. "I left him because he drinks, and when he drinks he threatens to beat me. He's ruining my health. I'm staying at the shelter for battered women in Moka now. I feel sorry for my children, but I have no choice. I need some peace of mind".

As the police represent the institution that maintains law and order (Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare: Criminological research on domestic violence 2000), the first place of protection a battered woman usually seeks is her local police station (Gunganah 1997). Despite Woman's Aid's 24/7 hotline service number to the shelter printed on one of the first pages of the Mauritian Telecom phone book, there are mostly previous residents of the shelter who choose to come there directly, and many women do perhaps not know that both governmental and non-governmental support systems do in fact exist on the island (Woman's Aid 2001). Hence, the battered women turn to the police, despite what might be perceived as a general lack of public faith and even distrust in the Mauritian police force. This is most apparent amongst the Creole population in the island as

⁷⁵ Upon my visit in Mauritius in June and July 2004, Rajni had been admitted to the Brown Sequare psychiatric institution.

the police force mainly consist of Hindus⁷⁶ (Laville 2000), and especially amongst *women* as there have been claimed instances of women who have sought help due to rape, only to be raped once more by police officers (Muvman Liberasyon Fam 1988)⁷⁷. As the women might already be considered of loose morals, their consent to the alleged sexual relation being put to questioning, rape might not be deemed a violation (ibid). Fortunately such events are highly exceptional, and although some women might still experience that their complaints are not taken seriously, and rather believed a family, and not a police matter as the case was for Beatrice, most of the 'newcomers' at the shelter are either referred or taken to the shelter by the police, and hence offered protection. Although many of the residents at the shelter criticise the police in general, few complained about misconduct. On the other hand, some of the social workers did:

"I think the Mauritian police are completely inadequate and inefficient" (Irish) Sister Marion grumbled. "I've experienced cases where women who have come to report abuse have been laughed at, the officers asking them "How hard" etcetera. The police here don't take women seriously".

Whereas others did not:

"Razia is planning on writing a book you know, about the problems the abused women face when they meet the police, that they are treated disrespectfully etc, and also focusing upon women as always being victims of extreme violence and in a horrible shape when they arrive at the shelter. How can she do that? It's not true! Yes, some have had bad experiences with the police, but most of them haven't. Besides, it is important for the shelter to maintain a good relationship with the police, to co operate with them. We need their help, and such a relationship should be based on both giving and taking. But I feel as if I'm not listened to at meetings, that I'm just considered a stupid 'social worker' by the other members of Woman's Aid" (Marianne).

All new cases of domestic violence registered at the police station are to be recorded in a special police form, the PF 74A. Still, many complaints are only entered into the police books simply as cases of "wounds and blows", without mentioning the specific cause of the abuse (MWRCDFW 2000), something which is of outermost importance if the battered woman later chooses to take legal action against her partner. If the woman has been wounded

⁷⁶ See chapter one for a historical perspective and explanation of the antagonism inherent in the relationship between Creoles and Hindus in Mauritius.

⁷⁷ One such incident is retold in Collen's novel "The Rape of Sita" (1995 [1993]: 165): *"There was the rape of Véronique Soulier, a young woman, and her rape took place in the Pwentosab Police Station. She was raped by four policemen inside the police station, behind closed doors. On the off-duty policemen's resting bed. She had gone to the police station in times of trouble: a violent row of some kind had broken out between her husband and his father (...). The policemen, when they heard about this left the men to kill one another. They raped Véronique instead".*

she should also be offered a PF 58, which is a medical examination certificate which registers injuries and which later can be used as evidence in court. At the same time the police have set up a number of Children and Women Protection Units (CWPU) across the country's police stations (ibid). With a view to complement the police service in dealing with domestic violence and child abuse, some 200 volunteering, female police officers completed in 1995 training on the phenomenon (Gunganah 1997), although later research has shown that the instructions received seems to not have been sufficiently adequate, even stating that "*these officers might do more harm than good during the interaction with the victims*" (MWRCDFW 2000: 30).

Otherwise, legal procedures are commenced as the abused woman makes an official complaint and declaration against her husband at the police (Gunganah 1997), but there are specific problems relating to the standards of the statement taking:

"The conversation between Rajni and the officer was done in Kreol, but as always the statement was written down in English. Rajni, like most of the other residents at the shelter, does not know English. Many of the women who reside at the shelter are also illiterate. Rajni signed without being able to read the complaint".

That declarations at the police are done in writing, is self evidently problematic if the person who makes a statement is illiterate. Then again, there might not be much which can be done about the problem, at least not amongst the police. On the other hand, although the official language in Mauritius is English, and many police officers are highly competent, even fluid in the language, very many are *not* as the lingua franca in Mauritius is Kreol, and the most commonly known foreign language is French⁷⁸. As the statements made at the police needs to be translated from Kreol to English, information might be irretrievably lost as the women themselves are not capable of checking the contents of their own declarations before they are signed and filed. As these statements might later serve as evidence in court the consequences of haltering, even faulty statements, might be severe.

The Protection from Domestic Violence Act and encounters with the district courts

Beating one's wife has been illegal in Mauritius since June 1997⁷⁹ when the Protection from Domestic Violence Act was enacted by the Parliament, the aim being to combat domestic violence and ensure the victim legal protection from court. The Act includes domestic

⁷⁸ See chapter one.

⁷⁹ It was the 8th of March 1998 that the Act was proclaimed and entered into force in its entirety (Woman's Aid 2001). See Appendix Four.

violence as any of the following acts committed by a person against his spouse or children (Paragraph 2: a-h):

- a) *Wilfully causing or attempting to cause physical injury*
- b) *Wilfully or knowingly placing or attempting to place the spouse in fear of physical injury to himself or to one of his children*
- c) *Intimidation, harassment, maltreatment, brutality or cruelty*
- d) *Compelling the spouse by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the spouse has a right to abstain*
- e) *Confining or detaining the spouse against his will*
- f) *Any harm or threat to cause harm to a child of the spouse*
- g) *Causing or attempting to cause damage to the spouse's property*
- h) *A threat to commit any act mentioned in paragraphs (a) to (g)*

The spouse it aims at protecting is identified as (Paragraph 2: a-c):

"Spouse means either of a man and a women who-

- a) *are or have been civilly or religiously married to each other*
- b) *are living or have lived together as husband and wife; and*
- c) *whether they have ever lived together or not, are the parents of a common child"*

The goal of the Act is to prevent the spouse from engaging in further acts of violence, and orders him/her to be of good behaviour towards the aggrieved applicant (Paragraph 3.1). The Act has generally been proclaimed to be written in a gender neutral language to ensure the protection of all potential victims to domestic violence, irrespective of gender. On the other hand, it might be worth noticing that all personal pronouns are masculine, both those referring to perpetrator *and* victim. Although such a fault might be minor, it might still be indicative that although legal reforms such as the Protection from Domestic Violence Act seek to deligitimise domestic violence, the gender ideology at the root of Mauritian social organisation is still left untouched. Not only because of the use of masculine pronouns of course, but also because it fails to recognise that domestic violence is largely a female oriented problem, and a result of prevailing patriarchal social structures, and not *only* individual pathological traits (Green 1999). As such victims of domestic violence are in need of gender sensitive approaches to the problem rather than gender neutral, in order to fully grasp the patriarchal gender ideology and practise behind the phenomenon domestic violence⁸⁰.

Attempts to redefine wife battery as a crime have been opposed in much of Africa (and in the West), as it has been perceived as a delegitimation of a husband's personal

⁸⁰ Still, I do *not* argue that men who suffer domestic violence should not be legally recognised.

authority over his wife and an attack on 'traditional family values' and the sanctity of private space. Domestic violence has therefore been considered off-limits to governmental interference although or perhaps precisely *because*, abuse of women has largely been condoned to the private sphere due to women's isolation within the home. As such domestic violence has also been silenced, even regarded as less severe and less deserving of sanctions than public expressions of violence (Green 1999). Hence, the implementation of the Protection from Domestic Violence Act in Mauritius was a major step forward in the struggle for elimination of violence against women as declared by the Mauritian government in the ratification of the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as early as in 1984 (Lam Hung 2003), and the signing of the South African Development Community's (SADC) document entitled "The Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children" in 1998 (MWRCDFW "La Famille, Notre Espoir"; year not stated). On the other hand, the sanctions stated to be implemented if the accused party breaches the conditions of the order, are by critical voices claimed to pivot around the upkeep of the welfare of the family, hence also traditional family values and notions, rather than the victim's safety (Woman's Aid 2001). Although the Act proclaims that a person who violates a Protection Order is, if convicted, either to be faced with a fine not exceeding 10 000 rupees, or imprisonment for a period not exceeding 2 years (Paragraph 13:1), the latter is rarely utilised. The trend so far has rather been to impose a fine and not send the aggressor to prison (Woman's Aid 2001). Besides, his verdict is based on the violation of the Protection Order and contempt for the law, *not* violence against another fellow human being (Lam Hung 2003). Another serious problem with the law is that *before* a Protection Order is obtained; to abuse one's wife or partner is not deemed an arrestable offence at all, the consequence being that a woman might be beaten *at least twice* before police interference.

"I was visiting a Children and Women's Protection Unit at a police station in the north of the island. The CWPU is to be a complement to general police service in their dealings with domestic violence and child abuse. The office was very different from what I had seen from all the other police stations I had visited so far, it had a crib and children's toys. All staff members of the CWPU are female officers who have volunteered for this particular job, and the woman in charge of this office was no exception. "My job is mainly concerned with giving advice and consultation to everyone involved in a situation of domestic violence; the father, the mother, the children, and help them find a common ground so as to be able to communicate and co operate". I interrupted her. "How come you define a 'family' as necessarily consisting of a mother, a father and children? To my knowledge, there are many other types of families in today's Mauritius". She looked annoyingly at me. "Yes, it's true that single parented households are becoming more and more normal, but only amongst the

Creoles. We Hindus have a much stronger family organisation, and we don't frequent bars and night clubs like the Creoles". Before I could interfere she changed the topic and was busy explaining me the 'true nature' of domestic violence. "It's not only women who are victims of abuse, but men as well. Many women are unfaithful, and because of that, the family starts slowly to fall apart. Because domestic violence isn't just physical, it can be both psychological and financial as well". I confronted her again. "So what about the Law of Protection Order? Correct me if my assumptions are mistaken, but according to my calculations, although a woman has filed a complaint at the police against her husband, he will not be arrested until she is in possession of a valid Protection Order. Although the crime has already been committed one or several times, isn't it so that the abuse is not punishable until the court has issued an order against it? That seems like a paradox to me..." By now she was getting slightly upset, frowning at the corners of her eyebrows. "Domestic violence is not an arrestable offence, but it's still considered illegal. It's just too difficult to prove". "So what is an arrestable offence then? Theft is an arrestable offence isn't it? And isn't theft even more difficult to prove?" "Yes, theft is an arrestable offence, but if the woman's attacked with a weapon, so is domestic violence. And besides, although the woman doesn't have a Protection Order, we do take notice of her complaint, and call the couple in for questioning and counselling". I wondered how, as all complaints concerning domestic violence are apparently registered as a case of "wounds and blows" without mentioning its specific cause".

At the same time can only a police officer charge the perpetrator with a breach of the Protection Order, hence the police needs to be immediately summoned if the violent spouse is to be convicted at all (Lam Hung 2003). As domestic violence is usually referred to the intimacy of the home, and with only two (adult) individuals present, in most cases it is the battered woman herself who need to contact the police. If she is seriously hurt or even locked in, her opportunities to gain help at all are self-evidently limited. Many women who have been victims of previous separation assaults might also choose not to apply for a Protection Order, or if it is already obtained, not put it to practice. Separation assault is often marked by the batterer's first encounter with the authority of the law (Green 1999), and previous experiences with the phenomenon might have made the abused woman scared of applying for protection.

Although the Mauritian state *does* define and acknowledge domestic violence as criminal demeanour, they do not offer adequate security for the victims. All the governmental services aimed at assisting battered women offer consultation, but in many cases, like the example of my visit at the police's Children and Women's Protection Unit, the counselling seems to be primarily concerned with keeping up the family unit rather than offer the women advice on how to *escape* the violence⁸¹. There are for instance no governmentally run shelters

⁸¹ I do not mean to imply that family counselling is not beneficial, rather that the government should offer the women protection *as well*.

specifically destined to provide battered women protection. The only governmental shelter up and running in Mauritius is a shelter situated in Albion, and which provide sanctuary for abused and abandoned children, and not women.

Still, many abused women do apply for Protection Orders. There are no costs to be incurred for the court proceedings (Lam Hung 2003), and both governmental domestic violence centres and Woman's Aid assist with applications. There are also *Interim Protection Orders* provided women who are in need of instantaneous and urgent protection (Paragraph 3 [8: a]). This order is in force until the court has heard the case and has given its new ruling. The Protection from Domestic Violence Act can also grant an *Occupation Order* (Paragraph 4), which gives the victim exclusive right to live in the residence belonging to either the husband, wife or both up to a period of 2 years, or a *Tenancy Order* (Paragraph 5) which allows the victim the right to live in the house the partners are renting. All cases are heard at the various district courts. The cases of Nadja and Geraldine who had their hearings at the District Court in Moka on the same day, offer an empirical illustration of the proceedings both within the shelter and in court:

"Nadja's husband is not coming to court today. The police called, he's just been arrested for drug possession. It's important that you make sure that Nadja's Interim Protection Order is extended though as it's due today. Besides, watch out for Geraldine's husband. Don't be afraid to ask the police for help if there are any problems. He's been violent with Geraldine out on the street before" Amina warned. *I was accompanying Nadja and Geraldine to the District Court in Moka for their Protection Orders.*

Nadja and Geraldine had been busy all morning, trying on different outfits, putting on make up and fixing their hair. Perfume filled the hallway upstairs. Some of the other women helped; Geraldine's hair was carefully combed back, and small, colourful pins applied by Caroline and Venita. Although Geraldine smiled a bit embarrassedly, and complained that she was too old for this, she was silenced by the other's compliments. Caroline herself had cut her hair in preparation for her big court day, and Venita was teasing her about how ugly she thought she looked. The procedure was standard, everyone skipped in to help bust the confidences of those going to court. Besides, how long had it been seen they had seen their husbands? Better make sure they know what they might loose I was told. We had to leave, the court was due at 13.00, and it was already 12.30.

The District Court of Moka is a small replica of the Supreme Court in Port Louis. Although not as big and impressive, it is still a beautiful colonial mansion which oozes historical respect and obedience, with a lawn that stretches far and wide before its porch. We arrived together with Geraldine's husband. He had met up with us on the way over. Although Nadja and I were walking in front of them, we constantly turned our backs to keep track of what was happening. "He's mauve (bad)" Nadja told me. I remembered Amina's warning. "He wants the daily custody of the children" Geraldine had told me earlier in the day. "He can forget it though, he's not getting it. Neither Darel nor Noel wants it either. They don't like him very much. Corina is still too small not to like him. And there's no way I'm returning to him. Besides, it should be him leaving the house, not me. The house is mine. He can go and stay with his mistress for all I care".

While Geraldine was in court, Nadja and I were busy extending Nadja's interim protection order. As the hearings are closed, we were not allowed in. Nadja told me that she was going to her mother's later in the afternoon. "Well, if he's already locked up, I guess there's no reason for me to continue to stay at the shelter now is there?" She laughed. "I guess destiny is on my side now".

Geraldine gained a 6 months Protection Order, but no Occupation Order. Nadja was picked up by her brother later in the day, and I never saw her again.

Other family (related) laws

The laws which govern domestic violence are usually in close relation with *family laws*. Family laws are often claimed to be the very picture of a state's body politics as they are situated in a position between public and private, or civil society (Borneman 1992). At the same time family laws are often perceived by feminists to be the most effective means achievable for the state to control women, or at least define their status (Green 1999). Even the definition applied to what is believed to constitute a 'family' is of importance. A new family policy was for instance to be implemented in Mauritius shortly after I was to complete my fieldwork on the island.

"The Ministry's recent focus upon the importance of the family is extremely harmful!" Amina proclaimed. "It is only concerned with the welfare of the family, and not the individuals who compose them. Besides, it defines a family only to be a nuclear family; thus it doesn't legitimise women who live on their own with their children. The Mauritian state is moving backwards, when all the rest of the world is moving forwards. This new focus only makes it more difficult for the women to cope on their own due to the stigma attached to their status. It has been prevalent in Mauritius before this new government run Family Campaign as well, and it is not going to make it any easier. Aren't Sandra, Camille and their children a family for instance? When we were to find them a house, we had to face several problems due to the landlord's prejudices. He was very reluctant to lease the house to us there were 'only' going to be two single women living there and no men. And the government doesn't exactly help to yield such situations. How on earth are Mauritian women ever to make it on their own when the laws only seem to make their lives even more difficult than what they already are?"

Later I had an interview with a representative from the Ministry of Women, Child Development and Family Welfare. Madam Bali⁸² is in charge of the Ministry's Family Welfare Unit.

"The whole idea developed out of the celebration of the Family Day. We are still in the working process though". I asked her how the Ministry defines a "family". "We first and foremost recognise the nuclear family consisting of a man, his wife and children, as the most common family in today's Mauritius, as the traditional

⁸² As the interview was conducted in a formal manner and with an official representative from the Ministry I see no reason not to use Madam Bali's real name.

extended family has largely been replaced. But then again, many couples in Mauritius today live together, even have children, but are not married. Even single headed households are becoming more and more common, so it is necessary to include those types of families in our new policies as well".

Although it might seem as if Amina was wrong in her criticism of the new governmental family policy in the island, there are other family laws which are clearly not of advantage to women. Although the Act of Protection Order states that domestic violence is amongst others to "*compel the spouse by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the spouse has a right to abstain*" (Paragraph 2: d) marital rape is *not* deemed an illegal offence in Mauritius (Lam Hung 2003). Collen in "The Rape of Sita" (1995[1993]) exemplifies this as follows: "*Of course there was his wife, Noella. He raped her. But as far as he was concerned that wasn't rape (...). Because he said, you can't rape your own wife. She's yours*"⁸³. If a man forces sexual intercourse on his non-consenting wife, he might be judged guilty of assault, depending on the degree of force applied, but not rape. Sodomy on the other hand, whether consensual or not, is punishable by a term of imprisonment up to five years(Lam Hung 2003), whereas if an abusive man is judged guilty of breaching a Protection Order he shall not be imprisoned for a period exceeding *two* years. The implications of not legally recognising marital rape, which is a highly violent and violating expression of domestic violence, is that women abused in such a manner is left without means to remedies. Additionally it functions as a strong indication of the prevailing Mauritian gender ideology (Green 1999).

There are also other examples of family laws which clearly indicate the contextual gender ideology within which these laws have been created. The criminalisation of *abortion*⁸⁴ is an example. The Mauritian law does not permit abortion on any grounds, even in cases of rape (marital or not), incest or threats to the health of the foetus or the mother. As mentioned in chapter one, estimated numbers show that there are between 15- 20 000 abortions annually in comparison with an average of 19 000 live births in Mauritius, and as most of these are

⁸³ When "The Rape of Sita" was first published in Mauritius it caused such controversy that it was banned by the government and temporarily withdrawn by the publishers. The author, Lindsey Collen, was threatened with sexual molest.

⁸⁴ "*Whosoever, by any food, drink, medicine or by violence or by any other means whatever shall procure the miscarriage of any woman quick with child, or shall supply the means of procuring such miscarriage, whether the woman be consenting or not, shall be punished by Penal Servitude not exceeding 10 years. The like punishment shall be pronounced against any woman who shall procure her own miscarriage, or shall have consented to make use of the means pointed out or administered to her with that intent, if such miscarriage shall ensue there from*" (in Gunganah 1997: 49).

performed by lay-practitioners under unsafe conditions, or so called 'back street abortions', abortions represents a serious health problem to a very high number of Mauritian women (Gunganah 1997). Still, the problem is neglected. Critical voices, of which there are many⁸⁵, blame the law on the stronghold of the Roman Catholic establishment on the island (ibid). At the same time even miscarriages can trigger suspicion, and risk police investigation and prosecution (Muvman Liberasyon Fam 2002)⁸⁶. Hence the law on abortion represents a most immediate example of the state- or the body politics' direct influence in individual women's lives. The same can be said about the Mauritian law on *divorce*. Divorce can only be granted on the grounds of fault (including domestic violence) or on the grounds of a breakage of matrimonial life (if the couple live separately for five years), but *not* on the grounds of either parties mere desires to separate (mutual consent) (Lam Hung 2003)⁸⁷. Although the law does recognise domestic violence as viable reason for separation, women who lack Protection Orders, either because they have never applied or because the evidence in court has not been sufficient, might struggle to establish fault on behalf of her husband and hence fail to obtain a divorce. Many women who wish to separate from their (violent) husbands therefore choose the only means left to them, namely informal separation. She leaves him. As discussed in chapter four, to leave might trigger a risk of separation assault (Green 1999). Additionally has an informal separation, instead of a legal divorce, economical consequences for women already financially deprived. As *she* is responsible for leaving the conjugal home, she might not obtain alimony. On the other hand, the Mauritian state does have a social security system which aim is to secure a basic standard of living for people in need of financial aid. If the woman applies for a social aid allowance, she might be granted 595 rupees monthly. If she has left her conjugal life with her children, a child under the age of ten will get 225 rupees, and the one above ten 275 rupees (Lam Hung 2003). At the same time the Women and Children in Distress Scheme is another initiative which grants women who can not return to their homes, an allowance of 3000 rupees once they leave the *shelter* of the Ministry of

⁸⁵ The weekly news paper "News on Sunday" run a series on abortion from the 4th of July 2003 ending with the 25th of July 2003 edition. Discussion run high both in the pro- and anti-abortionist camps.

⁸⁶ Lindsey Collen's "Getting Rid of It (1997)" tells the story of a woman having had a miscarriage. Due to her anxiety of police investigation, she puts the foetus in a plastic bag, and carries it with her a whole day with the intention of "getting rid of it" somewhere safe. According to Collen the novel is based on an actual news paper notice (Private conversation March 2003).

⁸⁷ See also discussion concerning divorce in Expresso 27- 11th of April 2003.

Women, Child Development and Family Welfare (ibid)⁸⁸. Which is odd, since there is no governmentally run shelter for battered women in Mauritius.

Although the government do provide single women who try to make it on their own with some financial assistance, it is by far enough. Despite various governmental entrepreneur projects and the introduction of the micro credit scheme which provide women with secure loans to enable them to launch small businesses⁸⁹, the feminisation of poverty is on the increase on the island (Lam Hung 2003).

The Mauritian state's responses to domestic violence

"I have tried all the so called hot line numbers given in the different brochures against domestic violence from the Ministry of Women. I don't know whether my pamphlets are old, but none of the numbers seem to be in use" (Lisa). Although the Protection from Domestic Violence Act, and all other laws for that matter, is passed in Parliament, the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare, Child Development (and Consumer Protection) is the highest political body responsible for all governmental support services regarding domestic violence. The current Minister of MWRCDFW is the Hon. Mrs Indranee Seebun, whereas Arianne Navarre- Marie was the Minister during my fieldwork in 2003. The *Family Welfare Unit* is the sector in Ministry in charge of domestic violence related matters. It was set up in June 2003, and is headed by the previously mentioned Mrs. Bali. The family Welfare Unit operates through 6 regional offices known as Family Support Bureaus which handle all cases of domestic violence, previously the responsibility of the Domestic Violence Intervention Units set up shortly after the introduction of the Domestic Violence Act in 1997. The Bureaus are all divided into three subunits; the Family Counselling Service, the Family Protection Unit and Child Development Unit, all within the same premises to provide victims of domestic violence a holistically oriented support system. The bureaus offer legal assistance, psychological counselling and operates a 24/7 hotline number in case rapid intervention is necessary. If so, transport is accessible. The family Welfare Unit has also embarked on various projects with the aim of eliminating violence in general, and promoting family welfare (<http://www.gov.mu>)⁹⁰.

⁸⁸ See also advertisement in Week- End Scope 14- 20th of May 2003.

⁸⁹ See also brochure "Finding hope amidst poverty" published by the MWRCDFW 2002.

⁹⁰ An example is for instance the "Men as Partners" pilot project which promotes responsibility and participation of men within the family and the community so as to enable an effective empowerment of women, and an enhancement of the quality of life of the family. It was initiated on the 18th of May 2003.

The Ministry has also set up a Women's Unit which is to serve as a focal point for women issues, and which functions through a network of 12 women centres and about a 1000 women's associations throughout the island. The main objectives of the unit are to strengthen gender mainstreaming, taking into account the reproductive, productive and social roles of women (<http://www.gov.mu>). The various centres offer for instance courses in home economics, weight management, sports, dress making, hair dressing, basketry, floral arrangements and embroidery. The courses lead to diplomas which might be used in future job applications. Still, all these activities might be perceived as only reproducing the status quo of Mauritian gender practice and ideology, as they at least at first glance only seem to be courses held to improve the women's skills as housewives, and not as means to empower women. In a Mauritius which has become highly industrialised, the demand for handmade, and thereby expensive, embroidered tablecloths- or baskets, are restricted. On the other hand, such activities are first and foremost considered of low status in a Western context, and not necessarily equitable to Mauritius. The stigma attached to such skills can also be perceived as a result of traditional patriarchal models (Moore 1988). At the same time are discussions on gender awareness a part of all these programs. If traditional Mauritian female activities and feminist teachings are combined, these courses will have a basis in the women's own experiences of a gendered Mauritian 'reality', but still aiming at empowering women's position. As such these courses correspond to the women's own life worlds; hence the women do not necessarily reject the ideology taught either. As discussed in chapter two and four, such a problem seemed for instance to be played out at the shelter when the women refused to work. Still, irrespective of whether one agrees with the means of empowerment employed by these governmentally run Women's Centres, they do offer a comfortable social setting and a meeting place for women from all walks of life. Although the centres do not specifically aim at aiding victims of domestic violence, indirectly they might therefore still do. Some of them even offer courses in self-defence.

Otherwise and as previously discussed in this chapter, the Children and Protection Units having been set up at various police stations across the island are governmentally run. Still the CWPU usually work independently from the Ministry. There is also another shelter in Mauritius housing women and children in distress. It is run independently from the Ministry, but receives funding from it (MWRCDFW 2000)⁹¹.

⁹¹ I first realised the existence of the shelter in Forest Side through the above mentioned research rapport (MWRCDFW 2000). The same rapport also mentions a shelter in Flic en Flac, but these shelters have never been

The relations between Woman's Aid and the state in their dealings with domestic violence

"If you're interested in doing research with battered women, you should contact the shelter in Moka. The Ministry co-operates with them, and whenever we have cases where the women can't return home, we refer them there". I was meeting with a representative from the Ministry of Women's Rights concerning my request to visit their shelter in Albion".

"We do counselling, and help the abused women with the different legal procedures concerning domestic violence. We help them obtain interim protection orders for instance, and up until they gain one, they can stay at the children's shelter in Albion. At least for a week or so. Besides that there's not much we can do. If they can't return home, we refer them to the shelter in Moka. But don't tell my boss I told you that". I was visiting a governmental Family Counselling Service".

In lack of own facilities to protect battered women it seems as if it is common practice for governmentally employed representatives from various sectors of the Ministry to refer cases to Woman's Aid. Whereas the first example gives an impression of open co-operation between Woman's Aid and the Ministry, the second only reluctantly admit to using the services of Woman's Aid and even asked me if I could keep it from her superior. The reason might be that the legal adviser I had a meeting with at this particular Family Counselling office, was well aware that Woman's Aid had not been granted any economical funding from the Government this year, something which was an enormous source of frustration within the organisation.

"Yes, the Ministry refer cases to us, but it is not based on mutual co-operation" Amina told me. "Not only do we not receive funding for the work we end up doing for them, but so as not to make that 'suspicious', they don't phone us themselves, but rather provide the abused women who come for their help with our number. According to some of the women who have come here after having been in contact with the government centres first, in some cases they have only been provided with our name, and have been told that they need to locate the shelter themselves despite the fact that as government run institutions, they have means available to them which we don't, such as cars to take the women here for instance. It would therefore also be much easier for them to accompany the women to their houses for getting their personal belongings than it is for us. Besides, if an

brought up by any of the representatives from the Ministry that I have been in contact with. Without exception they all referred me to Woman's Aid in Moka, which was of course already the locus of my field work, but without their knowledge as I was afraid that an association with Woman's Aid would limit my information access. My efforts at gaining further information about these shelters were unsuccessful. Whereas it might seem that the shelter in Flic en Flac does no longer exist, the shelter at Forest Side do as I briefly encountered the husband of someone who is employed there. By then I only had a few weeks left in Mauritius, and I did not manage to schedule a visit.

abused woman seeks governmental help, she has no choice but to apply for an interim protection order. Many women don't necessarily want Protection Orders, but rather somewhere safe to stay, and it's the women's own decisions which should be the initiative for undertaking any action on their behalves. Besides, what does for instance a 24 hour restraining order help if the woman has to return home to a violent husband? The women should not need to suffer further only because the government fails to offer them adequate protection. I think the government's problem is ideologically based. They don't want to recognise women living and managing on their own without being dependent upon a man. They don't really do anything to empower women's positions. Why do for instance the women centres they run teach women skills in sewing, embroidery and basketry when no one buys what they make? How is that suppose to empower women, or make them financially independent? We have occasionally worked with the Ministry on various projects, but it's very rare. There have been major disagreements between us".

Amina was not the only one concerned for the future of the shelter. It was primarily the social workers who experienced the lack of funding firsthand. In the beginning of my fieldwork there were always two social workers on duty at the same time, also during the nightshifts. If one of the social workers would not be able to come to work, an extra was called in. During the latter half of my research, the extra was let go off, and only one social worker was on duty during the night shifts. Sometimes there was only one social worker at the shelter during the weekends when Amina was off work as well.

"Marianne was aggravated: "Yesterday there was an Executive Committee meeting, and I tried to tell the others present that the shelter is underemployed. Just one social worker on duty during the night just isn't enough in case something happens. No one agreed with me as they didn't understand why there needs to be another social worker on duty if there are only 7 women and 4 children at the shelter as there is now. But that changes by the day! Besides, it doesn't even matter if suddenly there is a case of emergency of some sort. They only told me that they will reconsider when there are more women arriving. And what is worse yet, is that although Razia cuts down on the social workers hours so as to save money, this meeting was overflowing with food paid by the organisation's apparently extremely limited funds".

Although Marianne's annoyance was first and foremost aimed at the leadership of Woman's Aid, her indignation might not be neither felt nor expressed if funding had been granted. As the Ministry continues to refer the shelter cases, the social workers workload will increase, and the shelter's potential for offering protection and support naturally decrease. Such consequences were already starting to become noticeable at the end of my fieldwork. The food which was served the residents became less diverse, and consisted of cheaper, hence less nutritious ingredients. I also became the only one who accompanied the women to the police and the court, as the sole social worker on duty needed to be available at the shelter. If I was not there, the women would either go by themselves or together with other residents. If the women chose to, they could leave the premises on their own, but many of the women were afraid to do so. As Rajni put it: *"What if my husband jumps out of the sugar cane field all of a*

sudden?" Although Rajni laughed at herself for "thinking such silly things" as she said, she still needed the comfort of someone close to her when she left the protected premises of the shelter. At the same time Woman's Aid considered the women *their* responsibility while resident at the shelter, and the social workers were therefore sometimes reluctant to let the women off on their own. Ivana even complained that she had stayed locked up in the shelter an entire Sunday, not "even being able to go to church". She did not dare to go alone. Both Rajni and Ivana illustrate a common problem experienced by battered women. Although it is their husbands who are responsible for law-breaking behaviour, it is the battered women who are 'punished'. While the perpetrators continue their lives, the women hide behind barbed wired walls. *"The shelter resembles a woman's prison. Why do I need to be here while my husband still roams the street? Isn't he supposed to be the one locked up behind walls?"* Anita once complained.

Concluding remarks

Through various regulative means and institutions such as state policies and legislation, the state controls its population, hence also individual lives. In a Foucauldian vocabulary such mechanisms of control are labelled *body politics* as Foucault claims the *body* to be the primary target onto which discursive power strategies are ascribed (Patton 1998). Such state policies are never created in vacuity, and the continuous (re)production of gender ideology and practise can thus function as an example of micro-macro relations perpetual dependency and reinforcement of each other. Women's civil social statuses and public legal positions can therefore often be co-relational. Feminists have for instance argued that the state tends to promote a particular form of family or household structure; the male wage earner and dependent wife and children, mostly because such a family is consistent with the prevailing civil gender ideology and assumptions of proper relations between the sexes (Moore 1988). Although there are various governmental institutions and laws which more or less directly interfere in the lives of Mauritian women, this chapter has primarily focused upon those which battered Mauritian women commonly encounter in their pursue of protection from domestic violence. Notions of power, control and dominance do not only relate to the act of domestic violence per se, but also to the larger context in which the abuse takes place. With the implementation of the Protection from Domestic Violence Act in 1997, the Mauritian state has in many ways far 'out- progressed' comparative African countries. Still, as portrayed throughout this chapter, Mauritian legislation has several loopholes which need to be directed. Although the Protection from Domestic Violence Act does indeed seek to limit the severity of

violence against women, the gender ideology at the root of Mauritian social organisation seems in many respects to still be largely untouched. Critical voices within the Mauritian context claim for instance that the state body politics seem occupied with the welfare and upkeep of the family, rather than the individual victims of domestic violence. I therefore dare proclaim that speaking out against domestic violence is not enough; the Mauritian state also needs to be prepared to offer victims adequate support and protection. The women's abusive partners should also be offered violence-preventative psychological counselling and therapy, something which is far from the current Mauritian reality.



Final remarks -

Notes on corporeal ontology and domestic violence in a feminist perspective

Societal silence and muted women

“Mauritian women are comparatively safe on the streets, but their safety at home is cause for concern” (Gunganah 1997: 51). The high media profiled case of Sandra O’Reilly’s double rape⁹², and the tragic murder of the 20 year old student Nadine Dantier, set off a public frenzy during a period of my fieldwork in Mauritius. Many of the daily newspapers seemed filled with horror stories of men who were believed to somehow have “returned to their primate instincts”⁹³ (Le Défi Plus 19-25 July 2003). People started to question the safety of Mauritian women in the streets, some even proposed that women should not be alone when out ‘in public’ (ibid). That women all over the world are victims to violence and abuse *within* the ‘safety’ of own homes, and that one of the reasons for such violence is argued by for instance feminism to be found in the very patriarchal gender practise believing that women *should* be referred to ‘private space’, did not seem to be questioned. Despite that the Mauritian winter of 2003 raised the public’s awareness of gender based violence, its’ most common manifestation *domestic violence*, seemed bygone.

If women’s worlds have been barred from anthropological discourse due to a male bias, *battered* women’s voices are not solely absent, but muted. Their voicelessness might be a result of the act of violence per se as argued throughout this thesis, but it can also be ‘blamed’ on the aura of privacy which seems to surround the problem. As the violence takes place inside ‘sanctified’ Mauritian family borders, it bars intervention from the outside. On

⁹² See chapter one.

⁹³ Such argumentation contains enormous faults as it (gender) stereotypically claims that men are somehow driven by sexual instincts they are not able to control. The implication of such an argumentation can therefore be that what one is not capable of controlling, one can not be blamed for either.

the other hand, most Mauritian neighbourhoods consist of small concrete houses strung together like grey pearl necklaces, and the consequence of that is that neighbours are often well and intimately aware of what takes place within the house next door. It might be talked about over coffee with friends; women pitying other women they know are beaten by their husbands. Still they do not interfere. When the unknowing anthropologist of the neighbourhood asks why, she is met with a shrug of the shoulders. It is not their problem, so how can they impede? The subject is swiftly switched and only silence remains.

The theoretical ‘origin of the thesis’; the relation between feminism and anthropology

The silence which surrounds the phenomenon domestic violence is not necessarily only empirically experienced, but just as much theoretically encountered by the anthropologist who choose to dive into the topic’s ‘muddy waters’ (McClusky 2001). In line with feminist objectives and aspirations which link violence against women to more general issues of women’s subordination, the goal of this thesis has therefore been to challenge the stillness which seems to surround the problem by drawing on the vast knowledge of feminism and anthropology combined.

The traditional female exclusion, marginalisation and silence within social anthropology have been referred to as a *male bias*. Ardener’s (1972) theory of muted groups claims for instance that the dominant groups in different societies create and control the modes of expression, and that muted groups are silenced by and in these structures and thereby forced to express themselves in the dominating language. As men have traditionally occupied public space whereas women have been ‘banished’ to the privacy of the home, this dominating language is largely perceived as male. At the same time such a ‘male view’ has been equated with ‘society’s view’ by many anthropologists. Not only have the majority of ethnographers traditionally been male, but both men and women carrying out fieldwork have tended not to question these ‘male views’ as not being representative for the entire population in the areas they have studied. The reason might be that they themselves have also been subjected to male models drawn from their own ‘culture’, and that they have thereby unintentionally suppressed what Ardener refers to as women’s models or women’s life worlds (ibid).

Due to such awareness, a study of *women* arose in anthropology during the early 1970s. Through a critical approach based upon *anti-essentialist* feminism as developed and fronted by post colonial scholars such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, the anthropology

of women was later replaced by a study of *gender*, such as not to make the mistake of repeating, but rather erase biased gender representations. The aim of anti-essentialist feminism was at the same time to substitute theories by feminists who especially under the bra-burning 60s and 70s were claimed to commit the mistake of subsuming *all* women under the category of white, Western middle and upper class women to which they themselves belonged. Although their (noble) goal was a gender equal world, it was based upon their own life experiences, hence even more marginalised voices than their own were unintentionally imperialised and excluded (Okin in Nussbaum and Glover 1995). The new anti-essentialist approach was one that was culture relative, and argued that it is not possible to talk about women and the problems of women 'as such', but rather that one always needs to refer to the differing situations of different individuals, whether they share the same sex or not. It was argued that there is no homogenous categorical Woman, only shared life worlds due to women's similar experiences in male dominated surroundings.

The theoretical focus of the thesis; feminism, corporeality and phenomenology

"Experience is not a raw mode of access to some truth- the body provides a point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject, and what is external and publicly observable" (Grosz 1994:20). The focus of inquiry and conceptualisation of 'society' employed throughout this entire dissertation has been *bodies*. By utilising the theoretical and analytical concepts personal, social and political bodies (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987) as entrances to individuals' experiences as articulated by Grosz (1994), several questions have been raised. What is the body? Does it matter? If so, how does it matter? And more specifically; how does it matter in relation to the field of gender practice in Mauritius and domestic violence? How does the expressions of illness so commonly articulated in the shelter relate to the body? Or violence? Is there a relation between the two, and if so; what 'connection' is there?

Just as criticising the silence which surrounds the field of domestic violence within anthropology only can be done by being aware of the tradition from within such silence has been developed, posing questions as those above is also necessarily done within an 'ontological genealogy' which think and discuss understandings of bodies. Although perceptions offered by 'corporeal feminism' is but one way to go, I believe the choice of feminism as theoretical point of view for this dissertation can be easily justified due to the highly gendered topic of domestic violence.

Cartesian dualism, the separation of the mind from the mechanical, and yet naturally conceived body, is considered by post modern, academic feminism concerned with the body to be of substantial social influence due to the tendency for the correlation of mind: body to other binary oppositions⁹⁴, such as for instance mind with male, subject, activity and culture, female with flesh, object, passivity and nature, all in hierarchical relations. Feminists argue that just like the body is considered inferior to mind, so are women to men in Cartesian reasoning, and the social devaluing of the body is perceived as a patriarchal logic and means to justify the oppression of women. Academic feminists therefore often resist such conceptions and try to deconstruct the Cartesian dualism in an attempt to define their bodies anew (Grosz 1994).

In general there are two differing methods applied by feminist scholars in the attempts of dissolving the Cartesian dualism. These two feminist positions and orientations roughly correspond to the dissimilarity between American academic feminism and French poststructuralist feminism (*Écriture Féminine*); the first is rooted in the empirical social sciences, and the second in European philosophy, linguistics and psychoanalysis. Whereas American academic feminists write about the *lived* experiences of women's bodies, French poststructuralist feminism focuses upon the female body as not only existing sexually, but also *textually*. The body is conceived as a *sign*, and women's subjugation and difference is argued due not only to a fleshy materiality, but is also inscribed in language. Whereas American academic feminism is trying to retrieve their bodies *back* from the traditional objectifying male gaze, French postmodernist feminism is attempting to *write* the body entirely anew. If one is to truly liberate the female body from the heritage of Cartesian dualism, representatives of *Écriture Féminine* argues that it is not enough to solely redefine concepts and conceptions of the female body as such an approach is believed to be done in accordance with phallic codes, but it is rather necessary to challenge the very structure and foundation of (the male) language itself, and create new concepts with which to think bodies in a female discourse equal to that of today's presiding male (Dallery in Jaggar and Bordo 1989).

Despite that both of the academic feminist orientations mentioned above encourage the dissolving of the Cartesian dualism; the foundation onto which feminist critique has evolved can still be argued to be *based* in that very same oppositional and binary thinking.

⁹⁴ The term binary opposition has its origin in Lévi Strauss' structuralism which claims that all people categorise the world they live in through a few, universal principles shaped as oppositions or dichotomies.

Simone De Beauvoir's classic "The Second Sex" (2000 [1949]) functions as an apt illustration. To be able to construct an allegory of the one sex as man and the second as woman, there is necessarily a difference and divide made between the two sexes, but also the values inscribed on those very same sexed bodies. On the other hand, feminism is not alone in utilising, yet criticising the Cartesian dualism. Merleau-Ponty's famous "The Phenomenology of Perception" (2002 [1945]) begins for example with a fundamental presumption of the *interrelatedness* of mind and body; *res extensa*, in *opposition* to Descartes and the *res cogito*: "The union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object, brought about by arbitrary decree. It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence" (Merleau-Ponty 2002 [1945]: 102). Humans live in bodies, and according to Merleau-Ponty, lived bodies are not only the instruments through which we perceive the world and situate ourselves as subjects, but as *others'* bodies are similarly constituted; my body will also become an object to others' perceptions. Hence Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is both object and subject, both immanence and transcendence (*ibid*).

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach has not only been put to use in the works of various feminists in an effort to evade the Cartesian dualism, but has at the same time been criticised for ignoring the sexual variations of bodies. The relations between subject and object or one subject and another, between owning and being a body, are argued not to be the same for women as for men as the gendering of societies inscribe different values upon male or female bodies (Grosz 1994). It is also argued that the privileged, or even dominant focus of *vision* (as implied even in Merleau-Ponty's title "The Phenomenology of Perception") in acting as a model for all other perceptual relations, is concomitant to the male objectifying gaze of the female body (as for instance expressed in pornography) in a phallic economy (Irigaray in Grosz 1994). When I discuss the situation of domestic violence as asymmetrical communication and a process of objectification and subjectification of bodies in chapter four of this thesis, it is thus both an interpretation based in the problem of the body as discussed by Merleau-Ponty, but also in a feminist critique and appropriation of his claims.

Still, of importance for anthropology has also been the consequence of phenomenological thought on depictions of the empirical field. As the body is argued by Merleau-Ponty to be a subject of knowledge, experience and meaning *prior* to representation, phenomenological inspired anthropologists have aimed towards philosophical naturalism or realism; recording and testifying human experience before intellectual reflection and interference (Good 1994). One method applied for doing so has been the use of narratives as

exemplified in chapter three of this thesis, and in well-known monographies such as Scheper-Hughes' "Death without Weeping" (1992) and Abu-Lughod's "Writing Women's Worlds" (1993). Still, and as mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, narratives can not be understood as 'pure' forms of experience, as they are both necessarily shaped and articulated within cultural and contextual discourses. Immediate sensory experience is always fused with cultural knowledge.

Writing violence and suffering

While discussing the evolvment of bodies as analytical entrants to the field, and the corporeal feminist epistemology and ontology within which this thesis has been developed, Foucault's writings on body politics as empirically utilised in chapter five, can just like Merleau-Ponty, hardly be avoided. Foucault claims the body to be a tabula rasa onto which the inscription of society's (heterosexual) values and norms are articulated through the "Law of the Father". As such, discursive norms are embodied by individuals, and the body becomes the medium through which the play of body politics; powers, violence, discipline, knowledges ("episteme")⁹⁵ and resistances, is located and worked out. Butler's "Queer Theory" which claims that sex does not exist prior to gender, but rather that sex is an effect of gender inscribed on the surface of bodies as performative categories in accordance with 'societies' normality standards (Butler 1990), functions as an example of a feminist appropriation of Foucault. On the other hand, both Foucault and Butler have been targets of disagreement within various feminist camps. Whereas Foucault, like Merleau-Ponty, has been argued to bypass the female subject within his writings, Butler has been criticised to overlook the (sexed) *materiality* of bodies' altogether. Although the metaphors of writing bodies can be useful tools with which to think analytically, Grosz (1994) argues for instance that the specific modes of materiality of the 'page' or the body should still be accounted for as the text inscribed does not necessarily have the same meaning if written on male or female bodies. If the abused women of this thesis had not been in possession of specifically female sexed bodies, violence might not have scarred their bodily surfaces. But then again, one can also argue that the problem is not one related to sex, but rather the contextual norms and values

⁹⁵ Thoughts produced with a specific period of time form discourses of power which systematically shape our actions (Feldman 1991).

that specify gender. That it is primarily women who are beaten by men, can thus be perceived as sex becoming an effect of ‘societies’ inscriptions of gender roles and statuses.

When discussing violence, Foucault draws on Nietzsche’s genealogical techniques and fascination with the inscription of social power on bodies. Still, Foucault’s and Nietzsche’s contributions to the field of violence differ slightly. Whereas for Foucault the body is a largely passive medium onto which knowledge, hence discursive practises are edged, Nietzsche argues that discourse can not be understood as extrinsic to human agency, as it is the body which is the agent and active cause of knowledge/power (Grosz 1994). By reversing the authorial and authoritarian position between act and agent, and rather perceive bodies as locus of all cultural production, Nietzsche thus invest humans and their bodies with an agency which is largely absent in the writings of Foucault. As such the very act of violence invests both the body of the perpetrator, *and* the body of the victim with agency as ‘doing’ is perceived by Nietzsche to be ‘everything’ (Feldman 1991). The battered women’s bodies argued to be made into objects in chapter four of this thesis, can thus be understood as just as much a locus of agency as the perpetrator or ‘author’ of the writing of violence. The women’s responses; their coping strategies, can function as examples.

Various efforts to understand and explain violence and suffering are also recurrent themes within anthropology. However, most anthropologists occupied with such discussions are so in reference to political- and not intimate violence. Whereas the division between performers and victims of violence in areas which experience eruptions of social unrest or zones of long-lasting conflict or war are rather diffuse, perpetrator and victim of domestic abuse are commonly quite unambiguous. However, frequent questions raised by anthropologists occupied in the field of political violence, are also of use to understand domestic violence. What constitutes violence? How can it be defined? Can violence and ensuing suffering be understood as universal or contextual phenomenon? Is violence a potential within ‘normal, everyday life’, or is it rather an anomaly? Riches (1986) universalistic approach argues for instance that everyone involved in violence is likely to recognise it as such, although there are contested perceptions as to whether the violence is legitimate or not in reference to one’s position within Riches’ triangle of performer, victim or witness. Others, such as expressed in the much acclaimed trilogy by Das, Kleinman, Ramphela, Reynolds and Lock (edt.) entitled “Social Suffering” (1997), “Violence and Subjectivity” (2000) and “Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery” (2001), rather focus upon the contextual expressions of violence and suffering. Whereas

Riches (1986) claims violence to be an abnormality to 'societies', the contributors to the above mentioned trilogy rather perceive violence and suffering as 'normal' social phenomenon which result from institutional power structures' influence in people's everyday lives. Hence, they also argue that there is often a close linkage between personal and contextual, societal problems. This has also been argued throughout this dissertation by illustrating the relatedness of individual actions to society's structures, and vice versa. The impact of gender in Mauritius, and what masculinity and femininity should entail, are examples. At the same time there are important dissonances between these gender structures, and the reality wherein very many men find themselves in today's Mauritius. Although 'society' expect them to be 'providers and protectors' of their families, men's unemployment rates have been rising, whereas women's have at least up until quite recently, been declining due to the largely feminised Export Processing Zone. A redefined 'masculinity' might therefore be the best way to try to end violence against women, but it is also a development which requires the help of time (Ramphela in Das, Kleinman, Lock, Ramphela and Reynolds 2001).

The above mentioned trilogy-authors also emphasise *suffering* as social and contextual constructions (Kleinman, Das and Lock 1997). Although to be a victim of domestic violence is a personally painful experience, how the women suffer can also be argued to be determined by their contextual 'belongings' (ibid). In this thesis, this has been illustrated by the utilisation of the comparative analytical concepts of personal and social bodies, and the body politics. As individual pain can be argued to always be in relation and interfusion with the collective, through the social body suffering becomes articulated by the 'communal' creation of a somatic discourse in the shelter. At the same time the expressions of suffering can be highly structured by respective body politics (Das, Kleinman, Lock, Ramphela, Reynolds 2001). The largely corporeal suffering by the women at the shelter might for instance be argued to have been determined by the social silence which seems to surround the phenomenon domestic violence on the island.

Illness as specific feminine forms of protests

When Scarry (in Good 1994) claims that pain might shatter language, Scarry does not differ between pain experienced by male or female bodies. As Grosz (1994) argues that living in a fleshed female body is different than to that of inhabiting a male body (and other female bodies for that matter), consequential questions arise. Would a male body experience the pain

inscribed as different to that of a female's body? If the hypothesis of the battered women's responses to the abuse as reproduced through the lingual muteness of illnesses in the shelter context is 'verified', would male bodies show similar or completely different patterns of reactions? Both the American and French feminists discussed above, would probably argue that such expressions of the 'language of the body', are specific to the female sex. Irigaray (in Whitford 1991) claims for instance that male desire is in need of an instrument; the female vagina, the hand or even language as a form of self-affection. As language is perceived as a cultural construction by men and in accordance with a phallic economy expressed through the "Law of the Father", female pathology is commonly comprehended as *embodied protest* and a rebellion against the patriarchal 'society'. In the terms of Kristeva⁹⁶ (in Moi 1986) the social, cultural and linguistic society is labelled "The Symbolic Order", whereas the pre-lingual 'outside' is referred to as the "Semiotic" or the "Chora". Still, it is only in the Symbolic Order that one can localise Chora as it is manifested through breaks of syntax, Freudian slips and muteness. If illnesses are communication done through bodies, the abused Mauritian women can hence be conceived to have returned to a pre-patriarchal semiotic level as a form of protest against the male models, norms and practises which violate their bodies.

On the other hand, while criticising Kristeva, Butler (1990) claims that "nothing exists before language", and argues that if the Chora is always implemented in the Symbolic Order, why would anyone bother conducting subversive acts? Bordo (1989) also argues that if one can speak of such protests, there is something inherently self-defeating and self-deconstructive within the women's objections. With reference to my own empirical field; to remain put and silent might temporarily reduce violent outbursts, but the women are still beaten. By falling ill the women are also subject to misinterpretations and misunderstandings from the shelter staff, something which might even render the women vulnerable rather than empowered to continue a life free from violence. At the same time to remain silent is also the condition of the mute, uncomplaining woman, an ideal of patriarchal culture and the Symbolic Order (ibid).

⁹⁶ Although Kristeva refuses the label 'feminist', and rather argues to be fighting the cause of all marginalised groups, she is commonly utilised in various feminist works.

Body matter and anti-essentialist feminism

Feminism which fight to reclaim women's bodies 'gone astray', generally aim at liberating female bodies from an objectifying male 'gaze'. The process of objectification which originated in the tradition of the famous Cartesian dualism did not only create women as bodies, but also determined those very same bodies' expressions and articulations to suit male modelled standards of aesthetics. Almost everyday and everywhere, women come face to face with those very idealised and polished body images as they stare down at us from glossy magazines in the shelves of our local newspaper shops, our own bodies having become object(ified) into shapes that are alien to us. As passive paper-dolls they do not correspond to our own *lived* bodies in any way; bodies which might both have been pampered and well cared for, but which might also have been mistreated and beaten. Still, and as this thesis has aimed to illustrate, female bodies are not only objectified in various media channels, women's bodies are objectified everyday, everywhere through the means and methods of gender based violence.

Although the intention in feminist philosophy is to open up for the possibility for women to retrieve their long miss(ed)ing bodies, in much Western feminist writings, the body matter(iality) somehow seems lost in words which are hard to make sense of in reference to a beaten up and bleeding 'reality', instead of a 'reality' which is only thought. Discussions such as those above somehow seem very far from real life, people and problems as the social construction of the body alone⁹⁷ gives the impression of *being* the body in such writings, and the body as biology (as well) seems hidden away in flows of words. Not only is the flesh remarkably *present* when I pinch my arm, but the body is self-evidently even more so when confronted with the physical wounds left after the severity of abuse. I believe bodies *matter*, and the analytical challenge which face the anthropologist who work in the area of bodies is to be able to combine the material and empirical bodies we experience and observe around us everyday, with understandings of the body as *more* than that which is pure flesh. Medical anthropology has for instance argued that bodies and minds do not necessarily need to be conceived as oppositions, but rather as representing differing aspects of a continuum (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987).

At the same time it is important not to repeat the 'colonial' mistakes conducted by Western middle class feminists during the 60s and 70s. If female empowerment functions as a

⁹⁷ Butler's "Queer Theory" is perhaps the most radical one.

method to reach (gender) equality and justice, one needs to open up to the possibility of alternative and contextually expressed approaches of reaching there.

“The debates in many Western countries about essentialism, the female body, and radical feminism, are not characteristic of the new African feminism, which is rather distinctly heterosexual, pro-natal and concerned with bread butter, culture and power issues” (Mikell 1997:4).

That all individuals experience their surrounding world in multiple ways is ‘common sense’ in social anthropological cognizance. Differing and contested understandings of feminism are no exception. As has also been raised in chapter two and four of this thesis, reference points for Western (trained) feminists and Mauritian women might be completely different, *as* they can be between African or Mauritian feminists for that matter. The differing contexts in which gender awareness becomes pertinent, are highly relevant for understandings of both expressions of feminism, *and* of individual men- and women’s orientations within the structuring gender principles in the respective ‘societies’. Whereas Western feminists (and a Norwegian one) might have been troubled by African (or more specifically Mauritian) women’s insistence on the importance of their roles as nurturers, and their pride in their ability to give birth or being able to make a delicious curry for that matter, we feel uneasy because such pride does not correspond to our own conceptions of empowerment of women, and rather remark these roles and tasks as backwards and inferior. We tend to forget that what we perceive as ascribed gender roles and oppressed practises is the result of patriarchal models making such activities marginalised and inferior in the first place. Gender awareness must rather emerge from within than being imposed from the outside if we are to avoid the error of essentialist feminism. Anthropologists and their vast knowledge of diverse ‘cultures’ have both an advantage and perhaps even a responsibility in so case. At least we can tell the differing stories.

Embodiment, self-reflection and ethics

Sometime during my research my responses started affecting my understanding of the field in a different manner than earlier. All of a sudden I realised that *I* could be abused. Although I already knew that the possibility of experiencing violence is one not possible to foresee, my knowledge was based in *theory* rather than in any felt ‘reality’. To put phenomenological terms to use; the insight somehow became *embodied*. As mentioned in chapter four of this thesis, I even frequently fell ill. Although I neither shared my informants’ abusive experiences

nor their socialised and cultural “habitus”⁹⁸ (Bourdieu 1977), the locus and focus of my field work seemed not only to affect me on an emotional level, but also on a highly physical one. According to Das (in Ross in Das, Kleinman, Lock, Ramphele and Reynolds 2001) the *strength* of experiencing another’s pain in one’s own body is that it can provide the means for the exploration of suffering. Hastrup (ibid: 273) even claims that “*the anthropological exercise is characterised by the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers*”.

Still, realising that I, like everybody else, can never be immune to violence knocked me off my feet at first. Then again, a constructive drive seemed to be created out of my anxieties. I truly desired to be able to understand how these women managed the violence of their everyday lives. I wanted to be able to help them change their situations in a manner expressed by themselves. Although I ‘entered’ the field as a Western bred feminist, I left much more humble.

At the same time non-involvement did not seem an option, despite that I wished it was from time to time. I was and always will be involved. Hence this dissertation has been anything but objective, at least in the conventional notion of the term as unbiased, neutral and value free (Keller 1985). Although I tried being impartial in certain situations, such as not choosing sides between residents or social workers when conflicts arose, my empathy for many of my informants’ situations have probably been easy to pinpoint. Still, such impartiality does not worry me too much; to have managed to keep my emotions distanced and disengaged at all times would have troubled me more. Post modern feminist critique of science even claims the need to redefine the term *objectivity* as all science is understood to be socially situated, rather than originating from ‘no place at all’. As long as there are people who conduct research, and people are always part of a ‘larger society’, complete objectivity will never be possible. It is not a goal either. As the term objectivity is understood to have developed out of the need for ‘Us’ to view the ‘Other’, ‘Us’ being Western, white, male, heterosexuals, and feminists believing all dichotomies to be hierarchical, to redefine the term objectivity allows access to the voices of marginalised groups in all science instead of struggling to achieve perfect, mirror-like representations of the world based on a male, heterosexual norm. To be aware of the fact that all science has been constructed through- and within political desires, interests and values, will only open up to a science capable of greater

⁹⁸ According to Bourdieu’s (1977) “Theory of Praxis” are people born into structures of meaning. These structures are constituted by material, cultural, symbolic and social norms which produce habitus. Habitus can be understood as a highly organised set of cognitive and bodily dispositions which determines our actions.

objectivity as one realises that one's own research is no exception from such a discourse, and that the field changes through (participant) observation in the interaction taking place between for instance the social anthropologist and her informants (Keller 1985).

Therefore I find no shame in admitting that I was emotionally affected in the field. I was both angry and sad, but also happy and content, and I am fully aware that such emotional affection coloured both my fieldwork and the contents of this thesis. Then again, I believe anything else would have been odd⁹⁹. The advice from more experienced anthropologists and literature to newcomers to the field is often contradictory. Some might claim that emotions will hinder good research, whereas others believe that one will never be able to understand informants unless we form attachments to them (Kleinman and Copp 1993). In line with my ascribed status in the field as just 'Karine', I chose to be myself as much as possible. The result was a quasi-positivistic one. I allowed myself to express particular feelings in interaction with my informants whereas others were reserved the bosom of my private domain. I am quite sure that such a response to the field is one which is shared with almost everyone occupied in the arena of qualitative methodology. Still, it is solely within the area of topics believed to be scientifically (or sometimes personally challenging) that emotional responses to the field ever seems to be discussed.

Concluding remarks

Just like there is no Woman, neither is there a singular, homogenous Feminist. The basis for feminist critique is at the same time not equitable with the study of merely women, but is rather an analysis of gender relations as structuring principles in all 'societies'. If feminists fight for women's rights, it is at least most commonly, with the ultimate goal of universal gender equality. The reason and tendency to focus upon women rather than men in feminism is closely connected to this aim of gender equity as women's voices have been subjugated and barred by much louder male vocals, and women's empowerment therefore becomes a necessary route in the achievement of gender equality and justice. At the same time the contents, expressions and understandings of the term feminism differ, and may have as many sub-movements and academic sub-disciplines as anthropology does. Although I might for instance be blamed by other feminists for not using any other weapon than my computer key

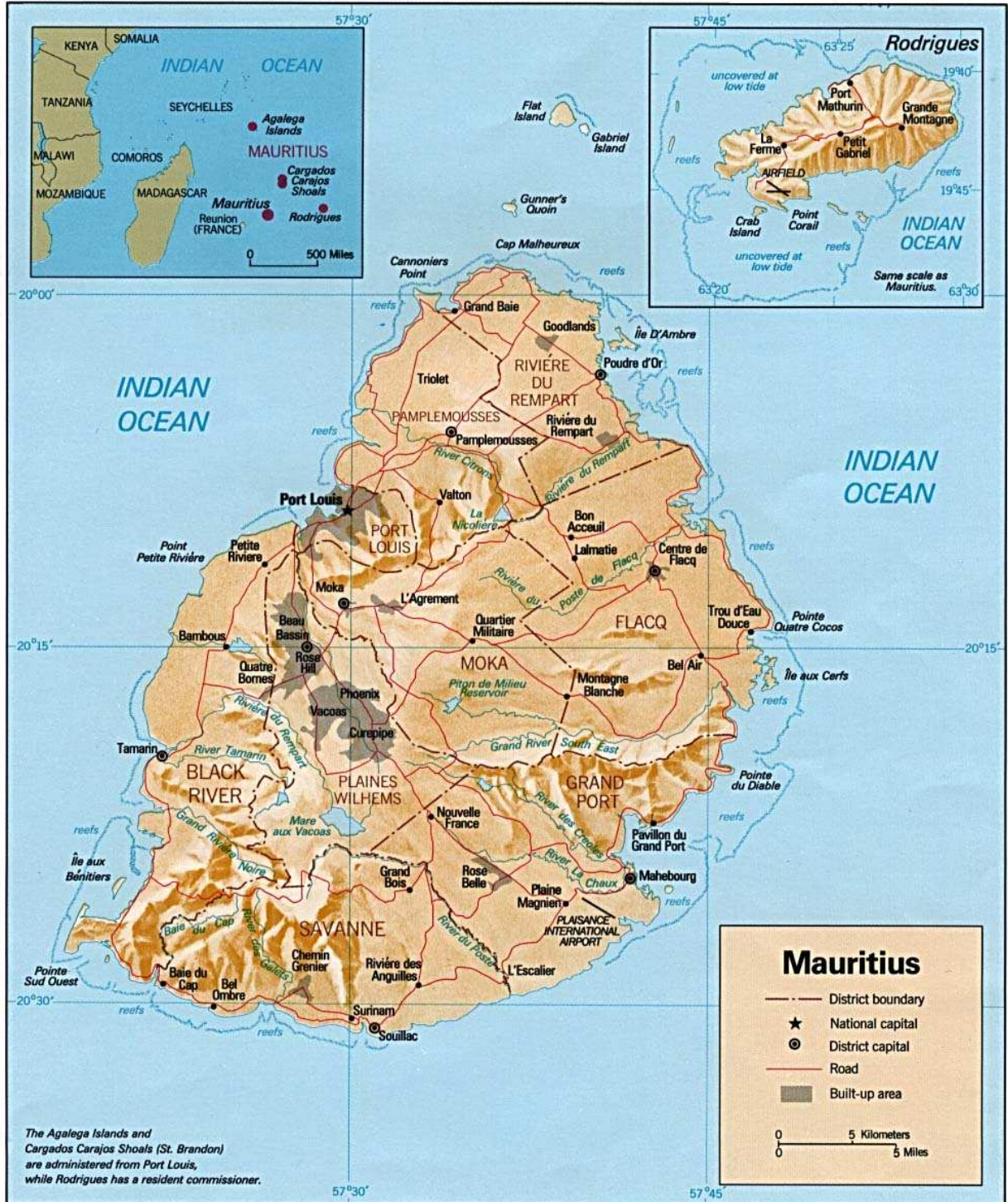
⁹⁹ If I had not allowed myself to display any emotions in interaction with my informants, I would probably have been believed to be inhumanly cold and distant, something I am sure would not have benefited my research in any way.

board for fighting gender inequality, I might accuse essentialist feminists to be ethnocentric. As there is necessarily a political agenda, or a wish to change the status quo inherent in feminism, the challenge is to find coherence within these differing positions while at the same time create feasible changes. When working within the area of gender based- and domestic violence, one also realise that radical transformations that challenge patriarchal ideologies and practises are absolutely necessary. The United Nations estimates for instance that at least one out of every three women in the world has been victim to violence, and labels gender based violence a global epidemic that kills, maims and tortures women all over the world (<http://www.unifem.org>). On the other hand, fighting against gender based violence might only be successful if we start listening to and take account of what battered women have to say themselves.

“Only the battered women themselves know in detail what will help them to be safe. If we fail to listen, we might fail to be of help” (Hague, Mullender, Aris 2003: 3). Hence I hope that this thesis has both given voice to my informants’ silent suffering and acknowledged their struggles. At least that has been the intention.

Appendices

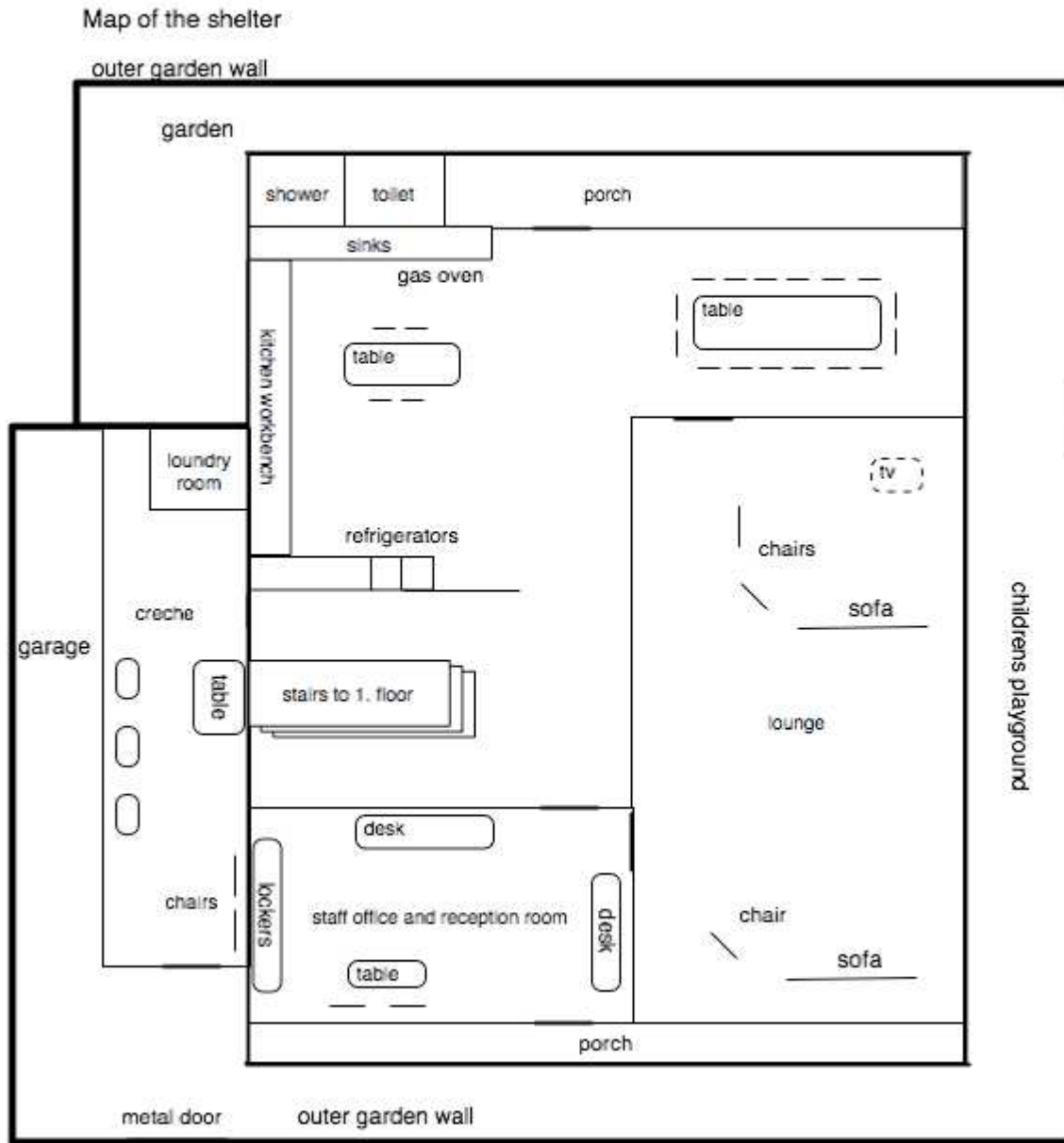
Appendix One: Map of Mauritius



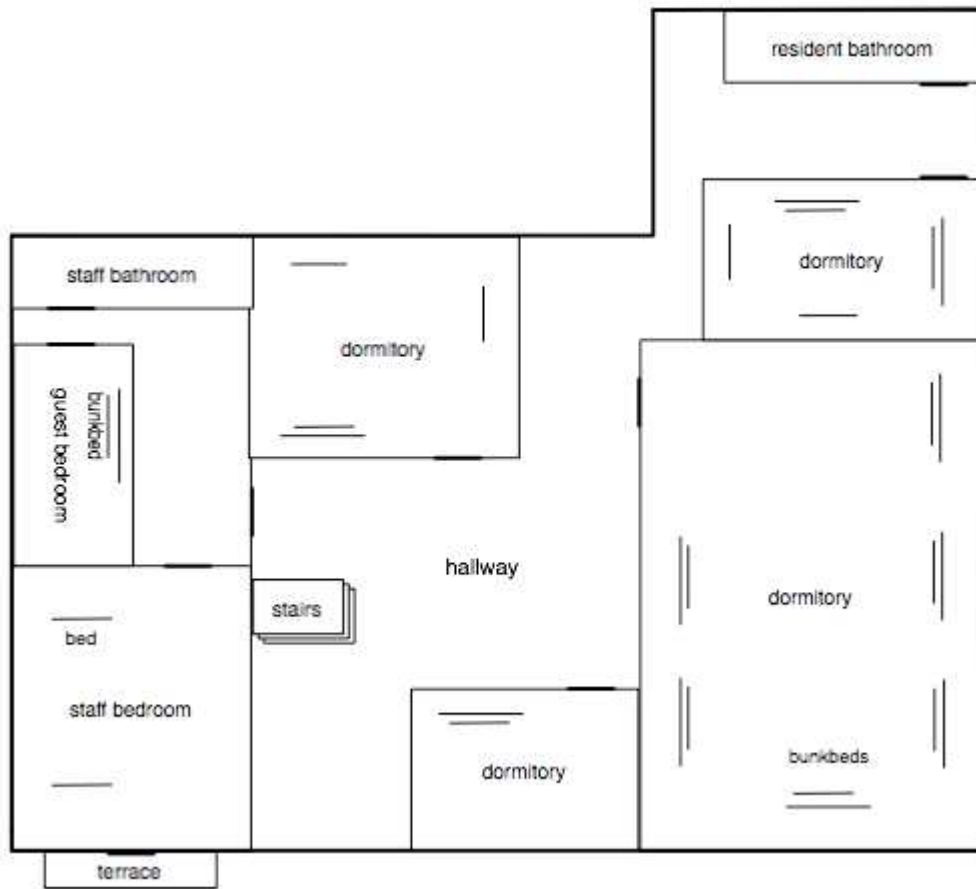
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[Http://www.lib.utetexas.edu/maps/](http://www.lib.utetexas.edu/maps/)

Appendix Two: Map of the shelter, ground floor.



Map of the shelter, first floor



Appendices

Appendix Three: List of key informants (residents at Woman’s Aid’s shelter)

Informant	Age	Religion & ethnicity	Children & years of marriage	Paid occupation	”Type” of domestic violence	Times to the shelter & return to husband	Husband’s: Age, religion occupation and type of substance abuse
Arianne	23	Catholic and Nicaraguan	Di 1 year old. Married for 2 years		Physical, psychological, economical and problems with in-laws	1. Returned to husband with Protection Order	32, Catholic Creole, technician, alcohol- and drug abuse
Sandra	21	Catholic Creole	Emma 5 and Nadine 1. Married for 6 years	Private maid	Physical, psychological and economical	3. Did not return to husband	
Camille	21	Catholic Creole	Natasha 1 year old. Married for 1,5 years	Textile factory worker	Physical, psychological and problems with in-laws	1. Did not return to husband	26, Catholic Creole, on and off construction worker
Veronique	22	Catholic Creole	Kelly 1 year old. Married for 3 years		Physical, psychological, sexual	2. Returned to husband with Protection Order	Alcohol abuse
Carol	29	Catholic Creole	Lucia 1, Fransesca 5 Fanny 9 and Lili 11. Married for 7 years		Physical, psychological and sexual	8. Returned to husband.	Alcohol abuse
Ratna	24	Telegu	Ravi 3 and Anista 1	Private maid	Physical psychological, and problems with in-laws	1. Did not return to husband.	38, Telegu, on and off construction worker, alcohol abuse
Ginette	51	Hindu. Married for 17 years			Physical, psychological and problems with step-children	1. Did not return to husband.	Alcohol abuse
Anita	37	Catholic Creole	Steve 6 and teenage daughter. Married for 14 years	Private maid	Physical and psychological	1. Returned to husband with a Protection Order	35, Catholic Creole, unemployed, alcohol- and drug abuse
Geraldine	38	Catholic Creole	Noel 13 Darel 10 and Corina 6. Married	Private maid	Physical and psychological	1. Return unknown	36, Catholic Creole, on disablement benefit, alcohol

Appendices

			for 15 years				abuse
Caroline	24	Catholic Creole	Kenneth 3. Cohabiting for 3 years.	Art teacher	Physical, psychological	1. Did not return to husband	23, alcohol abuse
Nadja	28	Catholic Creole	Denis 4 months and daughter 10. Cohabiting for 3 years		Physical and psychological	1. Return unknown	23, Catholic Creole, alcohol- and drug abuse
Nina	52	Catholic Creole	4 children, three grown up and one son, 15. Married for 23 years		Physical, psychological and adultery	2. Returned to husband	47, Catholic Creole, high position in construction company, alcohol abuse
Beatrice	38	Catholic Creole	2. Married for 17 years	Private maid	Psychological	1. Return unknown	56, Catholic Creole, taxi driver, alcohol abuse
Marie	57	Catholic Creole	6 grown up children. Married for 33 years		Physical, psychological and adultery	1. Returned to husband with a Protection Order	58, Catholic Creole, on and off construction worker, alcohol abuse
Rajni	42	Hindu	3. Married for 17 years		Psychological	6. Returned to husband	Banker, alcohol abuse
Venita	28	Telegu	3. Married for 11 years	Caretaker in an elderly home	Physical, psychological and problems with in-laws	2. Did not return to husband	37, self employed furniture maker, alcohol abuse
Ivana	23	Catholic Creole	Married for 1 year	Sales assistant in a photo shop	Physical, psychological, problems with in-laws and adultery	1. Returned to husband with a Protection Order	30, Catholic Creole, mechanic, alcohol abuse
Nazira	37	Muslim	Zara 1, 5, Abdul 3 months. Married for 4,5 years		Physical and psychological	1. Returned to husband with a Protection Order	55, Muslim, taxi driver

Appendix Four: The Protection from Domestic Violence Act 1997

(Due to the condition of the 'original' copy are some of the pages in the following Act asymmetrical)

32

Acts 1997

An Act

To provide protection to the victims of domestic violence

ENACTED by the Parliament of Mauritius as follows :—

1. Short title

This Act may be cited as the Protection from Domestic Violence Act 1997.

2. Interpretation

In this Act —

“aggrieved spouse” means the spouse for whose benefit a domestic violence protection order is sought, or is in force;

“Child” in relation to a spouse, includes any biological, adopted, step or foster child below the age of eighteen and any other minor in the care or custody of such spouse;

“Court” means the District Court of the area where the aggrieved spouse lives;

“domestic violence” includes any of the following acts committed by a person against his spouse or a child of such spouse —

- (a) wilfully causing or attempting to cause physical injury;
- (b) wilfully or knowingly placing or attempting to place the spouse in fear of physical injury to himself or to one of his children;
- (c) intimidation, harassment, maltreatment, brutality or cruelty;
- (d) compelling the spouse by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the spouse has a right to abstain;
- (e) confining or detaining the spouse against his will;
- (f) any harm or threat to cause harm to a child of the spouse;
- (g) causing or attempting to cause damage to the spouse's property;
- (h) a threat to commit any act mentioned in paragraphs (a) to (g);

“Enforcement Officer” means any officer of the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development, authorised by the Minister to act as enforcement officer and any police officer;

“interim order” means a protection order, an occupation order or a tenancy order of an interim nature;

“Minister” means the Minister responsible for the subject of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development;

“occupation order” means an order issued under section 4;

“property” includes any movable or immovable property of which the spouse has the sole or joint use or possession;

“protection order” means an interim or permanent protection order issued under section 3 restraining a spouse from engaging in conduct which may constitute an act of domestic violence;

“residence” means the premises where the parties are or have been living together as members of the same household;

“respondent spouse” means a person against whom a domestic violence order is sought, or is in force;

“Schedule” means the Schedule to this Act;

“spouse” means either of a man and a woman who —

- (a) are or have been civilly or religiously married to each other;
- (b) are living or have lived together as husband and wife; and
- (c) whether they have ever lived together or not, are the parents of a common child;

“tenancy order” means an order issued under section 5.

3. Protection order

(1) Any person who has been the victim of an act of domestic violence and who reasonably believes that his spouse is likely to commit any further act of domestic violence against him, may apply to the Court, in Form A of the Schedule to this Act, for a protection order restraining the respondent spouse from engaging in any conduct which may constitute an act of domestic violence and ordering him to be of good behaviour towards the applicant.

(2) On an application being made for a protection order, the Court shall cause notice thereof to be served on the respondent spouse who shall further be summoned to appear before Court on such day as may be fixed by the Court (not later than 7 days of the date of the application) to show cause why the order applied for should not be made.

(3) An application for a protection order shall be heard as a civil case between the parties who shall be free to call witnesses in support of their respective case.

(4) In determining an application for a protection order, the Court shall have regard to the following —

- (a) the need to ensure that the aggrieved spouse is protected from domestic violence;
- (b) the welfare of any child affected or likely to be affected, by the respondent spouse's conduct;
- (c) the accommodation needs of the aggrieved spouse, his children as well as those of the respondent and his children;
- (d) any hardship that may be caused to the respondent spouse or to any of his children as a result of the making of the order;
- (e) any other matter which the Court may consider relevant.

(5) Where a protection order is issued, the Court may further —

- (a) prohibit the respondent spouse from being on premises on which the aggrieved spouse resides or works;
- (b) prohibit the respondent spouse from being on premises specified in the order, being premises frequented by the aggrieved spouse;
- (c) prohibit the respondent spouse from approaching within a specified distance of the aggrieved spouse;
- (d) prohibit the respondent spouse from contacting, harassing, threatening or intimidating the aggrieved spouse;
- (e) prohibit the respondent spouse from damaging property of the aggrieved spouse;

- (f) prohibit the respondent spouse from causing or attempting to cause another person to engage in conduct referred to in paragraphs (d) and (e);
- (g) specify the conditions on which the respondent spouse may—
 - (i) be on premises on which the aggrieved spouse resides, works or which he frequents; or
 - (ii) approach or contact the aggrieved spouse or a child of the aggrieved spouse;
- (h) *proprio motu*, make a provisional occupation or tenancy order for such time as it thinks fit, where it is satisfied that such an order, although not applied for, is essential for the effective protection of the aggrieved person.

(6) (a) A protection order shall be in Form C of the Schedule and shall remain in force for such period, not exceeding 24 months, as the Court may specify.

(b) Where a protection order contains a prohibition or condition of the kind specified in subsection (5), the Court may specify different periods, being periods none of which exceeds 24 months, as the period for which each prohibition or condition is to remain in force.

(7) (a) Where a protection order is in force, either party may apply to the Court for a variation or revocation of same.

(b) The spouse moving for such variation or revocation shall cause a copy of an application made under this section to be served on the other spouse.

(c) In determining whether to vary or revoke a protection order the Court shall have regard to the matters specified in subsection (4).

(8) Where the Court is satisfied that there is a serious risk of harm being caused to the applicant before the application may be heard and that the circumstances revealed in the application are such as to warrant the

intervention of the Court even before the respondent spouse is heard, the Court may --

- (a) issue an interim protection order in Form B of the Schedule to this Act, restraining the respondent spouse from engaging in any conduct which may constitute an act of domestic violence and ordering him to be of good behaviour towards his spouse;
- (b) order the Commissioner of Police to provide Police protection to the applicant until such time as the interim order is served on the respondent spouse or for such time as the particular circumstances of the case may justify.

(9) Where an interim protection order is issued, the District Clerk shall immediately take steps to have a copy thereof served on the respondent spouse who shall further be summoned to appear before Court on such day as may be fixed by the Court to show cause why the said order should not be confirmed, varied or discharged.

(10) An interim protection order shall, unless the Court directs otherwise, remain in force until such time as the Court pronounces itself on the application for the protection order.

4. Occupation order

(1) Any person who has been the victim of an act of domestic violence and who reasonably believes that his spouse is likely to commit any further act of domestic violence against him, may apply to the Court in Form D of the Schedule to this Act, for an occupation order granting him the exclusive right to live in the residence belonging to him, the respondent spouse or both of them.

(2) On an application being made for an occupation order, the Court shall cause notice thereof to be served on the respondent spouse who shall further be summoned to appear before Court on such day as may be fixed by the Court (not later than seven days of the date of the application) to show cause why the order applied for should not be made.

(3) An application for an occupation order shall be heard as a civil case between the parties who shall be free to call witnesses.

(4) The Court shall, on being satisfied that it is necessary for the protection of the aggrieved spouse or of a child of the aggrieved spouse and that it is in the best interest of the family, make an occupation order in Form F of the Schedule, for a period not exceeding 24 months.

(5) (a) Where an occupation order is in force, either party may apply to the Court for a variation or revocation of same.

(b) The spouse moving for such variation or revocation shall cause a copy of an application made under this section to be served on the other spouse.

(c) In determining whether to vary or revoke an occupation order the Court shall have regard to the matters specified in subsection (4).

(6) Where the Court is satisfied that there is a serious risk of harm being caused to the applicant before the application may be heard and that the circumstances revealed in the application are such as to warrant the intervention of the Court even before the respondent spouse is heard, the Court may issue an interim occupation order in Form E of the Schedule granting the applicant the exclusive right to live in and occupy the residence.

(7) An interim occupation order shall, unless the Court directs otherwise, remain in force until such time as the Court pronounces itself on the application for the protection order.

(8) Where an interim occupation order is issued, the District Clerk shall immediately take steps to have a copy thereof served on the respondent spouse who shall further be summoned to appear before Court on such day as may be fixed by the Court to show cause why the said order should not be confirmed, varied or discharged.

5. Tenancy order

(1) Any spouse who has been the victim of an act of domestic violence and who reasonably believes that his spouse is likely to commit any further act of domestic violence against him, may apply to the Court, in Form G of the Schedule to this Act for a tenancy order so that the tenancy of the residence occupied by him should vest in him.

(2) On an application being made for a tenancy order, the Court shall cause notice thereof to be served on the respondent spouse who shall further be summoned to appear before Court on such day as may be fixed by the Court (not later than seven days of the date of the application) to show cause why the order applied for should not be made.

(3) An application for a tenancy order shall be heard as a civil case between the parties who shall be free to call witnesses.

(4) The Court shall not make a tenancy order in Form I of the Schedule unless it is satisfied that such an order is necessary for the protection of the aggrieved spouse and/or of a child of the aggrieved spouse and that it is in the best interest of the family.

(5) (a) Where a tenancy order is in force, either party may apply to the Court for a variation or revocation of same.

(b) The spouse moving for such variation or revocation shall cause a copy of an application made under this section to be served on the other spouse.

(c) In determining whether to vary or revoke a tenancy order the Court shall have regard to the matters specified in subsection (4).

(6) Where the Court is satisfied that there is a serious risk of harm being caused to the applicant before the application may be heard and that the circumstances revealed in the application are such as to warrant the intervention of the Court even before the respondent spouse is heard, the Court may issue an interim tenancy order in Form H of the Schedule granting the applicant the exclusive right to live in the residence.

(7) An interim tenancy order shall, unless the Court directs otherwise, remain in force until such time as the Court pronounces itself on the application for the tenancy order.

(8) Where an interim tenancy order is issued, the District Clerk shall immediately take steps to have a copy thereof served on the respondent spouse who shall further be summoned to appear before Court on such day as may be fixed by the Court to show cause why the said order should not be confirmed, varied or discharged.

6. Effect of tenancy order

(1) On the taking effect of a tenancy order, the aggrieved spouse shall, subject to subsection (2), be deemed to become the tenant of the dwelling house subject to the terms and conditions of the tenancy in force at the time of the making of that order.

(2) Except where the Court orders otherwise, the spouse who, before the tenancy order was, by the terms of the contract of tenancy, responsible for the payment of the rent, shall continue to be so responsible.

7. Provisions relating to occupation orders and tenancy orders

(1) Before any permanent occupation or tenancy order is made, notice of the application shall be given to any person having an interest in the property which may be affected by the order and any such person shall be entitled to appear and be heard in the matter as if he were a party to the application.

(2) Where an application is made for an occupation order or tenancy order the Court may treat the application as one for occupation or tenancy, as appropriate, to ensure the right which the aggrieved spouse in fact needs for his protection.

8. Power to make ancillary order in respect of furniture

(1) On or after making any occupation or tenancy order, the Court may, subject to subsection (2), make an order granting to the aggrieved spouse the use, for such period and on such terms and conditions as the Court thinks fit, of all or any furniture, household appliances, and household effects in the residence to which the order relates.

(2) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (1), an order made under this section —

- (a) may, on the application of one of the parties, be varied or discharged;
- (b) shall, unless the Court otherwise directs, be deemed to be made for a period corresponding to the occupation or tenancy order to which it is ancillary;
- (c) shall, irrespective of the terms of the order, expire when the occupation or tenancy order expires or is discharged.

9. Proceedings to be in camera

The hearing of any proceedings under this Act shall, subject to the provisions of section 10 (10) of the Constitution, be held in camera.

10. Registry

(1) The Registry of the Court shall maintain a record of all applications filed pursuant to this Act and of all protection, occupation and tenancy orders issued by the Court.

(2) The record shall contain —

- (a) the names, address, age, sex and relationship of the parties;
- (b) the domestic violence alleged, whether it involved any weapon or resulted in personal injuries and whether the injuries inflicted required medical treatment;
- (c) the effective date and terms of each order issued; and
- (d) the address of the property concerned by the order and, where applicable, the name of the landlord.

11. Powers and duties of Enforcement Officers

(1) Where an Enforcement Officer reasonably suspects that a person is the victim of an act of domestic violence he shall, as soon as possible, cause an investigation to be made into the matter.

(2) Where it is reported to an Enforcement Officer that a person has been or is likely to be the victim of an act of domestic violence, he shall immediately cause an entry to be made in the Police Station Occurrence

Book or such other record maintained for that purpose and shall, as soon as possible, cause an investigation to be made in the matter.

(3) Where, after investigation, the officer reasonably believes that action should be taken to protect the victim of an act of domestic violence from any further violence, he shall —

- (a) explain to the aggrieved spouse his rights to protection against domestic violence; and
- (b) provide or arrange transportation for the aggrieved spouse to an alternative residence or a safe place of shelter, if such transportation is required;
- (c) provide or arrange transportation for the aggrieved spouse to the nearest hospital or medical facility for the treatment of injuries, if such treatment is needed;
- (d) assist the aggrieved spouse to file a complaint regarding the domestic violence;
- (e) accompany and assist the aggrieved spouse to his or her residence or previous residence for the collection of his personal belongings.

(4) An Enforcement Officer may, with the consent of an aggrieved spouse, file on his behalf an application for an interim or permanent protection, occupation or tenancy order and shall to that effect swear an affidavit reciting the facts on which he relies to make the application on behalf of the aggrieved spouse.

12. Information to Enforcement Officers and exclusion of liability

(1) Any person who has reason to believe that an act of domestic violence has been, is being or is likely to be committed, may give information in respect thereof to an Enforcement Officer.

(2) No liability, civil or criminal, shall be incurred for information given in good faith for the purpose of subsection (1).

13. Offence

(1) Any person who wilfully fails to comply with any interim or permanent, protection order, occupation order, tenancy order or an ancillary order made under this Act shall commit an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding 10,000 rupees and imprisonment for a period not exceeding 2 years.

(2) Any person who commits an offence under subsection (1) may be arrested by the Police.

14. Jurisdiction

Notwithstanding section 114 of the Courts Act and section 72 of the District and Intermediate Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act, a District Magistrate shall have jurisdiction to try an offence under this Act and may impose any penalty provided under this Act.

15. Service of documents

Where it appears to the Court that it is not reasonably possible to serve a copy of an application under this Act personally, the Court may make an order for substituted service.

16. Appeals

(1) Subject to subsection (2), an appeal shall lie to the Judge in Chambers against any decision concerning a protection, occupation or tenancy order in the same way as an appeal lies from a decision of a District Court in the exercise of its civil jurisdiction.

(2) No appeal shall lie against any decision concerning interim protection orders, interim occupation orders or interim tenancy orders.

(3) An appeal against an order shall not have for effect to suspend its operation until the decision of the Judge in Chambers or the Appellate Court.

17. Costs

(1) Notwithstanding any other enactment no costs shall be allowed in any proceedings under this Act, nor shall any aggrieved person appealing against any decision under section 16(1) be required to furnish any recognizance to prosecute the appeal.

(2) Notwithstanding any other enactment, all civil, judicial, and extra judicial acts, and all documents made use of or produced before the court, in any matter arising out of or brought under this Act shall be exempt from registration and stamp duties and from the payment of any fees.

18. Regulations

The Minister may make such regulations as he thinks fit for the purposes of this Act.

19. Commencement

(1) Subject to subsection (2), this Act shall come into operation on a day to be fixed by Proclamation.

(2) Different days may be fixed for the coming into operation of different provisions of this Act.

Passed by the National Assembly on the twenty-seventh day of May one thousand nine hundred and ninety seven.

BHUPEN DWARKA
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

THE PROTECTION FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT

Form A

(section 3(1))

THE PROTECTION FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT 1997

APPLICATION FOR A PROTECTION ORDER

In the District Court of

I

of

being the spouse of of

inasmuch as-

- (a) we are civilly/religiously married;
- (b) we have lived together as husband and wife; and
- (c) we are the biological parents of a common child

MAKE OATH/SOLEMN AFFIRMATION AND SAY:

1. That I have been the victim of an act of domestic violence in as much as my said spouse has.....

2. I have reasonable cause to believe that my said spouse is likely to commit further acts of domestic violence unless he is restrained from so doing.

3. I therefore move that my said spouse be summoned to appear before Court to show cause why a Protection Order, under Section 3 (1) of the The Protection from Domestic Violence Act 1997, should not be issued restraining my said spouse from engaging in conduct which may constitute further acts of domestic violence and ordering him/her to be of good behaviour towards me.

4. I further aver that there is a serious risk of harm being caused to me before the present application for a Protection Order may be heard by the Court and that it is therefore urgent and necessary that an interim Protection Order be issued under Section 3 (8) of the The Protection from Domestic Violence Act 1997.

Sworn before me..... District Magistrate.

This..... day of.....199.....

THE PROTECTION FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT 1997

Form B

(section 3(8))

INTERIM PROTECTION ORDER

In the District Court of

To.....of

Whereas I am satisfied by information ON OATH that —

Mr/Mrs..... who has applied for a Protection Order under Section 3 (1) and (8) of the The Protection from Domestic Violence Act 1997 has reasonable cause to believe that she may be the victim of further acts of domestic violence and that it is urgent and necessary that an interim Protection Order be issued under Section 3 (8) of the said The Protection from Domestic Violence Act 1997.

You the said are therefore restrained from engaging in any conduct which may constitute an act of domestic violence against your said spouse and you are further ordered to be of good behaviour towards him/her pending the decision of this Court in the application filed by him/her for a Protection Order.

You are further summoned to appear before the District Court of.....onto show cause why the said interim Protection Order should not be confirmed, varied or discharged.

Warning you that should you fail to appear before the Court as hereby requested the Court may proceed to hear the application for the issue of the Protection Order in your absence.

Given under my hand at.....In the District of.....

This.....day of.....199.....

District Magistrate

THE PROTECTION FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT 1997

Form C

(section 3(6))

PROTECTION ORDER

In the District Court of

To.....

Take notice you the said that after hearing an application from your spouse Mr/Mrs..... for the issue of a Protection Order, the Court, in virtue of the powers conferred upon it by Section 3 (1) of The Protection from Domestic Violence Act 1997 hereby restrains you from engaging in any conduct which may constitute an act of domestic violence against your said spouse and further orders you to be of good behaviour towards him/her.

The said Protection Order shall remain in force until.....

Take also notice that the Court, in virtue of the powers conferred upon it by Section 3 (5) of The Protection from Domestic Violence Act 1997 further prohibits you.....

This prohibition order shall remain in force until.....

Given hereunder my hand at..... in the District of.....

This.....day of199.....

District Magistrate

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