

Rethinking Women's Political Agency in Mauritius:

An Intersectional Feminist Perspective

by

Anjalee Dabee

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Anjalee Dabee

Discipline of Women's Studies
College of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences (HASS)
Flinders University
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ABSTRACT

Women's political representation has been traditionally explained in terms of their formal representation. The core assumption has been that descriptive representation generally translates into women's substantive representation. However, feminist scholars have criticised this approach on a number of grounds, arguing that it limits women's substantive representation to one category of actors, location and approach to representation which take place only at the level of parliament; and assumes homogeneity of women's interests. This research expands on this notion and seeks to redefine and expand the ways in which "political representation" has been traditionally conceived in mainstream politics by looking at the various actors, sites and ways and methods that inform the different practices of substantive representation through a case study on the island of Mauritius, which also hosts a multi-ethnic society. Through interviews conducted with women at the levels of the State, in State Structures and at community level, the thesis demonstrates that the substantive representation of women does not necessarily require a "critical mass" of women in formal politics- rather, there are a multitude of ways in which women perform their roles as political actors at these different levels to seek to address their practical and strategic needs in light of their intersectionality. The research subsequently argues that agency can be conceptualised through a different perspective that encompasses different modes of representation through non-institutional politics. Furthermore the findings reveal that in order for effective substantive representation and women's empowerment to take place, there needs to be a non-linear collaborative process of interaction between actors at the State level, in State Structures and at grass-roots levels.

Key words: Women, Activism, Mauritius, Politics, Representation, Intersectional Feminism

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: A.DABEE

Date: 15 November 2017

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Lastly, I want to thank my family and close friends for all their support.

Acronyms

Association of Mauritian Women (Association Des Femmes Mauriciennes) -AFM

CEDAW- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

CFWO- Common Front for Women's Organisations

FBUS- Female Entrepreneur

GMS- Commonwealth Gender Management System

GAD- Gender and Development

GFP- Gender Focal Point

MAW- Mauritius Alliance of Women

MGE- Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare

MMGE- Male Participant, Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare

MP- Member of Parliament

MLF- Muvman Liberasyon Fam

NGOs- Non Governmental Organisations

NGPF- National Gender Policy Framework

NWC- National Women's Council

PAC- Participatory Advisory Committee

PGN- Practical Gender Needs

SADC- South African Development Community

SGN- Strategic Gender Needs

UN- United Nations

WCBO- Woman in Community Based Organisation

WCLG- Women Councillor, Local Government Level

WID- Women in Development

WIPRep- Women Member of Women in Politics Network

WMGE- Female Participant, Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare

WMP- Woman Member of Parliament

WP- Women in Formal Politics

WSC- Women in Senior Citizen's Association

WPW- Women in Political Wings of Major Political Parties

Preface

I am a fifth generation Hindu Mauritian and my upbringing and intersectional gendered identity has been largely influenced by the indo-Mauritian way of life and its cultural aspects. I left Mauritius when I was eighteen and studied in Australia in the field of women's studies, after which I worked for different entities of the United Nations in policy planning and project implementation to address women's empowerment and gender equality. Following ten years of fieldwork, I decided to pursue a PhD in the Discipline of Women's Studies. My interest in studying within this academic discipline resides in the fact that I have been actively working in the field of gender and development in Mauritius and on the African continent. However, I find that every time the topic of "women in politics" was being raised at the level of Government, whether it was in Mauritius or on the Continent, "politics" referred to formal, institutionalised politics. The actions of women¹ at the grass-roots level seem to be rendered invisible in reporting to international human rights bodies such as the Commission on the Status of Women in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) Periodic Country Reports or to the South African Development Community (SADC) Reports. Moreover, gender equality remains an integral part of discourses towards democracy and sustainable development in Mauritius as stipulated in the various Government Programmes from 2005-2012 during the period that I was working in Mauritius. These include women's political, economic and social empowerment. Yet, women's descriptive representation has remained low at the level of Parliament, while

¹ The thesis by no means seeks to homogenise women's interests, rather the term "women" has been used in the different sections to relate what the majority of women, irrespective of their intersectionalities have stated, for the purpose of the analysis.

there are around 1500 registered women's associations in Mauritius. The fact that there is a low descriptive representation of women, while there is a high number of women's associations has led me to rethink the way that "politics" has been traditionally conceived, in terms of institutional politics, creating an opportunity to examine the other sites and modes of representation where women exercise their sense of agency as political subjects despite their different subjectivities.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

LOCATING THE RESEARCH:

A QUALITATIVE INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST APPROACH

“... I am a woman, I am a mother, I am a Wife, I am a Hindu, I am an activist...I am a Councillor”²

Women’s political representation has been traditionally explained in terms of their formal representation. The core assumption has been that descriptive representation (in terms of the number of women at parliamentary level) generally translates into women’s substantive representation. However, feminist scholars have criticised this approach on a number of grounds, arguing that it limits women’s substantive representation to one set of actors, one site and mode of representation which takes place only at the level of parliament; and assumes homogeneity of women’s interests.

My research seeks to redefine and expand the ways in which “political representation” has been traditionally conceived in malestream politics³, by looking at the various actors, locations and processes that inform the different processes of substantive representation through my study on the island of Mauritius⁴. Through my chapters, I look at the political, legislative and institutional reforms brought by different governments coupled by the intentions on the part of successive governments to empower women and enhance their status; whilst further arguing that existing socio-ethnic, institutional, political and socio-economic constrictions contribute to reproduce systemic inequalities in a former colony.

The aim of my research is to also look into how the substantive representation of women’s interests undertaken in Mauritius. In the process, it seeks to gain an understanding into the multi-dimensionality of Mauritian women’s interpretation of their

²Interview with Woman Councillor, 4 December 2013, Flacq

³ Youngs G., 2004, “Feminist International Relations: a Contradiction in terms? Or: why women and gender are essential to understanding the world “we” live in” in *International Affairs*, Vol. 80(1), pg. 74

⁴ See Map 1 – Map of Mauritius showing different Districts where Interviews were carried out

practical (PGN) and strategic needs (SGN)⁵ as well as how these are being substantially represented through critical actors at different strategic levels, namely in the community based associations, at the State level and Parliamentary Level. I further aim to see whether there is a non-linear approach to representation of these interests and potentially any policy changes or other systems that may need redress to better address women's interests.

Given the multi-ethnic character of Mauritian society with 48.5 per cent of people of Indian origin⁶ as well as the ethnic heterogeneous nature of some parts of the island, I am also mindful not to focus my research on this single-axis framework (of race/ethnicity) looking at the most dominant group in Mauritian society, so as not to provide a distorted analysis, whilst also acknowledging the fact that the operative conception of race/ethnicity are not the only categories at play when women formulate their interests, but there is rather a much wider complex phenomenon that enables the formulation and representation of women's interests. In the subsequent chapters I will provide insights into the different issues of interests portrayed by key informants and will reveal that issues are further divided by informants intersectionality, including, ethnicity, class and age⁷. However, in this Chapter, I seek to consider how the different feminist perspectives relate to or even differ from my proposed methodology.

Based on my chosen methodology, I reveal that in a multi-ethnic post-colonial society like Mauritius, an in-depth understanding of the practical and strategic gender interest requires a methodology that is sensitive to women's intersectionality and

⁵ The concept of "practical and strategic needs" are adopted from Molyneux's work on interests and acquired by Moser Molyneux M., 1985, Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, State and Revolution in Nicaragua, *Feminist Studies*, 11(2)

⁶ Statistics Mauritius, Resident population by religion and sex" , Statistics Mauritius. pg. 68.

⁷ Not all participants revealed their class

Only 4 participants were of the age of 16-21 and the latter were regrouped in a Youth Network.

specific markers of identity. I conducted a series of individual interviews in the nine districts of the island with women in community centres and at the grass-roots level; I further interviewed representatives of the Women’s Policy Agency and Gender Focal Points at the State Level; followed by one-on-one interviews with three women at the level of Parliament, as per Table 1.

My interview questions were designed with the view of gathering sensitive and useful data and were conducted with the strict level of confidentiality required following a strict code of ethic. The ultimate aim of the data gathered was to gain a better understanding of the different processes of representation, uncover issues of interests that were perhaps being ignored by actors at the decision making level; and potentially provide recommendations on how to redefine the politics of substantive representation of women in a plural Mauritius. My interviews were carried out in a manner to make my participants feel that they were being treated with a level of respect, compassion and interest, whilst my findings have been analysed from a feminist lens using a combined methodology borrowed from feminist research practices, phenomenology and intersectionality.

Through my interviews⁸ with some 76 women (some of whom invited me to hold focus group discussions to have a broader understanding of the way their associations operated, and some who invited me to their activities such as “Celebrating International day of the Elderly” and “International Volunteer Day”, I am able to show that the substantive representation of women does not necessarily require a female “critical

⁸ Interviews were held with around 76 women, some of whom invited me to hold focus group discussions to have a broader understanding of the way their associations operated, and some who invited me to their activities such as “Celebrating International day of the Elderly” and “International Volunteer Day”,

mass” in formal politics. Rather, I analyse the multitude of ways in which women as “critical actors” at different levels including grass-roots, State structures and the Parliament seek to address their practical and strategic needs/interests, in light of their intersectionality. Through my other findings, I maintain that for effective substantive representation and women’s empowerment to take place, there needs to be a non-linear process of interaction by women at these three levels, based on the decriminalization of abortion (2012) case study in Mauritius. I thus conclude by stating that both formal and informal institutional politics contribute to organise a conducive environment that enable and influence gender sensitive policy processes and outcomes.

In order to conduct my research in Mauritius, I developed a methodology underpinned by qualitative research and obtained approval by the University Ethics Committee, following which I undertook field research in Mauritius from August 2013 to January 2014. Field research was critical to me, given the gap in knowledge and to give a space for women’s voices to be heard. Women were my primary key informants through oral testimonies and I was guided by Audre Lorde’s statement:

...I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared...

-Audre Lorde, *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*

My research is two-fold, looking at the issues that remain important to women, and whether these are being substantially represented. However, throughout my interviews, I came to the realisation that intersectionality impacts on what women see as being of interest to them. These markers of identity were manifested through the age, ethnicity

and class of the participants and impacted on their pathways they embarked upon to gain entry into informal politics. Hence, amongst the other questions I investigate, this further leads me to question how women organise themselves to exercise their sense of agency in light of their intersectionalities.

In order to frame my chapter, I have chosen to divide it into different sections, namely, to discuss my qualitative approach and its relevance to my study; the research design and demographics of participants; the interview processes; the processes and considerations that I adhered to and provide a preliminary presentation of findings in the research processes. I briefly look at the methodological challenges identified in the literature in terms of undertaking intersectional analysis in light of the “status” and number of social categories and then look into analysing women’s lived experiences and narratives to gain a better understanding of how their issues of interest have been and are being shaped, as well as how they have participated in diverse forms of politics.

The underlying reasons that brought me to choose the field of women and politics is that in Mauritius, as well as in different parts of the world, the number of women who are in formal politics is low (22.1 percent)⁹, and I wanted to find out how, in a deeply patriarchal society, women transgress from the private to the public sphere, under what conditions and in what ways they perform these critical political act. There is also a deep concern that women’s interests are not being substantively represented at the uppermost echelons of decision making. Yet, despite this lack in descriptive representation, there have been positive changes in the status of women in Mauritius, for example, girls seem to perform better than men in the educational sector.

⁹ IPU, 2014, Women in Parliament: 20 years in Review, Available online at <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/WIP20Y-en.pdf>, Last Accessed 3 August 2017

Nevertheless, in the context of a democratic Mauritius where the State has signed and ratified a number of international and regional human rights instruments to further the status of women and empower them in the social, political and economic spheres, the fact remains that there is a very low percentage of women in the Parliament, which in turn questions the state of Democracy and good governance in Mauritius. In the same vein, it remains essential to analyse the ways that women are systematically underrepresented in Parliament. At the same time, Mauritius is taken to be a “super civil” society¹⁰, hence, the possibility of organizing at the community level remains an avenue of opportunity to have women’s interests represented, through activism and a bottom-up approach to decision-making.

Concurrently, Mauritius is a pluri-ethnic society as a result of the successive wave of immigrants who were brought to the island from Europe, Africa and Asia, which entails that women are divided by their intersectionalities, based on, their ethnicities and class. The dividedness of the population on multiple issues based on their ethnicities and communalism is also flagrant given the fact that there was an ethnic conflict in the struggle towards national independence in 1968 and subsequently in 1999. Likewise in present day politics, communalism plays a major role in the way that candidates are given electoral tickets and in the way that they are placed in their respective and winnable constituencies. The social and political dynamics of the country makes it an interesting case study- more so when women decide to enter the formal political sphere.

As I started delving in the topic of women in politics in Mauritius, it appeared to me that the actions and stories of women were glaringly missing in the history of the

¹⁰ Miles, William F.S., 1999, "The Mauritius Enigma," *Journal of Democracy*, 10(2), April, 91-104.

making of Mauritius, apart from very few women figures. The few books that were available provided an androcentric view and spoke of the male political figures and their actions towards the independence of the nation. At the same time, the few stories that were retold in books revolved around the status of women as being the wives of these political figures, nothing more. Nevertheless in Mauritius, Governments had put in place policies and have adopted laws to empower women, more specifically, decriminalizing abortion, which remains a crucial issue related to women's choice. There is now also an affirmative action law that requires for a 30 per cent representation for women at the Local Governmental Level which has significantly increased the number of women in politics at that level.

I thus became enthusiastic to carry out more in-depth research to see how these laws have come into place and investigate whether women's organizing has played an integral part in terms of framing such claims and how these laws have been debated in Parliament, thus looking at the actions of critical actors and their roles in this process. To that effect, in order to frame my research, I had to go back to the roots of women's organisations in Mauritius, to examine whether Mauritius has a history of women's political movement and analyse their gains and challenges in terms of addressing women's interests. However, due to the lack of academic research in the field of women in politics in Mauritius, I depended on a few primary sources that did not provide a historical and contemporary analysis *per se* on the women's movement, nor address the barriers and conditions which affected women's move from the private to the public sphere. Women's voices and stories did not seem to resonate through the analysis. The few publications that I managed to obtain from Australia merely provided statistics on

women's representation in Parliament and company boardrooms, while it appeared that the women's action group (or women's movement) in Mauritius is dormant despite the fact that the National Women's Council (women's umbrella organisation) had an affiliation of around 1500 women's associations. The actions of small women's associations were obscenely completely invisible. The actions of these women at the grass-roots remained to be analysed to look at the type of organising that they are doing, and whether they are able to bring their issues up to the level of State structures, the failure of which would result in having organs of the State unaware of the needs and interests of women at the community level, and issues of importance and concern to women (women's interests) remaining at the periphery of development.

Thus, this research led me back to my home country to encapsulate women's voices and close the gap in knowledge and academic research on the field of women and political agency in Mauritius. The way that I have looked at politics has been to redefine its traditional androcentric definition. By enlarging the notion of "politics", the ways that other form of non-institutional forms of politics becomes visible. To bridge this gap in research, my main questions have revolved around how women have regrouped themselves and in what circumstances and what types of issues of interests have they addressed in the past, and how women are presently addressing their needs in present day Mauritius. To make my analysis more complete, I also look at the role and capabilities of women in formal political institutions and examine whether they are able to navigate through an essentially male dominated sphere and investigate whether there is a channel of communication between women at the top levels of decision making and at the bottom/ receiving end of policies and programmes. The intermediate

structure is further questioned by looking at the role, capability, coordinating structures and programs of the State agency for women's empowerment and gender equality that is the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare.

My research aim was not to quantify my data, but to gain insights into what are women's issues in Mauritius, and how these were being addressed through women organising in formal and non-institutional politics. A qualitative methodology was undeniably fitting in order to explore the multifarious dimensions of the participant's lived experiences, the meanings derived from those experiences that in turn shaped the way in which they framed issues of concern¹¹. The qualitative method design enabled me to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's lives, understand the differences amongst women as well as a contextual variation given the multi-ethnic aspect of Mauritian society. It further enabled me to understand the commonalities in issues of interest amongst women as well as any patterns or emerging issues in Mauritius.

Feminist Methodology as a Central and Mainstreaming theme

Methods in themselves are not inherently gendered, the research has ensured that "feminist questions" infuse all parts of the research process, and mainstreamed the standpoints and experiences of women. There are different positions with respect to what makes research feminist in nature¹² and the idea that there is a particular form of

¹¹ D'cruz H. & Jones M., 2004, *Social work research: Ethical and political contexts*, Sage, pg. 3-16

¹² Wheaton B., Watson B., Mansfield L., Caudwell J., 2018, Feminist Epistemologies, Methodologies and Method. In: Mansfield L., Caudwell J., Wheaton B., Watson B. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Feminism and Sport, Leisure and Physical Education*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, pg. 203-208

feminist research is agreed upon in the literature¹³. Feminist research in this thesis is defined by the values and process that underpin that research¹⁴. Based on the multi-stranded political ideologies of the women's movement of the seventies, feminist research recognizes women's lived experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge. Hence, the feminist methodology in this research has sought to eradicate sexism and bias, based on essentialism and privilege, to capture women's voices that remain consistent with feminist ideals. In line with the existing literature, this research has sought to reduce the hierarchical relationship between myself as a researcher and the participants to facilitate trust and has sought to recognise and reflect on the emotionality and lived experiences of women interviewed. Thus, there is a widely agreed commitment to creating social change and critiquing the prevailing methods of knowing¹⁵. Moreover, in order to have a feminist approach, the research process has incorporated a gender sensitive lens and feminist approach to the way that the research and interviews are conducted, the techniques used and the epistemology, namely, in the ways of creating knowledge.

The research is further seen as having adopted a feminist methodology in the sense that it has sought to highlight the meanings that women have given to their experiences, narratives and their livelihoods, whilst acknowledging that the research is being undertaken in institutions that still remain patriarchal in nature in Mauritius. The principles of different types of feminism have been used to inform all stages of the

¹³ Maynard, M. (1994). Methods, practice and epistemology: The debate about feminism and research. In M. Maynard & J. Purvis (Eds.), *Researching women's lives from a feminist perspective*, Oxon: Taylor and Francis, pg. 10, pg 11-26

¹⁴ Campbell J., Wasco S.M., 2000, "Feminist Approaches to Social Science: Epistemological and Methodological Tenets" in *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 28(6)., pg 773-791

¹⁵ Kelly, L., Burton, S., & Regan, L. (1994). Researching women's lives or studying women's oppression? Reflections on what constitutes feminist research. In M. Maynard & J. Purvis (Eds.), *Researching women's lives from a feminist perspective* (pp. 27-48). Oxon: Taylor and Francis.

Michelle O., Tremblay M., 2000, *Questionnements Feministes et Methodologie de la Recherche*, Montreal et Paris: L'Harmattan

research process, starting from the title, to the interview process to the analysis of the data¹⁶. Given that the category of women is not a homogenous group, this research is also characterised by its diversity and using intersectionality as a feminist method, as well as its interdisciplinary focus (politics and feminist). It has further used different methodologies to reflect the diversity and concerns of women from different backgrounds and perspectives, in the context of a post-colonial and multi-ethnic society, in line with Greaves *et al*¹⁷. who state that the actual context of research should underpin the choice of methodology, instead of finding the most appropriate method for every context. Hence, the research has adopted a variety of methods.

The literature identifies five basic principles in epistemology that renders a research feminist in nature, namely, taking women and gender as the core of analysis; the critical dimension of consciousness raising; rejecting the “subject” and “object” by according a high level of value to the expert knowledge of the participant (mostly females), and conceding that objective research will reflect a particular social and historical standpoint. Lastly, the research ultimately seeks to empower women and redress unequal gendered power relations by identifying the ways that substantive representation is taking place (or not), identifying the gaps and providing recommendations on how to redress existing gaps¹⁸. Whilst this research has endeavored to achieve an ideal feminist research process and methodology, there are

¹⁶ Ralph, D. (1988). "Researching from the Bottom: Lesson of Participatory Research for Feminists". In *From the Margins to the Centre: Selected Essays in Women's Studies Research*, edited by Dawn Currie, Saskatchewan: The Women's Studies Research Unit, University of Saskatchewan, pg. 134-141

Robbins, W., 1996, "Dollars and Sense, or, Reflections and Projections of a Feminist Researcher," in *Memories and Visions: Celebrating 20 Years of Feminist Research* with CRIAW/ICREF, 1976-1996. Ed. Linda Clippingdale. Ottawa: CRIAW/ICREF, pg.170-77

¹⁷ Greaves, L., Wylie, A., and the Staff of the Battered Women's Advocacy Centre: C. Champagne, L. Karch, R. Lapp, J. Lee & B. Osthoff, 1995, "Women and Violence: Feminist Practice and Quantitative Method". In *Changing Methods: Feminists Transforming Practice*, Sandra Burt and Lorraine Code (Eds.), Ontario: Broadview Press, pg. 334.

¹⁸ Cook, J. and Fonow, M. M., 1986, "Knowledge and Women's Interests: Issues of Epistemology and Methodology" in *Feminist Sociological Research*. *Sociological Inquiry*, 56 (4), pg. 2-29

nevertheless the limitations of having outside forces impacting on the choices and decisions being made thereon, for example, the individuals interviewed who have an investment in the outcome of the data analysis and may gear their answers in a particular way¹⁹. It is acknowledged that the findings of this research can definitely not speak for or be representative of all women in Mauritius, but rather it has strived to provide a new form of knowledge as grounded in the realities of the women and stakeholders who have been interviewed.

Mainstreaming Feminist Methodology and Intersectionality

Feminism in itself is multidimensional in nature and draws on a multifarious range of standpoints, methods and techniques to carry out enquiry. At the beginning of the process of conceptualising my own understanding of feminism, I hesitated with respect to my own position or what kind of feminism I espoused and whether I was a radical feminist at heart. I sought to find an answer to the aim of feminism itself, or whether to me the ultimate goal of feminism was gender equality and equity in access to power and resources. Despite this initial convoluted task of self-reflexivity, which in a way, is still being negotiated, I have acknowledged that I have a feminist existence, and reminded myself of two notions, that of women being valuable human beings with equal human

¹⁹ Ralph D. presents a power pyramid which shows how different levels of power inform the decision making process. In the pyramid, the feminist researcher remains on the bottom of the structure as it is stated that the latter has a high level of difficulty in controlling the choices being made by the different outside factors. Ralph, D., 1988, "Researching from the Bottom: Lesson of Participatory Research for Feminists". In *From the Margins to the Centre: Selected Essays in Women's Studies Research*, Dawn Currie (Ed.), Saskatchewan: The Women's Studies Research Unit, University of Saskatchewan, pg. 140.

rights and needs, and the “need for social change if women are to lead secure and satisfying lives”²⁰.

At the core of my thinking, I am a feminist and throughout this thesis, I advocate for substantial change in the way that women’s human rights and needs are conceptualised, and all while embodying ideas that support elemental changes in the way that women’s needs and interests are represented, and ultimately, to achieve gender equality and equity. Feminism and its values of equity and equality, and its humane sympathetic face have shaped and informed the way that my ethical and rational thoughts have operated since I started my first course of study at Flinders University. Subsequently, it has guided my work in developmental agencies and is now underpinning the formulation of my research methodology, including research questions, the recruitment of participants, data collection technical, analytical processes and being sensitive to the multiple lived experiences of women, especially in a plural society bearing on women’s intersectionality.

Intersectional analysis was deemed crucial in order to have a holistic understanding of what women viewed as being of interest to them as these were directly impacted upon by their race, class and age, amongst other markers of identity. I also aim to demonstrate that through an in-depth analysis of women’s lived experiences, I was able to have a reliable starting point to understand how women’s intersectionality was important in framing their issues. Adopting an intersectional methodology has deemed critical in looking at the differences between categories of women in the research design of my study but it also had its implications in analysing

²⁰ Crawford M. & Unger R. K., 2004, *Women and Gender : A Feminist Psychology*, McGraw-Hill: Boston, pg.8

narratives of participants in Mauritius, their origins and routes they undertook to enter institutional politics and further to look at how women have constructed their social boundaries according to their intersectionality. I see intersectionality as a framework for analysis to look at the interplay of different categories that set how the way that women are positioned in society and how they position themselves affects the way that they frame issues that are relevant to them. I see intersectionality as addressing a crucial theoretical and normative concern in feminism linked to difference²¹, capturing the multidimensional nature and complexity of women's individual and collective experiences and interests. Moreover, I do not wish to reach a representational dilemma that is exclusionary; but hold true to decentring woman as a collective subject²² and believe that intersectionality offers an opportunity in that regard. My findings are relevant in that they uncover invisibilities constituted through the multiple social positioning of women.

In Mauritius, I find that these categories of intersectionality relate to gender²³ class, ethnicity and age, and these categories seem to resemble markers in the existing literature²⁴. It is written that an intersectional approach is based on how various social "classifications" are formed and reinforce each other into an overall system of social

²¹ Lutz H. Year. Intersectional Analysis: A Way Out of Multiple Dilemmas Brisbane. *In: International Sociological Association Conference, July, 2002 Brisbane*

²² Spivak G. C., 1988, Can the Subaltern Speak?, *Reflections on the history of an idea*, pg. 21-78
Spivak argues that subalterns will continue to engrave their subordinate position in society when they reclaim a collective cultural identity. The assumption of having a subaltern collective identity becomes similar to ethnocentrism or essentialism, which then doesn't account for heterogeneity of the colonised body politics.

²³ I have not had the opportunity to speak to participants from the LGBTQ group as there seems to be an invisibility around such issues, but managed to have an interview with one participant who identifies as LGBTQ and I hence make quick critiques of heteronormativity as an issue of interest, however do not delve in any deeper given the lack of participants.

Herrera Vivar M. T., 2011, Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies, Routledge:London

²⁴ Phoenix A., 2011, Psychosocial intersections: Contextualising the accounts of adults who grew up in visibly ethnically different households, pg. 137-152

Phoenix A., 2006, Editorial: Intersectionality, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol13(3), pg. 187

differentiation or oppression²⁵ resulting in sets of identities that reciprocally constitute each other²⁶. At the same time, I do not want to reduce intersectionality to the “race/class/gender/age” at the risk of categorising intersectionality into a “quadrilogy”. I see intersectionality as both difference between women by deconstructing the category of gender, whilst at the same time looking at the simultaneous interplay of different categories of inequality.

Scholars such as Hornschied, have stated that the intersectionality framework of analyses may ignore some types of feminist knowledge that do not look at intersectionality for example, earlier forms of black feminist writings are seen as an unfinished agenda. Hornschied and other scholars further argue that intersectionality focuses on social categories but overlooks “categorisation” as a process²⁷. Inspired by these arguments, I see the need in my research to look at intersectionality as a process and power being relational, especially when women in Mauritius have been divided across ethnicity through colonialism; class boundaries as Mauritius underwent economic restructuring in the late eighties; as well as a new form of younger women’s activism in the country. My dynamic and evolving process-centred approach seems to resonate with the work of a few scholars such as Choo and Ferree²⁸ who write in terms of “racialization, more than races, economic exploitation rather than classes, gendering

²⁵ Collins P. H., 1998, It's all in the family: Intersections of gender, race, and nation, *Hypatia*, 13(3), pg. 62-82

²⁶ Bruitelaar, 2006, I am the Ultimate Challenge: Accounts of Intersectionality in the Life-Story of a well-known Daughter of Moroccan Migrant Workers in the Netherlands, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol.15(3), pg. 211-228

²⁷ Hornscheidt A., 2009, Intersectional challenges to gender studies—gender studies as a challenge to intersectionality, *Gender Delight. Science, Knowledge, Culture and Writing*, pg. 33-46; Christensen A.-D. & Jensen S. Q., 2012, Doing intersectional analysis: Methodological implications for qualitative research, *NORA-Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 20(2), pg. 109-125; McCall L., 2005, The complexity of intersectionality, *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 30(3), pg. 1771-1800
Helma L., Vivar M. T. H. & Spunik L., 2011, Framing intersectionality: Debates on a multi-faceted concept in gender studies, *Farnham: Ashgate*, pg. 8

²⁸ Choo H. Y. & Ferree M. M., 2010, Practicing intersectionality in sociological research: A critical analysis of inclusions, interactions, and institutions in the study of inequalities, *Sociological theory*, 28(2), pg. 134

Ferree M. M., 2011, The discursive politics of feminist intersectionality, *H. Lutz, M. Vivar, & L. Supik, Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, pg. 55-65

Yuval-Davis, 2006, Intersectionality and Feminist Politics, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol13(3), pg. 200, pg. 193-209

and gender performance rather than genders”. Likewise, Squires²⁹ cautions against the ontological differences between categories, stating the “distinctive nature of each inequality strand”, as gender identity operates differently from class identity and the latter operates differently from ethnic identity. My research thus agrees with scholars who support the notion that forms of differentiation such as gender/race/class affect individuals differently on both an identity formation and structural level. Furthermore, I see my research fitting along the idea that notions of differentiation are shaped by power relations and, in turn, shape power relations³⁰. I also do not see some forms of differentiation as superseding or being more powerful than others, for example, I do not see race as being the dominant form of oppression, but rather mutually constitutive.

Concurrently, Lutz identifies fourteen categories in intersectional analysis³¹. I am mindful of an interminable list of categories and intersectionality being a “chimerical concept”³², but have resorted to narrowing and framing³³ my analysis based on the historical and contextual conditions of the island, and have pinned down anchorage points for my analysis to render it context and history specific. Also mindful of the fact that including standpoints of men as members of society would make my analysis richer in contributing to knowledge about how the substantive representation of women’s interests is being (or not) undertaken³⁴. Including some voices of men was important to me as the voices of the more powerful and privileged also position the voices of those

²⁹ Squires J., 2007, *The New Politics of Gender Equality*, Palgrave:United Kingdom, pg. 162

³⁰ Conaghan J.A.F., 2009, Intersectionality and the Feminist Project in Law. in E Grabham, D Cooper, J Krishnadas & D Herman (eds), *Intersectionality and Beyond: Law, Power and the Politics of Location*, Routledge: Cavendish, pg. 21

³¹ Lutz H., 2002,r. Intersectional Analysis: A Way Out of Multiple Dilemmas. *In: International Sociological Association Conference*, July, 2002 Brisbane.

³² Lutz, 2011, “Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies”, Routledge, London, pg. 45

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ Yuval–Davis N., 2011, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*, Sage:London, pg. 1-46

Yuval-Davis N., 2006, Intersectionality and Feminist Politics, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, Vol.13(3), pg. 193-207

viewed as less privileged, creating nuanced differences in understanding what are perceived as being women's interests in Mauritius.

In order to enrich and validate an intersectional approach, I also look at the importance of women narrating their life-stories. Narration is not new in the literature, however, is vital in my research as women have told their lived experiences in relation to their intersectional identities and I have seen a trend emerging in terms of how women have recounted their stories based on their social categories (age/class/ethnicity and religion). This aspect has also been emphasised in the literature³⁵. Women have told their stories speaking from different intersectional positions that Buitelaar refers to as the “dialogical self”³⁶.

My research is also anchored in a particular locality, and Mauritius has a colonial past. Slaves were brought from Africa to work the land, Traders were brought from China, Indentured Labourers from India and White colonists from Europe. I have looked at the roots of the women participants and how their historical backgrounds have shaped and continue to shape their intersecting identities and issues of interest. These historical differentiations are still present in contemporary Mauritian society and impact on the social and class positioning of women and men. For example, one of my female participants belonging to the category of “Person of African Descent” sees class as an economic notion, but also sees class as a social and educational matter in the way that she was not able to finish primary school and cannot obtain better paid jobs, and hence sees herself as lower class based on her ethnicity. On the same issue, one female

³⁵ Prins B., 2006, Narrative Accounts of Origins: A Blind Spot in Intersectional Approach, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol13(3), pg. 288, pg 277-290

³⁶ Buitelaar, 2006, pg. 261 as cited in Bilge S., 2010, Recent Feminist Outlooks on Intersectionality, *Diogenes*, 225, pg. 58-72

participant from an Indian background saw class as being a caste issue and was only allowed to marry a partner of the same caste. Focusing on differences within dissimilar ethnic groups ³⁷ further proved fruitful given the underlying caste system in Mauritius. This notion of historical belonging proved to be a common thread throughout my interviews and shaped women's perceptions of issues that are important to them.

Focusing on the every-day lives of the participants as a methodological framework was essential in my intersectional analysis as the latter framed their interests in light of their lived experiences. For my analysis, the experience of everyday life has been fruitful, as it has enabled me to look at categories of class/ethnicity in an indirect manner, and not directly ask participants whether the issue they have put forward is related to their class, thus discerning social categories without an a priori construction of such categories in my own mind. Similarly, asking about "class" to a participant may be sensitive, without me giving projecting a negative connotation; and with the same line of reasoning, not "othering" ethnic minorities as women of African descent. As much as possible, I have sought to show a level of respectability towards minority women. I have, to the extent that was possible to me, addressed Bourdieu's³⁸ argument of not looking down on minority women as well as their behaviour and culture as I was mindful that my research findings would bear cleavages within and between different ethnic groups in Mauritius. Likewise, I noticed that women within the same ethnic groups constructed boundaries between themselves. For example, one woman from a minority group talked

³⁷ Gullestad, 2006, also writes about dissecting the "us/them" binary and calls for a focus between and within minority and majority groups

Gullestad M., 2006, *Plausible prejudice: Everyday experiences and social images of nation, culture, and race*, Univ.-Forl.

³⁸ Bourdieu P., 1980, *The Logic of Practice.*, Stanford University Press: Stanford

Bourdieu P., 1984, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge:London

Bourdieu P., 1986, The Forms of Capital, In: RICHARDSON, J. G. (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Capital*. Greenwood Press: New York, pg. 241-258

Skeggs B., 2004, Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of class, gender and sexuality, *Sociological Review*, 52(33), pg. 19-33

about motherhood and parenthood as being an important issue of interest to her and passing on her culture, whilst she mentioned the fact that other women from the same locality did not take as much time to witness and value their children's development. She mentioned that she distanced herself from the other women in terms of what she believed was a discrepancy in "proper parenthood". Looking at every-day stories such as the latter showed to me that taking lived experiences as a starting point to understand women's interests also reveals how their intersecting categories are inextricably joined to frame their interests. It has further enabled me to look at the intra and inter-categorical differences in conceptualisation of women's interests in terms of looking at discursive differences in interests within and between ethnic groups³⁹.

Lastly, I have looked at intersectionality also in terms of power relations and dynamics. For example, looking at the history of women's political agency in Mauritius, I have observed that different "categories" of women in the colonial days were hostile amongst each other, but also cooperated with each other in some instances. They also overcame class differences in some instances, but at the same time, there are testimonies of some categories of women to secure their privileges in the hierarches through exclusion in certain processes.

Introducing Fragments of Phenomenology in my Qualitative Research

Given that I have asked women to elaborate on their lived experiences to frame the way that they have conducted political acts and addressed their interests, I find it apt to

³⁹ Mc Call L., 2005, The Complexity of Intersectionality, *Signs*, 30(3), pg. 1771-1800

introduce elements of phenomenology in my research, as a philosophical and qualitative method of inquiry on experience⁴⁰ which enables a rich analysis on lived experiences, as consciously experienced by subjects⁴¹. In this case, Sartre developed the notion of “nothingness” to assert that things that are absent and invisible remain as vital to analysis as those that are present and being said⁴², with an underlying assumption that the self-conscious is engaging individuals into a process of “becoming”.

In the same vein, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) examines subjective experiences as per the status quo. Mainstreaming an IPA approach proves fruitful in my analysis of women’s formulation of their interest as it provides a framework to look at women’s lived experiences and how their interests have been framed accordingly, as well as how the individual has a defined meaning of her lived experience⁴³. It further enables me to understand a “first person” from a “third person” perspective⁴⁴ and focus on the participant’s own perception, not running the risk of reducing their narratives to predefined categories. I adopted the three stages of IPA, namely, by understanding the subject matter before-hand, interrogating the responses and reflecting on the responses and doing self-reflection. Whilst designing my research questions for my interview schedules, I had presumed that the Government would formulate policies based on existing research of what constituted issues of importance

⁴⁰ Zahavi, Dan, 2003, *Husserl's Phenomenology*, Stanford: Stanford University Press

⁴¹ Smith, B. & Smith, D. W., eds. (1995), *The Cambridge companion to Husserl*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 301–302

⁴² Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, eds., 1974, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Volume 2: *Selected Prose*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press Sartre J-Paul, on Being and Nothingness, Also available online on <http://www.dhsprory.org/kenny/PhilTexts/Sartre/BeingAndNothingness.pdf>, last Accessed 13 April, 2016

⁴³ Smith J., Flowers P., Larkin M., 2009, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Theory, Method and Research*, Sage Publications, pg. 1

⁴⁴ Smith J., 1996, Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology, *Psychology & Health*, Vol.11(2)

to women. Hence, I reviewed the existing literature on what constituted practical and strategic issues to women in Mauritius, that is, what Mauritian women perceived to be important to them, however, there was no available research that had been undertaken in that respect, apart from the international reports submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and to the South African Development Community (SADC)⁴⁵. I then pondered on how the Government formulated their policies, based on what? Were women being involved in policy formulation and implementation processes? How would the Government know what policies/programs to design if there was no research on what women perceived as being issues of interests to them. I hence proceeded in a pathway of designing specific questions in my interview schedules to learn from women and their experiences, what issues affected their daily livelihoods or what they wanted to be addressed on the agenda. The different units of analysis, including the stories, my field reflections, the conversations all contributed to the narrative inquiry and gathering data for my analysis.

In light of the inductive approach of IPA, I appreciated the fact that it gave me room to manoeuvre, to look at emergent themes during the interview process enriching my analysis and my own experience of being a researcher in my own country and in a field that I have studied and practised in for almost 10-15 years since being an undergraduate student. The attractiveness of the IPA method being interrogative and its close linkage with the social sciences further meant that I had space to probe for new sources of information and also include aspects of narrative analysis. I was able to

⁴⁵ United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Fiftieth session, 2011, Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Mauritius, CEDAW/C/MUS/CO/6-7, Available Online at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/co/CEDAW-C-MUS-CO-6-7.pdf>, Last Accessed, May 2018

Southern African Development Community, 2018, "Protocol on Gender and Development", Available Online at <http://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/show/803>, Last Accessed May 2018

engage with my participants in a constructive dialogue, sharing stories and even relating to events. Therefore, I believe that having an interdisciplinary approach combining feminism, intersectionality IPA and phenomenology provides me with a framework for a richer analysis of my data.

An Integrative Approach- Mainstreaming Feminism, Intersectionality and Phenomenology?

I am of the firm conviction that feminist methodology benefits from phenomenology and vice versa, and incorporating intersectional analysis further enriches my analysis pertaining to a multi-ethnic society. The maxim by Simone de Beauvoir⁴⁶ immediately came to my mind, “One is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman”. In the same way, I thought, issues that are important to women (issues of interest) are just not “innate”, but are constitutively and performatively “produced” through lived experiences in an attempt to redress inequality and inequity and enhance livelihoods. Concurrently, as Butler⁴⁷ mentioned, gender identity is also performative. Hence, this led me to think, interests would vary according to gender identity/identities, which are inherently engrained with women’s intersectionalities. A link with feminist research practice, intersectionality and phenomenology to me was immediate to enable me to assess these complex interplays.

⁴⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone, 1973, *The Second Sex*, New York: Vintage Books, pg 301.

⁴⁷ Butler J., 1998, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, in *Theatre Journal*, Vol.40 (4), pg. pg. 519; Butler, J. (1986). *Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex*. *Yale French Studies*, (72), pg. 35-49.

Over the past thirty plus years, there seems to be a thriving literature on feminism and phenomenology⁴⁸, which provides a leeway to understanding in a valid manner women's interpretation of their own lived experiences through a feminist lens. As a research practice, feminist researchers seek to understand how the human experience is embodied, and interwoven into a cultural and personal maze, which gives significance to the research. Using a phenomenological and feminist research methodology approach, I have sought to enrich my analysis through a system of "double stock-taking" by acknowledging the responses of my interviewees, but also uncovering any silences that may have structured her discourses, all while bearing in mind the engrained power structures that have served to strengthen the patriarchal status quo. I have engaged in reflexivity to be more sensitive to my own prejudices and have embraced the fact that I am a Mauritian female doing research with and for Mauritian women. I believe this is a critical point as it enabled me to acknowledge my inter-subjectivity with my participants which I am convinced gave me an avenue to understand women's voices in a more genuine manner.

I felt that the analysis would be richer with phenomenology and interpretations of narratives. Phenomenology (almost an interdisciplinary use of phenomenology with a feminist lens) has been important in this context in terms of looking at consciousness-raising of women (female and feminist) through the stories that they have narrated during the interviews and analyse their lived experience pushing past the assumption that I would tend to bring to experience, so that the experiences that women have described are not seen as neutral, and challenging the universal subject of experience

⁴⁸ Fisher, L., & Embree, L. (Eds.). (2000). *Feminist phenomenology*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, pg. 1-15.

which may be white/middleclass. Thus we can discern between the two forms of consciousness. In light of the specific context of a plurality of ethnicities in Mauritius, phenomenology would prove critical to analyse the layers of living experiences.

Moreover, using feminist phenomenology facilitates a broader structural analysis of the situation within which the experience of the participant was unfolding.. Although the stories of the participants have not been quoted in the chapters, the narratives have proved essential. The point of the thesis was not to retrace the life-stories of participants, rather provide an analysis of the narratives, The limitations of adopting the feminist phenomenology method is that the participants should be able to articulate their thoughts about the experience they were narrating, and in some cases, it was felt that it was difficult for the older women to express themselves fully due to cognition or embarrassment. Moreover, it may be worthy to note that phenomenology has required for me to make interpretations, however, it is felt that care and rigour has been observed to reduce biases and my own preconceived ideas about an experience or how particular events have been recounted in history texts or are “common knowledge.

In the same vein, I acknowledge that my own identity and positioning vis-à-vis the participants in this research may create some limitations, however, I am under the impression that through our open dialogues, and being myself from the country, participants felt that they would be more comfortable to talk about their experiences. At times when the formal and official English language did not provide the right words to convey a specific meaning, participants switched to Creole which is the widely spoken language. At the level of Ministries, participants used English more often. Yet, as in any

qualitative research, responses are subjective, and it may be argued that interviewees have the latitude to always control their responses. However, I have endeavoured to produce a reliable analysis through the methodology that I have adopted. At the same time, I have to admit that my concerns may have, to a certain extent, been expressed in this research work. I have been concerned with the possibilities for building up horizontal relationships between State and non-State actors and the thesis has been geared in this way to answer some of my research questions to make the case for a collaborative approach towards substantive representation.

Intersectionality is coined as “the most important contribution that women’s studies has made so far”⁴⁹. As described by Davis, intersectionality recognises the fact that there are differences amongst categories of women and addresses exclusion within white feminist theorising⁵⁰. Intersectionality, being multidimensional provides a way to understand the “interlocking systems of oppression” or “matrix of domination” put forth by Collins or the combined effects of various structures and relations of oppression put forth by Beale⁵¹. Other scholars have also found it hard to separate women’s intersectionalities (class, race and gender) from sexual oppression⁵². In short, intersectionality provides the means to analyse difference between women and categories of women⁵³. Whilst I see intersectionality as an important methodological tool in my research, it has also been the object of theoretical debates. Some theorists have argued on which and how many categories are deemed sufficient for intersectional

⁴⁹ McCall, 2005, *The Complexity of Intersectionality*, Signs, Vol.30(3), pg. 1771

⁵⁰ Davis K., 2008, “Intersectionality as a Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes A Feminist Theory Successful”, in *Feminist*, Vol. 9(1), pg. 67-85

⁵¹ Beale F., 1979, *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female.*, New American Library:New York, pg. 90-100

Hill Collins P., 1990, *Black Feminist Thought*, Unwin Hyman:Boston

⁵² Combahee River Collective, 1981, pg. 213; Moraga C., Anzaldua G. , 1983, *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, New York: Kitchen Table Press

⁵³ Davis K., 2008, *Intersectionality as a buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful*, *Feminist Theory*, 9(1), pg. 67 - 85

analysis⁵⁴. I have deemed it important for my analysis to present a compromise on race, class, gender, ethnicity as a baseline for my analysis⁵⁵, however, I see that at the same time, there are other intersections that have cropped up which have impacted on women's issue framing, for example, a sense of national belonging. McCall⁵⁶ further looks at "critical categorisation", whilst Crenshaw⁵⁷ states a "vulgar constructionist" approach to deconstruct categories in the name of anti-essentialism. Crenshaw argues that identity politics should not be overlooked, however, needs to acknowledge the fact that there are multiplicity of identities, and calls on the need to look at the sites in which these categories intersect. In my research, I view intersectionality as a way to ground women's issues based on the socio-cultural, historical and political context in which they live.

In extending my analysis further based on the interviews carried out, as well as looking at the existing literature on colonialism in Mauritius, I have noted that post-structuralism has been beneficial to understanding "social categories". I put this point forward due to the fact that in Mauritius, it appears to me that identity categories such as gender, race, class, ethnicity cannot be understood in an essentialist way, but, rather, these are inscribed in the historical context and social terms that overlap and

⁵⁴ Lutz, 2002, Lutz presents a list of 14 different categories: gender, race, sexuality, skin colour, ethnicity, national belonging, class, culture, religion, able-bodiedness, age, sedentarities, property ownership, geographical location, status

Lutz, H., 2002, 'Intersectional Analysis: A Way Out of Multiple Dilemmas?', paper presented at the International Sociological Association conference, Brisbane, July. Other discussions that have guided this analysis include: Crenshaw, K., 1989, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics', University of Chicago Legal Forum, Vol.14, pg. 538-554; Felski, R., 1997, 'The Doxa of Difference', Sign, Vol. 23(1): 1-69; Haraway, D.J., 1988, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism as a Site of Discourse on the Privilege of Partial Perspective', Feminist Studies, Vol. 14(3), pg. 575-599. Knudsen, S.V., 2006, 'Intersectionality — A Theoretical Inspiration in the Analysis of Minority Cultures and Identities in Textbooks', pp. 61-76 in E. Bruillard, B. Aamotsbakken, S. V. Knudsen and M. Horsley (eds) Caught in the Web or Lost in the Textbook? Caen: IARMcCall, L., 2005, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', Signs, Vol. 30(3), pg. 1771-1800

⁵⁵ Leiprecht and Lutz, 2006 have also seen these "categories" as a "minimum standard", as cited in Marotta, V. & Scheibelhofer, P., 2013, 'Intersectionality: Legacies and Controversies', Journal of Intercultural Studies (Virtual Special Issue). Available online at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276214850_Intersectionality_Legacies_and_Controversies, Last Accessed May 2018. Leiprecht and Lutz, 2006 have also seen these "categories" as a "minimum standard".

⁵⁶ McCall, 2005, The Complexity of Intersectionality, Signs, Vol.30, No.3, pg. 1779, pg. 1771-1800

⁵⁷ Crenshaw K., 1991, Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol.43(6), pg. 1297-1299

create a foundation for the establishment of unequal social relationships and in turn inform the way that women frame their interests. I tend to relate this “anti-categorical” approach to Mohanty and Spivak, as well as Hall’s notion of “decentred positioning”⁵⁸. The latter argue that the subject has a temporary character, framing my argument that the intersectionality approach to how women frame their interests in Mauritius is related to the different social positioning of women and their relation to men, and allows me to reflect on ways in which women engage with their surroundings to voice their interests.

Clearly, the strength of an interdisciplinary approach of feminism, phenomenology and intersectionality has proved beneficial to my case study to look at difference and diversity in a plural society. I am aware of the debates around intersectionality as being too “open” to categories or even the idea of “categorisation” has been contested, however, I see this as a positive. The strength of mainstreaming intersectionality is that there is an emphasis on identity politics which is specific to the historical and socio-cultural context of Mauritius. It further makes visible the effects of intersectionality in the way that women have expressed their issues of interests and participate in formal or non-institutional politics. Intersectionality essentially being post-structural in nature

⁵⁸ Mohanty C., 2003, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Durham, Duke University Press
Mohanty C., 1988, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, *Feminist Review*, Vol. 30(6), pg. 1-88
Spivak G., 1993, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, London; Routledge
Crenshaw K., 2011, in Lutz, Helma, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik (Eds.), *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., pg. 33.
King D.K., 1988, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology”, *Signs*, Vol. 14, No. 1. Pg. 42-
Butler J., 1990, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge: NewYork, pg. 143
At the same time, one critic that may arise is the idea of “categorical thinking” to end the list of predicates relating to gender, race, class, sexuality, amongst others. Debates on intersectionality state the problem of categorising and relying on these categories for intersectional analysis. Knapp (2005) also mentions that intersectionality scholars have overlooked specific ontologies and histories behind social inequality

deconstructs the universal identity of woman, and provides a different way for me to explore power dynamics, resonating with the ideas of scholars in this field⁵⁹.

Using a Case Study Method

“The Case Study method⁶⁰ used in this research to look at the decriminalisation of abortion provides an avenue to study a particular event to substantiate the point being made in the thesis about how effective substantive representation has been carried out in Mauritius, in the absence of other examples in a relatively new independent state. The case study has further substantiated the different claims made by the participants who have stated in general that there is a lack of channel of collaboration between the grass-roots and the higher levels of decision-making and their aspiration for an enhanced collaboration to enrich representation. Using the case study method provides a detailed level of understanding of a distinct topic being researched as per Geertz’s notion of ‘thick description’, that provides an opportunity to carry out a thorough analysis of the multifaceted and precise nature of an event⁶¹. A case study method has been used in the light of its context-specific and holistic account that this method has to offer, and its contribution to theory-building but, to a lesser extent, theory-testing⁶².The case

⁵⁹ Brah, A., Phoenix A., 2004, “Ain’t I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality”, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 5(3), pg.84

Lykke N., 2005, *as cited in* Carbin M. & Edenheim S., 2013, “The Intersectional Turn in Feminist Theory: A Dream of a Common Language”, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 20(3), pg. 236

⁶⁰ Bennett, A. and Elman, C. (2007) ‘Case Study Methods in the International Relations Subfield’, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 40(2), pg.171; Robert Yin defines a case study method as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. Yin R., 2009, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. SAGE Publications Ltd: London, pg. 14

⁶¹ Geertz R., 1973 Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Clifford Geertz (Ed.), New York: Basic Books, pg. 3-30

⁶² Gerring, J. (2004) ‘What is a Case Study and What Is It Good for?’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol.98(2), pg. 341-354. Gerring, J. (2006a) *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge; Gerring, J. (2006b) ‘Single-Outcome Studies: A Methodological Primer’, *International Sociology*, Vol.21(5), pg. 707-734; Gerring, J. (2007) ‘Is There a (Viable) Crucial-Case Method?’, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol.40(3), pg. 231-253.

study used has been situated within a broader, pluralistic mixed-method qualitative research strategy.

Nonetheless, the limitation of the case-study method needs to be acknowledged in the sense that a poor case selection may otherwise lead to an over-generalisation and/or dangerous and significant misunderstandings of the relationship between the processes and topic being studied⁶³. Whilst looking at the decriminalisation of abortion, the case study has revealed that with a good level of collaboration (bottom-up/ top-down), an issue of women's concern has been brought to the political agenda and subsequently, the thesis has made a parallel with another example where the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development has not been fully ratified by Mauritius in light of the low level of mobilisation of all stakeholders and collaboration through a bottom-up and top-down approach.”

Recruiting of Qualitative Sample

Mauritius had seen a sharp decrease from 18.2 per cent of women in parliament in 2010 to 11.6 per cent in 2014. In contrast, following a reform in the Local Government Act (2011), the percentage of women councillors at local governmental level rose from 6.4 per cent to 26.2 per cent in 2014. Concurrently, there are approximately some 1500 women's associations registered under the National Women's Council representing the

⁶³ Bennett, A. and Elman, C. (2006a) 'Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol.9, pg. 460-463

umbrella organisation under the aegis of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare⁶⁴.

From an intersectional researcher point of view, the issue of difference and diversity is important to me, as well as the discursive nature of identities grounded in specific contexts. The specificity of Mauritius is that it is composed of people from different ethnic backgrounds from Africa, Asia and Europe each with their distinct identities. For my research, I had to ensure that I captured this diversity both in culture and perspectives, yet at the same time, because the Hindu population makes up a large percentage of the population, there were more participants from the Hindu population. Concurrently, I had to make sure that I reached out to women and other critical actors at different levels of society, namely, at the grass-roots level, State and Parliamentary levels. At no point in time, did I expect, however, to be able to interview the Secretaries/ Presidents of all the Women's Associations, nor is it my intention to make generalisations, however, I expected to find commonalities and divergence in issues important to women⁶⁵ as well as the ways in which women exercised their sense of agency.

The opportunity that was available to me in contacting and reaching out to my proposed sample was that I had been previously working in Mauritius, and hence had prior knowledge of the existence of larger organisations, or at least, their names and how they could be contacted. Using purposive sampling, I sent out the Information Sheet approved by the Ethics Committee (SBREC Approval 6202) to women

⁶⁴ IPU, 2014, Women in Parliament: 20 Years in Review, Available online at <http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/WIP20Y-en.pdf>, Last Accessed on 13 April, 2016

⁶⁵ I further refer to these issues as "issues of interest" to discern the issues that women have brought up during interviews as being important to them

participants identified in Table 1 and according to the Information Sheets and Questionnaire in Appendix 1.

Power Dynamics, Communication and Language

I had reservations going into the field in Mauritius given the fact that in Mauritian culture there is an aspect of hierarchy and relations of power between younger individuals and Elders as well as between women in ranks of power and decision-making. However, I found that once women MPs and other participants were given the assurance of confidentiality, they spoke in an honest and open manner addressing the questions that were being asked, identifying factors that they believed had led to their subordination. With regard to the older women in women's associations, they extended a warm joyful welcome, inviting me to their next activities and referring me to other women's associations. The fact that I was a Mauritian who spoke the three common languages also made the interview process easier. Mauritius being a multi-linguist country meant that participants conversed in three different languages at times, using all three languages in one sentence during the interviews. Being multi-lingual myself and being a native, there was no communication barrier, however, translating the very specific meanings of some words into English required some dexterity. Most women at the level of associations spoke creole, whilst women in State Structures and women MPs and Politicians replied in English or French or sometimes a combination of both, coupled by Creole. Some words and phrases that were spoken in creole by participants had to be

given meaning within in the socio-cultural and political context of the story being told, or in the irony of the situation.

Serendipity

During the course of my interviews with a couple of women members of one of the bigger women's organisation, it was brought to my attention that my grandmother had been amongst the group of women who had been actively engaged in non-institutional politics in the seventies through to the early nineties. My grandmother is now 93 years old. She had been part of the first wave of the women's movement in Mauritius, engaging in political activities such as walking from door to door to educate women about their sexuality, their right to contraceptives and encouraging women to get out of the domestic sphere and join Women Centres across the island. She had been a resource person at one of the Women Centres to build the capacity of women to engage in income-generating activities. She was also actively engaged in the women's political wing of one of the major political parties canvassing women to do their civic duties- creating feminist consciousness. Moreover, she was engaged in fund-raising activities with the assistance of my late grand-father to enhance the services being extended by one of the formal women's NGOs (Mauritius Alliance of Women). She had been considered to be included in the Mauritian delegation to participate in the Fourth World Conference on Women, however, due to the big lobby that was going on, in terms of many women wanting to attend the Conference, she was not able to attend the Conference. My grandmother was also sitting on various consultative committees

established by the Government in the eighties and nineties where she represented the NGO that she was a member of, raising women's concerns with members of the state structure. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I was unaware of her political engagement as she had sparingly told me her life story, however, given the richness of her experience, I decided to interview her over a period of days, which in turn proved to be invaluable in terms of contextualizing the first wave of the women's movement. She then referred me to another member of the NGO (who was in her eighties and has now unfortunately passed away) who had worked alongside her performing similar political acts during that period. The richness of information generated by both women has to be formally acknowledged in this thesis. I am grateful that such knowledge has been captured in this thesis and the experiences of what I consider to be silent pioneer activists documented.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter one has located the context of the research and provided an overview of the methodology that has been adopted to conduct the research and conclude on the findings. Chapter two is presented in the form of a literature review to establish the various theoretical frameworks that have been adopted and extended upon throughout the thesis to make the claim towards a redefinition of the politics of substantive representation of women. By employing the theoretical framework set out in the literature review chapter, this thesis then takes shape by weaving together a critique of the existing literature, addressing the gap in women's political representation in

Mauritius. Chapter two builds upon Pitkin's (1967) seminal work on "representation". Pitkin looks at "representation" as rendering subjects present again, therefore, re-presenting their perspectives and interests in public making processes. Pitkin presents four dimensions to representation including descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation, in this regard examines the extent to which the representative resembles the individuals being represented, whether they have common interests or share a level of shared experience; whilst substantive representation resonates with the activities and actions being taken on behalf of, and in the interests of the constituents, as well as whether the representative in fact advances their policy preferences. Subsequently, the Chapter provides a critique of Pitkin's theorising arguing that women are not a homogenous category and instead calls upon the politics of ideas and argues that there is a need to expand the original concept of representation to the notion of participatory democracy to understand representation as not only the legitimacy of democratic institutions of the State but also other sites of representation. This shift and expansion then becomes a way of understanding how public policies are being framed and interests represented. This idea then makes it possible to understand how associational life (through social movements and community based associations) can be recognised as part of an array of forms of democratic representation, as put forth by Mansbridge. Political representation is then not viewed as a monolithic process, rather as a two-way interaction of associations with the State and vice-versa. In the same vein, Young sees representation as a dynamic process. The literature review then provides an overview of women's engagement in movement politics looking at women's activities to address the different needs and

interests. I also provide a very brief overview of the Case study on Mauritius, looking at the few available literature on women's involvement in politics through their associational life. However, the Chapter also posits that there is a gap in the literature on women's engagement in this extended sphere of politics in Mauritius.

Chapter three subsequently attempts to fill this gap by looking at the political engagement of women around the period leading up to Independence and post-independence in Mauritius to make the claim that there is a rich history of women's activism in Mauritius, despite their invisibility in formal political institutions and in historical accounts. Looking at their different types of organising sets the tone for this thesis as it subsequently argues that there are essentially different waves of the women's movement in Mauritius each addressing the different interests of women, in light of their intersectionalities. In this respect, women's gendered identities and interests in Mauritius have been formulated in light of women's intersectionalities based on their ethnicity, gender and class. It subsequently informs the study about how women are performing substantive representation in different sites in Mauritius despite the low descriptive representation of women in Parliament.

Chapter four argues that without identifying women's interests in contemporary Mauritius, substantive representation cannot be effectively carried out. Therefore, based on the findings from the field work, the different types of issues that women have identified as being of importance to them (or issues of women's interests) are presented.

Chapter five then looks at how representation is being undertaken at the level of the State and State structures and questions whether the substantive representation of women, based on the interests that they have framed at the grass-roots level, is being effectively undertaken. In so doing, it looks at the way that women parliamentarians are able to act for and on behalf Mauritian women, and looks at the factors at play that enhance or impeded this process. It further looks at the role of the State Structure in place to address women's interests and further gender equality, and further analysis whether there is an effective channel of collaboration between the Women's Policy Agency and women at the grass-roots level

Chapter six subsequently looks at other sites of representation, arguing that there is a common ground for women's political organising in Mauritius which remains grass-roots activism. Furthermore, it states that women's organising is a result of a multiplicity of expressions and intersectional gendered identities; and, in a number of smaller women's associations, the activism being carried out further reflects the divisions across ethnic, social and class lines. Lastly, the Conclusion provides a summary of the findings of the different chapters and completes the research by providing elements of areas of recommendation to improve women's substantive representation in a multi-ethnic society such as Mauritius.

CHAPTER TWO

REDEFINING

WOMEN'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Within the gender and politics lexicon, it is established that women's participation in all aspects of democracy is vital to the quality of democracy⁶⁶, and women's under-representation in politics represents a democratic deficit⁶⁷. Furthermore, empirical research⁶⁸ on women's substantive representation in politics has often established a causal link between the number of women in institutional politics and gender sensitive outcomes. However, the nature of this link has been investigated by focusing on representation in formal parliamentary and institutionalised structures, within which women have been categorised as a homogeneous group with shared interests.

This Chapter however, asserts that rethinking women's political engagement and substantive representation in politics necessitates a further look at representation through extra-parliamentary structures in the different new spaces as well as more traditional areas outside formal politics where women participate as political actors via a kaleidoscope of actions, portray the power of their collective actions, but also articulate different interests. Through institutional or non-institutional politics, and in different sites of power, women as "critical actors"⁶⁹ have portrayed nuanced forms of agency in addressing a diversity of issues that affect their livelihoods and practical and strategic

⁶⁶ Craske N., 1999, *Women and Politics in Latin America*, Rutgers University: New Brunswick, pg. 1

⁶⁷ Lovenduski J., Baudino C., Guadagnini M., Meier P. & Sainsbury D., 2005, *State Feminism and Political Representation*, Cambridge University Press, pg. 2 Following the 1995 UN Beijing Platform for Actions, donor agencies have been quick to include programmes on "women in politics" as part of good governance.

Sawer M., Tremblay M. T. & Trimble L. J., 2006, *Representing Women in Parliament: A Comparative Study*, Routledge: New York, pg. 1

⁶⁸ Lovenduski J., 2005, *Feminizing Politics*, Polity Press: Cambridge

Mateo Diaz M., 2005, *Representing Women? Female Legislators in West European Parliaments*, ECPR Press: Colchester

⁶⁹ Kanter (1977) and Dahlerup (1988) write about critical mass theory (Grey, 2006). Childs (2008: xxvi) proposes instead the concept of "critical actors" referring those individuals who spearhead reforms or mobilise others to bring changes to policies. By evoking the term "critical actors", it renders it possible to look at women's substantive representation that is taking place in the absence of a large number of women.

needs not necessarily reducible to the family or gender⁷⁰ creating change in subtle or obtrusive ways⁷¹ in response to various forces⁷² thus confirming their political identity. In so doing, it adopts an inductive approach⁷³ to examine how and why women's substantive representation occurs and the broader processes of substantive representation by multiple actors at different levels. It subsequently seeks to inform the case study on women's substantive representation in Mauritius, which will look at where, why and how representation occurs.

This inductive approach has also been adopted in the gender mainstreaming literature which looks at the way in which gender is integrated in all stages of policy planning and implementation through inputs from different stakeholders⁷⁴. The aforementioned approach also finds its place in a body of literature on the study of women's substantive representation echoing recent conceptual development in the field of political theory and feminism that formulate representation as representative claims-

⁷⁰ Rakowski C. A., 2003, "Women as Political Actors: The Move from Maternalism to Citizenship Rights and Power", in *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 38(2), pg. 181

⁷¹ Dickinson T., Schaeffer R., *Transformations: Feminist Pathways to Global Change*, Paradigm Publishers: London.

Worden M. (ed.) 2012. *The Unfinished Revolution*, Australia: Spinifex Press, pg.1.

Hausman M. & Sauer B., 2007, *Gendering the State in the Age of Globalization: Women's Movements and State Feminism in Post-industrial Countries*, Rowman & Littlefield: UK, pg. 3

Childs S. & Krook M. L., 2010, *Women, Gender and Politics: A Reader*, Oxford University Press: New York, pg. 3

Purkayastha B. & Subramaniam M., 2004, *The Power of Women's Informal Networks: Lessons in Social Change from South Asia and West Africa*, Lexington Books: USA, pg. 2

⁷² For example, Hausmann & Sauer (2007) explore women's activism in response to State policies and interventions

Naples & Desai (2002) also look at women's activism in response to globalisation

Worden (2012) delves into women's political activism around gender issues and equal rights

In the case of Tibet, Bonnet (2012:14) concludes that the human-rights based strategies and the "grid of intelligibility" (Foucault 1973) adopted by women activists have forged their identities and how women's groups rethink their subjectivities

As the boundary between the public and personal has become more blurred, examples of political activism illustrating how the private has been merged with the political are diverse; for example, in Argentina, Chile and Algeria where women have carried out public demonstrations to defend their motherhood⁷². In fact, ideologies relating to motherhood and democracy have become one of the political tools used by women to begin and justify resistance and politicisation

⁷³ Celis K., Childs, S., Kantola, J. and Krook, M. L. (2009) 'Constituting Women's Interests through Representative Claims', Paper presented at the APSA Annual Conference, Toronto, Canada, 3–6 September

⁷⁴ Burton Hafner E., & Pollack M., 2000, Mainstreaming gender in the European Union, *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 7(3), pg. 432–455

Verloo M. 2001. *Another Velvet Revolution? Gender Mainstreaming and the Politics of Implementation*, Instituut voor de Wetenschappen Wom Menschen, IWM Working Paper No. 5

True J., 2003, Mainstreaming Gender in Global Public Policy, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 5(3), pg. 368–396

Rai S. (ed.), 2003. *Mainstreaming Gender, Democratizing the State: Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

making; and what Squires refers to as the “constitutive representation of gender”⁷⁵ which, she argues, complements substantive representation. Women’s substantive representation is seen therein as a dynamic process. This concept further argues that women’s interests are constructed through claims, instead of being merely a societal construct. Indeed, the concept of “women’s interests” has been problematised in the literature⁷⁶, where it has been argued that “women’s interests” have been frequently viewed in terms of essentialism⁷⁷ or normative views of women as a group; or where it has either been reduced to the agenda of women’s groups⁷⁸, homogenising women; or where selecting gender specific issues leaves invisible other types of representative acts and actors⁷⁹.

Subsequently addressing women’s substantive representation of women in a holistic manner requires an exploration of the literature on representation, and competing conceptions of women’s/ feminist “interests” to answer the question of *who* acts for women. The literature on different sites of power for women is also explored as well as the institutional mechanisms to answer the question of *where* substantive representation takes place. In a bid to look at *how* substantive representation occurs,

⁷⁵ Squires distinguishes between the Substantive Representation of Women (SRW) and Constitutive Representation of Gender (CRG) in the way that SRW looks at one aspect of the representative. Process where elected parliamentarians speak for female constituents through a priori defined interests, CRG looks at the ways in which unelected femocrats and gender experts formulate these interests through conceptions of gender relations. Squires argues that CRG provides a way at looking at how gender relations are constituted through representative claims making processes, and the “representative process needs to be understood as both enabling and constraining”.

Squires J., 2008, *The Constitutive Representation of Gender: Extra Parliamentary Re-Presentations of Gender*, pg. 187

Saward M., 2006, “The Representative Claim”, in *Contemporary Political Theory*, Vol. 5(3), pg. 297–318.

Relations, *Representation*, 44(2), pg. 187-204 Squires J., 2005, Is Mainstreaming Transformative? Theorising Mainstreaming in the Context of Diversity and Deliberation, *Social Politics*, Vol. 12(3), pg. 366-388

Daly M., 2005, Gender Mainstreaming in Theory and Practice, *Social Politics*, Vol. 12(3), pg. 433–450

⁷⁶ Chappell L. & Hill L. (eds.), 2006, *The Politics of Women’s Interests: New Comparative Perspectives*. London: Routledge

⁷⁷ Celis, K et al., 2009, “Constituting Women’s Interests through Representative Claims”, Paper presented at *the APSA Annual Conference*, Toronto, Canada, 3–6 September.

⁷⁸ Carroll S. J., 2001, *The Impact of Women in Public Office*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Cowell-Myers K. & Langbein L., 2009, Linking Women’s Descriptive and Substantive Representation in the United States, in *Politics and Gender*, Vol.5(4), pg. 491–518

Swers M. L., 2002, *The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁷⁹ Celis, K., 2008, “Studying Women’s Substantive Representation in Legislatures: When Representative Acts, Contexts and Women’s Interests become Important”, in *Representation: Journal of Representative Democracy*, Vol. 44(2), pg. 111–123.

interventions by the State and non-State actors at various levels are investigated. Answering the question of *why* women's representation is attempted by critical actors remains complex. Thus, this chapter goes beyond considering the numbers of women in formal politics to look at women as critical actors in terms of the different sites of power and actions that they are engaged in, which contribute to their substantive representation. Simultaneously, it acknowledges that more women in higher instances of decision-making contribute towards a more inclusive development agenda where gender equality and women's empowerment is mainstreamed into policy and programmatic processes⁸⁰. The political is thus reconstructed to include multiple activities where women participate in and are able to exert agency over structures of the State and policy formulation and implementation⁸¹. The Chapter also highlights women's sense of agency through their activism in different sites of power in democracies. Finally, this section seeks to explore women's engagement in formal and informal politics within the Mauritian context, which will further inform the scope and constraints of the connection, if any, between descriptive and substantive representation of women.

Point of Reference- Feminism as a Political Paradigm

The term feminism is difficult to analyse as a single rubric as it has no common agenda for all women. Similarly, the thesis uses the term "feminism", not as a "women's rights" focus, but rather as having a political definition and philosophy. The study of "women in

⁸⁰ Evidence shows that that women in parliament contribute to, but not limited to, an increased sponsorship and priority of legislation concerning women's issues, social policy issues such as peace and child welfare
Fallon K., M., 2008, *Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movement in Sub-Saharan Africa*, The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, pg. 1

⁸¹ Craske N., 1999, *Women and Politics in Latin America*, Rutgers University: New Brunswick, pg. 1

politics” has traditionally been equated with the institutional aspect of politics and linked to power, the exercise of power and collective action in institutions. Conventional literature on politics has subsequently treated the political as encompassing formal State apparatus and government, or put simply- what concerns the State. This perspective hence distinguished between the public arena and the private sphere, and further distinguished between the political and the personal⁸². Dating back to ancient Greece, this system of democracy built on the public/private divide provided a Universalist model of citizenship that often excludes difference⁸³ has rather served the interests of men.

Feminist theorising has criticised this construction of the public/private divide arguing that it has served to hide and perpetuate women’s oppression⁸⁴, and instead contested with the slogan that “the personal is political” suggesting that politics is being enacted everywhere, in different spaces through different critical acts⁸⁵. The adoption of this maxim provided an avenue to deconstruct the state/market/family aspects of the public/ private divide. Subsequently, social relations that were otherwise viewed as personal or private as well as issues of importance to women that had been previously relegated to the private sphere and had a disparate impact on women were politicised. This shift provided an impetus for feminism and women’s associations and organisations to mobilise and advocate for equal rights. The public/private dichotomy

⁸² Heywood A., 2007, *Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, pg. 91 Feminism has criticised this latter construction of politics as confined to the public power of the State on the basis that it was restrictive.

⁸³ Rai M.S., 2000, *International Perspective on Gender and Governance*, Macmillan Press, UK

⁸⁴ Boyd S., 1997, *Challenging the Public/Private Divide: Feminism, Law, and Public Policy*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto, pg. 12. See also Pateman C., 1983, “Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy”, in *Public and Private in Social Life*, pg. 118 Pateman writes that “the dichotomy between the public and the private ... is ultimately what feminism is about”.

⁸⁵ Squires J., 1999, *Gender and Political Theory*, Polity: Cambridge, pg. 21. There’s a lot of references here and in other places why? If they are used directly then should be there you may want to get rid of some of it.

Mackinnon C., 1989, *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*.

Pateman C., 1983, “Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy”, in *Public and Private in Social Life*., pg. 295-298

Heywood A., 2007, *Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, pg. 98

was, therefore, seen as one of the crucial frameworks for feminist law reform efforts and activism.

A number of feminist analyses, however, critique the universality of the public/private dichotomy's conceptualisation of women's subordination, in terms of its construction around family ideologies of capitalist societies. They have also remarked that this construction of the public/private divide (State versus family) blocks further analysis on how it functions in relation to race, sexuality, culture and class, across time and location. It has thus been argued that the public/private divide should not be taken as a determinate division. The public/private dichotomy takes gender as the basis for women's oppression, examining how these other identities intersect with gender is rendered difficult. Similarly, it is argued that not all households are structured on the model of Pateman's "sexual contract"⁸⁶. Subsequently, some studies demonstrate that States' intervention reinforce gendered roles and relations⁸⁷. Principles relating to private familial life based on the idea of a patriarchal family have tended to inform law and social policy. For example, Boyd⁸⁸ explains that in the Canadian context, a preconceived notion of women as caregivers and a normative model of motherhood underpins social policy regulations relating to work and the family. Boyd⁸⁹ further mentions that as the State cuts back on health care, or child support, the family is called upon to assume such responsibilities. In Mauritius, it may be argued that western feminist theory has successfully rendered the personal into the political. The recognition

⁸⁶ According to Pateman (1998), women enter into a sexual contract by voluntarily performing unpaid labour which enable their male counterparts to perform in the public sphere and have more power in both spheres. Pateman C., 1988, *The Sexual Contract*, Stanford University Press: California

⁸⁷ For example, in the Canadian context, child care policy has shaped beliefs around motherhood, the roles of families and women's roles

⁸⁸ Boyd S., 1997, *Challenging the Public/Private Divide: Feminism, Law, and Public Policy*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto, pg. 18

⁸⁹ Ibid, pg. 19

that women's issues in the private sphere remain public issues constituted by gendered systems of oppression has provided the foundation for feminist theorising and gender research. In the same vein, whilst it has to be acknowledged that western feminist theory has had an impact on rendering issues that have been previously relegated to the private sphere into public discourse, as reflected in the adoption of the Protection from Domestic Violence Act (1997), at the same time, the policies put forth by the State have also sought to support women's reproductive role, such as maternity. Under the Employment Rights Act (2008, Article 30)⁹⁰, a female worker is entitled a full-pay 12 weeks' maternity leave for the 3 months immediately preceding the beginning of leave and she has produced a medical certificate. However, Article 31 of the Act legitimates the rights of a father of a new born child to take only five continuous days off work following the birth of his child, thus reinforcing women's reproductive role. Subsequently, the use of a feminist lens, compels an analysis of the public/private not as two separate spheres, but in fact calls for an analysis of their inter-connectedness. The private sphere can thus be termed as a site of both power and struggle and it proves useful to understand this connection to examine the ways in which women negotiate within this site of power/struggle through various critical acts⁹¹.

Feminist post-colonial theory remains a point of reference in the thesis in the light of Mauritius being a pluri-ethnic society with an ethnic majority. Post-colonial feminists are concerned with the representation and experiences of non-western/white women in

⁹⁰ Government of Mauritius, Employment Rights Act, Act No. 33 of 2008, Amended by Amendment Act No.10 of 2015. Available Online at:[http://labour.govmu.org/English/Documents/Legislations/Employment%20rights%20acts%202008/ERiA%202008%20-%20updated%20as%20at%20May%202015%20-%20Annex%20I%20\(1\).pdf](http://labour.govmu.org/English/Documents/Legislations/Employment%20rights%20acts%202008/ERiA%202008%20-%20updated%20as%20at%20May%202015%20-%20Annex%20I%20(1).pdf), Last Accessed May 2018

⁹¹ Teghtsoonian K., 1997, " Public Policy and Devaluation of Women's Work", In: Boyd, S. B. (ed.) *Challenging the Public/ Private Divide: Feminism, Law and Public Policy*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto, pg. 139

countries that were under colonial rule. According to Weedon⁹² postcolonial feminism accounts for how racism as well as the political, economic and cultural regime of colonialism have repercussions on non-white, non-western woman subjects in the postcolonial world. Feminist post-colonial theory proves to be useful to analyse ethnic privilege and the conceptualisation of women's interests in Mauritius and recognise that there are differences amongst women based on their ethnic locations. Feminist post colonial theory has sought to bring in the racial discourse into western/white mainstreaming feminist theorising and to include feminist concerns into colonialism and postcolonialism writings and challenge ethno-centrism.

Anti-racism feminist politics arose from the recognition of that there are differences between women as a category and imperialistic writings of first and third-world women. Anti-racist feminism provides an important background to the women's movement and their recognition that gender remains permanently racialised. The second wave of white western feminists had built on the experiences and theorising of their experiences resulting in the global sisterhood motto, postulating that white concerns remained the concerns of all women. Such essentialism resulted in silencing or rendering invisible the concerns of non-white middle class women, nor that of the developing world. For example, Mills and Lewis⁹³ elaborate on how the the right to sexual liberation of the 1960s were considered by Muslim feminists to degrade women's sexualitu and represented an erroneous definition of women's freedom towards the interests of men. Following the critique by Black and "third world" feminist writings on the over-generalisation of white women's concerns, the category of gender itself was

⁹² Weedon C., 2004, *Identity and Culture*, Open University Press: New York.

⁹³ Mills S., Lewis R., 2003, *Feminist Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Routledge: New York, pg. 4

rethought. Gender was initially seen to be a social construction, but the term “gender” itself rendered it challenging to speak about women as a homogenous group as soon as the different values and interests of women in different cultures were taken into account. This aspect of the “dividedness” of women made it difficult to create allegiances in struggles at the international level⁹⁴, for there is not a common oppression for woman⁹⁵. Arguments on the intertwined nature of gender and race were also made visible through Black feminist writings relating to racial-sexual oppression⁹⁶. The adoption of a post-colonial feminist approach remains crucial in this thesis as arguments of the interlocking nature of race and gender will prove critical to understanding how women define their identities in Mauritius and how these are linked to the way that their interests are conceptualised.

Furthermore, Mohanty⁹⁷ discusses the prominence of Postcolonial Feminism within feminism with a critique of “Eurocentric” feminism and the tendency to homogenise and systematise the experiences of different categories of women in the non-western world which has the power to make invisible the smaller acts of resistance. Instead, Mohanty calls upon respecting differences, and representing these differences. The stereotypical depiction of the “veiled” woman or “chaste virgin” is seen as a “universal, ahistorical splendor”. It is hence posited that this universalisation has a power in the way that third world women are represented through a colonial discourse and defines and maintains the first world and third world relations. Thus, Mohanty

⁹⁴ Butler J., 1990, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge: New York .Butler argues that “gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo” ;Butler J., 1988, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, *Theatre Journal* Vol. 40(4), pg. 520

⁹⁵ Rich A., 1984, “Notes Towards a Politics of Location”, in Adrienne Rich, *Blood and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985*, Little Brown & Co: London, pg/ 210-231

⁹⁶ Smith B. (Ed.), 1983, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press: New York

⁹⁷ Mohanty, C.T., 1984, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*.

argues that this universalisation remains problematic especially in the context that all groups do not share a similar history or societal and cultural values. In this sense, postcolonial feminists tend to validate their experiences irrespective of other discourses posited by the different types of feminism. Likewise, Bulbeck⁹⁸ challenges western feminism to study “the other woman” in a different light, regardless of stereotypical representation by the media. By restructuring the discourse of feminism to acknowledge differences and be more inclusive, post-colonial feminism provides an avenue to study women’s identities in Mauritius and the way that their intersectionalities shapes their interests and for substantive representation to take place to address these specific interests. Using a post-colonial feminist approach, it then becomes easier to assert that there is more than one category of women defined by class or ethnicity, and even sexual preference, with a focus on the historical, cultural and social perspectives of women within their respective society and culture. In this sense, post-colonial feminism remains an early form of theorising on intersectionality within feminism. The concept of intersectional feminism has been explored in feminism as multiple points of inequalities experienced by women in the mainstream. Collins⁹⁹ explains intersectionality as a “matrix of oppression”. This perspective is especially important in a multi-ethnic society that will be analysed as part of the case study in Mauritius to highlight women’s diversity. Additionally, it enables an analysis of voice and representation in terms of what types of claims are made and how these are framed by different types of women’s associations and grass-roots movements as well as the

⁹⁸ Bulbeck C., 1997, *Reorienting Western Feminism: Women’s Diversity In A Postcolonial World*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge

⁹⁹ Collins P., 2000, *Black Feminist Thought-Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge: London

particular interests and strategies adopted¹⁰⁰. It may further inform any analysis of the interplay of institutions and political discourses and whether these may be reframed to address this matrix of oppression, and any opportunity for alliances between different associations.

Another key concept remains the redefinition of substantive representation that looks at the role of different critical actors in addressing a diversity of issues of concern to women, their issues of interest and feminist demands. The “exact” definition of the substantive representation of women, as well as what that entails and how it is performed remains open in the literature. Yet, it is generally asserted that the introduction of women’s interests or perspectives at all stages of deliberations is critical in rendering subjects or certain standpoints politically acceptable¹⁰¹. Likewise, in a major part of the literature reviewed, the substantive representation of women entails examining the extent to which women in formal politics act in favour of women’s interests or feminist demands¹⁰²; or who are the actors outside the formal political sphere that perform “critical acts”¹⁰³ in favour of women and what strategies they are using¹⁰⁴ to render the interests of women as female citizens central to the representative process in a democracy.

Women’s Empowerment and Agency

¹⁰⁰ McCall L., 2005, “The Complexity of Intersectionality”, in *Signs- Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 30(3), pg. 1771-1800

¹⁰¹ Cramer Walsh K., 2002, “Female Legislators and the Women’s Rights Agenda”, in Rosenthal C.S., (ed.) *Women Transforming Congress*, Congressional Studies Series 4. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, pp. 370–396.

¹⁰² Wangnerud L., 2009, “Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation”, in *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 12, pg. 59. This entails looking at their acts and contents of debates.

¹⁰³ Dahlerup D., 1988, “From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics” in *Scandinavian. Political Studies*, Vol. 4, pg.275–298

¹⁰⁴ Childs S. & Krook M., 2006, “Should Feminists Give up on Critical Mass? A Contingent Yes”, in *Politics and Gender Vol. 2(4)*, pg. 522-530

The concept of “empowerment” of women has been widely cited in the literature, however, the meanings associated with the terminology vary widely, as well as the conceptualisation and methods of systematically and empirically measuring women’s empowerment¹⁰⁵. According to the World Bank¹⁰⁶, “empowerment” in its wider appreciation is the “expansion of freedom of choice and action”. Women’s empowerment bears other specificities, whereby women’s reproductive role and gendered social relations should be reflected in specific policy actions to address their practical and strategic interests, including through institutional transformation, and institutions that support patriarchal attitudes and structures. The concept of women’s empowerment can be distinguished from “female autonomy”, “women’s status” and “gender equality” by two specific features, namely that of processes of change towards a greater freedom of choice and equality, and agency. Agency is seen as the process in which women are significant agents in these processes of change rather than the beneficiary of the change¹⁰⁷. Kabeer¹⁰⁸ provides an important start to conceptualise women’s empowerment through addressing the elements of process and agency, and differentiates “power” from empowerment. Thus, according to Kabeer, empowerment refers to broadening an individual’s ability to undertake “strategic life choices” in a context where this ability was previously not given to them. Resources are seen as an

¹⁰⁵ NARAYAN-PARKER D. (ED), 2005, MEASURING EMPOWERMENT: CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES, WASHINGTON: WORLD BANK

¹⁰⁶ World Bank, 2002, Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook, Washington: World Bank, pg. 10-23
Available Online at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/486312-1095094954594/draft.pdf>, Last Accessed May 2018

¹⁰⁷ Kabeer N., 2001, “Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment” in *Discussing Women’s Empowerment: Theory and Practice*, SIDA Studies 3, Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

¹⁰⁸ Kabeer N., 2001, “Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment” in *Discussing Women’s Empowerment: Theory and Practice*, SIDA Studies 3, Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

important catalyst and conducive factor for empowerment¹⁰⁹. In the context of Mauritius, resources are seen as an important enabling factor and catalyst for the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes for women's empowerment, as is revealed through an analysis of the limited budget of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare.

Concurrently, agency remains a core element in the conceptualisation of empowerment in the literature, and as the essence of women's empowerment. Agency in the thesis relates to the ability of women to make strategic choices and be able to control the resources and be part of the dialogue on the decisions that affect their livelihoods. Whilst speaking of empowerment, the importance of agency implies a rejection of a top down approach to development, and therefore, a participatory and inclusive approach to development. Yet, have a sense of agency does not mean that all improvements in the status of women should be brought about by women themselves, nor is it their individual responsibility to empower themselves. Government and international human rights organisations have put in place a number of legal and institutional frameworks to give women an increased access to resources, however, not all these actions may essentially lead to women's empowerment¹¹⁰.

Feminist and Female Consciousness

Feminist consciousness refers to the political consciousness of women seeking to challenge patriarchy, marked by women's mobilisation and organizing. It can thus be described as a self-realisation and political consciousness by women that they form part

¹⁰⁹ Kishoor S., 2000, "*Empowerment of Women in Egypt and Links to the Survival and Health of their Infants.*" in *Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Moving Beyond Cairo*, Harriet Presser and Gita Sen (Ed.), New York: Oxford University Press.

¹¹⁰ Sen A., 1999, *Development as Freedom*, New York: Knopf

of a subordinate group who have been oppressed through patriarchal attitudes and structures, and the realisation that this oppression is determined by the society they live in and cultural norms thereof. Moreover, through feminist consciousness, women as a collective can shape a society where both women and men are autonomous. The literature reveals that feminist consciousness is related to a resistance by women of patriarchal ideas. Concurrently, there needs to make a distinction that all women's groups are not homogenous; differing in terms of ethnicity, class, and an attempt at generalising these different groups has its pitfalls¹¹¹. Kaplan¹¹² explains that female consciousness is linked to the recognition of the gendered expectations of a society in a given time and culture, and creates a platform for women's organising. It is stated that women possessing a female consciousness accept the gendered system of the society and historical period they live in, and their political consciousness emanates from the sexual division of labour which provides for women's reproductive roles. Women with a female consciousness submit to these gendered roles, yet demand their rights that these obligations entail. Corcoran-Nantes¹¹³ sees female consciousness as having been developed around strategic gender interests in Brazil.

Understanding Women's Political Participation and Organising

¹¹¹ Lerner G., 1993, *The Creation Of Feminist Consciousness: From The Middle Ages To Eighteen-Seventy*, Oxford University Press: New York

¹¹² Kaplan T., 1982, *Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918* in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pg. 545

¹¹³ Corcoran-Nantes Y., 1993, "Female Consciousness Or Feminist Consciousness?: Women's Consciousness Raising In Community-Based Struggles In Brazil" In Sarah A. Recliff And Sallie Westwood, "Viva": Women And Popular Protest In Latin America, Routledge: London, Pg. 148

The principles of justice, difference¹¹⁴, equity and representation¹¹⁵ lie at the heart of debates on women's participation in politics¹¹⁶. Understanding the concept of representation is key to appreciate women's activism in different sites of power; and to the extent that women's presence and participation in institutional/ parliamentary and non-institutional/non-parliamentary structures should lead to the adoption and implementation of more women-friendly and gender-sensitive policies/programmes and benefit women's interests¹¹⁷. However, it is to be noted that at the context of representation and participation of women in politics also remains primordial to avoid over-generalisation and can also impact on how conclusions are being made. In order to provide the framework for representation, Pitkin's seminal four-part typology in her "Concept of Representation"¹¹⁸ provides a conceptual framework for analysis. It defines representation as "acting for" (descriptive/symbolic), "and "standing for" (substantive) - phrases that are subject to scrutiny in feminism¹¹⁹. Thus, another important conceptual framework put forward by Phillips, in response to Pitkin's ideas, that of the "Politics of Presence", which informs many political studies on women globally. Phillips writes that:

There are particular needs, interests, and concerns that arise from women's experience and these will be inadequately addressed in a politics that is

¹¹⁴ Lovenduski, J., 2005, *Feminizing Politics*, Polity Press: Cambridge, pg. 24

Weikarta L., Chena A., Williamsa G., & Hromica H., 2006, "The Democratic Sex: Gender Differences and the Exercise of Power", in *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*, Vol 28(1), pg. 119

¹¹⁵ At higher levels of decision-making, empirical evidence confirms that women's and gender issues are raised more frequently with the presence of women Members of Parliament, and at the grass-root levels, women's movements and women's collective actions through associations/community organisations have mobilised and advocated for women's rights leading to substantial political, social and cultural change. Dickinson T. D., Schaeffer, Robert K., *Transformations: Feminist Pathways to Global Change*, Paradigm Publishers: London, pg. 4; Dahlerup D., 2000, "Women's Movement and Internationalization- Empowerment or Disempowerment?", in: *APSAA 2000 Conference Paper*, pg. 7

¹¹⁶ Childs S., 2008, *Women and British Party Politics: Descriptive, Substantive and Symbolic Representation*, Routledge: New York, pg. xx. Historically, women's exclusion from political structures and processes has been explained in terms of multiple structural, functional and personal factors, which are context-bound

UN Daw, 2005, Women's Political Issues and Challenges, *Enhancing Participation of Women in Development through an Enabling Environment for Achieving Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women*, Bangkok, Thailand

¹¹⁷ The issue of universality/ a common women's interest and shared experience is contested in feminism and will be addressed in subsequent sections.

¹¹⁸ Pitkin H., 1967, *The Concept of Representation*, Berkeley, pg.38-42 According to Pitkin, the composition of a legislature is more significant than what functions is undertaken therein, and substantive representation occurs when the concerns of the representative and constituents converge.

¹¹⁹ There are debates on whether there are common women's interests and whether any woman can represent and speak for all women, See Phillips A., 1995, *The Politics of Presence*, Clarendon Press: Oxford,

dominated by men. Equal rights to a vote have not proved strong enough to deal with this problem; there must also be equality among those elected to office¹²⁰.

Indeed, there are strong arguments towards why women's representation is fundamental both in institutional and non-institutional politics. Descriptive representation is explained as the number of women elected to national parliaments and substantive representation is explained as the effects of women's presence in parliament. The theory of the politics of presence expects a link between descriptive and substantive representation. This also resonates with Young's and Mansbridge's arguments that women bring a different perspective to the quality of deliberations as part of deliberative democracy¹²¹. Yet, empirical support towards the theory for the politics of presence is mixed. However, several studies testing for a wide set of indicators on the importance of gender in parliamentary processes indicate that female politicians do contribute in a positive manner to strengthening the position of women's interests¹²². Research on women's substantive representation has, nevertheless, been studied quantitatively and qualitatively by focussing on women Members of Parliament, overshadowing the other types of representatives, and their political acts and contexts of representation; and limiting or failing to consider a wider formulation of women's interests and forms of political expression¹²³.

¹²⁰ Phillips A., 1995, *The Politics of Presence*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, pg. 66

¹²¹ Phillips A., 1995, *The Politics of Presence*, Clarendon Press: Oxford

Mansbridge J., 1999, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent "Yes"", in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61(3), pg. 629-630; Young I. M., 2000, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, pg. 125; Young I.M., 1997, "Deferring Group Representation." In *Ethnicity and Group Rights*, Shapiro I. & Kymlicka W. (ed.), New York: New York University Press, pg. 354

¹²² WANGERUD L., 2009, "Women In Parliaments: Descriptive And Substantive Representation", In *Annual Review Of Political Science*, Vol. 12, Pg. 51-69

¹²³ Celis K., 2008, "Studying Women's Substantive Representation In Legislatures: When Representative Acts, Contexts And Women's Interests Become Important", in *Representation*, Vol. 44(2), pg. 111

Conversely, part of the literature also claims a positive link between descriptive and substantive representation as set forth in the politics of presence is “probabilistic rather than deterministic”¹²⁴. The link between descriptive and substantive representation is seen as probabilistic in terms of the different barriers women in formal politics face; for example, the deeply embedded culture of masculinity in political institutions; gender biases in personnel and in the policy of political organizations; party ideology and political position of the female politician¹²⁵ remain the greatest hurdles for women and determine whether they can make an impact¹²⁶. Additionally, Beckwith¹²⁷ asserts that numbers and “newness/experience” should be taken into consideration when looking at gender in formal institutions. Hence, despite having their descriptive representation, women may still not be able to work towards substantively representing women’s interests.

Thus, if analysed using this perspective, the question that remains is how does women’s substantive representation occur when descriptive representation is low or absent. It also leads to an exploration of how critical actors enhance women’s substantive representation in the absence of descriptive representation or a critical mass of women in parliamentary structures. Hence the substantive representation of

¹²⁴ Dodson DL, 2006, *The Impact of Women in Congress*, Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press Research on descriptive representation is wider, starting from Duverger’s 1955 study on the role of electoral systems in determining the number of women elected. The variables are also easily defined in studies on descriptive representation. In terms of research on substantive representation, dependent variable become more diffused or multifaceted; and women meet other obstacles such as party politics. Duverger M., 1955, *The Political Role of Women*, Paris: UN Economic and Social Council; Lovenduski J., 2005, *Feminizing Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, pg. 48-52

¹²⁵ Haavio-Mannila *et al.*, (1983) distinguished two kinds of divisions in political positions those related to formal power (hierarchical gender structures) and those related to policy areas (functional gender structures). Women are significantly more assigned to health and welfare issues as compared to men who sit on economic committees
Heidar K. & Pedersen K, 2006, “Party Feminism: Gender Gaps Within Nordic Political Parties”, in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 29(3), pg. 192–218

¹²⁶ Grey S., 2006, “Numbers and Beyond: The Relevance of Critical Mass in Gender Research”, in *Politics and Gender*, Vol. 2(4), pg. 492–502

¹²⁷ Beckwith K., 2007, “Numbers and Newness: The Descriptive and Substantive Representation of Women”, in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 40(1), pg. 27–49

Jeydel A. & Taylor A., 2003, “Are Women Legislators Less Effective? Evidence from the U.S. House in the 103rd–105th Congress”, in *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 56(1), pg. 19–20

women is possible even in the absence of descriptive representation. Subsequently this shift beyond numbers is necessary for women's substantive representation and it may be argued that women in formal politics may bring an added-value to the quality of deliberations if they have both a "horizontal" and "vertical" connection to their constituents¹²⁸, through interaction with community-based and women's political organising that remain crucial to guide both a top-down and bottom-up approach to women's substantive representation. It also offers a shift from studying what women at the macro level of institutional politics achieve to offering an insight into the activism of women as political actors in extra-parliamentary structures, at the micro level, as well as their interaction, across these levels. It further looks at the importance of "resistance" as reflecting power¹²⁹ and the varying sources of power in any situation, inclusive of institutional, cultural and power of the individual.

In the more practical sense, substantive representation may be linked to achieving Molyneux's concept of practical and strategic gender interest, where gendered interests are formulated considering the social and economic and political status and positioning of women and impact differently on women's subjectivity¹³⁰. Women's political acts are often linked to addressing subordination due to gender inequality based on an ascribed gender division of labour, shaped by class and ethnicity. Molyneux further argues that practical gender interests need to be addressed in the formulation of strategic gender interests given that "the politicisation of these practical interests and their transformation into strategic interests which constitutes a

¹²⁸ Mansbridge explains "vertical" connection as between constituent and representative; and "horizontally" as being among the representatives. Mansbridge J., 1999, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent "Yes"", in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61(3), pg. 629

¹²⁹ Abu-Lughod L., 1990, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women", in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 17, pg. 42

¹³⁰ Molyneux M., 1985, Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, State and Revolution in Nicaragua, *Feminist Studies*, 11(2), pg. 232

central aspect of feminist practice”¹³¹. Scholars posit that identifying and working towards achieving their practical gender interests across class and ethnic barriers has underscored women’s political participation in non-institutional politics¹³², in the light of more prescient and urgent concerns in women’s lives, especially women living in the non-western world.

Considering the different perspectives on what comprises women’s interests and the substantive representation of women, combining the above perspectives into a three-fold approach seems appropriate to look at women’s interests for the purpose of this study. In this respect, Wangnerud¹³³ poses that women’s substantive representation is underpinned by firstly, the recognition of gendered power imbalance; secondly, appreciating women as a social category; and thirdly the aspiration to implement policies to enhance women’s autonomy. Empirical research on the issue of women’s substantive representation has seemingly adopted these three features to women’s interests and representation. For example, a review of related studies¹³⁴ operationalize women’s interests in terms of firstly, their relation to the private sphere; secondly, women’s position in the public sphere and welfare state, which Molyneux¹³⁵ has termed as practical gender interests¹³⁶; and thirdly having a feminist strategy to surmount

¹³¹ Molyneux M., 1985, “Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, State and Revolution in Nicaragua”, in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 11(2), pg. 236-237

¹³² Corcoran-Nantes Y., 2008, “Female Consciousness or Feminist Consciousness? Women's Consciousness Raising in Community-Based Struggles in Brazil, In: Dickinson, T. D. & Schaeffer, R. K. (eds.) *Transformations: Feminist Pathways to Global Change- An Analytical Anthology*. Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, London, pg. 125

¹³³ Wangnerud underlines that women’s substantive representation may have a feminist bearing in terms of enhancing women’s autonomy.

Wangnerud L., 2000, “Testing the Politics of Presence: Women's Representation in the Swedish Riksdag”, in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 23(1), pg. 67–91.

¹³⁴ For example, Carroll S. J., 2000, Representing Women: Congresswomen's Perceptions of their Representational Roles, *Women Transforming Congress: Gender Analyses of Institutional Life*, Rutgers University: University of Oklahoma

¹³⁵ Molyneux M., 1985, “Mobilization Without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua” in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 11(2), pg. 233

Practical gender interests arise “from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender divisions of labour”.

¹³⁶ Interests are then translated into needs. Interests are defined in terms of women’s concerns that remain a priority to them. Once these interests are identified, then it remains possible to translate these into needs and take into account and mainstream these

discrimination and have equal rights and be autonomous either in the private or similarly in the public sphere, which Molyneux¹³⁷ has termed as strategic gender interests. Research has usually combined practical and strategic gender interests to measure the substantive representation of women, for example, in looking at women's rights bills; voting behaviour on laws or policies pertaining to women such as abortion, breast cancer, domestic violence¹³⁸; salary protection, social policy¹³⁹, however, has often concluded that support towards these interests is often dependent on activities and characteristics of various women's State mechanisms (such as a Ministry/ Department/ Unit), women's organising, political consciousness, and the policy environment, amongst others.

Redefining the substantive representation of women in politics subsequently entails supporting the heterogeneous characteristic of women's interests through a diversity of approaches and the actions of critical actors in different contexts¹⁴⁰. In this line of thought, it is possible to look at women's substantive representation using a broader feminist framework embracing the history of the changed nature of politics in the public and private domains, through the reformulation of "the political" in practice, ideology, and political theory.

needs into the policy formulation and planning processes to address women's interests. Moser C., 1993., *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice Training*, Routledge:New York, Chapter 3

¹³⁷ Molyneux M., 1985, "Mobilization Without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua" in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 11(2), pg. 233, pg. 232

"Strategic Gender Interests" arise from an "analysis of women's subordination and from the formulation of an alternative".

¹³⁸ Dodson D. & Carroll S., 1995, *Voices, Views, Votes: The Impact of Women in the 103rd Congress, The Impact of Women in Public Office*. New Jersey: Rutgers

Reingold B., 2000, *Representing Women: Sex, Gender and Legislative Behavior in Arizona and California*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press

¹³⁹ O'Regan V., 2000, *Gender Matters: Female Policymakers' Influence in Industrialized Nations*, Westport, London: Praeger.

¹⁴⁰ It further unveils the actions of other critical actors, for example in examining the Scottish Parliament, Chaney concludes that critical actors are essential, despite the fact that female critical actors represented women's issues more but emphasizes that "it is how critical actors interact with the critical mass that plays a role in women's substantive representation".

Concurrently, many countries have witnessed the opening up of new democratic spaces through civil society organising, social movements¹⁴¹, or the institutionalisation of participatory governance mechanisms which have paved the way for women to enter other forms of political spaces beyond formal politics. This is best captured by Bystydzienski's description of the strategies adopted and activities performed by women in this broader definition of politics where:

...interpersonal networking, grass-root economic development projects, protests of many kinds, and use of traditional women's activities in the cause of national liberation, and involvement in nongovernmental and informal women's groups and organisations...politics includes people's everyday experiences of oppressive conditions, the recognition of the injustice of power relationships at all societal levels.¹⁴²

The literature reveals the inherently political nature of women's movements which also have a variety of flexible strategies¹⁴³ comprised of different alliances and actions over a multitude of political venues and sites of power which merit additional exploration. Within this outlook, one is able to differentiate between the different forms of politics that women are involved in. Thus, in many instances, women's issues have been seen within the parameters of a larger struggle for liberation, transition¹⁴⁴, human rights, social and development and democracy, amongst others. Similarly, women at different levels have advocated for issues of particular interest to their livelihoods, survival or their practical and strategic needs through different means and ways, even

¹⁴¹ Moghadam explains that social movements denote a powerful form of political participation, equated to an engagement inside State structures. Moghadam V. M., 2013, *Globalization and Social Movements: Islamism, Feminism, and the Global Justice Movement*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: Maryland, pg. preface

¹⁴² Bystydzienski J., 1992, *Women Transforming Politics: Worldwide Strategies for Empowerment*, Indiana University Press: Indiana, pg. 4

¹⁴³ Waylen G., 2010, "Gender and Transitions: What do we Know?", in *Democratization*, Vol. 10(1), pg. 158

¹⁴⁴ In the context of gender and transition, the Latin American and Eastern European regions have been the most studied. Alvarez S., 1990, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil :Women's Movements in Transition Politics*, Princeton University Press: New Jersey

Friedman E.J., 2000, *Unfinished Transitions: Women and the Gendered Development of Democracy in Venezuela, 1936–1996*, State University Press: Pennsylvania

Sperling V., 1999, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge

though a mainstream understanding of politics continues to be limited to the formal public arena.

Consequently, to understand women's substantive representation through their organising as active agents of change operating in non-institutional settings, it is crucial, to look at their political engagement in other sites of power at the micro level in which women exert a varying degree of substantive representation (through popular women's/feminist movements and civil society) bearing in mind the heterogeneity of women's interests.

Nevertheless, although activism in both formal and non-formal settings are key variables in the gendered analysis of substantive representation, it is to be recognised that institutions shape the strategies of these actors and impact on their goals. Indeed, the literature on State feminism and the existence of women's policy reveal varying success in countries where the women's movement and women's policy agencies have alliances. The success/partial success is determined by characteristics of actors of the women's movement, their accountability to different categories of women, the policy environment, and characteristics as well as the activities of women's policy agencies¹⁴⁵. Indeed, empirical evidence shows that parliamentarians often establish contact with social groups, social movements and interest groups to inform their actions, whilst, also asserting that the presence of a representative vibrant and independent women's movement with access to public bodies remains an effective avenue to improve women's substantive representation¹⁴⁶. In fact, there are a range of dynamic processes

¹⁴⁵ Hasso F. S., 2001, "Feminist Generations? The Long-Term Impact of Social Movement Involvement on Palestinian Women's Lives", in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 107 (3), pg. 586

¹⁴⁶ Weldon S. L., 2002, Beyond Bodies: Institutional Sources of Representation for Women in Democratic Policymaking, *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 64(4), pg. 1162; Hasso F. S., 2001, "Feminist Generations? The Long-Term Impact of Social Movement Involvement on Palestinian Women's Lives", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 107 (3), pg. 590

and significant acts performed both by female critical actors¹⁴⁷ at the grass-roots level and in the legislative arena that converge to meaningfully inform processes of women's substantive representation. Therefore, it is crucial to look at the interaction between institutions and these actors to understand broader institutional contexts, as well as the outcomes of women's activism and why some women political actors may be successful than others to assert their inherent citizenship rights.

Concurrently, it is to be pointed that the issue of difference and intersectionality amongst women also resonates in the literature on women's equal citizenship¹⁴⁸. Feminist theorists have highlighted the significance of discerning between the political, socio-economic and ethnic bases underpinning women's citizenship, as well as their affiliations to sub-collectivities¹⁴⁹. This comes with the recognition that not all women share the same socio-economic space and ethnic-base, and therefore, the discourse of universal citizenship and interest is to be averted. This is especially crucial in looking at women's activism in ethnically diverse contexts¹⁵⁰. Feminist standpoints are of importance in this context to look into how knowledge is constructed amongst various groups based on their experiences, influenced by social locations and life conditions which may not be revealed in the conceptual structures of dominant groups. This perspective is especially important in the Mauritian context with an ethnically diverse female population.

¹⁴⁷ Recent studies on substantive representation of women apply a claim-based framework, looking at how, why and by whom women's substantive representation occurs (Celis *et al.*, 2008:111) The term "critical actors" is evoked¹⁴⁷ (Childs & Krook, 2009:126) to refer to those groups or individuals (men or women) who spearhead actions in favour of women in spite of descriptive representation

¹⁴⁸ Marshall's definition of citizenship as "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community" encompassing their civil, political and social rights and obligations. He links citizenship to being membership in a community rather than to the State. His multi-tier construct involving people's membership in a variety of collectivities – local, ethnic, national and trans-national enables an analysis of women's differentiated citizenship.

¹⁴⁹ Yuval-Davis N., 1997, Women, Citizenship and Difference, *Feminist Review*, Citizenship: Pushing the Boundary, Autumn Issue

¹⁵⁰ Anthias F. & Yuval-Davis N., 1983, Contextualizing Feminism: Gender, Ethnic and Class Divisions, *Feminist Review*, Vol.15pg. 62;

Naples N. A. (ed.) 1998. *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class, and Gender* New York: Routledge

The Relationship between Descriptive and Substantive Representation

Whereas the descriptive perspective maintains that political institutions should in fact reflect society's composition, substantive representation asserts that women's exclusion would not echo their needs, interests and any feminist claim¹⁵¹. Part of feminist political theory and the literature on the "politics of presence" have previously established a link between descriptive and substantive representation, claiming that women's shared gendered experiences imply that women will act for women¹⁵² and scholars often refer to "critical mass theory", claiming that women's substantive representation is likely to take place through formal politics when women comprise between 15-30 per cent of the legislature¹⁵³, for example, a number of studies conducted in parliaments where women form a critical mass find a direct link¹⁵⁴, whilst showing that women have shared interests and women tend to lobby for different policies as compared to men¹⁵⁵. As Kanter¹⁵⁶ notes, an increased number of women in most pivotal institutions is essential to form a critical mass, however, this theory has also been challenged claiming that descriptive representation does not automatically translate into a positive outcome for women's policy preferences. it is not; for instance, other studies conducted in the Nordic Countries and Latin and North America have noted that there may even be a backlash in legislative initiatives in the presence of a greater number of women Members of

¹⁵¹ Childs S. & Celis K., 2012, "The Substantive Representation of Women: What to Do with Conservative Claims?", in *Political Studies*, Vol. 60, pg. 213

¹⁵² Dovi, S., 2002, "Preferable Descriptive Representatives: Will Just Any Woman, Black or Latino Do?", in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96(4), 729

¹⁵³ Childs S. & Krook M. L., 2006, "Should Feminists Give Up on Critical Mass? A Contingent Yes", *Politics and Gender*, Vol. 2(4), pg. 522-530

¹⁵⁴ Piscopo J. M., 2011, "Rethinking Descriptive Representation: Rendering Women in Legislative Debates", in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol.64(3), pg. 448

¹⁵⁵ Bratton K. R., Leonard P., 2002, "Descriptive Representation, Policy Outcomes, and Municipal Day-Care Coverage in Norway", in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 46(2), pg. 428-437

¹⁵⁶ Kanter R. M., 1977, "Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women", in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82(5), pg. 965-990

Parliament¹⁵⁷, with the actions of key actors being more important than a critical mass. Similarly, studies reveal that having a critical mass of women may not automatically result in women friendly policies in the light of contextual factors (structural, political and ideological factors; and role of interest groups such as civil society and women's movement) that come into play¹⁵⁸.

The review of the literature in the African region, however, reveals that there is a dearth of research that has been carried out on the link between the descriptive and substantive representation of women in Parliament, with no definite result on the direct link between an increased number of women and substantive representation. Existing research in this area has been linked to the impact of quotas on the process of democratisation and political modernisation in line with the institutional reforms that accompany implementation of a quota system. The adoption of gender quotas in a number of African countries has been rendered possible in recognition of the support of the women's community based organisation and movement, which aligned itself with the dominant party, for example in Rwanda¹⁵⁹. However, Krook stipulates that in general, gender quotas where there are more women present in Parliament does not

¹⁵⁷ Heath R. M., Schwindt-Bayer L. A. & Taylor-Robinson M. M., 2005, "Women on the Sidelines: Women's Representation on Committees in Latin American Legislatures", in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol.49, pg. 420-436; Franceschet S. & Piscopo J., 2008, "Gender Quotas and Women's Substantive Representation: Lessons from Argentina", in *Politics and Gender*, Vol. 4, pg. 393-425; Crowley J., 2004, "When Tokens Matter", in *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol.29(1), pg. 109-136 Anne T., 2003, "Understanding the Effects of Larger Ratios of Women in National Legislatures: Proportions and Gender Differentiation in Sweden and Norway", in *Women and Politics*, Vol. 25(1-2), pg. 1-29

¹⁵⁸ Paxton P, & Kunovich S.,2003. "Women's Political Representation: The Importance of Ideology" in *Social Forces*, Vol. 82(1), pg.87

Krupavicius A. & Matonyete I., 2003, "Women in Lithuanian Politics: From Nomenklatura Selection to Representation", in: Montgomery, K. A. & Matland, R. E. (eds.) *Women's Access to Political in Post-communist Europe*, Oxford University Press: New York, pg. 102-103; For example, in spite of the low number of women in political power during the Soviet period, women who were active in politics were successful in engraving their places and held meaningful power Durbrow J., 2006, "Enhancing Descriptive Representation in a New Democracy: A Political Market Approach", Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Ohio State University, pg. 32; Katzenstein & Mueller (1987); Bystydziensky (1988); Gelb (1989) look at how women's movements have effected change in this context, pg. 553

¹⁵⁹ These reforms have been identified as an electoral system based on proportional representation with a closed list, placing women in winnable positions on the list, multi-member districts, and penalties for the non-enforcement of quotas .Hassim S., 2005, "Women, Parliaments and Gender equality in Africa: Exploring the Virtuous Circle of Representation", In: Bauer, G. & Britton, H. (eds.) *Women in African Parliaments*. Lynne Rienne: Boulder, pg. 15.

necessarily result into the adoption of feminist quotas¹⁶⁰. This is reflected in the African context, where for example, in Uganda, women Members of Parliament have been unable to pass a bill spearheaded by the women's movement due to their allegiances to the National Resistance Movement, and they are not likely to challenge party policies. Likewise, in South Africa, women Members of Parliament have not been capable of a "womanist"¹⁶¹ intervention due to strong dominant party ideologies¹⁶². In the Indian context, women entering Parliament under the quota system are seen as token candidates with less legitimacy and being less accountable representatives. This situation, Tamale argues, is also reflected in Uganda, where any representative supporting women's agendas may be seen as unable to sustain in the longer run a broader political agenda¹⁶³.

Bashevkin¹⁶⁴ contends that descriptive representation, in Canada does not imply substantive representation, and assuming that women would simply act for women implies neglecting other ideological differences, such as party identity¹⁶⁵ or contextual factors¹⁶⁶. Subsequently, it is mentioned that for women to make a difference, they would have to have a degree of political consciousness to be able to substantively

¹⁶⁰ Krook M. L., 2006, "Gender Quotas, Norms and Politics", in *Politics & Gender, Vol.2(1)*, pg. 110-118

¹⁶¹ Alice Walker's term "womanist" is being used here instead of "feminist" intervention as many women do not consider themselves feminist so the attribution of labels to their politics is problematic.

Walker A., 2004, *In search of our mothers' gardens: Womanist prose*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Collins P. H., 1996, What's in a name? Womanism, Black feminism, and beyond, *The Black Scholar*, 26(1), pg. 9-17

¹⁶² Tripp A. M., 2006, Uganda: Agents of Change for Women's Advancement?, In: Bauer, G. & Britton, H. (eds.) *Women in African Parliaments*. Lynne Rienner Publishers: Boulder

Tamale S., 1999, *When Hens Begin to Crow* Fountain Publisher: Kampala

¹⁶³ Tamale S., 2003, The Implementation of Quotas: African Experiences, *Introducing Quotas in Africa: Discourse and Legal Reform in Uganda*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)/Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA)/Southern African Development Community (SADC) Parliamentary Forum Conference, 11–12 November 2003: Pretoria, South Africa

¹⁶⁴ Bashevkin S., 1996, Political Parties and the Representation of Women In: A.B., T. & GAGNON, A. G. (eds.) *Canadian Parties in Transition*. Nelson Canada.: Toronto

¹⁶⁵ Beckwith K. & Colin-Meyers K., 2007, "Sheer Numbers", *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.5 (5), pg. 553–565

For example, it is posited that individual conservative parties are now more descriptively representative in terms of sex (Childs and Webb, 2011; Kueschner, 2010). Other studies prove that, women representatives in rightist parties usually adopt a more progressive, liberal and feminist position than male counterparts.

¹⁶⁶ Celis K., 2008, Studying women's substantive representation in legislatures: When Representative Acts, Contexts and Women's Interests Become Important, *Representation*, 44(2), pg. 115

represent women¹⁶⁷. Thus, looking at the degree of political consciousness as further broken down into “feminist consciousness” along with “female consciousness” and female solidarity is deemed essential.¹⁶⁸ Firstly, it circumvents reducing women’s substantive representation to the feminist substantive representation of women; where feminist concerns sit on the left of the political spectrum, secondly, it precludes the possibility of no, or perhaps anti-feminist representation¹⁶⁹. Concomitantly, whilst having a feminist consciousness, one needs to be mindful that substantive representation is also dependent on the complexities of gendered institutions^{170,171}, such as party ideologies. Likewise, the various processes leading to political consciousness varies, as has been the case in Brazil¹⁷². At the same time, reducing substantive representation to exclusively feminist claims creates a blind spot that makes invisible the actions of other actors, and diversity of women’s needs¹⁷³, and restrains a thorough appreciation of what “good” substantive representation entails in a democracy¹⁷⁴.

Making the Case- Why the Shift from Descriptive to Substantive Representation

¹⁶⁷ Kathlene, L. (1998), “In a Different Voice: Women and the Policy Process.” In *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, & Future* (S. Thomas and C. Wilcox (eds.)), New York: Oxford University Press, pg. 188–202

¹⁶⁸ Corcoran-Nantes Y., 2008, “Female Consciousness or Feminist Consciousness? Women’s Consciousness Raising in Community-Based Struggles in Brazil”, In: Dickinson, T. D. & Schaeffer, R. K. (eds.) *Transformations: Feminist Pathways to Global Change- An Analytical Anthology*, Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, London, pg. 124

¹⁶⁹ Duerst-Lahti introduces the concept of “feminalism” referring to a gender ideology combining both feminism and non-anti-feminist perspectives. However, this concept has not been explored widely.

Duerst-Lahti, G., 2008, “Gender Ideology: Masculinism and Feminalism”, in Goertz G. & Mazur A. (eds), *Politics, Gender and Concepts*, Cambridge University Press: New York, pg. 159–192

Dov S., 2008, “Theorizing Women’s Representation in the United States”, in Wolbrecht C., Beckwith K. & Baldez L., (eds), *Political Women and American Democracy*, Cambridge University Press: New York, pg. 154

Duerst-Lahti G., 2008, “Gender Ideology: Masculinism and Feminalism”, in Goertz G. & Mazur A. (eds), *Politics, Gender and Concepts*, Cambridge University Press: New York, pp. 159–192

¹⁷⁰ Lovenduski, J., 2005, *Feminizing Politics*, Polity Press: Cambridge

¹⁷¹ Reference is made to Bratton and Ray, 2002; Carroll, 2001; Chaney, 2006; Childs and Withey, 2006; Dodson, 2001; Hawkesworth, 2003; Kathlene, 1995; Reingold, 2000; 2008; Swers, 2002; Trimble and Arcsott, 2003; Weldon, 2002

¹⁷² Corcoran-Nantes Y., 2008, “Female Consciousness or Feminist Consciousness? Women’s Consciousness Raising in Community-Based Struggles in Brazil”, In: Dickinson T. D. & Schaeffer, R. K. (eds.) *Transformations: Feminist Pathways to Global Change- An Analytical Anthology*, Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, London, pg. 128

¹⁷³ Celis K., Childs S., Kantola J. & Krook M-L., 2009, “Constituting Women’s Interests through Representative Claims”, Paper presented at the APSA Annual Conference, Toronto, Canada, 3–6 September 2009

¹⁷⁴ Celis K., 2009, “Substantive Representation of Women (and Improving It): What is and Should it be About?”, in *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 6 (4), pg. 95–113.

Focusing on descriptive representation alone and the gender of a parliamentarian¹⁷⁵, gives rise to some limitations; namely, a direct link between gender and what comprises women's interests—for example, claims that only women can represent women substantively, that women legislate differently from men¹⁷⁶ or that representation only occurs within formal political institutions, while “representative claims” can be dynamic and performative formulated by a variety of actors within civil society¹⁷⁷. Furthermore, other factors at play¹⁷⁸ may constrain effective women-friendly policy making even with the presence of a critical mass of women engaged in the process.

Thus, in order to move the debate beyond a question of sheer numbers of women (critical mass)¹⁷⁹ in institutional politics and their ability to lobby for women-friendly public policy, scholars have explored the concept of substantive representation in contrast, as it looks at the other forms of critical “representative acts”¹⁸⁰ that women perform in different sites and contexts to advocate for women's interests and perspectives¹⁸¹. It further unveils the actions of other critical actors, for example Chaney¹⁸² examines the proceedings of the Scottish Parliament and concludes that critical actors who comprise men and women parliamentarians and non-state actors are essential, despite the fact that female critical actors represented women's issues more

¹⁷⁵ Young (2000:7-8) argues that “democratic discussions and decision making” should be seen, and be enriched by, a process where different social groups should be able to work together to resolve collective problems from their “situated positions”. Young I. M., 2000, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press: Oxford

¹⁷⁶ Cowell-Meyers K., 2001, Gender, Power, and Peace: A Preliminary Look at Women in the Northern Ireland Assembly, in *Women and Politics*, Vol. 23(3), pg. 57

¹⁷⁷ Cowell-Meyers K., 2001, “Gender, Power, and Peace: A Preliminary Look at Women in the Northern Ireland Assembly”, in *Women and Politics*, Vol. 23(3), pg. 55-88

Saward M., 2006, “The Representative Claim”, in *Contemporary Political Theory*, Vol.5(3), pg. 298, 300, 306

¹⁷⁸ These have been identified as ideology of political party and party affiliation, institutional norms, lack of formal political, and a non-conducive external political environment.

¹⁷⁹ Critical mass theory has itself been problematised

¹⁸⁰ Celis K., 2008, “Studying Women's Substantive Representation in Legislatures: When Representative Acts, Contexts and Women's Interests Become Important”, in *Representation*, Vol. 44(2), pg. 111

¹⁸¹ It is important to have a broad conception of women's interests and perspective, instead of limiting their definition for a better view of all critical acts performed by women; Celis K., 2008, “Studying Women's Substantive Representation In Legislatures: When Representative Acts, Contexts And Women's Interests Become Important”, in *Representation*, Vol. 44(2), pg. 111-123

¹⁸² Chaney P., 2012, “Critical Actors vs. Critical Mass: The Substantive Representation of Women in the Scottish Parliament”, in *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 14(3), pg. 441

but emphasizes that “it is how critical actors interact with the critical mass that plays a role in women’s substantive representation”.

Moreover, Dahlerup stated: “Since politics is not physics, we should look for critical acts, not for a critical mass”¹⁸³. The theoretical linkage of critical mass to that of political representation of women looks at how the numeric representation of women could potentially be linked to improving their substantive representation¹⁸⁴. Proponents of Critical mass theory argue that with a higher number of women entering the formal political sphere more female-friendly policies will be adopted which will be beneficial to all women. the more women enter the political sphere, more female-friendly policies will be passed and therefore these policies will be beneficial to all women¹⁸⁵. Nevertheless, there remains insufficient consensus on what constitutes a critical mass. Scholars, however, argue that critical mass fails to consider the factors why women in high level decision-making positions endeavor to act for women in the first place.¹⁸⁶ It is noted from the literature that “critical acts” depend on the “minority” (in this case, women), to form alliances to act on behalf of the women in the said group¹⁸⁷. Taking this notion implies that representation refers to the actions done, rather than who performs these actions, for example the adoption of gender quotas by a Parliament composed of women and men , and passing legislation to protect women’s rights. The concept of critical act, however, has been built upon to that of “critical actors” who

¹⁸³ Dahlerup, D., 1988. From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 11(4), pg. 290

¹⁸⁴ Childs, S. & Krook, M.L., 2008. Critical Mass Theory and Women’s Political Representation. *Political Studies*, 56(3), pg.725–736

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 725

¹⁸⁶ Childs, S., 2006. The Complicated Relationship between Sex, Gender and the Substantive Representation of Women. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 13(1), pg.7–8

¹⁸⁷ Celis, K. & Childs, S., 2008. Introduction: The Descriptive and Substantive Representation of Women: New Directions. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 61(3), pg.420

perform critical acts.¹⁸⁸ As stated by Dahlerup, a critical act transforms the positioning of the “minority” (in this case, women) and results in more improvements¹⁸⁹. Hence, a critical act depends on the capability and commitment of women to mobilise resources to make progress for themselves and to empower women as a group. The concept of critical actors is now privileged in existing literature as it focusses on the outcomes, rather than the actors¹⁹⁰. Therefore, for the purpose of the thesis, critical acts is defined in line with the existing scholarly writings in terms of legislators and actors, irrespective of being females, who initiate policies and legislation on their own, or mobilise other actors to take measure to promote women friendly policies, notwithstanding the number of women representatives. In this line of thought, critical actors may be men promoting women’s interests. The use of critical actors thus provides a shift away from an essentialist depiction of “women acting for women” in institutional politics, and presents rather an inter-relational holistic approach to look at substantive representation.

Nonetheless, critical acts remain important and enrich women’s substantive representation, for example, proposing a Bill to cater for specific needs of women is a critical act, irrespective of whom proposes the said Bill. Critical acts comprise a range of actions, including supporting the Bill, widening the political agenda to address women’s interests and advocating on specific women’s rights issues. Therefore, the claim of a representative is a critical act in itself, or the acting for women is a critical

¹⁸⁸ Sawyer, M., 2012. What Makes the Substantive Representation of Women Possible in a Westminster Parliament? The Story of RU486 in Australia. *International Political Science Review*, 33(3), pg.321.

¹⁸⁹ Dahlerup, D., 1988. From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 11(4), pg.296.

¹⁹⁰ Childs, S. & Krook, M.L., 2009. Analysing Women’s Substantive Representation: From Critical Mass to Critical Actors. *Government and Opposition*, 44(02), pg.138.

act. The framework to then analyse the process of substantive representation of women is therefore linked to both a series of critical acts and critical actors.

In Mauritius, the adoption of the Protection from Domestic Violence Act (1997) remains an example of the advocacy of a series of critical actors (namely, women and men Members of Parliament and women at the community levels amongst others), and the critical act of introducing the Bill into Parliament and its adoption. Hansard records¹⁹¹ indicate that upon its third reading, the Protection from Domestic Violence Bill¹⁹² (No. V of 1997) was passed unanimously on its third reading by 52 Members, composed of 47 males. An examination of the content of the legislative debate reveals that while there were only 5 women Members of Parliament (MPs), the passing of Bill received the unequivocal support of male MPs across party lines. All Members in the House had the opportunity to debate all aspects of domestic violence. In this case, the introduction of this Bill by the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare (a female Minister), is seen as a critical act, and debates supporting the content and the passing of the Bill by a majority of male MPs represent critical acts undertaken by critical actors, in the absence of a high descriptive representation of women. The adoption of the Bill remains an example of the interaction between critical acts and critical actors. Similarly, in 2004, the Protection from Domestic Violence Act

¹⁹¹ Hansard Records, Mauritius National Assembly, 27 May 1997, Public Bill: Protection from Domestic Violence Bill (No. V of 1997), Adjournment, pg. 1350

¹⁹² The object of the Bill is "to provide protection to victims of domestic violence. It also aims at reducing and preventing domestic violence and at ensuring that where such violence occurs, there is effective legal protection for the aggrieved spouse through the issue, by the Court, of Protection Orders, Occupation Orders or Tenancy Orders.
Ibid.

(1997) was amended¹⁹³ with the support of both male and female MPs to strengthen the provisions of the law.

Subsequently, one of the main arguments for the substantive representation of women in formal politics revolves around fostering an equal democratic political system and bringing in different “situated knowledge” and perspectives¹⁹⁴ The literature does not specify a set definition as to what “substantive” is, but generally looks at women’s substantive representation as representation that brings together the multifarious political arenas, both formal and informal, to institute change. This has been explained in terms of including “women’s interests”, gender mainstreaming and “feminist demands” at all levels of policy formulation and implementation; the roles of women’s policy agencies, the State and interaction with women’s movements and legislative behavior¹⁹⁵.

In terms of formal/institutional politics, another key aspect of substantive representation remains the presence of a women’s minister, in charge of a portfolio of women’s rights supported by other female MPs¹⁹⁶. In this context, it is important to look at the “ranking” of that particular Ministry and its budget allocation to assess whether the Ministry holds enough “weight” vis-à-vis other Ministers and Members of Parliament to advance a gender specific agenda. Furthermore, party identity plays a crucial role in determining whether substantive representation of women can take place, and the

¹⁹³ PDVA Amendment Bill (No. XIV of 2004)

The Bill seeks to extend protection from domestic violence to other persons living under the same roof and to extend the time for the hearing of the case and also to provide counselling to perpetrators

¹⁹⁴ Young I., 2000, *Inclusion and Democracy* Oxford University Press: Oxford, pg 109-114

¹⁹⁵ Krook M-L., 2009, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reforms Worldwide*, Oxford University Press: New York

Studlar D. T. & Mc Allistar I., 2002, “Does a Critical Mass Exist? A Comparative Analysis of Women’s Legislative Representation Since 1950”, in *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 41, pg. 234

Ootshoorn J. & Kantola J. (eds.), 2007, *Changing State Feminism*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, pg. 15

Lovenduski J., Baudino C., Guadagnini M., Meier P. & Sainsbury D., 2005, *State Feminism and Political Representation*, Cambridge University Press: New York, pg. 4

¹⁹⁶ Childs S., 2004, *New Labour’s Women MPs: Women Representing Women*, Routledge: New York, pg. 176, 196

conditions under which women representatives can act for women. Thus, Childs¹⁹⁷ writes that it is important not to adopt a “deterministic relationship” between women’s presence in parliament and acting for women; rather it is crucial to look at the interplay of gender and party identities, as not all women act for or on behalf of women. This sentiment has been previously established by Phillips¹⁹⁸ who asserts that the substantive representation of women by women cannot be guaranteed.

Political Consciousness and Substantive Representation

A number of studies in the developed world conclude that women’s political behaviours’ in formal politics are compatible with feminism¹⁹⁹. However, a deeper look at these studies suggests that these conclusions demand closer consideration with respect to party affiliation and degree of feminist consciousness²⁰⁰. It is reported that, for example, in the context of American politics, male democrats may be more liberal and have a higher degree of feminist consciousness than Republican women. Thus, having feminist and non-feminist elected women does not bring in the same outcome for the substantive representation of women, even if it has been reported that women were significantly more feminist than men²⁰¹. Yet, the themes associated with a womanist²⁰² issue (for example, abortion, increasing the number of women in politics) can also

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 198, 197

¹⁹⁸ Phillips A., 1995, *The Politics of Presence*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, Pg. 83

¹⁹⁹ Burrell B. C., 1994, *A Woman’s Place Is in the House: Campaigning for Congress in the Feminist Era*, University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor

Sweres M. L., 1998, “Are Women More Likely to Vote for Women’s Issue Bills than their Male Colleagues?” in *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 23(3), pg 435–448

Thomas S., 1994, *How Women Legislate*, Oxford University Press: New York, pg. 72-76

²⁰⁰ Tremblay M. & Pelletier R., 2000, “More Feminists or More Women?: Descriptive and Substantive Representations of Women in the 1997 Canadian Federal Elections”, in *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 21(4), pg. 382

²⁰¹ Dodson D. L. & Carroll S.J, 1991, *Reshaping the Agenda: Women in State Legislatures*, Research Paper, Centre for the American Woman and Politics, Rutgers State University of New Jersey

²⁰² “Womanist” was termed by Alice Walker and later taken up by Crenshaw in reference to intersectionality. As the thesis has adopted an intersectional methodology, the idea of womanism as opposed to feminism appears more relevant

influence the “degree of feminist spirit” portrayed by elected women²⁰³. Hence, it is safe to assert that not all political women will represent women; that is, a direct causal link between descriptive and substantive representation of women and feminist ideologies, in light of the nuance of political party ideology being incompatible with feminist philosophy²⁰⁴.

This view is reflected in a study examining the relationship between women’s qualitative and quantitative representations in the context of Canadian parliamentarianism that concluded that the degree of ‘feminist’ consciousness of political men and women influenced more significantly opinions on gender related issues, as compared to gender itself, although more women identified themselves as feminists. The study identified that having more women in Canadian politics was not necessarily the best approach to meet the interests and needs of women in a feminist context, but similarly mentioned that it was more appropriate to elect more feminist women. However, the study also equally highlighted that men with a higher degree of feminist consciousness could not embody women’s experiences as “second-class citizens” due to gendered power differentials²⁰⁵. Feminist consciousness in this context was measured in terms of participation as a collective, level of power discontent in society, and level of satisfaction with institutions and other societal systems.

In terms of non-institutional politics, the motivation of women to participate towards their substantive representation has been explained in different ways. Women’s political affinities has been traditionally categorised in feminist terms and women’s

²⁰³ Erickson L., 1997, “Might More Women Make a Difference?: Gender, Party and Ideology among Canada’s Parliamentary Candidates”, in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 30(4), pg. 663–688

²⁰⁴ Bashokin, S. (1996). “Political Parties and the Representation of Women” in A. B. Tanguay A.B & Gagnon AG(eds), *Canadian Parties*, pg. 479–495, Nelson Canada: Toronto

²⁰⁵ Tremblay M. & Pelletier R., 2000, “More Feminists or More Women?: Descriptive and Substantive Representations of Women in the 1997 Canadian Federal Elections”, in *International Political Science Review*, 21(4), pg. 398

movements; or bearing a focus on motherhood and women's reproductive roles, however, it is acknowledged that in some contexts, women's roles are multi-faceted and cannot be reduced to these two categories. For example, in the Latin American context, feminism is viewed as a middle-class philosophy²⁰⁶, but women use their social identity and status as mothers (supermadres) "through and within which" they still perform political acts and strengthen their political involvement²⁰⁷. Much of the literature reviewed on women's involvement in non-institutional politics has focused on the Latin American context, looking at the processes of women's political conscientisation, and forms of consciousness-raising through self-help groups and union work, which in turn provide women with their distinctive identities.²⁰⁸.

Gender and Politics- Sites of Power

Over the last three decades, the study of women and politics has shifted the focus from women's behaviour as political persons in a conventional and electoral context, to understanding their engagement in community action, social movements, informal and inconspicuous mobilisation. Recent scholarship has shifted focus from "women" to "gender", albeit the definition of "gender" has varied considerably²⁰⁹ giving rise to an extensive range of literature looking at how "gender" is a major constitutive component

²⁰⁶ Corcoran-Nantes Y., 2008, Female Consciousness or Feminist Consciousness? Women's Consciousness Raising in Community-Based Struggles in Brazil, *In: Dickinson T. D. & Schaeffer R. K. (eds.) Transformations: Feminist Pathways to Global Change- An Analytical Anthology*, Paradigm Publishers: Boulder, London, pg. 125

²⁰⁷ Longwe's Empowerment Framework can also be referred to in this context.

Longwe S., 1995, "Gender Awareness: The Missing Element in the Third World Development Program" in Candida M. & Wallace T. (eds.) *Changing Perception: New Writings on Gender and Development*. Oxfam: Oxford.

Brickner R., 2013, "Gender Conscientization, Social Movement Unionism, and Labor Revitalization: A Perspective from Mexico", *Labor History*, Vol. 54(1), pg. 21-41

²⁰⁸ Domínguez E. R. & Castro I., 1997, "Women's Urban and Rural Movements: Towards a New Type of Citizenship and Political Culture" in *Mexico Today*, pg. 2

²⁰⁹ Beckwith K., 2005, "A Common Language of Gender?" in *Politics & Gender*, Vol.1(1),pg. 128, 131

The meanings of gender have ranged from a synonym for sex to relations of power varying from culture and society. Beckwith proposes two meanings of gender, i.e. gender as category and gender as process

of politics and political power²¹⁰. These have been quite diverse, ranging from issues of citizenship, voting, leadership, representation, non-institutional politics, gender in political theory including gender differences in policy implementation and electoral systems. Research on comparative politics analysing a range of dependent/independent variables is also vast²¹¹. Similarly, a second body of work examines women's participation in political parties; response of political parties to feminist demands²¹²; and cross-national variations of party ideologies and strategies, electoral systems and activism within and outside parties²¹³.

Molyneux contends that a comparative look reveals that the emergence and vigour of women's movements and their engagement with the State varies by region, in their effectiveness, timing and type; whilst also being contingent on the character of civil society, cultural attributions, family structure, and political configuration and the type and level of female solidarity²¹⁴. Indeed, women's engagement as political actors is ubiquitous, taking various forms, from revolutions, populist upheaval, and Islamist opposition; to liberal processes such as voting, campaigning for elections or members of political wings. Women have constructed their political claims in relation to their identities as mothers and women and have mobilised collectively or individually as political actors to rise up against authoritarian regimes, such as in Argentina and El

²¹⁰ Beckwith K., 2010, "Comparative Politics and the Logics of a Comparative Politics of Gender" in *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.8, pg. 160

²¹¹ Caraway T., 2010, "Gendering Comparative Politics" in *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.8(1), pg.170

²¹² Young, L., 2010, *Feminists and Party Politics*, UBC Press: Vancouver, pg. 3

²¹³ Kittilson M., 2006, *Challenging Parties, Changing Parliaments: Women and Elected Office in Contemporary Western Europe*, Ohio State University Press: Columbus, pg. 2

²¹⁴ Molyneux M., 1998, "Analysing Women's Movements" in *Development and Change*, Vol. 29, pg. 221

Salvador²¹⁵ through direct confrontation or demonstrations; in opposition to war, as in the Committee of Soldiers' mothers in Russia; in Israel and Serbia, the Women in Black have resisted sectarian welfare and disputed the oppression of ethnic minorities; in Northern Ireland and in Chile, the Irish Women for Peace and Mothers of the Disappeared in Chile have staged public protests²¹⁶; or in Sub-Saharan Africa, women have participated actively in democratic transition whilst organising themselves into community associations to address political and social issues dating back to the pre-colonisation ²¹⁷. The democratisation of Eastern European, Latin American and Sub-Saharan countries subsequently resulted in the new dynamic of women's formal and informal engagement with politics and opened up new political opportunity structures for actors to challenge State authorities²¹⁸.

Women have drawn upon their "culture of politics"²¹⁹ to create new political environments for them to engage in and reconstruct the notion of nationhood and extend the concept of equal civil political and social rights for women in parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America²²⁰. These collective identities and activities performed by women have historically not been classified as political, and gender issues have not been central to politics, or have been misinterpreted to be solely women's issues. Concurrently, the institutions of politics in the Government have been traditionally resilient to mainstreaming women's interests. Feminism has transformed the way that

²¹⁵ Stephen L., 1995, "Women's Rights are Human Rights: The Merging of Feminine and Feminist Interests Among El Salvador's Mothers of the Disappeared (CO-MADRES)", in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 22(4), pg. 807

²¹⁶ Miles A., 1996, *Integrative Feminisms: Building Global Visions 1960s-1990s*, Routledge: New York

Yuval-Davis N., 1997, *Gender and Nation*, Sage: Thousand Oaks

²¹⁷ Fallon K., 2008, *Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movement in Sub-Saharan Africa*, The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, pg 2

²¹⁸ Almeida P. D., 2003, "Opportunity Organizations and Threat-Induced Contention: Protest Waves in Authoritarian Settings", in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 109(2): 348-349

²¹⁹ Robinson, M., (1998), "Democracy, Participation and Public Policy: The Politics of Institutional Design", in *The Democratic Developmental State: Politics*. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, pg. 39-40

²²⁰ Moghadam V. M., 1999, "Gender, National Identity and Citizenship: Reflections on the Middle East and North Africa", in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol.XIX(1), pg. 137

gender is theorised in political theory, theorising both female and male subjectivities. Feminism has further questioned the traditional definitions of gendered power relations emphasising the role of cultural practice, as well as the process through which women's subordination is established and reproduced. These include economic, social and political processes,

Women's Activism and Citizenship

In many cases, women have linked their activism to social movements and broader struggles for democracy through the discourse of citizenship²²¹. Studies have focused on the impact of women's mobilisation on processes of democratisation, democratic consolidation and how these processes have impacted on how women have carried out political acts both at the national level and at the grass-roots level. In both cases, the specificity of political context, as well as the effects of changing international norms, has been further critical in enabling women's engagement with citizenship issues. In the Latin American region²²², the quest for a return to democracy acted as the basis for a coalition of social forces through cooperation amongst different groups of women, from the Catholic Church, feminist elites, to grass-root organisations. It is argued that intellectual leadership and political consciousness of women were crucial to demarcate women's mobilisation as a movement and marking out women's demands as political. In Central America, women's activism expressed through peaceful marches, strikes and sometimes participation in armed conflict were geared towards creating a democratic State responsive to their interests under the banner of human rights which led to the

²²¹ Rai S. E., 2000, *International Perspectives on Gender and Democratisation*, Macmillan: UK

²²² Women in post-communist regimes excluded.

Alvarez S., 1990, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey

recognition of women's collective demands in the civil sphere under newly formed democratic governments. However, in the post democratisation period, it is revealed that there was a decrease in the number of women in the Central American Region and Eastern European States elected in decision-making instances, in the number of gender-sensitive programmes favouring women and measures for the increased regulation of women by the State. Nevertheless, in the consolidation phase, Central America saw a burgeoning civil society organisation and NGOs²²³.

In addition, studies have also examined the contribution of women's organising in breaking down non-democratic regimes to transition to formal electoral politics²²⁴. Other case, studies have criticised the ways that women have been side-lined in democratic transition processes and in the decision making structures of Government and political parties after national liberation. In Mozambique for example, although the post-independence Government introduced legislative provision to work towards an equal socio-economic gender inclusive society, feminism was seen as divisive to the struggle for independence²²⁵.

It is important to note, nevertheless that whilst the discourse of citizenship has underscored women's political pressure for equal economic, social and political rights, scholars have warned of the limitation in its universality and unitary standards. According to critics, citizenship is seen in terms of an ethnocentric conception of rights, overlooking the heterogeneity of subject identities²²⁶. Scholars have subsequently

²²³ Saint-Germain M. A. & Chavez-Metoyer C., 2008, *Women Legislators in Central America: Politics, Democracy, and Policy*, University of Texas Press: Austin, pg. 11-13

Chavez Metoyer C., 2000, *Women and the State in Post-Sandinista Nicaragua*, Lynne Rienner: Boulder, CO

Jonas S., 2000, "Democratization through Peace: The Difficult Case of Guatemala", in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 42(2), pg. 11, 15

²²⁴ Waylen G., 2010, "Gender and Transitions: What do we Know?", in *Democratization*, Vol. 10(1), pg. 158

²²⁵ Pillai S., 2000, *National Liberation Movements and Women's Liberation*. PhD- Political Studies, University of Aukland

²²⁶ Eisenstein Z., 1993, *The Color of Gender – Reimagining Democracy* University of California Press: Berkeley, pg. 6

proposed a reconstruction of rights inclusive of difference based on gender, race, class, situated knowledge, and sensitive to social needs and the conducive conditions that are needed for these rights and needs to be realised²²⁷. In this context, the literature review provides an array of examples of differences amongst women in terms of class and agendas, as in Angola²²⁸ where the Organisation of Angolan Women (OAW) which is the women's wing under the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)- had a vital role in helping the guerrilla forces, both within and outside of the country, however, members were educated women bearing ties to the political leaders of the party.

Civil Society and Women's Movements

It is written that the vibrancy of a civil society that mirrors the interests of social groups in that locale is taken as a crucial axis that affects the process of democracy in a country²²⁹. Although some scholars have argued that democracy is embedded in liberal democracy and is inherently gendered²³⁰, the framework and language of democracy has been used as a powerful political motif by civil society²³¹ to inform collective action to claim parity in representation,

²²⁷ Wilson W. J., 1987, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago; Correa S., & Petchesky R., 1994, "Reproductive and Social Rights: A Feminist Perspective" in Sen G., Germain A. & Cohen L.C. (eds.), *Population Policies Considered*, HCPD & IWHC, pg. 107–26; Hill Collins P., 1990, *Black Feminist Thought*, Unwin Hyman: Boston

²²⁸ Ducados H., 2004, *Angolan women in the aftermath of Conflict: From Military Peace to Social Justice? The Angolan Peace Process*. Accessible Online at <http://www.c-r.org/accord-article/angolan-women-aftermath-conflict>, Last Accessed March 2013. In contrast, to the OMA, women in leadership positions in Independent League for Angolan Women (LIMA), "the women's wing of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, had no kinship ties to the UNITA leadership"

²²⁹ The other two factors are international/inter-state relations; individual state/its political institutions and leadership. Huber E., Rueschemeyer D. & Stephens J. D., 1997, "The Paradoxes of Contemporary Democracy: Formal, Participatory, and Social Dimensions", in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29(3), pg. 323

²³⁰ Bystydzienski J. & Sekhon J., 1999, *Democratisation and Women's Grassroots Movements*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington, pg. 9

Kymlicka W., 1995, *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, Oxford University Press: Oxford

Pateman C., 1986, *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*, Allen and Unwin

Rai S., 1996, Gender and Democratisation: Autonomy and Ambiguity, in: Luckham, R. & White, G. (eds.) *Democratisation and Regionalisation*, University of Warwick: Warwick

²³¹ Civil Society is seen as a realm that in in-between the private family domain and the State. As a term, it remains nebulous

participation, accountability and equality of citizenship and individual subject positions. The definition of civil society remains fluid and reflects a multiplicity of interests, groups and motivations. In order to have an appreciation of social movements, as part of civil society, it is useful to formulate an appropriate definition and look at their *modus operandi*. Tarrow²³² writes that the basic characteristic of social movements relies on collective action, common purpose, social solidarity and sustained interaction and commitment²³³ of the movement participants²³⁴. This idea echoes Tilly and Wood²³⁵ in the argument that social movements have “collective challenges based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities”. In light of these characteristics, it may be argued social movements are defined as “conscious collective sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspects of their societies through extra-institutional means”²³⁶. Thus, it may be asserted that the key potential of social movements remains mobilisation through personal involvement; their capacity to generate new ideas and practices and mobilise action around this new thinking²³⁷. Collective action usually involves public direct action against the power structure or cultural codes through collective “contentious”

Taylor (cited in Kligman, 1990:179, 420) describes civil society as “a web of autonomous associations independent of the State, which bind citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their existence or actions could have an effect on public policy.” Conceptualising civil society in this term enables a working definition for many scholars, however, it remains blurry as to whether it includes political organisations. Hence, for the purpose of this section, another working definition as proposed by the London School of Economics is seen as more appropriate

Kligman G., 1990, “Reclaiming the Public: A Reflection on Recreating Civil Society in Romania”, in *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 4(3), pg.

Hann C. & Dunn E., 1996, *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*, Routledge: London, pg. 27

²³² Tarrow S., 2011, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge

²³³ *ibid* Pg. 9-12

²³⁴ More recently, scholars have asserted that the political regime in place affects the form of oppositional discourse of social movements. Veit A., 2011, “Social Movements, Contestation and Direct International Rule: Theoretical approaches, in *Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, Vol. 20(11), pg. 18

²³⁵ Tilly C. & Wood L., 2009, as cited in Tarrow S., 2011, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pg. 9

²³⁶ Goodwin J. & Jasper J., 2003, *The Social Movements Reader*, pg. 3

²³⁷ Dahlerup D., 2000, “Women’s Movement and Internationalization: Empowerment or Disempowerment?”, in: *APSAA 2000*

challenges²³⁸. In terms of common purpose, solidarity and sustained interaction, it is argued that the concept of interest²³⁹ informs the collective action of social movements.

In the same vein, women's movements, as part of civil society have employed the language of human rights, entitlements, equality, difference, as well as the universalist discourse of citizenship (and those focusing on women's rights) as strategies of resistance and/or to formulate strategies to enhance their participation in democratic nations, for the democratisation of politics, in institutional design of their States, and to address their practical and strategic needs, amongst others²⁴⁰. Women's movements have been defined in terms of an alternative form of collective action by women in their quest to reach a common goal. Molyneux has identified three forms of collective action by women, namely, "independent, associative and directed"²⁴¹. A substantive part of the literature on women's movements links women's activism to struggles for democracy, demands for substantive and formal citizenship status and framed discursively in terms of universal human rights, as has been the case in Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe. However, critics point out that whilst the concept of citizenship and human rights portray a universal image, it is also gendered and ethnically structured. Thus, democracy and a politics of citizenship based on this universalistic understanding of human and women's rights has served to mask the diversity of women's needs and experiences in countries that are

²³⁸ *ibid*

²³⁹ Or recognition of a common interest. This concept will be elaborated upon in the subsequent sections

Melluci (1988), on the other hand claims that movement purposely construct collective identities through constant negotiation Melluci A., 1988, "Getting Involved: Identity and Mobilization in Social Movements." *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, Vol.1, pg. 329-348

²⁴⁰ The literature identifies three major schools of thoughts on social movement organisation theory. These look at resource mobilisation, political process, and cultural-cognitive approaches²⁴⁰. In terms of resource mobilisation, the literature recognises that there are different types of organisations that associate themselves with movement activities; whilst the political process approach elaborates on the concept of political opportunity structure to consider the diversity of factors that shape movement development. These factors include institutional provisions for participation, stability of political, access to elites and alliances, conflict with elites and level of repression²⁴⁰. The cultural-cognitive approach explains that movements are formed and operate within social and cultural contexts that resonate with their personal lives, values and beliefs, for example, in some cases membership in the women's movement is explained by identity affiliation rather than social class²⁴⁰.

²⁴¹ Molyneux M., 1998, *Analysing Women's Movements*, *Development and Change*, 29(2), pg. 219-245

economically and culturally diverse. Thus, in different contexts and points in time, women's organizations have advocated for different elements of citizenship and have had alternative conceptions of the discourse of human rights²⁴².

In terms of inter-sectionality, Halsaa²⁴³ explains that in the Norwegian context, empirical research carried out in the last three years reveals that migrant minority women and the majority of women members of women's organisations fail to see themselves as being equal to other women in the same movement and do not engage collaboratively on the same issues, for example relating to violence against women. It is explained that there is a lack of intersectional thinking or due to identity politics²⁴⁴, which leads to a more complex understanding of identities. This situation is also seen in the Belgian women's movement amongst the North African, Turkish and Southern European women, as well as in the United Kingdom amongst Caribbean women. Ouali²⁴⁵ writes that migrant women from North Africa established their own women's association in light of their identities as Muslim women to address their needs which were often derided by the mainstream Belgian women's associations. Subsequently, in a bid to form their own associations, it is argued that these minority women have taken a political stand by linking their identities to exercising a sense of agency, or what Yuval-Davis²⁴⁶ has termed as multi-layered citizenship to the extent that it is linked to their gendered citizenship and mediated through cultural and religious differences. Similarly, a study of the Spanish women's movement reveals that the concept of inter-

²⁴² Blacklock C. & Macdonald L., 2000, "Women and Citizenship in Mexico and Guatemala", in: Rai S. (ed.) *International Perspectives on Gender and Democratisation*, Macmillan: London

²⁴³ Halsaa B., Roseneil S., Sümer S., 2012, *Remaking Citizenship in Multicultural Europe*, pg. 178, 182

²⁴⁴ Although it is argued that it places too much emphasis on cultural, class-based and economic differences (Kauffman, 1990); focuses on private grievances, rather than public actions and building consensus (Elshtain, 1993); leads to reductionism and essentialism (Modood, 1994); and divides sections of the populace (Gitlin, 1995),

Nicholson (2008, pg 186), however, argues that identity affects life choices and needs to be addressed on a political level

²⁴⁵ Ouali, 2007, as cited in Halsaa B., Roseneil S., Sümer S., 2012, *Remaking Citizenship in Multicultural Europe*, pg. 181

²⁴⁶ Yuval Davis N, 1999, "The Multi Layered Citizen", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol.1(1), pg. 119-136

sectionality plays a major role in the types of claims made and how debates are framed. It is thus revealed that in the Spanish context, claims to address gender violence have been made mostly by the ethnic majority women's organization, whilst ethnicity race and class remain silent categories within the women's movement, with little evidence of an intersectional approach to bring to the open problems of violence²⁴⁷. Subsequently, Hekman²⁴⁸ calls for activism that moves beyond identity politics.

These findings are important to the extent that it is crucial to investigate to what extent a sense of shared identity becomes central to women's collective action in and across associations; or whether there exists an ethnocentric version of women's emancipation that guides the actions of women's association in Mauritius, given its multi-ethnic base. It further calls for a nuanced approach to identity and political activism, and how this is exercised through a citizenship framework as part of civil society.

Deconstructing the Universal Woman- "Differentiating Citizenship"²⁴⁹

Feminist scholarship relating to post-structuralism and black feminist writing has critiqued androcentric political theory that rendered women invisible and unveiled the "false universalism" of women where the category of "woman" has been equated with the dominant women (white/middle classed) in virtually the same manner that political

²⁴⁷ Sandu A., 2013, "Participation, Representation and Voice in the Fight Against Gender Violence: The Case of the Women's Movement in Spain", in *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 14(1), pg. 24-39

²⁴⁸ Hekman S., 2000, "Beyond Identity: Activism: Feminism, Identity and Identity Politics" in *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 1(3), pg. 304

²⁴⁹ Term borrowed from Lister R., 1997, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* Macmillan:Basingstoke, pg 39

theory has been representative of the abstract dominant group of “man”²⁵⁰. However, deconstructing the category woman into fragments also implies that there is no “category” of woman to be constructed as “citizen”. In the same vein, Black feminist writings have asserted “woman” not being a unitary concept, does not preclude the fact that they share a solidarity and common interests based on gender relations. These common interests include, primarily the exclusion from practising their full citizenship by being excluded from the public sphere with its inherently gendered institutions. Lister²⁵¹ refers to the term “differentiated citizenship” to explain this latter idea as a “new kind of articulation between the universal” where universalism is understood as a “moral commitment” to equal participation.²⁵²

This theoretical standpoint can be applied to the issue of citizenship rights and participatory decision-making through what has been termed as “transversal dialogue” involving a fluid process where participants still hold on to their own multiple social identities, but simultaneously are disposed to partake in open dialogue with others rooted in their own identities²⁵³. This conceptual framework resonates with the “politics of difference” which entails “a commitment to a universalistic orientation to the positive value of difference within a democratic political process”²⁵⁴. Such a politics of difference requires a readiness by any one movement to show a level of interest in combatting

²⁵⁰ Williams F., 1989, *Social Policy: A Critical Introduction* Polity Press Cambridge, pg 118. Williams F., 1996, *Postmodernism, Feminism and the Question of Difference*, Routledge:London

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, pg. 39

²⁵² Mouffe C., 1993, *The Return of the Political*, Verso:London, pg. 13. Yeatman A., 1993, *Voice and Representation in the Politics of Difference*, pg 229.

Young I. M., 1990, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* Princeton University Press: Oxford

²⁵³ Yuval-Davis N., 1994, Women, Ethnicity and Empowerment *Feminism and Psychology*, 4(1), pg. 179-197

²⁵⁴ Yeatman A., 1994, *Post-modern Revisionings of the Political* Routledge:London, pg. 89

different forms of oppression expressed by another movement²⁵⁵ A practical example of transversal dialogue echoes with the South African example which saw the formation of a Women's National Coalition comprising of women from different walks of life, differentiated by race/ethnicity, class, religious and political lines to form a forum for dialogue and negotiation. As a result of the deliberations of the Forum, a Charter for Effective Equality was drafted inclusive of the diversity of women's voices towards the new Constitution²⁵⁶. Cockburn also identifies a similar type of transversal universalism in women centres across Belfast, where women, despite their differences across political ideologies have come together united to meet at community centres to discuss issues surrounding gender inequality. Such examples are found across the different continents where women lobby and advocate together to exercise different forms of agencies²⁵⁷. may not permit the space/time to engage in a participatory dialogue, or in situations with structural barriers such as poverty which may limit dialogue in the first instance. Concurrently, a different feminist pluralistic notion of citizenship has also been identified examining the differences existing between women as a category and the multiplicity of representational sites where women exercise their agency towards political citizenship. It is argued that the practice of active political citizenship could unite women beyond their identity politics through dialogue and while displaying a solidarity despite the many differences amongst women²⁵⁸, or strategic solidarities²⁵⁹ in reference to their multiple

²⁵⁵ Yeatman A., 1993, *Voice and Representation in the Politics of Difference*, pg. 231

²⁵⁶ Kemp A., Madlala N., Moodley M. & Salo E., 1995, *The Dawn of a New Day: Redefining South African Feminism*, Westview Press:Boulder, Colorado and Oxford, pg. 150

²⁵⁷ Cockburn C., 1996, *Different Together: Women in Belfast*, *Soundings*, 2, pg. 32-47

²⁵⁸ Lister R., 2003, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*, New York University:New York, pg. 82

²⁵⁹ Dean J., 1997, *Feminism and the New Democracy: Resisting the Political*, Sage: London, pg. 17. Dean uses the term tactical solidarities

subjectivities and roles. Having a “common context of struggle”²⁶⁰ has also been adopted to explain a compelling women’s alliance within difference. In this case Mohanty presents the alliance established amongst different groups of black women such as the Maori, Asian women and Pacific Islanders. Concurrently, the problematic of difference amongst different groups of women renders alliance building and women’s organising impractical due to the different historical contexts that some groups of women have evolved in, putting them in a more subordinate position. Mohanty relates to the case study of Maori women who view a multicultural alliance with Asian women as weakening their fight for indigenous rights, and rather have bicultural alliances²⁶¹.

Parliamentary Gender Caucus

The importance of a Parliamentary Gender Caucus with a mandate to apply a gender lens to policy and to oversee the gender mainstreaming commitments of governments cannot be overlooked²⁶². The leverage provided by an institutionalised structure at the highest level, instead of through an individual Parliamentarian, to monitor gender equality commitments, requires that such issues may be raised more effectively in the Parliament with stronger support. Furthermore, where such a structure is of a cross-party nature it may gather momentum to adopt certain bills and promote trust across

²⁶⁰ Mohanty C. T., Russo A. & Torres L., 1991, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington, pg. 7

²⁶¹ Mohanty C., 2003, Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles, *Signs*, Vol. 28(2), 507

²⁶² See IPU Resolution “Beijing + 10: An Evaluation From A Parliamentary Perspective” (2004) which encourages parliaments to play an active and positive role in the promotion of gender equality and to implement measures aimed at ensuring gender equality in representation, by establishing parliamentary committees on gender equality, composed of both men and women, making use of the tools of gender budgeting analysis, ensuring the gender mainstreaming of all decisions and legislation, and allocating sufficient resources to these activities

European Parliament resolution on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Development Cooperation, adopted 13 March 2008

party lines, thus facilitating joint action to promote gender equality²⁶³. Parliamentary Gender Caucuses are seen as specialised parliamentary body dealing with gender equality covering a broad spectrum of conceptual and operational frameworks; from the most to a lesser formalised cross-party or single party structure varying in terms of structure, membership, mandate, working/operative methods, and relationships. The literature reveals that there are numerous empirical arguments outlining parliamentary institution building, and more specifically on the setting up of Parliamentary Gender/Women Caucuses (PGCs). The most common arguments relate to the empowerment of individual parliamentarians through group dynamics that support the same cause for gender equality. This would reduce pressure on individual MPs to lobby for a cause and rather create cross-party consensus. Other scholars speak of the functional arguments by applying a gender lens to policy formulation and implementation²⁶⁴, as is the case in Australia²⁶⁵.

PGCs are reputed as being a catalyst for affirmative action in the political arena in various ways, ranging from identifying to reviewing discriminatory institutionalised practices and legislative frameworks that discriminate against women or that are insensitive to practical and strategic gender interests. Women's caucuses may even build partnerships with women's NGOs, women's community based organisations and the women's policy agencies to lobby with respect to specific issues. Some PGCs are subject to formal parliamentary approval, whilst others may be less structured. A number of countries around the world have set up their specific functional Parliamentary

²⁶³ IPU., 2013. *Guidelines for Women's Caucuses* [Online]. Available: <http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/caucus-e.pdf> [Accessed 5 February 2017], pg. 17-46

²⁶⁴ Shifman P., Madlala-Routledge N. & Smith V. 2012. *Women in Parliament caucus for action to end violence* [Online]. Available: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10130950.1997.9675661> [Accessed 3 March 2017].

²⁶⁵ Palmieri S. 2008. *Gender Mainstreaming in the Australian Parliament: Achievement with room for improvement* [Online]. Available: https://www.flickr.com/photos/cpa_hq/sets/72157681573491656 [Accessed 6 March 2017].

Gender Caucuses, or a Reference Group on Gender Equality at National level, such as the US Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues; Rwanda's Parliamentary Gender Caucus; the Belgium Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men; the Canadian Standing Committee on the Status of Women; and the Indian Committee on Empowerment of Women. One of the best practices remains the Committee of the European Parliament working on gender equality comprising representatives from all political parties in the European Parliament. The PGC architecture worldwide operate through a range of repertoires, and have specifically been instrumental in raising awareness on gender issues using a bottom-up approach, hence bringing about action on specific issues of concern to male and female constituents; monitoring the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies in all policies, plans and programs, including scrutinizing the national budget from a gender-sensitive lens.

Furthermore it is reported that PGCs have been effective in countries such as the Ugandan's Women's Caucus has conducted workshops for women MPs on parliamentary procedures and coalition building; in Finland, the Network of Women Deputies in the Finnish parliament conducts debate luncheons where gender issues are raised and in Morocco the Women's Parliamentary Network trained women parliamentarians on conflict resolution²⁶⁶. Overall, it is argued that PGCs give a strong signal of the Government's political will to the women's empowerment and gender equality agenda, at the highest level of decision-making²⁶⁷. PGCs have also been established in the forms of specialized gender committees across party line in countries

²⁶⁶ Institute. N. D. 2004. *Women's Caucus Fact Sheet* [Online]. Available: Women's Caucus Fact Sheet [Accessed 6 March 2017]. Ndi-Morocco, 2003, Information Seminar on Women Parliamentarian's Groups: Examples from Across the Globe- (support material for the information seminar on women parliamentarian groups, Rabat, Morocco, February 20-21, 2003),

Tripp A. M., 2001, The New Political Activism in Africa, *Journal of Democracy*, 12(3), pg. 150

²⁶⁷ Markham S., 2012, Strengthening Women's Roles in Parliaments, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 24.

such as Belgium, India, South Africa where they have been able to implement gender mainstreaming strategies in the contents of bills, policy-making and working in close partnership with national gender machineries and the media to ensure monitoring of the status of gender mainstreaming²⁶⁸. In Mauritius, a cross-party Parliamentary Gender Caucus has been established at the level of the National Assembly through an amendment to Standing Order 69 and the Rule and Regulations of Parliament. The overall vision of the Caucus is the attainment of gender equality, through assessing the gender sensitivity of policies and programmes however, this initiative is still at its embryonic stage and the Caucus has only been recently launched in 2017^{269, 270}.

Exploring the Links from here – Structures of the State and Civil Society

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, a number of countries have adopted some form of gender quota within their electoral systems. These countries have been in majority post-conflict countries within the Eastern and Southern African region, namely in Burundi, Eritrea, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Angola and Rwanda. Countries such as Kenya, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Francophone countries such as Senegal and Togo have also followed suit in terms of adopting some form of gender

²⁶⁸ United Nations, 1998, Report of the Expert Group Meeting on National Machineries for Gender Equality, .31 August to 4 September 1998 Santiago, Chile.

²⁶⁹ It remains too premature to comment on the effectiveness of the Mauritius Parliamentary Gender Caucus as it has only been established and no strategic plan has yet been formulated.

Mauritius National Assembly, 15 March 2017, Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly 1995, Available Online at <http://mauritiusassembly.govmu.org/English/Documents/Standing%20Orders%20and%20Rules/standingordermrg.pdf>, Last Accessed May 2018

²⁷⁰ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. 2010. *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*; http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.MAR.6-7_en.pdf [Accessed 4 March 2017]. Paras. 65, 191

quota system²⁷¹. The literature reveals that the adoption of different forms of quota systems have been a result of mobilisation by women's movements, or have made reference to the strategies of political elites, or been grounded in values of equality and representation, and international norms and transnational effects²⁷². It is reported that there have been a number of factors that have led to the institutionalisation of the quota system relating partly to the opportunity structure offered by a post-conflict political transition which implied the adoption of new constitutions and electoral systems, as well as a mobilisation of the national women's movement, the interventions of expats who had been empowered while in exile in other countries, a liberation movement or dominant party with an inherent commitment to women's emancipation, and a diffusion effect from one country to another within the region²⁷³.

The case of Rwanda remains a best practice in the African Region and globally in terms of having the highest percentage of descriptive representation of women in light of the highest number of women in parliament (62 per cent)²⁷⁴. Scholars have credited the adoption of gender sensitive laws, gender mainstreaming in the legislative process and the institutionalisation of gender responsive budgeting to the increased presence of

²⁷¹ Government of Senegal, 2011, Code Electoral, Available Online at http://www.au-senegal.com/IMG/pdf/senegal_code-electoral_2011.pdf, Last Accessed May 2018

IDEA, 2018, Gender Quotas Database, Available Online at <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/quotas>, Last Accessed May 2018

²⁷² Krook M.L., 2010, "Gender Quotas and Women's Political Empowerment, E-International Relations, Available Online at <http://www.e-ir.info/2010/06/18/gender-quotas-and-women%E2%80%99s-political-empowerment/>, Last Accessed May 2018

²⁷³ Bauer G., Britton H., 2006, *Women in African Parliaments*, Lynne Rienner Publishers: New York

²⁷⁴ IPU, 2018, *Women in National Parliaments*, Available Online at <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>, Last Accessed May 2018

Paxton P., Hughes M.M., 2007, *Women, Politics and Power: A Global Perspective*, CQ Press

Dahlerup D., 2013, *Women, Quotas and Politics*, Routledge Research in Comparative Politics, Taylor & Francis Group: New York, pg. 112, 114, 130

Burnet J., 2008, "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda" in *African Affairs*, Vol. 127(428), pg. 261-386

Bauer G., Burnet J., 2013, "Gender Quotas, Democracy, and Women's Representation in Africa : Some Insights from Democratic Botswana and Autocratic Rwanda", in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 41(2) pg. 103-112

women in Parliament in Rwanda²⁷⁵. In the aftermath of the Genocide in Rwanda, a new Constitution²⁷⁶ was drafted that included an Equality of Result quota system for at least 30 per cent of all representatives, and including at the level of Parliament to be women. Concurrently, women were eligible for women-only seats. The literature mentions that the women's movement had had a mass mobilisation around the drafting of the new Constitution to make sure that equality was enshrined in the document. The umbrella women's organisation, "Collectifs Pro-Femmes" and affiliated member NGOs advocated for the inclusion of gender equality within the drafting processes along with concerted efforts with women parliamentarians and the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development. The newly drafted Constitution²⁷⁷ specifically cites CEDAW (1979) in its preamble and also stipulates the commitment towards

“...ensuring equal rights between Rwandans and between women and men without prejudice to the principles of gender equality and complementarity in national development....”

Additionally, Title One of the constitution also establishes the equality of all Rwandans ensued in terms of granting women at least 30 per cent of all positions in decision making organs. The 30 percent quota was filled in 2008 and women gained another 26 per cent of the seats in the legislature via the political party ballot amounting to 56 percent. In 2013, the descriptive representation of women rose to 64 per cent. It is also to be noted that the women's associations within civil society has developed a three-fold approach for coordinating their lobbying among civil society (represented by Pro-

²⁷⁵ Devlin C., Elgie R., 2008, "The Effect of Increased Women's Representation in Parliament: The Case of Rwanda" in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 61(2), pg. 237-254

²⁷⁶ The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, 2003, Available online at <http://www.rwandahope.com/constitution.pdf>, Last Accessed May 2018

²⁷⁷ *ibid*

Femmes), the executive branch (Ministry of Gender and Women in Development), and the legislative branch (Forum of Women Parliamentarians). Pro Femmes led the consultations with women at the grass-roots levels around the ratification of the new constitution to include their concerns. Pro Femmes subsequently held discussions with the representatives of the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development and the Forum of Women Parliamentarians to inform of the concerns of women at the grass-roots level. These three stakeholders, namely, Pro Femmes, the Ministry and the Forum of Women Parliamentarians drafted a policy paper for the Constitutional Commission to include these specific concerns. For Femmes then conducted a mobilisation campaign for women to support the country-wide referendum on the new Constitution. Hence, the coordination mechanism spearheaded by Pro Femmes with the Legislature and the Executive had contributed to giving women a powerful voice towards democracy.

Coupled with women's activism at three levels, there have been noteworthy changes in gendered roles and gendered power dynamics in post-genocide Rwanda. Furthermore, the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front under the now President, had ensured that women's inclusion remained a hallmark of its programme for post-genocide recovery and reconstruction. Similarly, in order to monitor and evaluate progress towards gender equality, and compliance towards various national, regional and international commitments, a Gender Monitoring Office²⁷⁸ has been established under the Prime Minister's Office in Rwanda, through the Constitution of 2003 (and revised in 2015). Members comprise representatives from the National Women's Council, Ministry

²⁷⁸ Gender Monitoring Office, Available Online at <http://www.gmo.gov.rw/index.php?id=333>, Last Accessed May 2018
I had the opportunity to interact with Members of the Women Parliamentary Forum in Rwanda, as well as Officers of the Gender Monitoring Office, National Women's Council, Ministry of Gender, National Children's Council and hold discussions with the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies during the course of an assignment on Parliamentary Gender Caucuses. The high level of political will from the President and commitment towards gender equality came out as one of the highlight of my interaction with the different stakeholders.

of Gender, National Children's Council thus ensuring that gender is mainstreamed at all these levels. In this context, it can be seen that the political will at the highest level of decision making, as well as a close collaboration between women at the grass-roots level, women in the legislature and at the level of the Executive has been the cornerstone of the increased descriptive representation of women in Rwanda²⁷⁹.

Whilst acknowledging the fact that women's policy machineries and women's organisations operate within different political spheres, it remains critical for the two categories to consult and support each other to bring about meaningful change. Lovenduski *et al.*²⁸⁰ examines the effectiveness of women's policy agencies in addressing women's/feminist interests in eleven post-industrial democracies by looking at the ways and conditions in which women's policy agencies have supported the lobbying actions of women's associations²⁸¹, by adopting a common methodology developed by the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS) scholars. The methodology looks at debates on political representation²⁸² and assesses the impact made by women's groups and the role of the policy agencies in reframing the terms of the debate on that particular issue. Under the overarching RNGS framework, it is claimed that debates on policies will vary according to the activities and characteristics of the WPAs and the impact of the women's groups, policy content and

²⁷⁹ Powley E., 2003. *Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda's Transition*. Washington, DC: Women Waging Peace; and Powley, Elizabeth, 2005. 'Rwanda: La moitié des sièges pour les femmes au Parlement' [Rwanda: half the seats for women in Parliament], in Manon Tremblay (ed.). *Femmes et parlements: un regard international* [Women and parliaments: an international view]. Montreal: Remue-ménage.

Newbury C., Baldwin H., 2001. 'Confronting the Aftermath of Conflict: Women's Organizations in Postgenocide Rwanda', in Krishna Kumar (ed.). *Women and Civil War: Impact, Organizations, and Action*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 97–128.

Tripp A. M., 2004. 'Quotas in Africa', in Julia Ballington (ed.). *The Implementation of Quotas: Africa Experiences*, Stockholm: International IDEA

²⁸⁰ Lovenduski J., Baudino C., Guadagnini M., Meier P. & Sainsbury D., 2005, *State Feminism and Political Representation*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pg. 4,5,8. See RNGS Research Network on Gender Politics and the State <http://libarts.wsu.edu/polisci/rngs/>

²⁸¹ The term women's movement is introduced to refer to a group of women's associations with a broad common agenda.

²⁸² Lovenduski J., Baudino C., Guadagnini M., Meier P. & Sainsbury D., 2005, *State Feminism and Political Representation*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pg. 4,5,8. In Lovenduski's case, case studies have examined three debates on political representation in 11 post industrialised countries

participation in light of the features of the women's groups as well as the overall conduciveness of the policy environment. It is assumed that although the RHGS methodology was designed for Western democracies, it may be applicable to the developing world²⁸³, given a similar evolution of women's policy agencies, after 1975 although they tackle different sets of contextual challenges²⁸⁴. The methodology adopted by the RNGS included documenting and assessing the activities of women's groups and WPAs from initial appearance of a proposal on the national agenda to the final government actions²⁸⁵.

Weldon²⁸⁶ maintains that a strong and autonomous women's group having a good link with public agencies is crucial to improve women's substantive representation. For example, in the case of Uganda, Tamale²⁸⁷ comments on the weak relationship between women MPs and women activists. Conversely, Childs²⁸⁸ notes that in the U.K., women MPs hold a strong relationship with their constituents and effectively voice their concerns and advocate for women as has been the case in reducing the value-added tax on sanitary products²⁸⁹. Moreover, organisations compete for financial resources and they have come to rely on financial support from the government. The financial nexus between non-governmental organisations' survival and their capacity to advocate in favour of women is crucial. In cases where organisations have limited funding, they may forego lobbying activities that they may have otherwise engaged in. For example,

²⁸³ Mc Bride D. E. & Mazur A. G., 2011, Background paper for WDR12 on Gender Machineries Worldwide, World Bank, pg. 20

²⁸⁴ Rai S., 2003, *Mainstreaming Gender, Democratizing the State? Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women*, Manchester University Press: Manchester: True J. & Mintrom M., 2001, "Transnational Networks and Policy Diffusion: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming", in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 45, pg. 27-57.

²⁸⁵ Mc Bride D. E. & Mazur A. G., 2011, Background paper for WDR12 on Gender Machineries Worldwide, World Bank, pg. 7

²⁸⁶ Weldon S. L., 2002, "Beyond Bodies: Institutional Sources of Representation for Women in Democratic Policymaking", in *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 64(4), pg. 1153-1174

²⁸⁷ Tamale, S., 1999, *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*, Westview Press: Boulder, pg.200

²⁸⁸ Childs S., 2004, *New Labour's Women MPs: Women Representing Women*, Routledge: New York, pg. 120

²⁸⁹ Childs S. & Withey J., 2006, The Substantive Representation of Women: The Case of the Reduction of VAT on Sanitary Products, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 59(1), pg. 10-23

in some African and Latin American countries, associations are often called upon to complement Government's services to provide women's health-related services. However, it may be argued that the source of funding affects the type of services provided by civil society and thus its ability to challenge the State²⁹⁰. In Mauritius, most registered associations are granted an allowance, and all women's associations fall under the umbrella of the National Women's Council and receive a token yearly grant to support their activities. The question of their autonomy thus becomes problematic, as well as the type of activities being implemented, which tend to focus on practical needs. It may be further argued that, as the aid architecture is changing in countries with a high Human Development Index, such as Mauritius, external donor driven agendas take precedence with limited local ownership and sustainability²⁹¹.

As the strategies of women's associations differ, its agenda, status, visibility and vibrancy also change. Not all women's associations seek to transform power relations, nor are they successful in doing so. Some women's grass roots organisations would not necessarily want to refer to their actions as feminist; nor can they come out as feminists. In this sense, it is crucial to look at its independence, as an autonomous, active and oppositional women's group is key to mobilise resistance in favour of women's issues and not be undermined by Government policies or financial support²⁹². Being autonomous is further central to its functionality to that it, firstly conveys a deliberative democratic portrait to policy debates by acting as key intermediaries in consultations on

²⁹⁰ Jaggar A. M., 2005, "Arenas of Citizenship: Civil Society, the State and the Global Order", in: Friedman M. (ed.) *Women and Citizenship*. Oxford University Press: New York, pg. 99

²⁹¹ Bunwaree S., *Governance, Gender and Politics in Mauritius*, ELP Publications: Mauritius, pg. 241

²⁹² Murray S.E., 2005. "Women's Movement Institutionalization: The Need for New Approaches" in *Just Policy*, Vol.38 (December), pg. 28

a wide range of policy issues; and does not succumb to 'institutionalised'²⁹³ State sponsored feminism, which has the potential of deradicalising women's activism²⁹⁴.

Subsequently, the question that arises is to what extent, women's/feminist associations can be autonomous without being isolated from other political discourses and organisations and running the risk of being excluded from important and relevant policy debates. In the same vein, Andrew²⁹⁵ argues that integrating feminism into an existing institution and shared institutional forms contributes towards making feminist projects susceptible to being marginalized within changing structures, and vulnerable to change in Government leadership and budgetary limitations. In Western Europe, for example, when women's associations regrouped into a "women's movement" extricated themselves from the State, it has been excluded from influencing policy decisions²⁹⁶.

The scope of intervention of women's groups to work towards achieving women's strategic needs depends on its autonomy. In post-colonial and countries undergoing democratic transition, autonomy of a women's movement has not been as much a pre-requisite as alliances for women's engagement in the political sphere, as compared to women's political organising in the Western world²⁹⁷. Tripp²⁹⁸ on the other hand, investigates the reasons why an emancipated autonomous women's groups should be regarded as important in the non-western world. According to Tripp, autonomous women's groups are in a better position to challenge embedded norms that are

²⁹³ It is to be highlighted that institutionalisation in social movement theories focus on the interaction of movements with the State only and may overlook their potential to form new institutions. Furthermore, according to social movement theory, institutionalisation is traditionally viewed as signaling the end of that movement.

²⁹⁴ Maddison S. & Partridge E., 2007, "How Well Does Australian Democracy Serve Australian Women?" in *Democratic Audit of Australia Focused Audit*, Australian National University: Canberra, pg. 610

²⁹⁵ Andrew M., 2010, "Women's Movement Institutionalization: The Need for New Approaches", in *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 6(4), pg. 610

²⁹⁶ Rowbothan S., 1996, "Introduction: Mapping the Women's Movement," in *Mapping the Women's Movement: Feminist Politics and Social Transformation in the North*. Verso: London & New York, pg. 13

²⁹⁷ Hassim S., 2006, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority*, University of Wisconsin Press: Madison

²⁹⁸ Tripp A. M., 2000, *Women and Politics in Uganda*, Fountain Publishers: Kampala

detrimental to men, whilst also challenging the State's position on those issues that are pertinent to women, but which may be controversial such as reproductive rights and reproductive choice. Whilst Tripp's analysis holds weight, Hassim remarks that too highly autonomous women's groups may be thrown in a political ghetto being unable to engage effectively with political parties or effect any change for women

Women and Politics in Mauritius

This section posits the research against the literature. Although there has been some academic research on Mauritius treating Mauritius as a model State in the Southern African Region²⁹⁹, the gendered dimension and women's role in the socio-economic and political landscape has often been overlooked³⁰⁰. Women's representation and participation in politics is usually equated with the number of women at parliamentary level in Mauritius. The conglomeration of women's organisations and associations in Mauritius is considered to be an ageing one³⁰¹. There are around 1200 registered women's associations at the national level, addressing the diversity of women's practical interests, and are underpinned by categories of ethnicity and social class.

In terms of the characteristics of civil society activism in Mauritius, Miles³⁰² mentions that the island may be labelled as a 'supercivil' society, with a high number of civil society associations per capita, in light of the small size of the island, however, their lobbying

²⁹⁹ Zafar A., 2011, "Mauritius: An economic Success Story" in *Africa Success Stories Project*, World Bank, pg. 4, 6, 13
Mauritius is seen as an economic miracle in the Southern African region

Morna C. L., 1991, Mauritius: Africa's First Tiger?, *Africa Report*, 36(6), pg. 42

Aumeerally N., 2005, 'Tiger in Paradise': Reading global Mauritius in shifting time and space, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17(2), pg. 161-180

³⁰⁰ Bunwaree S., 2010, "Governance, Gender and Politics in Mauritius", ELP: Mauritius, pg. 33

³⁰¹ Bali M., 2008, "Interrogating Women's Movements in Mauritius, Unpublished MSC thesis, University of Mauritius: Moka, pg. 5;
National Women's Council, 2011, Accessible Online at <http://women.gov.mu>, Last Accessed in March 2013

Ramtohol R., 2009, also looks at the history of women's movement in a plural Mauritius and has looked at political citizenship of women underscored by their intersectionality

³⁰² Miles W., 1999, "The Mauritius Enigma" in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 10(2), pp. 91-104.

culture is weak. By the time that Mauritius was granted independence, Miles reports that there were around 519 associations registered at the level of the Registry of Associations.

Similarly, Kasenally and Chiroro³⁰³ mention that civil society has a long history of engagement in the socio-economic, cultural and political landscape of the island with references dating back to 1961. The Registrar of Associations, Mauritius, has a member of 6000 volunteer associations registered under its aegis as at date, which of which are classified as community-based organisations and around 368 organisations with the characteristics of being an NGO, as defined by the Registration of Associations Act (1982)³⁰⁴. It is further stated that most of the community-based organisations have an ethnic orientation or are special interest based.

Concurrently, while few in number, it may be argued that the female wing of political parties and feminist oriented women's organisations have historically advanced women's rights in successive contexts in line with the development of the political landscape since colonialism of the 18th century³⁰⁵. At that point in time, the characteristics of civil society revolved around socio-religious and cultural activities in each ethnic/local community, many with branches/activities in which mainly women participated. These socio-religious women's "wings" were successful in different ways. The Muslim Ladies Association inculcated cultural and religious values to Muslim

³⁰³ Kasenally R., 2009 "Chapter 8: Mauritius" IN Denis Kadima and Susan Booyesen (eds) [Compendium of Elections in Southern Africa 1989-2009: 20 Years of Multiparty Democracy](#), EISA, Johannesburg, pg. 285

Chiroto, B 2005, [Engendering Democracy Through the Ballot Box in the Mauritius 2005 Elections](#), EISA Occasional Paper 37

³⁰⁴ Government of Mauritius, Registration of Associations Act 1982, RL 4/465 – 24 April 1982, Available Online at RL 4/465 – 24 April 1982, Last Accessed May 2018

Mauritius Council of Social Service (MACOSS) is the umbrella organisations for all NGOs and associations in Mauritius.

MACOSS, 2018, "Profile", Available Online at <http://www.macoss.mu/about/profil/>, Last Accessed May 2018

³⁰⁵ Bunwaree S., 2010, *Governance, Gender and Politics in Mauritius*, Mauritius, ELP Publications, pg. 217, 224

women; the Arya Samaj movement lobbied against child marriage, the dowry system; promoted female literacy and encouraged women to vote in the election preceding independence in 1968; while the Catholic Church educated young girls on home management skills, civic education and entrepreneurship³⁰⁶. In parallel, low income rural women regrouped to take up social issues such as marriage or betrothal, demonstrating agency over issues affecting their daily lives, and early form of feminist consciousness raising amongst the “lower class women”³⁰⁷. Post-independence period saw the setting up of a Self-Help organisation by rural Indian women, however, women’s associations were dispersed, addressing practical gender needs. They were not autonomous, operating under religious groups, leaving them with little manoeuvre to effect changes. Around the mid-seventies as the country suffered political unrest and economic instability, social movement politics began taking shape in Mauritius and the women’s movement became more focused and built alliances to demand that the Government address their practical and gender needs, reflecting Baldez’s “tipping/timing/framing” model³⁰⁸, and transcending intersectionalities. A feminist and female consciousness of women’s groups enabled them to transcend their ethnic differences to advocate for the legalisation of religious marriages to protect women’s rights³⁰⁹. It is to be noted that without the presence of women in formal political spaces, women’s movements in Mauritius have still been able to effect changes towards their practical and strategic needs in the early period. However, Bali, Bunwaree and Ramtohum assert that 21st

³⁰⁶ Ramtohum R., 2011, Conference Paper on “Intersectionality, Political Activism and Women’s Rights in a Developmental Context: The Case of Mauritius”, Organised by CODESRIA, *Africa and the Challenges of the 21st Century*, 13th General Assembly, 5-9 December 2011, Morocco, pg. 8

³⁰⁷ Ibid, pg. 9 Rughoonundon S., 2000, *La Femme Indo-Mauricienne - Son Cheminement*, Editions Capucines: Mauritius

³⁰⁸ Baldez L., 2002, *Why Women Protest: Women’s Movements in Chile*, Cambridge University Press: UK, pg. 5

³⁰⁹ Ramola R., 2011, Conference Paper on “Intersectionality, Political Activism and Women’s Rights in a Developmental Context: The Case of Mauritius”, Organised by CODESRIA, *Africa and the Challenges of the 21st Century*, 13th General Assembly, 5-9 December 2011, Morocco, pg.15

century feminism in Mauritius has not sought to challenge neither the status quo nor men's monopoly of political space³¹⁰.

Yet, despite the very low representation of women in institutional politics (11.6% in parliament and 26.2% at local governmental level) in Mauritius³¹¹, Parliament has enacted gender sensitive legislation such as the Protection from Domestic Violence Act (1997, amended 2011), the Sex Discrimination Act (2002) and the Equal Opportunity Act (2011)³¹². The State is also party to numerous international human rights instruments to protect and promote the rights of women and gender equality. Bunwaree³¹³ identifies a number of women's interests³¹⁴ but writes that there are issues that still need to be pinpointed to inform a feminist agenda in Mauritius. At the level of the Government and the Women's Policy Machinery, programs being implemented address the social, political and economic empowerment of women and gender equality³¹⁵; whilst the main entity that regroups all women's association is implementing programs geared towards address women's issues identified under thematic of the African Women's Decade³¹⁶. Concurrently, the Women's Policy Machinery also

³¹⁰ Bali M., 2008, *Interrogating the Women's Movement in Mauritius* Unpublished thesis for the University of Mauritius

Bunwaree S., 2010, *Governance, Gender and Politics in Mauritius*, Mauritius, ELP Publications, pg. 234

³¹⁰ Ramtohol R., 2011, Conference Paper on "Intersectionality, Political Activism and Women's Rights in a Developmental Context: The Case of Mauritius", Organised by CODESRIA, *Africa and the Challenges of the 21st Century*, 13th General Assembly, 5-9 December 2011, Morocco, pg.17

³¹¹ International Parliamentary Union. 2015. *Women in Parliament: 20 Years in Review* [Online]. Available: <http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/WIP20Y-en.pdf> [Accessed 17 August 2017 2017]., pg. 7

³¹² National Assembly, 2011, The Protection from Domestic Violence Amendment Bill, 2011, Available Online at <http://www.gov.mu/portal/goc/assemblysite/file/bill1911.pdf>, Last Accessed, April 2013.

ILO NATLEX, 2013, "Mauritius: Equality of Opportunity and Treatment", Available Online at http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.details?p_lang=en&p_country=MUS&p_classification=05&p_origin=SUBJECT, Last Accessed, April 2013

³¹³ Bunwaree S., 2010, *Governance, Gender and Politics in Mauritius*, Mauritius, ELP Publications, pg. 198

³¹⁴ These include abortion; low representation of women in science and technology; unequal wages for equal work; female unemployment; feminisation of poverty; unpaid work; domestic violence; feminisation of HIV/AIDS; teenage pregnancy; low representation of women in the media and poor visibility of women in politics and trade union.

³¹⁵ Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, 2012, "Activities of the Gender Unit", Available Online at <http://women.gov.mu>, Last Accessed, November 2012

³¹⁶ These include, fighting poverty and promoting economic empowerment of women and entrepreneurship; agricultural and food security; health, maternal mortality and HIV and Aids; education, science and technology; environment, climate change and sustainable development; peace, security and violence against women; governance and legal protection; finance and gender budgeting; women in decision-making positions; and the promotion of young women's movements. African Union, 2012, "African

implements recommendations of various international bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and gears its programs towards addressing issues identified in Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (African Union), the Commonwealth Gender Action Plan and the Protocol on Gender and Development (Southern African Development Community); and also receives funding from donor agencies such as the United Nations Development Program to implement gender sensitive projects³¹⁷.

As the female cohort within women's associations is ageing³¹⁸, with the exception of a few organizations that have been established recently, it is deemed important to firstly discern what practical and strategic gender interests represent for women in Mauritius. It is further crucial to identify the critical actors who define these interests and claims and initiate gender sensitive change. Looking at women's and feminist interests within the expanded range of sites where women's substantive representation may take place in Mauritius at a multifarious political level will lead to a richer and more complete understanding of women's activism and political pathways including how these interests are constructed in sites of representation by multiple actors. It will identify competing positions in the way that interests are identified or constructed and represented, as well as avoid *a priori* or essentialist definitions of women's/feminist interests, in the light of the concept of intersectionality. It further seems important to this research to analyse substantive representation by not reducing women's substantive representation to only feminist interests, as these are only part of

Women's Decade: 2010-2020", Available Online at <http://www.africa-union.org/root/AU/Conferences/2010/april/wgd/wgd.html>, Last Accessed November 2012

³¹⁷ Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, 2012, "Activities of the Gender Unit", Available Online at <http://women.gov.mu>, Last Accessed, April 2013; UNDP Mauritius & Seychelles, 2013, "Gender Equality", http://airhost.ca/~unintnet/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=57&Itemid=124, Last Accessed, April 2013

³¹⁸ Bunwaree S., 2010, *Governance, Gender and Politics in Mauritius*, ELP Publications: Mauritius, pg. 242

women's interests. However, at the same time, it is essential to look at the responsiveness of the State and WPAs to feminist demands, as this can inform how well the State is sensitive to feminist interests, and the quality of representation.

Moving Forward- Redefining the Politics of Substantive Representation

A number of studies have investigated women's political representation by taking Pitkin's multidimensional paradigm of political representation as a starting point. Some studies have adopted a theoretical approach in addressing the efficacy of concepts such as critical mass³¹⁹ to understand the link between descriptive and substantive representation. Others have adopted an empirical approach to investigate how women represent women's interests at the national level or through case studies³²⁰. Such empirical studies have looked at women's legislative behaviour, and analysed quantitative data sets of parliamentary records or in-depth interviews with women parliamentarians to establish how they conceive and carry out their roles as female representatives. Furthermore, some studies also adopt a diachronic comparative approach to evaluate women's legislative activity³²¹, or cross-sectional studies of women's activities in different legislative bodies in a given temporal period³²². However, the conclusions of these studies remain varied. Studies have further highlighted women's distinctive contribution at parliamentary level, for example in terms of

³¹⁹ Beckwith K., 2007, "Numbers and Newness: The Descriptive and Substantive Representation of Women", in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 40 (1), pg. 27-49 ; Celis K. Childs S., Kantola J., Krook M-L., 2008, "Rethinking Women's Substantive Representation" *Representation* Vol. 44 (2), pg. 99-110; Childs S., 2006, "The Complicated Relationship Between Sex, Gender and the Substantive Representation of Women", in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 13(1), pg. 7-21

³²⁰ Carroll S. J., 2001, *The Impact of Women in Public Office*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington. See also Carroll S. J., 2002, pg. 50-68, Celis K., 2006, pg. 85-114 and Chaney P., 2006, pg. 691-71

³²¹ Bratton K., 2005, Critical Mass Theory Revisited: The Behavior and Success of Token Women in State Legislatures, *Gender and Politics*, Vol. 1(1), pg. 97-125

³²² Dodson D. & Carroll S. J., 1991, *Reshaping the Agenda: Women in State Legislatures*, Eagleton Institute of Politics-Centre for American Women and Politics: New Brunswick

promoting gender and women's issues in the Scandinavian context; in the US and Great Britain, women parliamentarian were more likely than their male counterparts to defend issues in relation to women's traditional roles or adopt positions compatible with feminism³²³. Other research has insisted that a feminist consciousness remains a more significant variable than gender as well as political party ideology³²⁴.

This literature review has subsequently moved beyond defining women's substantive representation through their actions and outcomes in institutional politics alone to encapsulate women's activism and their role as critical actors at a more multifarious political level, both in the formal and non-formal arena. It has further posited that meaningful substantive representation takes place when the actions of women and other critical actors at these various levels converge. In light of the varied findings of previous research and case studies mentioned above, in order to guide the case study of women's substantive representation in Mauritius, it is important to adopt a multi-fold approach, firstly by looking at the actions and political/female consciousness of women in institutional politics; the role of the women's policy agency and its actors and women's activism in non-institutional politics, as well as their political/female consciousness. The strategies adopted at these various levels to represent women and identifying women's diverse interests are also deemed crucial for "good" substantive representation to take place. Finally, the act of representing women in a multi-ethnic society and how critical actors conceive of their representative function is crucial for substantive representation to take place.

³²³ Childs S, 2004, *New Labour Women's MPs: Women Representing Women*, London and New York: Routledge

³²⁴ Tremblay M. & Pelletier R., 2000, More Feminists or More Women?: Descriptive and Substantive Representations of Women in the 1997 Canadian Federal Elections, in *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 21(4), pg. 381-405, Celis K., 2006, Substantive Representation of Women and the Impact of Descriptive Representation. Case: the Belgian Lower House 1900-1979, *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*, Vol. 28(2), pg. 85-114

Additionally, it may be argued that redefining the substantive representation of women would entail politicising ideologies about what represents “female’s/feminist” interests in that specific context. It is expected that there will be a range of competing definitions of what constitutes these interests, varying from women’s policy agencies, women’s associations and movements and civil society organisations. However, Celis³²⁵ writes that such a multiplicity of definition as put forward by different ideological strands actually helps to better inform political choices and policy formulation and implementation. Further, it will be crucial to explore the common interests which have led to women’s mobilisation, despite differences based on ethnicity, class, amongst others. For example, in Britain, Sawer *et al*³²⁶ uses the term “strategic essentialism” to explain that women’s associations had mobilised around gender identity as the root of their political action, which “played down” differences amongst women and “played up” common experiences of subordination³²⁷.

It would further entail looking at the multiplicity of critical actors that advocate in favour of women’s and feminist interests; and their differences in approach to that effect. Moreover, in a multicultural setting, with the diversity in women’s experiences, an operational definition of women’s interest should take intersectionality into consideration. Moreover, as Tremblay³²⁸ explains, in institutional politics, individual legislators cannot embody the experiences and perspectives of all women, and Norris³²⁹ concludes that whilst women Members of Parliament (MPs) can make a difference in substantive representation, party ideology and politics remained the strongest marker

³²⁵ Celis K., Childs S., Kantola J. & Krook M. L., 2009, Constituting Women’s Interests through Representative Claims, *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*, Toronto, Canada, pg. 108

³²⁶ Sawer M., Tremblay M. T. & Trimble L. J., 2006, *Representing Women in Parliament: A Comparative Study*, Routledge: New York, pg. 7

³²⁷ *ibid* This concept of collective identity has, nevertheless, been criticised by post-modernist theorists

³²⁸ *ibid* pg. 131

³²⁹ Norris P., 1996, “Women Politicians: Transforming Westminster?”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 49(1), pg. 101-102

that divided politicians³³⁰. Thus, Young's³³¹ concept of social perspective may be adopted as it provides an inclusive approach to redefining women's substantive representation in formal institutions by recognising women's diversity, and rejecting a false notion of homogeneity of women's interests. Since the articulation of the Young's social perspective calls for collective processes, and meaningful links between the representative and the constituents, conceptualising women's substantive representation as a (complex) interplay of different critical actors, ranging from female/male MPs, women's movements, NGOs, associations and other civil society organisations, renders substantive representation more holistic. Furthermore, this differentiated interplay of actors brings one to question the institutional norms and structures that shape women's substantive representation, revealing their gendered nature.

Analysis of the Institutional Architecture

Redefining women's substantive representation in Mauritius entails an analysis at the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. Different structures, mechanisms and strategies have been put in place at the international, regional and national levels to channel women's voice and further women's rights and gender equality. Women's Policy Agencies (WPAs), Women's Policy Machinery (WPM) or National Gender Machineries (NGM) refer to the permanent Institutional architectures/ structures located inside the State and within the locus of public/formal government arenas or administration that formulate, implement and evaluate policies

³³⁰ Tremblay M., 1998, Do Female MPs Substantively Represent Women? A Study of Legislative Behaviour in Canada's 35th Parliament, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 31(3), pg. 435-465

³³¹ Young I. M., 2000, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, pg. 127-128

and programs for women's empowerment and enhancement equal gendered relations³³².

WPAs represent a prevailing feature of modern statehood³³³ representing ideally the building blocks for gender sensitive policy making and implementation. At the level of the State, such structures and processes typically include Government bodies in charge of women's issues and gender equality, or having a gender sensitive Constitution, legislative measures and budgetary systems. Governments are further accountable with respect to international and regional human rights commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Other typical structures that seek to address women's issues and gender equality include the women's political wings. At the non-state level, Non-governmental organizations or civil society organisation, and community-based initiatives or grass-roots women's associations; trade unions and engaging with the Private Sector³³⁴ may represent effective avenues for lobbying towards addressing women's needs and interests.

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action adopted by United Nations (UN) Member States recognised the potential of such institutionalised agencies within the State structure to extend technical, and administrative support for gender mainstreaming in all sectors of Government, including in their role to increase women's political

³³² True J. & Mintrom M., 2001, Transnational Networks and Policy Diffusion: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming" *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 45, pg. 30.

³³³ Berkovitch N. (ed.) 1999. *From Motherhood to Citizenship. Women's Rights and International Organizations*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, pg. 164-165

³³⁴ For example, the Australian Government presently extends financial aid to the Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation to give a voice to the private sector to be able to lobby for gender sensitive legislation and policy making. The "Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction" is another program that encourages partnership with the private sector to work towards maternal health and domestic violence amongst others. In Mauritius, the British American Insurance, a private company, has also worked with the Ministry of Gender Equality to conduct training of Officers of the National Women's Council on Women's Human Rights under different regional and international instruments.

representation, formulate and implement meaningful policies and programmes in favour of women's interests³³⁵. Retracing the establishment of these WPAs, scholars mainly identify three "waves" of WPAs underpinned by the claims of the women's movements for example, prior to the seventies, there were only a few WPAs in western democracies such as the Women's Bureau in the United States set up in 1920; the Women's Bureau in Canada in 1954; the 1965 Study Group on Women's Work in France. These agencies focused their activities on the employment status of women. Subsequently, following the 1975 First World Women's Conference in Mexico City whereby the UN called for Member States to establish policy machineries, and in line with the proliferation of women's movements in the western world, countries responded systematically in establishing such agencies, so that by mid-nineties, almost 127 UN Member States across the world had national women's machineries in place³³⁶. Linking the international level to the case study of Mauritius, the first national women's machinery was established in 1976 in the wake of the international women's year with a port-folio of consumer protection and throughout the years followed international trends in terms of expanding and gearing its activities towards addressing women's rights, implementing programs towards women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming, in the same vein as disclosed in the literature. The Ministry for Women's Rights in Mauritius followed

³³⁵ United-Nations, 1995, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The *Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing. States have committed themselves on different levels to put in place structures to promote and protect women's rights and gender equality through successive World Conferences on Women from 1975-1995 and the Global review on the status of women in 2015. States also have legal obligations through the ratifications of International Human Rights Treaties and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

³³⁶ Mazur A., 2005, *The Impact of Women's Participation and Leadership on Policy Outcomes: A Focus on Women's Policy Machineries**, *Expert Group Meeting on Equal participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), Economic Commission for Africa (ECA); Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU): EGM/EPWD/2005/EP.5 Squires J., 2007, *The New Politics of Gender Equality*, Palgrave:United Kingdom; Rai, Shirin. 2003b. "Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women: Mainstreaming Gender, Democratizing the State?" In Rai (ed) *Mainstreaming Gender, Democratizing the State? Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 15-39. Rai, Shirin. 2003. "The National Commission for Women: The Indian Experience." In Rai (ed) *Mainstreaming Gender, Democratizing the State? Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 223-243.

international women's movement of the second "wave" in the growth of women's national machineries which occurred in accordance with a general paradigm shift towards "gender" and "gender mainstreaming" was mostly as a response to international development agencies such as the UN³³⁷. Lastly, the third "wave" of agencies, arising from the late 1990s predominantly in Western European countries shifted again from a women and gendered approach to that of working towards the idiom of diversity embracing and assessing intersectionality with inequalities due to race, sexuality, class, age, ethnicity and disability.

Since the seventies, mandates of WPAs have varied between policy formulation, coordination amongst other stakeholders, implementation, legal advocacy, gender mainstreaming, development of Information/Education and Communication Materials for awareness-raising and training. Some national mechanisms further function as an observatory institution such as in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia³³⁸. One of the longstanding prevailing mandates of WPAs is their reporting commitments to international and regional bodies such as the United Nations (UN) or European Council; and African Union (AU) or the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Accordingly, it is reported that national mechanisms have only been able to partially fulfil their mandates due to limited resources, political will, and lack of capacity³³⁹. In 2009, the United Nations requested for all 192 Member States to list the mandates/strategies of

³³⁷ True J. & Mintrom M., 2001, Transnational Networks and Policy Diffusion: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming," *International Studies Quarterly*, 45(-), pg. 27-57

Staudt K., 2003, *Gender Mainstreaming" Conceptual Links to Institutional Machineries*, Manchester University Press:Manchester, pg. 40-66

³³⁸ UNDEF, 2015. *Tunisia: An Observatory for the Rights of Women* [Online]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OP90EI9ZxaY> [Accessed 28 January 2016].

³³⁹ Ofei-Aboagye E., 2000, The Role of National Machinery in Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, *The National Machinery for Women National Machinery Series, Third World Network Africa, Accra.* , No. 2.

their respective WPA. It was revealed that there was, still as such, no idiosyncratic structures of WPAs and these were not heterogeneous in the way that they implemented their respective strategies³⁴⁰; for example, Myanmar has a National Committee for Women's Affairs and a Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation; Mauritius has a Ministry for Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare; Tajikistan has a list of Gender Focal Points (GFPs), a Parliamentary Committee on Family, Health, Social Protection and Environment Affairs, a Coordination Council and a Committee on Women and the Family; the Netherlands has instituted a Minister of Emancipation, an Equal Treatment Commission and the existence of some other entities; and Australia has an Office for Women³⁴¹. The proliferation of these WPAs may fuel critiques on whether they have the potential to contribute significantly to feminist goals, and the needs and interests of diverse groups of women, especially in cases where these Statehood Agencies may be seen as an international construction given the fact that the international community, through the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had exerted pressure for Governments to set up institutional mechanisms to protect women's rights and promote gender equality since the 1960s and with their proliferation in the dawn of the Decade for Women³⁴². It becomes

³⁴⁰ The question asked was "Please list all bodies that are national mechanisms for gender equality, within the legislative, executive and judicial branches, as well as independent/advisory bodies" UN-Daw. 2009. *Questionnaire for Collection of Information and Data to Support Regional Studies on National Mechanisms for Gender Equality*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/> [Accessed 3 November 2015].

³⁴¹ Abdurazakova D., 2010, Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in South-East and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia-Regional Study, *In: UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (ECE) (ed.), UN-DAW: Sdd, 2010, Strengthening National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Regional Study - Asia and Pacific.*, Social Development Division (SDD) of ESCAP. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Bangkok

³⁴² Berkovitch N. (ed.) 1999. *From Motherhood to Citizenship. Women's Rights and International Organizations*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press], pg. 163-165
Stetson D. M., 1995, The Oldest Women's Policy Agency. The Women's Bureau in the United States., *In: STETSON, D. M. A. & MAZUR, A. G. (eds.) Comparative State Feminism*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, pg. 3

important not to assume that the existence of WPAs is a direct attestation of feminist outcomes.

Additionally it is important to note that having in place a formal institutional structure relating to women's policy agencies does not guarantee successful implementation of gender equality policies and programs. Critiques of institutionalised WPAs have spoken of the limited capability of WPAs to influence important areas of policy making, for various reasons, namely, limited fiscal resources; a non-conducive environment where gender equality norms in society are weak despite de-jure legislation on equality; actors that are resistant to gender equality changes; and "shifting policy discourses that have reframed the language of empowerment and gender equality into gender mainstreaming"³⁴³. Indeed, WPAs have seen a shift from the WID approach of the nineties to that of a gender mainstreaming paradigm. The concept of gender mainstreaming, finding its origin in the 1995 UN Beijing Conference, stipulate for all UN Member States to integrate a gender perspective in all policies and programs of the Government. As an addition to gender equality and anti-discrimination and affirmative action policies, "gender mainstreaming"³⁴⁴ seeks to incorporate gender in the

the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making
Hence, gender mainstreaming has been a motor to change institutional and public focus from specific programs aimed at enhancing the status of women towards necessitating

Mazur A. G. & Stetson D. M., 1995, *Women's Policy Machinery in Fourteen Countries.* , Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, pg. 311-315

³⁴³ Outshoorn J. & Kantola J., 2008 *Changing State Feminism* Palgrave:Houndmills

Ferree M. M., 1995, Making Equality: The Women's Affairs Offices in the Federal Republic of Germany',
In: STETSON, D. M. & MAZUR, A. (eds.) *Comparative State Feminism*. Sage: London

³⁴⁴ Council of Europe, 1998, Gender Mainstreaming: Conceptual Framework, Methodology and Presentation of Good Practices, *Final Report of Activities of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming*, Council of Europe: Strasbourg, pg. 15

gender sensitivity across all areas of policy making and implementation in Member States.

In the African region³⁴⁵, the nature and structures of Lead Institutions vary from that of a Ministry for Women to a mechanism which is attached to a Ministry but with the mandate of working in parallel towards the welfare of the family, children and/or community development, social development, youth and sports.³⁴⁶ Mechanisms include but are not limited to divisions and units in Ministries, Departments, gender focal points, parliamentary caucuses and select committees, divisions, women's wings of political parties, inter-ministerial committees. According to the Beijing plus 15 Survey carried out, GFPs were seen as the most popular mechanism in the African region³⁴⁷. Subsequently, the literature reveals that failing to establish a specific budgeted mechanism with an explicit port-folio for gender equality and women's empowerment actually weakens this exercise because the budget is not channelled towards specific goals, gender strategies are diluted and having a Unit within a complex archetypal set-up may not hold as much

³⁴⁵ The term African Region is used to refer to sub-saharan Africa. By no means does the thesis seek to homogenise the region with due care paid to the complexity and diversity of the Continent. It is acknowledged that the North African regional has other additional specificities, such as in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco such as the reform to the family code or confronting cultural rigidities, political resistance to change and patriarchal gendered relations

Moghadam V., 2007, *From Patriarchy To Empowerment: Women's Participation, Movements, And Rights in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia*, Syracuse University Press: New York, pg. 3, 73-120

³⁴⁶ Ministry of Advancement of Women and Family (Cameroon 2004), Ministry for Women and Social Action (Mozambique 2000), , Ministry of Social Affairs, Advancement of Women and Children (Guinea Conakry 1996), , Ministry for Community Development, Gender and Children (Tanzania 1990), Ministry for the Advancement of Women, and Child Protection (Niger 1999), Ministry of Social Affairs, Advancement of Women, Child Protection and Elderly People (Togo 1996), Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (Uganda 1998), , Ministry for Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development (Zimbabwe 2005), Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Child and Family (Mali 1997) Ministry of Family, Women and Social Affairs (Côte d'Ivoire 2007), Ministry of Gender, Family and Child (DRC 2007), Ministry of Family and the Promotion of Women (Angola 1997) and Ministry for Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation (Lesotho 2000) are also examples of ministries combining women's affairs with other social issues, Madagascar's Department for the Advancement of Women is within the Ministry of Population and Social Affairs.

³⁴⁷ UN-Women. 2010. *Regional 15-year Review Processes* http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/regional_review.html [Accessed 15 January 2016].

power and authority over other sectoral Ministries to influence gender mainstreaming within their port-folio³⁴⁸.

Other countries having smaller structures, for example, a women's bureau or council³⁴⁹, departments and desks, were institutionalised into larger structures such as Ministries with separate budgets. Concurrently, other structures that form part of the Gender Machinery include the setting up of Parliamentary Caucuses, Gender Units, Gender Focal Point Mechanisms, Women's Council, Gender Committee/ Commission³⁵⁰. These institutional arrangements as well as other types of instruments have had varying degree of success and effectiveness in advancing women's issues, on their own or when used together³⁵¹. Similarly, it is reported that the institutionalisation of multiple mechanisms in place for the promotion of gender equality plays an important role in decentralising the work of the main institution, as well as the fact that this gives even more legitimacy to the cause by having different institutions advocating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies and programs. Moreover, different institutions have specific, implying in turn that specific programs would be budgeted for accordingly, putting less strain on an already under-budget Women's Ministry gender equality; for example, gender issues in health such as sexual and reproductive health,

³⁴⁸ D. T., 2001, National machineries for the Advancement of Women in Africa: Are they Transforming Gender Relations?, *Third World Network-Africa, Accra*; Tsikata D., 2000, Lip-Service and Peanuts: The State and National Machinery for Women in Africa, *National Machinery Series*, 11(Third World Network Africa-Accra)

³⁴⁹ The National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) now stands as one of the two Departments of the Ministry for Women's and Children's Affairs; with the Children's Department, previously known as the National Commission on Children.

³⁵⁰ Parliamentary caucus/ committee: Ghana, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe; Gender consultative forum- Namibia, Zambia; Gender focal points: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe; Gender council- Botswana, Gambia, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal, Sierra Leone; Gender units- Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria; Gender commissions/ committees- Burkina Faso, Chad, Comoros, Lesotho, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe; Office of the President- Namibia, Niger, Nigeria; Attorney General's chamber- Lesotho; Political parties- Mozambique, Uganda; Gender groups, women's coalition- Chad, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mauritania, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe; **Others**-Burundi: National Counsel for Gender;Cape Verde: Cape Verde Institute of Gender Equity and Equality; Egypt: National Council for Women; Equatorial Guinea: National Plan for Multisectoral Action; Eritrea: National Union of Eritrean Women; Nigeria: Gender Monitoring Office.

³⁵¹ Reflecting the African Continent- Gender Policy:20 countries; GFPs:15 countries; National Women's Committees:12 countries; Legal Framework:17 countries; Observatory:7 countries; Gender Responsive Budgeting: 9 countries; Inter-Ministerial Committees on Gender Equality:18; Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines:4 countries

could be taken up by the institution responsible for health³⁵². On the other hand, the Beijing 15+ Review reveals that coordinating, monitoring and evaluating all the different mechanisms in place under a gender management system, as well as their synergies and avoiding duplicating programs has proved quite challenging³⁵³. At the same time, it is posited that there may be no definite proportional relationship between established structures and having effective policy influence, as factors depend on Government's actual commitment and action towards gender equality; the type of issues of interests to women that are open to negotiation; and the extent to which actions are transparent in nature. Additional factors encompass leadership quality of national mechanisms as well as the vibrancy of women's movements and their capability to effectively induce changes in policy and political processes. Nevertheless, these last points beget the question whether having different mechanisms are useful in terms of their perceived gender mainstreaming outcomes or whether certain types of mechanisms are operational simply due to their strategic location, and leadership³⁵⁴.

In the same vein, in the Mauritian context, there has been a shift from the "women in development" approach to the "gender and development" approach. There has been an evolution of strategies and approaches towards implementing women's rights programs that have focused on targeted programs that seek to empower women in specific sectors/ thematics to a gender mainstreaming approach that aims at a

³⁵² Tsikata D., 2000, Lip-Service and Peanuts: The State and National Machinery for Women in Africa, *National Machinery Series*, 11 (Third World Network Africa-Accra.)

³⁵³ UN-Women. 2010. *Regional 15-year Review Processes* [Online]. Available: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/regional_review.html [Accessed 15 January 2016].

³⁵⁴ Geisler G., 2004, *Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa, Negotiating Autonomy, Incorporation and representation*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet: South Africa

systematic gender sensitive policy analysis³⁵⁵ . Nonetheless, the discourse on gender mainstreaming in Mauritius seems fragmented as CEDAW periodic reports³⁵⁶ seem to reveal that the gender concept in itself has been misunderstood, and has not yet been institutionalised and all-embracing. Indeed the Beijing 15+ review for the African region³⁵⁷ highlighted that there lacks clarity on the gender concept itself as well as a lack of technical capacity towards gender mainstreaming in all sectoral delivery Units/ Ministries. Additionally, the fact that gender mainstreaming has been seen as a top-down approach has resulted in resistance in implementation at the Ministerial levels itself as well as resulting in unintended consequences, for example the elimination of women-specific programmes³⁵⁸. Concomitantly, as equated to the main continent , the Beijing 15+ review uncovered that the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies was further underpinned by a severe lack in financial resources whereby institutional mechanisms receive a very small percentage of the national budgets, leading them to rely heavily on donor funding. Concerns arise when international and donor agencies become the main driver for change in formulating and implementing gender-sensitive programmes and/or when their agendas clash with issues of national interests, whilst compromising sustainability in programming³⁵⁹. The Beijing 15+ review further found that there were a limited number of sectoral gender policies and gender was not mainstreamed into national policies and priorities. Building

³⁵⁵ United-Nations-Economic-Commission-for-Africa. 1999. Report on the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women on Mid-Term Review of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action *In: UNECA, ed. Sixth African Regional Conference on Women on Mid-Term Review of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action 22- 26 November 1999. 1999 Addis-Ababa*

³⁵⁶ State Periodic CEDAW reports (Initial-fifth) by Mauritius testifies to strengthening sensitisation on the gender concept and training State officers on the gender concept and gender mainstreaming

³⁵⁷ This is not an attempt to universalise women's experiences nor present the whole picture of women on the African continent, rather, the results of the Mid Term review report

³⁵⁸ Standing H., 2004, Gender, Myth and Fable: The Perils of Mainstreaming in Sector Bureaucracies, *IDS Bulletin*, 35(4), pg. 82-88
Moser C., M'Chaju O., Moser A. & Nwigira N., 2004, *Malawi Gender Audit: Evaporated, Invisibilized or Resisted?*, London, UK;
Tsikata D., 2000, Lip-Service and Peanuts: The State and National Machinery for Women in Africa, *National Machinery Series*, 11 (Third World Network Africa-Accra).

³⁵⁹ Sarr F., 2009, National Mechanisms for Equality in Francophone and Lusophone Africa, *in: UNECA (ed.)*,

the capacity of Staff and representatives of women's association was also seen to be crucial³⁶⁰.

The principal focus of this study is to assess the effectiveness of the women's policy agency in Mauritius- that is, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare- in bringing forward a feminist or gender sensitive agenda, as well as the effectiveness of the State in addressing women's interests' and concerns of women's associations, as well as their interaction. Lovenduski *et al.*³⁶¹ adopts a methodology designed by the RNGS to the study of the relationship between women's policy agencies and women's associations, concluding that women's policy agencies supports women's movement goals on the issue of increasing women's political representation in ten post-industrial countries, suggesting the importance of the presence of State feminism coupled with the presence of a cohesive women's movement³⁶². Whilst it may be difficult to assess whether those who carry out a "feminist" agenda are feminists (bearing in mind that their agenda may be feminist in nature) in Mauritius, it is perhaps as effective to explore the activities of women's political caucus that work towards advocating in favour of women's issues within the parliament or the existence of informal cross-party political caucus working to this end, given the absence of such a formal caucus in Mauritius. In this context, the term State feminism³⁶³ is used to look at the way that feminism is institutionalised in agencies of the state and in their economic, social and political systems and is explored further in the thesis.

³⁶⁰UN-Women. 2010. *Regional 15-year review processes* [Online]. Available: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/regional_review.html [Accessed 6 August 2016].

³⁶¹ Lovenduski L. *et al.*, 2005, *State Feminism and Political Representation.*, Cambridge University Press.: Cambridge, pg. 292

³⁶² Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, UK, USA

³⁶³ Zheng W., 2005, "State Feminism"? Gender and Socialist State Formation in Maoist China, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 31(3), pg. 519
Mcbride Stetson D. & Mazur A. G., 2010, *Comparative State Feminism* Sage:London

In terms of analysing the role and effectiveness of women's groups in Mauritius, as well as its interaction with the policy agency, it is appropriate in the first instance to question whether it has a female or feminist consciousness, as this will undoubtedly guide their further actions and inform their sense of agency. Feminist consciousness is here seen as a distinct process where women adopt a feminist vocabulary to give meaning to their status in society and are conscious of specific themes such as discrimination based on sex or gender. Moreover, with a feminist consciousness, feminism is injected in the everyday lived experiences of women and into their interpretation of these subjective experiences³⁶⁴. The undertone of this consciousness may be further related to women's intersectionality in Mauritius, and thus, it becomes important to apply an inter-sectionality approach (without imposing a feminist label), underlining the disaggregation of the meaning of "women" and their different type of consciousness and recognising the dynamism of subjectivities and power relations that render woman not a uniform political category, but marked by differences which reinforce or inform subordination³⁶⁵.

³⁶⁴ Hinz E. J., 1976, Feminine Consciousness, *Contemporary Literature*, 17(4), pg. 580.

Green P., 1979, The Feminist Consciousness, *The Sociological Quarterly*, 20(3), pg. 359

³⁶⁵ Weldon S., 2006, "The Structure of Intersectionality: A Comparative Politics of Gender", in *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 2(2), pg. 221

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEXTUALISING GENDER POLITICS

IN MAURITIUS

It is indeed true to say that although Mauritius has drawn its cultural inspiration from Africa, Asia and Europe, yet it has succeeded to a remarkable degree in evolving a distinct Mauritian way of life. The visitor to Mauritius is impressed by the fact that the average Mauritians have more in common with each other than with the native inhabitants of the land of their forbears. Indeed, it has been the privilege of my small country that its citizens have inherited the influence of the best traditions of the East and of the West. [Speech of the first Prime Minister, Sir Seewoosagar Rarmgoolam, 24 April 1968, upon the accession of Mauritius to the United Nations]

Traditional notions of citizenship have been conceptualised as a universal gender neutral experience. Yet, it is now widely acknowledged that the politics of performing citizenship is intricately linked to power differentials underpinned by social divisions and intersections of gender and ethnicity, amongst others³⁶⁶. This notion of gendered and intersectional citizenship in Mauritius has emerged as a powerful finding throughout the interviews with women at the levels of the State and in the community. Gendered and intersectional citizenship have influenced the differentiated nuanced ways that women have exercised their citizenship in Mauritius since colonisation and has affected the way in which the substantive representation of women has been undertaken at different levels of society, namely, at the State and community levels up to the present times.

The previous chapter has provided an analysis on the literature on women's political representation and the link between substantive and descriptive representation. A background to women's political engagement in the post-colonial setting has also been examined. Subsequently, from the gap identified in the literature review, this section moves on to specifically look at how ethnicity is constructed in Mauritius as this proves to be a critical dimension in the following chapters of the thesis. In this context,

³⁶⁶ Oleksy E. H., Hearn J. & Dorota Golańska D., 2011, *The Limits of Gendered Citizenship: Contexts and Complexities*, Routledge:New York

the chapter situates Mauritius as a pluri-ethnic space and provides an overview of the demographics and the statistics on Mauritius regarding the ethnic composition. For the purpose of the thesis, and in order to have focused arguments, the thesis has narrowed the analysis to the ethnic cleavages, in light of the fact that ethnicity shapes the way women define their intersectionalities in order to contextualise the analysis and claims made in the thesis.

Therefore, this section starts off by situating Mauritius as a trans³⁶⁷-colonial space. It then analyses the progression of women's activism in Mauritius before the nineteen sixties during colonial occupation. It retraces the history of women's organising relating to women's practical and strategic needs arguing that women's intersectionality has been a starting point for the way that women have defined addressed their needs and taken as a point of reference in the way that women's organising has been performed in Mauritius.

Situating Mauritius as a pluri-ethnic Space

Mauritius is situated in the South Western Region of the Indian Ocean and 2,400 square km from the African coast³⁶⁸. The Mauritian territory comprises the main island of Mauritius, and the outer islands of Agalega, St. Brandon and Rodrigues. Since 1970, the Mauritian economy has seen a diversification from a strong and stable sugar

³⁶⁷ "Transcolonial"³⁶⁷ is a terminology that has been proposed around the late nineties, referring to the solidarity, exchanges and link between the elite of different colonies. In the context of Mauritius, it would be appropriate to use this term as it relates to the context in which the ideas of religion, ethnicity, history and the nation as a whole is defined across different boundaries. M.S. Dodson, B.A. Hatcher (eds.), 2012, *Trans -colonial Modernities in South Asia*, Routledge: London, pg. 74.

³⁶⁸ See Figure 1

monocrop economy to a focus on the manufacturing (textiles and garments) sector with an expanding tourist industry in the 1980s. Mauritian offshore and Freeport activities have also been booming since the 1990s. By late 2014, the Mauritian economy grew by 3.5 per cent with a Gross National Income per capita at market prices reaching AUD\$ 10,768. The latest unemployment rate figures stand at 7.8 per cent while inflation stood at 3.2 per cent³⁶⁹. The population of Mauritius in 2016³⁷⁰ stood at 1,263,473 million with 50.5 per cent more females; comprising a mix of six ethnicities (or religious affiliations), namely Indo-Mauritians Hindus (40%); Creoles/ People of African origin (28%); Muslims (17%); Tamils (7%); Sino-Mauritians (3%); and Franco-Anglo Mauritians (2%). The overall population density is 965 persons per square kilometre. Boasting a literacy rate of 89.8 per cent³⁷¹, and a strong welfare system which also provides a social safety net, life expectancy for females is 77.7 years and 71.1 for males. The Labour force Participation/activity rate stood at 59.9 per cent with 45.3% females in the formal labour market, which states that despite a higher percentage of women in Mauritius, they are still under-represented in the paid labour force.

As a trans-colonial space Mauritius connects various histories and cultural legacies³⁷²; in fact, the kaleidoscope of the Mauritian landscape closely resembles a neo-primitive landscape in terms of topology and cultures encapsulated in post-colonial spatiality,

³⁶⁹ Statistics-Mauritius, 2014, Mauritius in Figures, , pg. 2

Tourist arrivals reached 1.03million in 2014

Statistics-Mauritius, 2014, Mauritius in Figurespg. 45

³⁷⁰ All data will be gender disaggregated further in this Chapter

Statistics-Mauritius, 2014, Mauritius in Figures, in: DEVELOPMENT, M. O. F. A. E. (ed.), Mauritius, pg. 3, 9, 11, 15

³⁷¹ The detailed socio-economic indicators is attached at Annex.

Statistics-Mauritius, 2016. *Digest of Demographic Statistics 2015* [Online]. Mauritius: Government of Mauritius. Available: http://statsmauritius.govmu.org/English/StatsbySubj/Documents/Digest/Demography/Digest_Demo_2015.pdf [Accessed 5 January 2017].

³⁷² Poddar N. 2010. *Paradoxes of Insularity: Re-navigating the Island through the Contemporary Mauritian Francophone Novel*. PhD, University of Pennsylvania.

Hassankhan M. S., Roopnarine L. & Ramsoedh H., 2016, *The Legacy of Indian Indenture: Historical and Contemporary Aspects of Migration and Diaspora*, Routledge:New York

with old architecture and modern structures, almost in negotiations with post-coloniality³⁷³. Present day narration of Mauritius is equated with modern democratic principles shaped by discourses of economic reforms and political stability which has granted the State with a type of regional legitimacy within the African region. On the economic map, Mauritius is classified as the most economically free country in Sub-Saharan Africa³⁷⁴ and referred to as the “Tiger in Paradise³⁷⁵” or “star and key” of the Indian Ocean, due to its strategic positioning between Asia and Africa, strengthened by its cultural and political ties to Europe, while its affinities with multiple cultures including colonial as well as multi-diasporic affiliation makes it a “rainbow” nation. Modern Mauritius and its post-colonial identity have seen a discursive construction of crosscutting diasporic identities³⁷⁶ underpinned today by a unique experience of post-colonialism³⁷⁷ almost leading to a sense of “strategic Mauritianism”³⁷⁸ subscribing to multiple national narratives and subjectivities in the light of the interplay of intersectionality.

The Republic of Mauritius is host to over 15 language groups under the umbrella of four major religions in a small island developing State arising as a result of the successive wave of immigrants on the island brought either as slaves or indentured

³⁷³Aumeerally N., 2005, Tiger in Paradise': Reading Global Mauritius in Shifting Time and Space, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17(2), pg. 161-180

³⁷⁴Eustace D., 2014. *The Rainbow Nation is fading* [Online]. Available: <http://www.freemarketfoundation.com/issues/the-rainbow-nation-is-fading-economic-freedom-of-the-world-2014-annual-report> [Accessed 5 December 2015].

³⁷⁵Aumeerally N. L., 1994, Tiger in Paradise, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17(2), pg. 161-180

³⁷⁶O'Leary B., Consociation: Refining the Theory and a Defense, *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*, 3 (2003), pp. 693–755

Noel S. (ed.) 2005. *Debating Consociation: Normative and Explanatory Arguments*, Toronto: McGill-Queens University Press, pg. 3-43

Lijphart A., 1969, Consociational Democracy, *World Politics*, 21(2), pg. 207-225

³⁷⁷Aumeerally N. L., 2005, 'Tiger in Paradise': Reading global Mauritius in shifting time and space, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17(2), pg. 161-180

³⁷⁸Mauricianism has been coined as a term to encapsulate the spirit of being Mauritian with a national identity and solidarity despite being of a different ethnic background

Boudet C., 2014, Nationalisme, décolonisation et consociation à l'île Maurice: l'émergence d'un Mauricianism stratégique (1945–1967), *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, Vol. 47, (3), pg.385–403

labourers or forming part of the colonial powers³⁷⁹. The issue of social cohesion in Mauritius remains critical to good governance, sustainable development and contributes to the quality of life of Mauritians. In this context, Carroll & Carroll³⁸⁰ stipulate that politics in Mauritius was viewed as a competition between different ethnic groups, in which each segment of the society necessitated a fair representation and sharing of benefits, leading to the adoption of a unique type of political representation referred to as the Best Loser System³⁸¹ to manage ethnic diversity. Hence, colonialism and its remnants can be seen as an aftermath that has shaped the development trajectory of the nation through the setting of institutional operational structures and frameworks that still operate in 21st Century Mauritius, as reflected in the Electoral system as well as in the intersectional identities of its citizens.

Linking contemporary Mauritian democratic society to Lijphart's "Consociational³⁸² theory" proves apt given the typology embeds its theoretical significance in the relationship between a political culture and the overlaying social structure on the one hand and political stability or fragmentation on the other. The various pieces of literature on the history of Mauritius reveals that the dominant "cross cutting cleavages"³⁸³ relate to that of religion and ethnicity that paint the social and

³⁷⁹ Teelock V., 2001, Mauritian history: from its beginnings to modern times, Mahatma Gandhi Institute

³⁸⁰ Carroll B. & Carroll T., 1999, The Consolidation of Democracy in Mauritius, *Democratization*, 6(1), pg. 179, 197, 184-185

³⁸¹ The Best Loser system represents an electoral system which ensures that minority ethnic groups are equitably represented at Parliamentary level.

Mahadew A., 2017, The Best Loser System in Mauritius: An Essential Electoral Tool for Representing Political Minorities, Mauritius Electoral Commission, 2002, Report of the Commission on Constitutional and Electoral Reform 2001/02, Port Louis Mauritius

An interview with a female Member of Parliament has revealed that ethnic affiliation remains a crucial component of being offered a ticket, and being placed in a winnable seat in line with the ethnic constitution of that particular constituency. The MP stated that this was a common knowledge in Mauritius, however, this was not spoken of so as not to create political unrest.

Interview with women member of parliament, held on 4 September 2013, Port Louis

³⁸² Lijphart A., 1969, Consociational Democracy, *World Politics*, Vol. 21(2), pg. 207

³⁸³ Acemoglu D. & Robinson J. A., 2006, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press:Cambridge, pg.42

cultural diversity of the island³⁸⁴, with intersecting memberships³⁸⁵. The same discourse is on-going in present day Mauritius and has been discussed in one of the interviews

As Mauritians, we are represented as one nation, one identity...Our National Anthem says as one nation, as one country, in peace, justice and liberty...but when you look at us, you cannot say who is a typical Mauritian as such, we look like Indians, Africans, Chinese, White people...we all practice our religion, it is in the Constitution, it is in the electoral system...we all feel that there is something we have in common, that's what they call the "Mauritianisme"...[WCBO7]³⁸⁶

A structural-functionalist view of ethnicity can be seen in Mauritius. Mauritian women see their ethnic identity as being construed as the extent of their adherence to a particular collectivity. Their identities are further constructed and in juxtaposition to the overall shared values and norms of that group during the course of social dealings and in their relationship formation within the Mauritian social system³⁸⁷. Identity formation in Mauritius has been the result of its historical making, According to historians, Carter and Teelock³⁸⁸, settlers who arrived in Mauritius under the status of slaves, traders and indentured labourers sought to accommodate themselves according to a colour-caste-class rules of stratification. In the same way, the caste system is still deeply embedded in contemporary Mauritian society³⁸⁹, for example, the Hindus are further divided in terms of the caste system, language, area of origin and religious affinity whilst the Creoles see themselves divided in terms of colour (fair and dark skinned, French

³⁸⁴ Eriksen T., 1992, *Us and Them in Modern Societies: Ethnicity and Nationalism in Mauritius, Trinidad and Beyond*, Scandinavian University Press:Oslo, pg. 169

³⁸⁵ A proposition put forth by group theorists Arthur F. Bentley and David B. Truman, in the same context as the "crosscutting cleavages" proposition of Seymour Martin Lipset. The two propositions claim that the psychological cross-pressures that arise from membership in different groups with a diversity of interests and aspirations tend to result in moderate attitudes.

Such groups may be organized in either a formal or informal way or may be "potential groups".

Bentley and Truman argue that "cross-pressures" operate both at the level of the mass public and at the elitist level, whereby the leaders heading social groups with a heterogenous and overlapping membership will tend to adopt moderate views; whilst when a society is sharply divided with few overlapping memberships this may lead to a fragmented political culture.

In this case, Lipset argues that "the chances for stable democracy are enhanced to the extent that groups and individuals have a number of crosscutting, politically relevant affiliations."

³⁸⁶ Interview with women member of a women's association, held on 31 August 2013, Triolet

³⁸⁷ Cohen A., 1974, *Urban Ethnicity*, Tavistock Publications: London, pg. ix, x

³⁸⁸ Teelock V., 1998, *Bitter Sugar: Sugar and Slavery in 19th Century Mauritius*, Mahatma Gandhi Institute Press.:Moka, Mauritius

³⁸⁹ Claveyrolas M. 2015. *The 'Land of the Vaish'? Caste Structure and Ideology in Mauritius* [Online]. Free Standing Articles. Available: <http://samaj.revues.org/3886> [Accessed 15 March 2017].

speakers and Creole speakers³⁹⁰. This notion of levels or layering of different identities is complex in the island with overlapping cleavages creating a sense of ethnic affiliation, making it even more complex when analysing gendered roles and relations as revealed in the interviews. For example, one participant explained how her gendered identity was strongly underpinned by her ethnicity.

...I am a Hindu woman, we are expected to get an education, then we get married and we have kids, if we have a boy, that is excellent...I mean you see it everywhere, when I had my girl, everyone who asked, first asked me whether it was a boy or a girl; when you say it's a girl, there is almost a disappointment in their faces, you get an "oh", followed by "a little Laxmi (name of a female Indian Goddess) as if they try to make it up to you...Every now and then, I go to the temple, I wear my Sari, I have to look like an Indian woman, I wear my Sindoor (indian red powder worn by Indian women on the forehead), I have to look like an indian woman, its everywhere, you are a woman and you belong to a culture and sometimes, by your name, people also know your caste. So you cannot just be a woman in Mauritius...³⁹¹

It can be argued from the above statement that there is a perceived strong ethnic cleavage which is further divided by gender intersectionality, where the participant appeared to define her subjectivity and lived life experiences based on the ethnic affiliation, as well as her gender and intersectional identities. Concurrently, whilst analyzing women's early forms of agency in Mauritius, the same type of cleavages pertaining to intersectionality seem to be present in the way that women have regrouped themselves during the colonial and post-colonial times.

³⁹⁰ Caroll B. & T. C., 2000, Accommodating Ethnic Diversity in a Modernizing Democratic State: Theory and Practice in the Case of Mauritius, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21(1), pg. 120-142

³⁹¹ Interview with female State Representative, held on 7 October 2013, Port Louis

Women's Early Forms of Agency in Mauritius- Female Consciousness in the Making using a Feminist Revisionist lens

While there is a dearth of literature on white Franco-Mauritian women, the few in-depth gender-sensitive research studies conducted on colonial life in Mauritius have looked at the roles of female slaves and indentured labourers. This section adopts a feminist revisionist lens to re-interpret the historical records of women's political agency in Mauritius thus challenging the traditional gender-blind views held about the historical event and introducing a new way to think about the motivations and decisions of women at that time. Teelock³⁹² and Carter³⁹³, in their work on Mauritian history and settlement, retrace the activities of female immigrants during the early days of colonization, their roles as wives and mothers and the extent of their work in the plantation sector. Both authors provide historical testimony of the ways in which women were attributed secondary status both culturally and under the legal framework of Code Noir³⁹⁴. The Code Noir in 1723 stipulated that African slave women were subject to their "master" and were able to be punished by their husbands or owner. Moreover, with the 1808 "Code Napoléon"³⁹⁵, married women in Mauritius were relegated to the status of a minor; or if unmarried, remained the responsibility of the patriarchal head of household, to be handed over to the husband after marriage. Moreover, the Code Napoléon

³⁹² Teelock V., 2001, *Bitter Sugar*, Edition le Printemps: Mauritius

³⁹³ Carter Marina, 1995, Laxmi's Legacy, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, pg. 24

³⁹⁴ Vaughan M., 1998, Slavery and Colonial Identity in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6(8), pg. 189-214 The Code Noir was a decree passed by Louis XIV of France in 1685, affecting French colonies involved in the sugar trade defining the conditions of slavery

Oracz M., 2015, Mauritius—the Paradise Island?, *Romanica Silesiana*, Vol.10, pg. 324-336

Allen R. B., 1983, Marriage and the maintenance of public order in Mauritius, 1721–1835, *Slavery and Abolition*, 4(3), pg. 214-231

Maurer S., 2010, Genetic identity in Mauritius, *Antrocom*, Vol. 6(1), pg. 53-62

Stovall T., 2006, *Race and the Making of the Nation: Blacks in Modern France.*, New York University Press: New York

Brown N., 1996, Mauritius: Mixed Laws in a Mini-Jurisdiction, *Studies in Legal Systems: Mixed and Mixing*, pg. 210-214

Maurer S., 2012, Post-Colonialism: The So-Called Malaise Creole in Mauritius., *Cultural Anthropology* pg. 87- 97

³⁹⁵ The Code Napoléon refers to the French civil code established under Napoléon I in 1804

Lee R. W., 1915, The civil law and the common law: a world survey, *Michigan Law Review*, Vol. 14(2), pg. 89-101

Angelo A. H., 1971, The Mauritius Approach to Article 1384 (1) of the French Civil Code, *The Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa*, pg. 57-71

classified married women as being politically incompetent and thus restricted to the private sphere and not being able to attend political meetings³⁹⁶. However, delving further, Carter revealed that patriarchal ideologies were intertwined with capitalistic development. She explains that between 1834-1839, the country saw the arrival of the first female labourers, however, paradoxically, female immigrants ended up being predominantly employed as child minders and general household servants because sugar estates did not seek their services, reaching one to conclude that this initiative was part of a labour immigration scheme. Looking at this from a Marxist standpoint, Carter explains that female labourers were brought in to reproduce the workforce. Along the same lines of thought, Burn³⁹⁷ asserts that the gendered division of labour in which women's reproductive role plays a major role has been pivotal in sustaining a fit and cheap labour force in the sugar export sector in Mauritius. Likewise, Carter echoes the same sentiment in mentioning that women faced were being told that their rightful place was in the home when they expressed the will to be economically independent by working and earning a wage³⁹⁸.

Colonial times remained an assortment of limited rights and regulations and defining a colonial citizen would be a process of including and excluding certain groups of people. Teelock³⁹⁹ highlights that both women and men slaves and labourers worked equally hard without much benefit in the sugarcane plantations through planting, cane-cutting, cane-loading and clearing the land. Women who were not slaves acted as a

³⁹⁶ Lerner G., 1993, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York

³⁹⁷ Burn N. (ed.) 1996. *Mauritius*, Mauritius: Editions de l'Océan Indien

Carter Marina, 1995, *Laxmi's Legacy*, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, pg.116

³⁹⁸ Carter M., 1995, *Laxmi's Legacy*, Mahatma Gandhi Institute

Carter M., 1995, *Servants, sirdars, and settlers: Indians in Mauritius, 1834-1874*, Oxford University Press:USA

³⁹⁹ Vijaya T., 1995, *Bitter Sugar*, Edition le Printemps:Mauritius

secondary pool of labour or “the weaker seconds”⁴⁰⁰ easily tapped into for ancillary duties such as weeding, and cleaning the fields after harvesting. Sack-making, laundering, dress-making and cooking in their own leisure time provided some women with avenues for minute financial gain, however, even in this trade, women’s wages were lower than men’s. Furthermore, different authors write that women engaged in sex work as an economic strategy or to obtain temporary freedom from their owners⁴⁰¹.

Moreover, Creole women had a critical role in enabling the setting up of Chinese commerce, acting as what Authorities have referred to as “prête-nom”⁴⁰², to obtain shop licenses in the event that a Chinese tradesperson had more than one shop in order to avoid suspicion. Chinese merchants were thus dependent on Creole women to bypass administrative red-tape and procedure, and as such Creole women played an important role in the economic development of the country at that time⁴⁰³. Indian women faced a triple oppression related to strict State Laws, the “Vagrant Act”⁴⁰⁴, patriarchal communal sanctions and familial hegemony. Nevertheless, the archives indicate that Indian women set up “baitkas” (small Community meetings) which proliferated in camps across the island to transmit cultural values, religion and traditions to the younger generation of Indian women. It may be deduced that these gatherings created a unified sense of identity, solidarity and sense of sisterhood amongst Indian women⁴⁰⁵.

⁴⁰⁰ John L., 1936, *Indian Centenary Book*, Archives of Mauritius:Port-Louis

⁴⁰¹ Burgh-Edwardes D., 1921, *History of Mauritius*, East and West Ltd.: London

⁴⁰² Translated from French, meaning, “lending one’s family name to establish something”

⁴⁰³ Anecdotally, these unconventional liaisons have contributed to a distinct community of “métisses” with distinct Chinese/ African/ and African physical features. Métisse is defined in terms of hybridity amongst races Prabhu A., 2007, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects*, State University of New York:New York, pg. 50-52

⁴⁰⁴ For the purpose of this section, the Vagrant Act stipulates prohibition of movement by persons without a pass from one district to another

⁴⁰⁵ Hazareesingh, K. (1975). *History of Indians in Mauritius*. Macmillan.

Despite this much defined role in the private sphere, women's reproductive role contributed to the expansion of the Mauritian economy during the colonial times. Women were also called upon to sustain the labour force, and were also used as a form of cheap labour. A combination of these factors thus enabled the sugar export sector to flourish⁴⁰⁶. Thus, female consciousness was present during the colonial times in Mauritius, where women acknowledged what their culture and class and the specific historical context expected from them. Whilst accepting the gendered system at play through the division of labour, women were still able to organise in a collective manner. The study of early forms of women's agency in the colonial period in Mauritius calls attention to the concept of female consciousness which enables an analysis of the diverse types of motivation in women's daily lives that lead them to act in a collective manner to achieve the goals that they would otherwise not have been able to do as individual subjects. There appears to be a sense of community that emerged during the colonial days that was a result of women's shared chores binding them to their ethnic communities and their class within their neighbourhoods, as revealed in the "baitkas". The "baitkas" were not only seen as places to congregate but also as an abode for women. Here they were able to establish a spirit of sisterhood and a basis for collective action. However, it appears that as Mauritian society developed further in terms of more urbanisation, female solidarity slowly changed as working conditions for women improved with education. As some categories women gained entry into the labour force, they slowly detached themselves from the close proximity of their original neighbourhoods and the sense of shared responsibilities that contributed to the female

⁴⁰⁶ Carter, M., 1994, *Lakshmi's Legacy: The Testimonies of Indian Women in 19th Century Mauritius*, Rose-Hill: Editions de L'Ocean Indien.

Burn, N., 1996, 'Mauritius', in U. Kothari & V. Nababsing, eds., *Gender and Industrialisation: Mauritius, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka*, Rose Hill: Editions de l'Ocean Indien. Vijaya T., 1998, *Bitter Sugar*, Edition le Printemps:Mauritius

consciousness slowly diminished, as well as weakening their lobbying and their collective action.

Early Forms of Organising- Feminist Political Consciousness and Intersectionality

By 1911, the Arya Samaj society⁴⁰⁷, a religious Hindu movement, was established that saw the involvement of women in its woman's association in 1912 with a view of promoting education amongst women, which was followed by the establishment of a Girls' school in 1922. The *Mahila Mandal* (termed Women's Association), under the Arya Samaj was established in 1931. In 1933, the Mahila Mandal held a national women's conference that saw the participation of around 500 women from across the country promoting equal rights for women and men in marital life and it worked in partnership with the Arya Samaj and Seva Shivar movements⁴⁰⁸, to work towards the elimination of the caste system, the abolition of purdah⁴⁰⁹ and the development of educational programs for girls. Moreover, the Arya Samaj movement along with the Mahila Mandal initiated a lobby towards the elimination of child marriages, as one participant revealed

...my mum was in the women's wing of the arya samaj. I cannot remember too well, but I know it was active, it was a tool to educate the maximum number of women in Hindu society. As women, it was easier to talk to other women, they spoke Bhojpuri... they were the force on the ground to reach other

⁴⁰⁷ The Arya Samaj is an Indian religious reform movement taking its branch in Hinduism

Tajinder K., 2015, Role of Arya Samaj in Propagation of Vedic Religion, *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5(7), pg. 110-115

⁴⁰⁸ The Seva Shivar is a religious social organisation which aims at societal reform, taking its branch in Hinduism

William M., 2000, *The politics of language equilibrium in a multilingual society: Mauritius.*,

⁴⁰⁹ Purdah refers to female seclusion. See Mannick A. R., 1979, *Mauritius: the Development of a Plural Society*, Spokesman: Nottingham

women...slowly the mentality changed... we used the teachings of Swami Dayanand to tell women and men that in our religion, women and men are complementary and equal...[WE]⁴¹⁰

It is believed that the Mahila Mandal further contributed to the empowerment of Hindu women through inculcating literacy skills and allowing girls to transgress from the private confine of the house into the public world⁴¹¹. Because of the strong patriarchal nature of Mauritian society during those times, it can be argued that the literacy skills program for Indo-Mauritian daughters was a means of subverting an androcentric system in which only males were able to receive a formal education. A similar religious organisation that contributed to enhancing Hindu women's literacy skills was the Jan Andolan⁴¹², a socio-cultural association which further aimed at sustaining the Indian way of life amongst Hindus in Mauritius⁴¹³. The association opened up Hindi schools across the island and provided literacy skills to Indian indentured labourers as well Hindu women who were then able to vote in elections prior to Independence, carving out niches for women to participate as political citizens⁴¹⁴. Muslim women were active in the Muslim Ladies Association which was established in 1940; and the Ahmadist Muslim Women's Association that was established in 1951, both working towards the empowerment and emancipation of Muslim women as well as their physical and spiritual health, and ran religious education classes as well as performing charity work.

⁴¹⁰ Interview with an Elder, Woman Activist, 16 December 2013

⁴¹¹ Rituparna S. & Vardhan A., 2000, *Pandit Basdeo Bissoondoyal: Pioneer of Mauritian Jan-Andolan*, Gaurav Prakashn: India

⁴¹² Selvon S., 2015, *A New Comprehensive History of Mauritius*, MDS Editions:Mauritius

Rituparna S. & Vardhan A., 2000, *Pandit Basdeo Bissoondoyal: Pioneer of Mauritian Jan-Andolan*, Gaurav Prakashn India

⁴¹³ Rughoonundon S., 2000, *La Femme Indo-Mauricienne - Son Cheminement*, Editions Capucines : Mauritius, pg 38-40

G. Lerner, 1993, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 10.

⁴¹⁴ Rughoonundon S., 2000, *La Femme Indo-Mauricienne - Son Cheminement*, Editions Capucines : Mauritius, pg 115

The Catholic Church organised the “Ecoles Menageres”/ Home Economics classes for Christian women in 1956⁴¹⁵. Around the 1950s, it was common for those girls from working class and low income backgrounds to stop going to school when they reached twelve years of age, and then got married off during their teenage years. The Ecoles Menageres was specifically set up as a response to educate young girls in home economics, household management, cooking, sewing, nutrition, grooming and domesticity. Women from the privileged Franco-Mauritian classes usually volunteered to hold training at the Ecoles Menageres and classes focussed on imparting such skills to future mothers and wives in line with Christian Ideologies. Activities of the Ecoles Menageres eventually transformed from focusing on activities restricted within the private sphere to conducting civic education, holding literacy classes, and educating Christian girls about the history and culture of the island, as well as how to set up kitchen gardening and entrepreneurial activities⁴¹⁶. This curriculum based on home management and home economics reflected the community’s expectation of women. Moreover, there seemed to be a privilege class-based consciousness amongst women who received training and Franco-Mauritian women delivering the training.

In addition to religion based women’s groups, the late 1940s also saw the emergence of more class-based smaller women’s groups in rural areas looking at social issues that affected young girls and women. These smaller associations comprised mainly of women from very low-income groups and illiterate women from the agricultural working class. Membership in these small associations acted as a source of female consciousness raising and class-based activism by enabling women to act in solidarity

⁴¹⁵ Bissoondoyal U., 1990, *Promises to Keep, Mauritius*, Editions de L’Ocean Indien : Mauritius

⁴¹⁶ Orian M., 1980, L’annee 1979 au feminin: Realisations, Problemes, Difficultes, Projets, *Virginie- La Magazine de la Mauricienne*, Mauritius:

made up of by sharing their common lived experiences⁴¹⁷. Concomitantly, the Women's Self-Help Association established in 1968 had a membership principally drawn from women of the upper-class- its social foundation being in more educated women married or related to government officials or politicians. The Association promoted a more entrepreneurial spirit offering free capacity-building training in embroidery, basket and handicraft making with a view of empowering women financially. By extension, women were equipped with the required skills to enter the Export Processing Zone that paved the way for Mauritian women to enter the employment sector in large numbers by the 1970s⁴¹⁸. Furthermore, it may be argued that the Association acted as a forum for women from distinct social classes to interact and develop an awareness of their different practical gender needs and interests and establish a sense of solidarity and sisterhood⁴¹⁹.

Transcending Intersectionalities for Collective Action

While the literature on social movement politics in Mauritius⁴²⁰ reveals that, there was no visible women's movement as such, and that most women had no formal education, it can be, nevertheless, argued that there was a form of female consciousness arising during colonial and post-colonial times, as women got involved in socio-cultural and religious organisations/associations despite being illiterate and divided in light of their different ethnicities and interests.

⁴¹⁷ Rughoonundon S., 2000, *La Femme Indo-Mauricienne - Son Cheminement*, Editions Capucines : Mauritius, pg. 159

⁴¹⁸ Domen E. & Dommen B., 1999, *Mauritius: An Island of Success- A Retrospective Study 1960-1993*, Pacific Press: New Zealand

⁴¹⁹ Dumont C., 1976, Aujourd'hui: Avec la "Women Self Help Association et la Ligue Feministe, *BVirginie- Le Magazine de la Mauricienne*, 2, pg. 22-24

⁴²⁰ Fam M. L., 1983, *The Need for an Independent Women's Movement in Mauritius*, Zed Books: London
Fam M. L., 1988, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Mauritius*, L'edikasyon pu Travayer:Mauritius

Whilst it appears that women did not actively seek to transcend their intersectional identities based on their ethnic affiliation, they did challenge very strong patriarchal ideologies, often blurring the lines between the private and public spheres. Although women regrouped in ethnic groups, they gained a female consciousness⁴²¹ in that setting, and eventually as Mauritius developed, and larger women's organisations were established, they were able to come together in groups, women of different ethnic affiliation identified points of interests across intersectional identities; the development of a spirit of female solidarity and sisterhood and setting up an agenda for the future⁴²². This may be explained through the ability of women to have control over their bodies through family planning. From 1950-1960, Mauritius experienced an exponential growth in its population rate⁴²³, where as a result, the Government of the day circulated a proposal to institutionalise a family planning scheme have a maximum of three children in a family. However, the Roman Catholic Church was vehemently opposed to the proposal until 1965, after which, family planning was officially endorsed and initiated at the national level through information and education campaigns resulting in a birth rate of 3.3 which the United Nations considered as a strong effort⁴²⁴. Likewise, a quantitative study undertaken around the Sub-Saharan region seems to suggest that there is a positive link between a decreased fertility rate and gender equality and a higher rate of human development and GDP growth⁴²⁵.

⁴²¹ Lerner G., 1993, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York, pg. 274

⁴²² Ibid, pg. 10

⁴²³ Jones H., 1989, Fertility Decline in Mauritius: The Role of Malthusian Population Pressure, *Geoforum*, 20(3), pg. 315-327

⁴²⁴ Bongaarts J., Mauldin W. P. & Hillips J. F., 1990, The Demographic Impact of Family Planning Program *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 21(6), pg. 6

⁴²⁵ Nwakeze N. M. & Schaffartzik A., 2014, Revisiting Boserup's Hypotheses in the Context of Africa, *Ester Boserup's Legacy on Sustainability*, pg. 175, 181

While women's ability to take control of their bodies and fertility as a matter of choice, resonating with a liberal feminist standpoint, during the mid-1970s, Mauritian society witnessed a surge in social movement politics. The rise of a leftist organisation (Mouvement Militant Mauricien-MMM) and a student revolt as the population held the Government accountable for poverty, unemployment and corruption. This wider state of political unrest provided the space for different women's organisations to engage in political acts in a quest to support better governance, for example, numerous non-ethnic/religious women's associations emerged, amongst which was La Ligue Feministe in 1974. The association was originally part of the MMM as the women's wing, however, required more autonomy to act on legislative and structural changes such as equal work for equal pay, anti-discriminatory provisions for women under the law, equal rights and access to education, reproductive rights and equal participation in formal politics. Additionally, the Association of Mauritian Women (AFM) was established in 1975 comprising women from the upper-middle class to promote women's well-being by educating both women of the upper-middle class and those at the grass-roots on their rights under the present system and undertake consciousness-raising with respect to the oppression that they were facing⁴²⁶.

As the country saw more unrest due to socio-economic concerns, The Women's Liberation Movement⁴²⁷ was subsequently established in 1976 with an ideology to primarily lobby for working women's equality in the formal employment sector. It also sought to educate working women through adult literacy classes, provide them with

⁴²⁶ Dumont C., 1976, Aujourd'hui: Avec la "Women Self Help Association et la Ligue Feministe, *BVirginie- Le Magazine de la Mauricienne*, Vol. 2, pg. 22-24

Oodiah M., 1989, *MMM: 1969-1989: 20 ans d'histoire*, Mauritius

⁴²⁷ Translated from the original name "Muvman Liberasyon Fam"

Muvman Liberasyon Fam, 1983, *The Need for an Independent Women's Movement in Mauritius.*, *Third World-Second Sex*. London: Zed Books

information on their reproductive rights⁴²⁸, lobbied for women to be represented in the media and mobilised working-class women to join trade unions⁴²⁹. An interview with a female activist of the movement revealed:

At the beginning in 1976, we formed the MLF to fight for women's liberation, all women alive. We started with adult literacy, we worked on family planning and reproductive rights campaigns, to include women in the media, have women active in trade unions and we sought to fight against class oppression, and laws that discriminate against women - we are still doing it, we have had advances. Yes we are political, we have organised sit-ins, hunger strikes- all silent peaceful but political. One of the first women's strikes in Mauritius that MLF participated in was linked to the Diego Garcia Islander Women (Ilwa) in 1978. They wanted the right to return back to their island and having the U.S. base removed from their motherland (demilitarisation). We supported the Diego Women going on a three week hunger strike. This was a first in Mauritius- women going on a hunger strike, taking a stand. For the Diego Women, it reflected their power in a patriarchal society (WCBO12)⁴³⁰

As women's activism was gathering momentum and with a deeper feminist consciousness, at the same time, the United Nations proclaimed 1975 as International Women's Year with the 1975-1985 United Nations (UN) Decade for Women. The UN Decade for women was critical for the Mauritian Government as the national women's machinery was institutionalised, thus giving legitimacy to the political acts being conducted at the local level by Mauritian women and at the global level. Twelve Mauritian women delegates comprising representatives of the State and non-governmental organisations were sponsored to attend the United Nations International Conference on Women in Mexico enabling them to share experiences⁴³¹. An interview with one of the older members of the delegation illustrates how they returned to Mauritius with renewed vigour to work towards the issues discussed at the Conference:

⁴²⁸ Legalising abortion.

⁴²⁹ Interview with representative of MLF, Port Louis, 2 November 2013
MLF, 1989, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 12(1), pg. 119-123

The Muvman Liberasyon Fam., 1989, *Muvman Liberasyon Fam: Women's struggle, class struggle, and antimilitarism in Mauritius*, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 12(1), pg. 119-123

⁴³⁰ Interview with representative of MLF, Port Louis, 2 November 2013

⁴³¹ Interview with one Mauritian representative that formed part of the delegation, RoseHill, 26 October 2013

We participated in drafting a World Plan of Action and we looked at the role of women in peace and development. I never thought to make the link, but being amongst all the women of the world, with vehement force, it validated our action, our solidarity. I thought we can do this in Mauritius, we can have equality, it was all falling into place. The women discussed equal access to education. In Mauritius, we already had “education for all”, but then we realised the word “access” was key. We reflected, on how we could improve access for women in Mauritius, so that they gain entry in jobs that they were invisible in; we thought of having more women in politics, not only in women’s wings, but up there in Parliament, we thought how to make this happen. It was as if we, women, we were now part of development, and we came back to Mauritius, thinking, yes, Mauritian women are part of Mauritian development, part of Mauritian history. When we came back to Mauritius, we then met on how to establish those opportunities to be equal partners in development. The motto- women in development, instead of women and development, made sense. Nothing would happen in parallel. We were an integral aspect of Mauritian socio-economic and political development [WCBO3]⁴³²

The Mauritian situation can be aligned with Mohanty’s theorising on women’s collective action which stipulates that strategic temporary alliances between women can be established when they understand their experiences as being materially grounded and historicised. Examples of women’s collective action in Mauritius can also be aligned with the Baldez “tipping model” where women acted to protect their gender identities, transcending ethnic and class boundaries, for example, the opening of the first women’s centre in Mauritius in 1982 by the MLF represented a milestone in the sense that women had a place of abode to meet and discuss specific gender issues and share experiences amongst themselves, in solidarity, despite differences in ethnicity. The opening of the first Centre was followed by the opening of several women’s Centres by the Ministry of Women’s Rights across the island⁴³³.

⁴³² Interview with a representative of Mauritius Alliance of Women, 3 October 2013, Quatre-Bornes, Mauritius.

The ideas expressed by the participant is also in line with items raised at the 1975 World Conference of Women, Mexico United-Nations. 1975. *World Conference of the International Women's Year Mexico City (19 June to 2 July 1975)* [Online]. Mexico. Available: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/mexico.html> [Accessed 4 January 2017].

⁴³³ The Muvman Liberasyon Fam C., 1989, Muvman Liberasyon Fam: Women's struggle, class struggle, and antimilitarism in Mauritius, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 12(1), pg. 119-123

Additionally women regrouped themselves into strategic alliances in the 1970s when the country witnessed structural and economic changes. Along the same vein, the Common Front for Women's Organisations (CFWO) ⁴³⁴ was set up which regrouped the key Associations mentioned earlier the MLF, Ligue Feministe and women's wing of the MMM for collective action to amend the Immigration and Deportation Act (1977). The Act was seen as a blatant discrimination against Mauritian women, because it did not allow for foreign husbands to obtain Mauritian citizenship/residency once married as foreign wives were able to do. Mauritian women married to foreign nationals were not able to resort to the justice system as there was no provision for sex-discrimination in the Mauritian Constitution. The CFWO sought action at the international level by appealing to the UN Human Rights Committee looking at Sexual Discrimination, which urged the Mauritian Government to amend the existing legislation⁴³⁵. Subsequently, it was not until 1995 that the Constitution (Sect. 16[3]) was amended to include discrimination based on "sex". The CFWO subsequently expanded its influence as other larger women's organisations joined to form "Solidarite Fam" (Women's Solidarity Group)- the first feminist movement in Mauritius- demonstrating a strengthened feminist consciousness now acting on a common oppressed gender identity. The CFWO lobbied for women's equal rights to employment, women's right to birth control, family planning services, equal division of household duties and day-care centres⁴³⁶.

Yet another example of the collaborative action of women in the wake of celebrations towards International Women's Year in 1978 was the setting up of the

⁴³⁴ Translated from Creole "Front Commun Organisations Femmes"

⁴³⁵ UN Human Rights Treaties, Communication 35/1978- 9 April 1981 http://www.bayefsky.com/html/100_mauritius35a.php

⁴³⁶ Amri L. & Ramtohol R., 2015, *Gender and Citizenship in the Global Age*, pg. 315, Available online <https://books.google.com.au/books?isbn=2869785895>, [Last Accessed 5 December 2015]

Mauritius Alliance of Women (MAW), an amalgamated re-grouping of 32 women's organisations as an umbrella organisation. Some of the leaders of these 32 organisations had participated in the 1975 International Women's Year Conference held in Mexico and were exasperated by the small amount of progress made by the Ministry. Some of the pertinent actions of the MAW included to rally women's support to change marital legislation where married women were considered as minors⁴³⁷.

Female and Feminist Consciousness

Looking at the history of women's organising, it appears that women have progressively shaped their practical and strategic interests in order to address both issues relevant to their biological nature during the colonial times as well as their gendered relations after independence. There appears to have been examples of a universalised form of struggle by women, although it appears that history has divided the experience of women based on their intersectionalities⁴³⁸. By looking at the different forces of a colonial history that have shaped the way that politics has been conceived and undertaken in Mauritius, it can be argued that there appears to be a consolidated form of democracy since independence in the midst of the rapid development of the industrial sector, and the importance of exploitation of human capital. However, the nature of political identities is heterogeneous and this has influenced the type of collective action undertaken by women of a different class, religion and ethnicity, amongst the myriad of identity markers. It can be argued that there is a pluralist model of democracy based on diversity existing in Mauritius given these intersectionalities. Concurrently, in Mauritius, examples of women performing the political in non-institutional spaces have been

⁴³⁷ Interviews representative of MAW, MLF

⁴³⁸ Boswell R., 2006, *Le Malaise Creole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius*, Berghahn Books: New York, pg. 208

provided, showing that claims for rights, justice and equity may be formulated outside of institutional male-stream definitions of politics, resulting in the creation of a space where interests and the “value-based identity”⁴³⁹ of women has been negotiated in light of pluralism, homogeneity and intersectionality. Pluralism among women has been the starting point for women’s organising at the national level since colonialism and is still evident in the definition of contemporary women’s interests given the fact that many religious, ethnic and subcultures co-exist within the same social and legal framework.

This follows another challenge of analysing how some policies that are underpinned by preferences which are grossly generalised to address most women’s/ gender issues, can effectively be transformed into an overarching policy that takes into account diversity and women’s intersectionalities. Thus, it may be argued that the forms of statecraft put in place to reconcile and merge pluralism with social, political, economic and ethnic diversity for gender equality remains critical to the working of a fair and just democracy⁴⁴⁰ where rights-based demands become prioritised and discourses that remain silent ⁴⁴¹ are addressed.

⁴⁴⁰ The concept of Democracy as is defined in the literature, relates to comprising key elements relating to a political system where choosing and replacing successive Governments is undertaken through free and fair elections along with an active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life, including the full protection of the human rights and where the rule of law prevails within which legal provisions are full applicable equally to all citizens. Concurrently, the thesis seeks to make the point whereby in society where there are different ethnic groups, with a majority of Hindus, the democratic system allows for a decision making process on the specific issues within the country to benefit all the segments of society equally. At the same time, there is on-going debate around the proper definition of the term “democracy” and how it is to be achieved in a pluralist social order, for example, Allain Touraine writes that a political system within a democratic society should recognise the existence of conflicts based on different values. He argues that a society that has the ambition to stay culturally homogenous is inherently anti-democratic. Democracy in this thesis is seen, inter alia, as a political system that holds the potential to acknowledge conflicts based on pluralism and seek to address them in light of the value-based identities of that society.

⁴⁴¹ Semetsky I., 2010, Silent Discourse: The Language of Signs and "Becoming-Woman", *SubStance*, 39(1), pg. 87-102
Sendbuehler F., 1994, Silence as Discourse in Paradise Lost, *GEMCS Conference*, Rochester:NY

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCEPTUALISING WOMEN'S INTERESTS

For women's substantive representation to take place, there needs to be evidence which suggests a certain form of heterogeneity of women's/ gender issues reflected in the political priorities of the State, the State Structure and women at the grass-roots level. Having identified the possible sites and critical actors that are involved in the politics of a substantive representation of women, it is now necessary to consider the kinds of interests that are being represented at different locations. However, the conceptualisation of what constitutes women's interests in Mauritius remains problematic in light of the fact that women are divided by intersectionalities. The research fieldwork undertaken for this thesis has specifically sought to determine these issues by undertaking interviews with women at different levels of the political hierarchy, namely at the Parliamentary level, State Structures, and with women in community based organisations. It was expected that interviewing women at these different levels would bring an enhanced consultative and participatory style to understanding what different categories of women see as being matters of importance to them in the representational process.

By determining what women's interests are in Mauritius through interviews at the three levels, this Chapter argues that dynamics of political representation do not remain restricted to elected bodies; rather, actors in multiple sites are able to articulate policy demands. Likewise, during the course of their lobbying actions, these different actors formulate claims about the categories of women that they represent as well as the types of issues of immediate concern to them that they want to be represented. Thus, by reframing representation in this sense, the thesis does away with a priori assumptions of what 'women's interests' are, but instead, paves the way for empirical investigation.

Thus this chapter seeks to identify the issues, interests and needs of women in Mauritius. In so doing, it argues that these issues may be categorised in terms of women's practical gender needs (PGN) relating to the needs that women identify with in accordance with their socially acceptable gendered roles. PGNs do not appear to challenge the status quo, however, but arise out of the gendered division of labour as well as women's subordinate roles⁴⁴². These PGNs have been raised at the level of women in the community based organisations/associations and are then to be taken as a response to women's immediate issues of necessity within a given cultural context. Concurrently, Strategic Gender Needs (SGN) identified by representatives at the State level relate to those needs that women identify in relation to their subordinate positions, in light of the gendered division of labour and androcentric power and control. By addressing SGNs, the State posits that women will be put at an equal level playing field with their male counterparts as the existing status quo will be challenged, thus redressing existing unequal gendered division.

Defining Women's "Interest" in Mauritius

The interviews carried out with the participants in Mauritius has shed light on the way that women have defined their different identities and varied interests. During the course of the interviews, a mutual baseline rapport was established with participants where they felt that they could relate to me as the Researcher in the light of me being a Mauritian female, raised in Mauritius. This rapport resulted in mutual understanding and

⁴⁴² Moser C., 1989, Gender planning in the Third World: meeting practical and strategic gender needs, *World development*, 17(11), pg. 1799-1825 Boyd E., 2002, The Noel Kempff project in Bolivia: gender, power, and decision-making in climate mitigation, *Gender & Development*, 10(2), pg. 70-77

trust, leading to an honest and open dialogue, rather than a form of questioning participants. In some cases, there were shared experiences between myself and the participants, whilst in other instances, there was an unrestricted sentiment of reciprocal exchange of shared standpoints and experiences. The participants' responses were gauged and then subtle adjustments were made to the open-ended questions contained in my interview schedules to maintain this rapport, and the conversation was redirected accordingly to obtain truthful answers. Therefore, it can be stated that in the Mauritian setting, women's group-identification in terms of their ethnicity, age, class and status implies that they belong to a particular association/CBO/NGO with a group consciousness that inculcates diverse ideologies and political awareness that impact on the collective action aimed at achieving the group's interests⁴⁴³. Having women of multi ethnic origins and intersectionalities in Mauritius has impacted on the setting up of specific women's organisations as well as targeted activities by these groups/associations aimed at achieving their distinguished needs/concerns and interests, for example, socio-religious groups, community based organisations comprising of women of a specific ethnicity, age, class and status. Whilst the literature suggests that this type of group organising is not uncommon elsewhere, where women regroup themselves based on their specific socio-economic and gendered identities to address their different interests needs; for example, the participation of women from lower socio-economic backgrounds in Latin America to defend their roles as mothers. In Mauritius, it appears that some women who are regrouped as a collective are not *particularly* conscious that they comprise a formation of different interest groups or a

⁴⁴³ Miller, A. H., P. Gurin, G. Gurin, and O. Malanchuk. 1981,. Group Consciousness and Political Participation. American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 25, pg. 494-511, pg. 495

heterogeneous collection of individuals who have a gendered and socially unique position with distinct interests. These standpoints have been reinforced through a colonial historical legacy, legal frameworks and socio-economic policies as well as through formal political ideologies. Throughout the interviews in this study it was clear that each community based organisation/ NGO with a distinct group of women articulating a political agenda identifying specific types of interests. For example, young women's groups expressed the need for IT Literacy training; Women Senior Citizens organizations spoke of personal security and female entrepreneur groups spoke of access to training and business incubators. One formal women's network with a more "elitist" membership referred to policy changes towards the adoption of an electoral quota system; another identified the need enhanced representation of women in the media; one NGO called for more funds to be injected into gender-specific projects, while another community-based organisation mentioned the need for training on project formulation. Activities being carried out by those groups which saw themselves as having a membership of women from a lower socio-economic class appeared to be related distinctly to reiterate their intersectional gendered identities pertaining to their reproductive roles and as wives in the private sphere whilst the women network with a composition of women from a higher working class sought a more gender-neutral participation and incorporation into the State and the public sphere. The activities being carried out by different groups were diverse in terms of addressing what they perceived to be their member's needs, interests, rights and concerns. In theory, whilst scholars have made a distinction between the concepts of needs, "interests", "rights", "concerns"⁴⁴⁴, these concepts may be hard to discern or be almost invisible problems

⁴⁴⁴ Schmitter P. 2006. *A Prolegomenon to a Theory of Interest Politics: Needs, Interests, Concerns, Action and Eventually*,

that impact negatively on women, unless these are identified by women themselves. In the Mauritian context, as interviews were being carried out, women at different levels of society appeared to use these terms interchangeably as they were trying to define the meaning of the concept of “women’s interests”. Each participant came to a different conceptualisation of what the term “women’s interests” referred to:

...Women’s interest? An issue of rights... what we need as citizens...how the Government makes sure that our rights are taken into consideration when decisions are made.... [WMP2]⁴⁴⁵

...something that concerns us as women, what each woman in Mauritius is interested in, a woman’s interest is an issue that affects the life of a woman; how we live and if it is something like domestic violence, then the Government needs to address it...[WNGO7]⁴⁴⁶

....I don’t think I can define what women’s interests’ means. Maybe in general it is things like gender based violence, abortion, female unemployment. I think in Mauritius, you cannot say that every women has one special interest. If you are poor, you have a concern, if you are creole, you have a different concern, now if you are poor and woman and creole, it is very hard....you cannot say what an interest is, I cannot tell you what your interest is, I can tell you in general but that is generalization. I think all in all, gender relations, power, define what an issue of interest is to woman [WSRep2]⁴⁴⁷

Additionally, these interests have been further framed in response to women’s lived experiences, socio-economic and political status at particular points in time, as summed up by a representative of a community organisation:

....it is something that affects her in her day to day life. It can cause discrimination...a problem that affects her family, her work, but it changes over the years, before you had women fighting for right to vote, now they have that, so you have women asking for more women in parliament. Context changes, time changes, interest as well [WCBO5]⁴⁴⁸

Associability [Online]. Budapest. Available: <http://www.eui.eu/Documents/DepartmentsCentres/SPS/Profiles/Schmitter/PCSPProlegomenonJan06.pdf> [Accessed 2 March 2017].

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Woman Member of Parliament, 28 August 2013, Port Louis

⁴⁴⁶ Interview Question “Define the term “women’s interest”” Interview with Woman Representative of NGO, 4 December 2013, Ebene

⁴⁴⁷ Interview with Women State Representative, Ministry of Gender Equality, 10

⁴⁴⁸ Interview with Representative of women’s association, 13 December 2013, Flacq; Interview with Representative of women’s association, 13 December 2013, Flacq

Furthermore, one young woman from a women's association who identified as part of the LGBTQI group mentioned that sexual rights were an issue of growing concern in Mauritius, in light of the fact that present legislative provisions are vague on the issue of sexual orientation. It was mentioned that LGBTQI rights is masked as a private issue where it is included as "Protection of Right to Personal Liberty" under the "Right of the Individual to a Private Life"^{449, 450} in the Mauritian Constitution.

Based on the interviews in this study, it may be argued that the notion of "interest" is intertwined with discourses on needs/concerns/rights. These interests are further defined by the gendered, sexual and intersectional identities of women. Moreover, the way that women have conceptualised issues of interest in Mauritius can be seen as being in response to the underlying gendered power differences, gendered identities in light of intersectionality and gendered relations in society. It further appeared that that women have attempted to frame their interests in juxtaposition to the gains of men.

.... A lot has to do with the gender relations in Mauritius. It is very patriarchal. Maybe younger women say that their husbands are now cooking in the home and bring the kids to school...or the women now work... but that does not mean that there is gender equality... We need to see how gender relations affect the way that women are being treated...if not worse now, before women were just at home, now they work as well!... [WSRep3]⁴⁵¹

Taken together, women's interests in Mauritius is seen as regrouping their needs, concerns and rights and addressing these interests so that women are able to

⁴⁴⁹ Government of Mauritius, The Constitution, Chapter II, Section , 3(c) , "Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the Individual", Available Online at http://www.gov.mu/portal/site/AssemblySite/menuitem.ee3d58b2c32c60451251701065c521ca/?content_id=03654555fc808010VqnVCM10000ca6a12acRCRD#pro, Accessed on 04 April, 2016

⁴⁵⁰ Paoli L.I and Zhu J., 2013, page 51 "State-Sponsored Homophobia: A World Survey Of Laws Prohibiting Same Sex Activity Between Consenting Adults", International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, pg. 51 The penalty for sodomy in Mauritius is 5 years of penal servitude

⁴⁵¹ Interview with Women State Representative, Ministry of Gender Equality, 10 December 2013, Port Louis

achieve their full potential through empowerment programs to enable them to exercise their sense of agency. Women's interests are also underpinned by their triple role, at home, in the community and in the public sphere, and these "interests" are framed and defined in terms of women's differences and lived experience. Yet, despite this, it appeared that the cross cutting "interest" among women remained the transformation of gender relations in Mauritius, as reflected below

... you cannot address women's interests by just addressing one aspect. It is not a piecemeal solution. You cannot say, okay we will empower women economically, and then expect that all will be better. You need to look at all the structures that sustain this oppression, mentality, culture, access to opportunities, everything favours one gender...[WNGO4]⁴⁵²

The other common thread in women's "interests" framed by Mauritian women in community based organisations/ women's associations appeared to be linked to achieving the immediate needs of women, whereas women at the level of the State structures spoke of policies and programs relating to the longer term empowerment and gender equality- women's interests were being conceived in terms of Molyneux's theorising of "practical (PGIs) and strategic gender interests (SGI)"⁴⁵³, and were further being defined in light of the difference amongst different categories of women namely, in terms of their age, class and ethnicity. Examples of the interests expressed by women of different socio-economic status were related to having regular water provisions, safe housing, employment for mature women, safety nets for women retrenched workers, security of the person amongst the elderly and reproductive rights. Furthermore, addressing the gender pay gap, environmental protection, food security, care for the

⁴⁵² Interview with Representative of women's international NGO, 2 December 2013, Floreal

⁴⁵³ Molyneux M., 2001, *Women's Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond*, Palgrave: Basingstoke
Einhorn B., 1993, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements in East Central Europe*, Verso: London & New York, pg. 179

elderly, gender-based violence and reproductive rights (right to abortion) and access to Information and Communication Technologies were also seen as being strategic in nature for women's empowerment and gender equality. Women interviewed at the grass-roots further spoke of the need of having training in new areas for employment, benefitting from targeting business schemes and training for young women entrepreneurs. Young women at the grass-roots also expressed the need to benefit from capacity building programmes that would equip them with the necessary skills, such as self-assertiveness skills, to enter the labour force.

Whilst there were commonalities between some of the interests expressed by women at the grass-roots level and those in the State structure, there appeared to be a general divide in terms of the type of interests expressed by women at the grass-roots level that revolved around addressing practical gender interest and issues related to motherhood; while women engaged in larger NGOs and in the State Structure (GFPs and at the Level of the Ministry of Gender) sought to address women's strategic gender interests- for example, women at the grass-roots level linked and legitimised their interests over issues related to the cost of living in terms of their roles as mothers and consumers instead of being from a lower socio-economic class. Concurrently while women in larger NGOs and in the State Structure spoke of the importance of having gender sensitive legislations, policies or a gender quota at decision-making levels and in Parliament⁴⁵⁴.

⁴⁵⁴ Interview with Representative of women's international NGO, 2 December 2013, Floreal
Interview with Women State Representative, Ministry of Gender Equality, 10 December 2013, Port Louis
Interview with Representative of women's association, 13 December 2013, Flacq

Difference in Conceptualisation and Representation of Interests by the State Institutions and Non-State Actors

The interviews with women Parliamentarians revealed that there was an inherent barrier in incorporating and addressing issues of women's interests in the party's political strategies. The quotes below reveal discursive opportunities and ruling political dynamics are linked to framing women's interests and iterative gender equality policies as being work in progress.

I trust in my Leader, if he asks us to work on things set out in the Manifesto, we have to. We have announced these in the campaigns. We need to work on these, or the electorate will lose faith in us, those empty promises

Well, how do we frame a woman's issue?... when we are on the ground working, we heard this and that from women, so we try to list them down. We cannot list everything, but if there's something big, like domestic violence, we list it down in the Manifest, or if something like women's unemployment, we know it will affect the whole country, so we mark these down too... Yes we look at stats, but there are priorities, we cannot take everything on board, you will have to re-elect us to work on the rest, ...[WMP3]⁴⁵⁵

The same finding is further reflected in the existing literature at the international level where there is a concern that issues pertaining to women and gender equality are marginalised or diluted in a political agenda that has to address claims of multiple inequalities ⁴⁵⁶. Hence, if issues that concern women are not being reflected in political manifestos which in turn would be mainstreamed into national policies and plans of actions of any government coming into power, the needs to be an analysis of the State structure that appears to be the link between the grass-roots and top level decision making. In this case, the women's policy agency, that is, the Ministry of Gender Equality

⁴⁵⁵ Interview with Woman Member of Parliament, 28 August 2013, Port Louis

⁴⁵⁶ | refer to Lombardo E., Meier P. & Verloo M., 2017, *Policymaking from a Gender+ Equality Perspective*, Vol. 18, pg 1-19
Squires J., 2007, *The New Politics of Gender Equality*, Palgrave:United Kingdom, pg. 19

remains a key actor in the way that it presents an opportunity for claims making and representing women's interests.

An analysis of the programs of the Ministry of Gender Equality and interviews with representatives of the Ministry⁴⁵⁷ reveal that it has adopted a paradigm shift from the Women in Development (WID) approach to that of Gender and Development (GAD)- both dominant strands having different implications for how women's interests have been formulated and represented at the level of the State Structure. In line with the WID approach that concerned women in development, the Ministry implemented activities towards equity and social justice, educational and employment and reproductive health, being aware that modernisation and the development agenda impacted differently on women and men. However, during the course of interviews, it was revealed that, whilst there was a concern for women's status, at the same time, the WID approach remained a political strategy to ensure that women also contributed to the economic development of the country-hence, activities that were being implemented by the Ministry- although seemingly appeared to be enhancing social equality- was also a political strategy towards national economic development and efficiency⁴⁵⁸. The adoption of the WID approach was further an underlying adherence to the international influence a liberal feminist stance of equality of rights stemming from the notion that women's subordination arose out of the agencies of socialisation⁴⁵⁹ and breaking down of stereotypes. This gives women and girls access to better training opportunities and entering the labour market would lead to enhancing women's status. However, the WID

⁴⁵⁷ Interview with Head, Gender Unit, 30 August 2013, Port Louis

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with former Representative of Ministry of Gender Equality, 30 September 2013, Ebene

⁴⁵⁹ Agencies of socialisation has been adopted from Connell Connell R. W., 1987, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, Polity Press:Cambridge, pg.34

approach failed to focus on the power dynamics between men and women, instead it focused on the roles of women as wives and mothers, restricting programs of the Ministry to a social welfare approach where activities tended to focus on home economics, and women's roles as producers outside the private realm was undervalued. As the international discourses evolved with a paradigm shift from WID interventions to recognising that women's subordination arose out of the unequal gendered power dynamics, the Ministry changed its focus towards a Gender and Development approach (GAD) in the late nineties where gender mainstreaming featured prominently on the Government's programme⁴⁶⁰. In retrospect, the role of International Bodies such as the United Nations (First World Conference to Beijing+20) played a pivotal role in the paradigm shift and the way in which policy was and is now being formulated, monitored and implemented at the national level. At the fourth World Conference on Women the then-Minister of Women's Rights asserted that articles and provisions contained in CEDAW and the Draft Document of the Beijing Platform for Action had formed the basis of policy-making of the Mauritian Government laying emphasis on human-centred development; for example, the Minister asserted that four out of the eleven critical areas of concern would be addressed as a matter of critical importance in policy-making namely in the field of education, health, gender

⁴⁶⁰ Analysis of the "White Paper on Women in Development" and the "National Gender Policy Framework" by the Government of Mauritius reveals that previous activities were in line with the women in development approach. With the adoption of the National Gender Policy Framework, there has been a shift in paradigm to "Gender in Development" Government programs 2005-2010; 2010-2015; 2015-2019
Government-of-Mauritius. 2005. *Government Programme 2005-2010: Address by the President of the Republic* [Online]. Available: <http://www.ggsu.net/Resources/GovtProgramme2005-2010.pdf> [Accessed], para 211
Government-of-Mauritius. 2010. *Government Programme 2010 - 2015* [Online]. Available: <http://mauritiusassembly.govmu.org/English/Documents/Add%20president/GovtProgramme2010-2015.pdf> [Accessed 4 March 2017], para 128; Government-of-Mauritius. 2015. *Government Programme 2015 - 2019* [Online]. Available: <https://www.lexpress.mu/sites/lexpress/files/attachments/article/2015/2015-01/2015-01-27/govprog2015.pdf> [Accessed 4 March 2017], para 144

mainstreaming. Subsequent conferences⁴⁶¹ called for the elimination of discrimination based on gender and gender mainstreaming in the policy and processes of Member States.

Representatives of the Ministry framed women's interests in light of the different articles set forth in the regional and international women's rights instruments that they had signed and by putting in place institutional and legal frameworks to address what are viewed at the international and regional level as women's interests. However, interviews with women at the grass-roots and with NGOs have led to the conclusion that whilst local women's interests do include some of these international concerns, local women's interests also go beyond the articles contained in international and regional documents. For example, in terms of domestic violence, the public servant, representative of the State Structure agreed that this was an emerging issue that needed redress and stipulated that the legal frameworks needed to be strengthened with harsher penalties

... there are some limitations with regard to implementation of our regional and international commitments. As a Government, we have to start working at the policy level and then these decisions will have a trickling down effect in terms of having projects to implement the policies... [WMGE4]⁴⁶²

On the other hand, on the same topic of domestic violence, and safety of the person, a number of women in community based organisations called for the setting up of safer Shelters and more half-way homes for young women, in addition to the existing structures provided by the Ministry for a more holistic approach to addressing its international commitments.

⁴⁶¹ These conferences include, inter alia, the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development and the Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women

⁴⁶² Interview with Head of Unit of the Ministry of Gender Equality, 3 December 2013, Port Louis

...Mauritius has all the legal provisions to prevent domestic violence, protection orders, they have shelters for older women, they have shelters for children, but what they don't realise is that once the woman or the child reaches 18 and leaves, she has nowhere else to go. Take domestic violence case, the woman goes to a shelter, but the husband can always try to find her, the shelter is not that safe and the shelter can only take so many...now think of the young woman, she has grown up in a shelter of the Child Development Unit, and needs to move on into adult life, there needs to be more half-way homes...I can only think of a few, but we need more... what if she does not have a place to stay, she will go back into the street, prostitution, drugs, you never know...those young women who want to have a safe place so they can give up drugs...those young women who want to be autonomous but do not have a safe place...those women who already have experienced domestic violence and still feel scared in the Shelter...we need safer shelters⁴⁶³ [WCBO32]

Hence, it can be argued that the State is aware of the general interest, however, the strategies to address these interests seem to be divergent- at the State level, it is thought to be a strategic response in terms of strengthening laws; whilst at the grass-roots level, women opt for more practical responses. A statement by a representative of a women's association sheds more light on this issue and reveals that the responsiveness, or lack thereof of institutional structures to their requests:

...they (the Ministry) seem to think they know what is going on in our community. There's a big gap in knowledge and understanding, they sign documents, I took the COMESA document (COMESA Gender Policy) and read it, how far this is relevant to Mauritian women, you tell me. In general it talks of regional trade, cooperation. Do you know one woman who has taken advantage of this? Apparently there is a FEMCOM⁴⁶⁴ in Mauritius, you see who is the representative, is it one of those women, political nominee, or is it a successful woman entrepreneur, you get what I am saying? We don't know anything about that, there's a NWECC (National Women Entrepreneur Council), but we don't get the info. In our association, because we are small, we only participate in local craft fairs; we never get to go outside the country. If I am not mistaken, the FEMCOM representative goes to trade shows in Africa, what happens to the small women entrepreneur? We go to the local bazaar? [WCBO8]⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶³ Interview with representative of NGO, Albion, 2 November 2013

⁴⁶⁴ FEMCOM is an institution of Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) established in 1993. FEMCOM has memberships in all the 19 COMESA member states, including Mauritius. It aims at promoting the interests of women entrepreneurs in Africa; and "Promote sub-regional, regional and international networking among women and enterprises owned by women to facilitate access to resources and increased support." http://www.femcomcomesa.org/?page_id=98

The COMESA Gender Policy which Mauritius is a signatory of, calls for gender equality in trade policies and regional cooperation <http://programmes.comesa.int/attachments/article/82/COMESA%20Gender%20Manuals.pdf>

⁴⁶⁵ Interview with Women Representative of an NGO, Interview held on 8 December 2013, Phoenix

When asked about the COMESA Gender Policy, the public servant (representative of the State) responded, on her side that the Ministry has guided formulation of a Gender Policy by the Ministry of Trade and Regional Cooperation⁴⁶⁶. However, based on the above response by the representative of the women's association, it is clear that there seems to be a disconnect between higher structures of the State (women MPs and the Ministry of Gender Equality) and women at the grass-roots level in terms of practical strategies and responses. This disengagement between the two levels thus becomes problematic in the sense that women's issues of concern are not being substantially represented through the State structure, and not mainstreamed into the policy processes. Moreover, some policies are being formulated in a gender-neutral or gender-blind manner, for example GFPs mentioned that both women and men had equal and free access to public gymnasiums, however, when asked to do a simple gender-sensitive analysis, both male and female GFPs stated that women could potentially not be able to access gym facilities due to cultural sensitivities and hours of opening⁴⁶⁷. Another similar example, relates to policies targeting women entrepreneurs, whereby the desk officer at the related Ministry stipulated that women entrepreneurs had equal access to bank loans:

...I do not see how gender comes into play when you access bank loans, the procedure is either that you are eligible or not, there is no gender issue...[GFP8]⁴⁶⁸

Yet, a woman entrepreneur mentioned that very often female entrepreneurs are unsuccessful in securing bank loans to setting up their small and medium enterprises

⁴⁶⁶ Interview with Women Representative of the Ministry of Gender, Interview held on 9 December 2013, Port Louis

⁴⁶⁷ Interview with GFPs, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Interview held on 08 September 2013

⁴⁶⁸ Interview with GFP, Interview held on 08 September 2013. However, when I kept prompting him about how he thought that might be detrimental to women (analysis from a gender sensitive lens) the GFP acknowledged that Banks required original papers of birth and marriage certificates that had to be re-issued every three months and it might be problematic for women to commute to these Offices given their triple roles.

due to a lack of collateral or guarantee and their low repayment capacity⁴⁶⁹. This testimony resonates with the fact that policies and services are gender neutral but impacting negatively on women at the receiving end.

Based on the way that “women’s interests” have been conceptualised and programs put in place to address their needs, in the Mauritian context, it can be argued that at times, bureaucratic processes produces and reproduces systems of gender inequality⁴⁷⁰, hence reproducing a male norm making issues of interest appear to be gender neutral, thereby discriminating against women in a systematic manner⁴⁷¹ and reproducing a sense of male power that serves to perpetuate male advantage⁴⁷², that is, the claim to gender neutrality has no basis and in daily policy formulation and implementation, gender bias is ever-present.

One female GFP provided a clear example of labour policies that were being put in place to redress the situation of older women retrenched workers of the Export Processing Zone, mentioning that older women were given training to enter the labour force in other sectors, mindful of the fact that training were being offered at hours suited for women who had busy day-time schedules:

...We have our commitments under ILO (International Labour Organisation), and we understand that with the closure of the factories, women had to be retrained...the Empowerment Program for Women is being deployed and we

⁴⁶⁹ Interview with Women Entrepreneur, Interview held on 4 October 2013, Phoenix

⁴⁷⁰ See Lovenduski, 2005, pg. 48; Rai, 2010; Savage and Witz, 1992; Jones and Jonasdottir, 1998 who arrive at the same conclusion in their studies on labour market policies, reconciling paid and care work.

⁴⁷¹ See Rees, 1998 who looks at role of the EU in perpetuating or breaking down gender segregation in the EU labour force. Rees T. L., 1998, *Mainstreaming Equality in the European Union: Education, Training and Labour Market Policies*, Routledge: Bristol. See Shaw, 2000, who looks at gender and styles of workplace discourses. Shaw S., 2000, Language, Gender and Floor Apportionment in Debates, *Discourse and Society*, Vol. 11(3), pg. 401-418

⁴⁷² See, for example, Inhetveen, 1999 who questions whether gender equality may be institutionalised in the context of quotas for equal representation

make sure that women are able to access training, even if some offices operate to suite women's hours... [GFP2]⁴⁷³

When studied in a comparative way, the State sees women's interests in light of the Articles of the Conventions that have been signed and ratified, whilst women at the grassroots see their interests as relating more to Molyneux's practical gender interests, for example, The State provides a space for women entrepreneurs to fabricate and market their products as part of a commitment towards women's empowerment, however, a woman member of a small association stated:

...They don't let us sell our products on the street, they say, go to the NWECC⁴⁷⁴ or MAW (National Women Entrepreneur Council, Mauritius Alliance of Women). You think I will pay a taxi with my goods to go to these cities. Too far, I don't have money, I am selling these to make money, not to spend on taxi!...Give us a stall at the normal local markets, no one thinks of going to MAW to buy things, tourists don't even go there, why put us in a corner! We want to be a part of development of the country, not put in a corner, here's your corner do what you can...(WCBO)⁴⁷⁵

In fact, policy making in Mauritius seems to be blind to women's interests with an "in-built hegemonic assumption"⁴⁷⁶ at the first conceptual stage within the policy-making process; and policy making seems to be a political process shaped by a discursive configuration of power in which the actors involved in the policy-making process are not aware, or have made a political decision, not to address the issues of interest to women at the grass-roots level, as reflected through the interviews. Moreover, it may be argued that ignoring women's concerns is not a neutral process- if their concerns are not being represented, then there is a clear political choice that is being made. In addition to inbuilt assumptions, the difference in definition of "equality", "gender" and "gender

⁴⁷³ Interview with GFP, Ministry of Labour, Interview held on 11 September 2013, Port Louis

⁴⁷⁴ National Women Entrepreneur Council (NWECC) is a para-statal body operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Gender Equality which aims at building the capacity of women to enter entrepreneurship activities

⁴⁷⁵ Interview with woman member of a CBO in which members are regrouped as Entrepreneurs, Interview held on 16 December 2013, Phoenix

⁴⁷⁶ Bacchi C., 2009, *Analysing Policy: What's the problem represented to be?*, Pearson Australia: Australia
Goodwin S., 2012, *Engaging with Carol Bacchi: Strategic Interventions and Exchanges*, University of Adelaide: Adelaide, pg. 30

equality” by critical actors interviewed appears conflictual amongst interviewees. In order to undertake substantive representation, the very meaning of these terminologies needs to be harmonised so that issues are effectively addressed at all levels. For example, women at the grass roots level believe that the term “gender” equals “women”, plain and simple

...(gender) I have heard the word gender, it is confusing, sometimes they say woman, sometimes gender, to me, it means related to women, when I hear gender, they always talk about things for women, now there is the Ministry of Gender, it used to be Ministry of Women...If you ask me, I am not an intellectual, I have to say ...gender is woman, or maybe this is how I see it, even this is how it has been discussed.[WCBO14⁴⁷⁷]

At the State level, some GFPs seem to have internalised the concept of “gender” as “the social relations between women and men” as they have attended the various workshops conducted by the Ministry of Gender, yet other GFPs seem to understand “gender equality” as the “same rights for women and men”⁴⁷⁸. Based on these two responses, it appears that there is a disparity in the attribution of meanings to the “gender” terminology. However, until and unless there is a clear and concise understanding of the term “gender” by actors operating in the State Structures, any action towards policy-making to address women’s and gender issues would remain incomplete.

Looking at the literature on discursive approaches to analyse processes of contestation and attribution of meanings of concepts related to gender equality and women’s interests remains beneficial in the Mauritian context. This enables a closer look into how terminologies may be expanded to incorporate or accommodate new meanings, for example, how women’s interests intersect with women’s intersectionality,

⁴⁷⁷ Interview with woman member of Senior Citizen’s Association, Interview held on 5 September 2013, Vacoas

⁴⁷⁸ Interview with GFP3, Interview held on 3 October 2013, Portlouis

and how gender equality intersections with other inequalities. Concepts may also be “played around with” to fit existing policy frameworks. Hence, scholars⁴⁷⁹ write that concepts may be reduced to generalised frameworks, such as in Mauritius, sexual rights has been interpreted as “equal opportunities”⁴⁸⁰ in the legal aspect; or “twisted” to achieve broader goals of development, such as when women’s economic empowerment is seen to contribute to the Government’s democratisation agenda and overall economic growth in Budget Speeches⁴⁸¹. In the Mauritian context, the meanings of gender equality may be further deconstructed in light of the historical contexts and understandings of inequality, thus developing gender equality frameworks to better formulate policies to address gender equality in a plural society,⁴⁸².

Based on the interviews, it is argued that in Mauritius, there exists a three-fold definition of “women’s interests”. In the first instance, women’s interests are equated with their concerns that exist in private sphere in line with established on gender relations. As an extension to the first type, the second category is linked with state policy, that is their “practical” interests”; and lastly, their “strategic” interests” linked to an analysis of women’s subordination. By linking their interests in the public and private there, a feminist formulation of women’s interests in Mauritius is thus associated with their recognition as a social category further disaggregated in theirs of their intersectionalities, a recognition of a gendered power dynamics and the resulting imbalance and actions to increase their autonomy. Furthermore, this chapter has

⁴⁷⁹ Lombardo E., Meier P. & Verloo M., 2009, *The Discursive Politics of Gender Equality. Stretching, Bending and Policymaking*, Taylor & Francis

⁴⁸⁰ Section 250 of the Mauritius Criminal Code of 1838

Government of Mauritius, Equal Opportunities Act, 2008, Act No. 42 of 2008

⁴⁸¹ Government-of-Mauritius. 2012. *Government Programme 2012-2015: Moving the Nation Forward* [Online]. Available: <http://mauritiusassembly.govmu.org/English/Documents/Add%20president/Govt%20Address%202012.pdf> [Accessed 4 December 2015]. Para. 37

⁴⁸² See Verloo M. & Walby S., 2012, Introduction: The Implications for Theory and Practice of Comparing the Treatment of Intersectionality in the Equality Architecture in Europe, *Social Politics*, Vol. 19(4), pg. 433-445

revealed that the way that interests have been formulated by elected officials represents one way by which the MPs have advocated on behalf of a group of women. Moreover, whilst addressing specific interests which they believe are important for the women they are acting for, their rhetoric and actions of contribute to the construction of not only women as a homogenous group, but of their interests as well. This gives rise to a distorted view of what women's interests are in reality and has important policy implications. This chapter has thus considered multiple sites of political action, not only at the level of formal politics, but that conceptualisation of interests takes place at different levels of government and in a variety of political forums, like cabinets, women's policy agencies and community based organisations and women's associations. From this perspective, the chapter has asserted that substantive representation is not unidirectional. By broadening the number of locations, the chapter has provided an enriched analysis of "women's interests" and has uncovered conflicting positions.

Clearly, the link between the agenda positioning for women's issues of concern and the claim for substantive representation by the State continues in Mauritius. Whilst there is an acknowledgement of women's concerns as framed by the international commitments to which Mauritius adheres, however, there appears to be a disconnect between the actual concerns of women at the grass-roots level and what the Ministry perceives to be their concerns, needs and interests. Moreover, there is a general sentiment that the Ministry of Gender addresses women's strategic needs, rather than their immediate practical needs. This democratic deficit should be addressed through an appreciation of gendered differences with a further recognition that women in Mauritius do not form a homogenous category, hence collective representation at the level of the State remains

challenging. An appreciation of these differences would better inform policy making and implementation at the State level. Indeed women's interests are continuously being defined and redefined by discursive and deliberative processes. By including civil society actors into policy-making processes, the policy cycle would become more inclusive and representative, in the light of the diversity of understanding of what gender equality and women's interests are. In the same vein, the term "gender" itself seems to be misinterpreted by Gender Focal Points in sectoral Ministries, thus making the process of substantive representation problematic. As revealed, diverse understandings of gender equality and women's interests are being articulated. Existing gender blind or gender neutral policies are thus being reproduced and, without the consultation with women at the grass-roots levels, these policies remain unchallenged. This gendered difference is not only enacted through gender blind or gender neutral policy making but is also a consequence of a broader issue impacted by a gendered structuring of the State itself as addressed in the next section.

CHAPTER 5

GENDERED STRUCTURING OF THE STATE

To speak of “the State” is misleading. “The State” means the entire apparatus of Government, from parliaments, cabinets, and bureaucracies administering programs...Each has a different relation to women⁴⁸³.

The role of the State has been explored at the international level in the recent scholarship underpinned by a feminist institutionalist approach that further maps out the gendered nature of the State, the Parliament and evaluates the role of Women’s Policy Agencies (WPAs) in promoting gender equality in countries such as Scotland, Sweden, Chile and Canada, amongst others⁴⁸⁴. Liberal feminists that write within a pluralist paradigm view State power as dispersed, wherein a diverse range of interests are represented within the State, thus, they make the case that the State can be a neutral terrain and women should be able to overcome androcentricism by entering the structures of the State in significant numbers⁴⁸⁵. The subject of whether institutions of governance within the State structure, including the Parliament, may be used as a tool to effect change towards gender equality remains a critical question with respect to women’s political representation. Some studies have established that the Parliament remains a key space for substantive representation whilst others have adopted more sceptical views. Likewise, strategies to advance gender equality have varied, with a contrasting assessment of their effectiveness. Other research has revolved around the key roles, potential alliances, rapport, level of interaction and room for agency between the State, its institutions and critical actors. These analyses have looked at the collaboration of State institutions amongst themselves and their collaboration outside the

⁴⁸³ Eisenstein H., 1996, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State.*, Temple University Press:Philadelphia, pg. xvii

Cerny P. G., 1990, *The changing architecture of politics: Structure, agency and the future of the state*, Sage:London, pg. xi
Structuration according to Cerny refers to the continuing interaction between agent and structure, where structures that are constraining can also change and be changed

⁴⁸⁴ Krook M.L., 2015, *Gender, Politics and Institutions: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism*, Palgrave Macmillan

⁴⁸⁵ Savage M. & Witz A., 1992, Theoretical Introduction: Gender in Organisations, *In: SAVAGE, M. & WITZ, A. (eds.) Gender and Bureaucracy*. Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, pg. 15

State structures, for example at the grass-roots level and with donor institutions; for example in New Zealand⁴⁸⁶

This section builds on the premise that the State is a critical and potential site for substantive representation of women's issues and gender equality in Mauritius. In order to evaluate this position, interviews were undertaken with a number of Stakeholders at the levels of the State, NGOs and community based organisations/women's associations. At the State level, present and former women members of parliament (MP) were interviewed. Retracing their political pathways, women politicians and present members of parliament recounted how they entered the formal political sphere, spoke in detail of their campaigning and the nature of support received by their party leaders and their constituents as well as the barriers they experienced working the field to obtain a 'ticket' for elections as well as the difficulties of being a woman MP. . Another female MP mentioned that the electoral system in Mauritius remained an outdated model based on proportional representation and a census of the population carried out in 1972.

Some women who were former political activists gave account of how they had been active during the early eighties when the women's movement was just starting in Mauritius. Many of the women interviewed did not define themselves as feminists, but mentioned that they believed in women's rights as being basic human rights. Women at the State level working in the Ministries/ Departments as identifiable Gender Focal Points in their Ministries mentioned that they believed in the equal rights of women but haphazardly happened to be given the task of gender mainstreaming due to the fact that

⁴⁸⁶ Curtin J., 2008, Women, Political Leadership and Substantive Representation: The Case of New Zealand, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 61(3), pg. 490-504. In the case of New Zealand, Curtin writes that the presence of an active and influential feminist group is critical to supplement women in the legislature. Phillips also refers to the collaboration between State and non-State actors for substantive representation to take place. Phillips A., 1998, *The Politics of Presence*, Oxford University Press: Oxford Weldon, 2002, *Protest, Policy, and the Problem of Violence against Women: A Cross-National Comparison*, University of Pittsburgh Press:Pittsburg

they were women, and they only undertook the task as it had been accorded to them⁴⁸⁷. At the Ministry of Gender Equality, the older women who were in their seventies that were interviewed mentioned that they had witnessed the development of the women's movement and the institution of women's rights at a national level through programs/policies and legislation being adopted by the successive Governments. One representative of the Ministry of Gender mentioned that she had always been interested in formal politics while other civil servants who worked at the Ministry or collaborated with the Ministry on specific projects identified themselves as feminists, but also mentioned the limitations they faced implementing projects with the support of the Ministry. Other participants, who declared themselves as having a feminist consciousness, at the grass-roots level were born in families with links to formal politics or entered non-institutional politics through their husbands who were engaged in formal politics or simply joined women's association as a way to get out of their homes for a few hours, or to empower themselves by listening to talks on maternal health, or to learn new entrepreneurial skills. Other women participants who were interviewed in community associations joined as solidarity to other women to be able to meet for socialising purposes. A few women mentioned that they joined the social welfare centres in their local village or district council as a first step to be able to enter formal politics at local governmental level and eventually progress to politics at the national level. A few women had always been interested in political activities and had joined their Student Unions at school or had joined the Trade Union at their workplace. At the same time, there were women who had been engaged in voluntary work when they were younger

⁴⁸⁷ This raises questions about ownership of gender mainstreaming and gender sensitive policy implementation which will be addressed in this chapter.

and decided to join a community-based organisation in their later years, whilst others joined the women's wing of political parties. All women participants who had previous political experience expressed a passion to make a difference in their communities whilst recounting their lived experiences of the machinations of gendered power dynamics and communalism at the level of the State.

Hence, the very nature of the gendered Mauritian State, the Parliament, and its Ministries – the apex of political enactment and power- needs to be analysed to firstly, demystify the assumption that ministerial portfolios and the experiences of women MPs are rather homogeneous; and secondly, to contextualise the way that the Women's Policy Agency is able to influence parliamentary debates and implement strategies for women's empowerment and gender equality. In the same vein, the way that masculinities are performed also provides a way to analyse how those mechanisms and processes through which androcentric political power and governance is reinforced and sustained in political and State institutions⁴⁸⁸, so much so that women MPs evolve through a system based on "masculinised ethos"⁴⁸⁹ and "jobs for the boys"⁴⁹⁰ in a "masculine logic"⁴⁹¹. This latter notion of performance of masculinity at the highest level has also been put forward by a former female politician:

So you have a Male Minister who is unaware of gender issues ruling one of the top most Ministries, what can you expect, that Ministry will be very gender neutral, or worse, in favour of male interests, they might not know it, it's a privilege to be a man anyway, they don't know they have that privilege, or maybe they do?...[laughs]... I mean, then you go down to the Local Government Level, Village Council, District Council, who are the representatives, Men! ...Just imagine, so simple, Ombudsman, chairman, the term man, this was changed after, but you know, just the language is masculine, and it's so normal that even I will say, Ombudsman, ... I even wrote

⁴⁸⁸ Bjarnegard E., 2013, *Gender, Informal Institutions and Political Recruitment*, Palgrave.: Basingstoke,

⁴⁸⁹ O'Neill B. & Stewart D. K., "2009, Gender and Political Party Leadership in Canada, *Party Politics*, 15(November 2009), pg. 737

⁴⁹⁰ McKay J., 2004, Women in German Politics: Still Jobs for the Boys?, *German Politics*, Vol. 13,pg. 56-80

⁴⁹¹ Duerst-Lahti G., 2002, *Governing Institutions, Ideologies and Gender: toward the Possibility of Equal Political Representation*, *Sex Toile*, 47(7-8), pg. 375 Watson S., 1990, *Playing the State: Australian Feminist Interventions*, Verso: London, pg. 9

down my title once when I was Chairperson, I wrote, you will laugh, I wrote Chairman. [laughs]...” [exWMP6]⁴⁹²

The above statement reflects the thoughts of a woman Member of Parliament (MP), however is not a stand-alone reflection. Interviews with two other women MPs underline a similar sentiment immediately revealing the existence of a deeply rooted gendered State and structures of governance in Mauritius. The gendered State makes it harder for critical actors who aspire to challenge the status quo where male privilege seems to be deeply embedded in the Parliamentary body where high level decisions are made. Concurrently, the gendered state is reflected in the language used to refer to the universal subject, which appears to be Male in this context in reference to the word “Ombudsman” instead of “Ombudsperson”. Furthermore, it can be clearly discerned that the Mauritian State is essentially a male construct with a deeply engrained patriarchal structure universally oppressing all women. Thus, it can be argued that the State establishes a social order where the interests of the population is seen as gender neutral or in the interest of men by legitimising processes that are inherently skewed in favour of men⁴⁹³, further representing an extension of patriarchy occurring in the private sphere now translated to the public sphere⁴⁹⁴ in Mauritius.

The danger that further arises in terms of the State seeing women as one homogenous category is that it leaves out a very important aspect of women’s intersectionality in Mauritius, divided by ethnicity and class amongst the other markers of identity thus seeing women in Mauritius as having a universal set of interests- a view reflected by a representative of a woman’s NGO:

⁴⁹² Interview with Woman MP, Interview held on 9 September 2013, Port Louis

⁴⁹³ Mackinnon C. A., 1989, *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, pg. 161-162

⁴⁹⁴ Acker J., 1989, The Problem with Patriarchy, *Sociology*, Vol. 23(2), pg. 235-240

I am all for voting for a woman, but you think by putting a woman up in Parliament, she will represent all women, NO! In Mauritius, women are too diverse, the catholic woman is different to the Hindu, the Hindu is different to the Muslim, they have different aspirations, they have different problems, so no, I will vote for someone from my community to represent me, either male or female, but someone who understands my ethnic belonging will know what problems I face...[WNGO8]⁴⁹⁵

Moreover, the State and its institutions have been historically structured in such a way to protect specific political and cultural communities through practices and discourses that have created boundaries separating women as the “Other” so much so that that it becomes difficult to challenge the different norms and procedures that would allow for women to engage with it, making women visible only in the private sphere. This was reflected in an interview with an older member of a woman’s association:

I was around 23, which was in the seventies, when I joined a women’s association. At that time, we were being given talks (by Officers of the Ministry and Resource persons from a catholic NGO) about what a good wife should be, how to educate the kids, how to be there for our husbands. These type of talks were going on in a lot of associations. I remember thinking, is that all that we women could do? If we listen to these talks, are we not being educated then to be able to join a political party? But of course, at that time, women were not able to leave the house, that was our place, and that was made clear to us...when I questioned the person giving us the talk, of course, it was our local member who was a man, he replied by saying, that politics was for men, if you decide to go into politics, there are too many things in place that would prevent a woman from making a change, first you would not even get entry into the party, you need to care for your children, you cannot expect your husband to stay at home to look after them, he needs to work, make money, you should support him...[WCBO3]⁴⁹⁶

Based on this statement, it may be assumed that historically the apparent full political and social citizenship of women granted by the State was fragmented and citizenship was inherently a male defined concept. Nevertheless, women were called upon to educate the next generation, but they were in parallel, included and excluded from the powers associated with being a full citizen, even when they possessed the qualities

⁴⁹⁵ Interview with woman representative of MAW, Interview held on 24 August 2013, Quatre-Bornes

⁴⁹⁶ Interview with women representative of a community based organisation, Interview held on 27 August 2013, Vacoas

needed to be full and active political citizens. However, because of patriarchal attitudes structural, economic and social barriers instituted by the State through discourses and practices, they were restricted in exercising their full citizenship. This point has also been expanded upon in the existing literature on women and citizenship in Mauritius where it is argued that communalism and ethnicity has played a major part in the way that women's citizenship has been defined and practised on the island⁴⁹⁷. This leads one to question the very gendered nature of the State by examining the processes at play that are perhaps conducive or inhibit women's full and active citizenship and representation of their interests.

Descriptive Representation in Mauritius

Mauritius joins five Southern African countries with the lowest percentage of women in parliament in 2015. The parliamentary representation of women rose from just 6 percent in 1983 to 17.1 percent in 2005 and to 19 percent in 2010. In more recent years, women have remained under-represented in numbers in the highest sphere of decision making with the number of women among parliamentarians being only 8 out of a total of 70 (11%) in 2014 compared to 13 (19%) in 2010⁴⁹⁸.

With the latest general elections in 2014, the percentage of women in parliament in Mauritius saw a very sharp decrease with the victory of "Alliance Lepep Coalition" that secured 47 of the elected seats out of 60, setting aside the existing 12 women Members

⁴⁹⁷ Ramtohol R., 2015, Intersectionality and women's political citizenship: the case of Mauritius, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 33(1), pg. 27-47

⁴⁹⁸ Statistics-Mauritius. 2016. *Digest of Demographic Statistics 2015* [Online]. Mauritius: Government of Mauritius. Available: http://statsmauritius.govmu.org/English/StatsbySubj/Documents/Digest/Demography/Digest_Demo_2015.pdf [Accessed 5 January 2017].

of Parliament in the previous Government, as well as the nine women fielded by the Coalition Alliance that escalated to power. As a result, Mauritius presently does not have any woman representative in the Opposition as a direct pitfall of the First Past the Post System which creates a competitive environment where women get allocated to precarious marginal seats. Analysis of the electoral campaigns reveals that the nine women candidates from the now Opposition party got fielded in “non-electable⁴⁹⁹” constituencies that they had never lobbied in previously, and did not stand a chance to be nominated as “best losers” , also reflected in one interview.

It was not the best electoral campaign that I had been involved in. I was told that I had to go down to that constituency, it was somewhere where I had not been present in an active way before, and I was also going against someone who was from a minority group, obviously he would be nominated under the best loser, so I had to work doubly hard... being a woman it's not like you can just walk around without having the fact that you are a woman mentioned all the time, that and my caste...all combined, it's very complicated [former woman MP]⁵⁰⁰

Amongst the four women who ran with the now Opposition Party, were former Ministers of Women's Rights and Social Security who had lobbied for key pieces of legislation namely, the Protection from Domestic Violence Act (1994); the Sex Discrimination Act (2002); the Amendments to the Criminal Code (Rights to Abortion) and the setting up of women's empowerment centres and Family Support Bureaus across the island⁵⁰¹. Moreover now, five out of the eight elected women parliamentarians hold a seat in Parliament for the first time. Nevertheless, the 2014 elections saw the nomination of the first woman President in Mauritius as well as the first woman Speaker of the National

⁴⁹⁹ Jones M. P., 1996, Increasing Women's Representation Via Gender Quotas: The Argentine Ley de Cupos *Women and Politics*, 16(December), pg. 75-98

⁵⁰⁰ Interview with former woman MP, Interview held on 9 October 2013, Port Louis

⁵⁰¹ Government-of-Mauritius, 2002, Sex Discrimination Act Port Louis, Mauritius

Lowe-Morna C. & Dube S., 2015, *SADC Gender Protocol 2015 Barometer*, Southern African Protocol Alliance/ Gender Links: Johannesburg

Assembly⁵⁰². Having a woman in one of the highest role in the country is a signal that the Government has the political will to institute women in higher ranking positions, whilst at the same time, it may simply be a political strategy. It is to be noted that the Mauritian electoral system is quite complex and ethnic considerations form a major part of the nomination processes of Ministers and high ranking political spaces.

The Local Government Level

Following regional and international pressure such as the United Nations (through the CEDAW Committee Concluding Comments⁵⁰³) towards adopting temporary special measures to accelerate women's full and equal participation in the political sphere (General Recommendation No. 25 (2004), the implementation of the 2014 gender quota law at local municipal council has witnessed a noticeable change in the percentage of women councillors at local level⁵⁰⁴. In 2005, women comprised 12.7 percent of members of municipal council, as compared to 36.7 percent in 2012⁵⁰⁵, with the adoption of a 30 per cent gender quota at local government level⁵⁰⁶. The Mauritian local government is segmented into five municipal councils and 130 village councils with elections held every 6 years, with a terms of reference aligned with Sections 50 and 51 of the Local

⁵⁰² Gurib-Fakim A., 2016, The Accidental President A Conversation with Dr. Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, President of Mauritius, *World Policy Journal*, 33(4), pg. 35-38

See also Table 2 and 3 in Appendix

⁵⁰³ United Nations, 2011, Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women- Mauritius, CEDAW/C/MUS/CO/6-7, Available Online at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/co/CEDAW-C-MUS-CO-6-7.pdf>, Last Accessed May 2018

⁵⁰⁴ Statistics-Mauritius, 2014, Mauritius in Figures, Port Louis Mauritius, Available online at <http://statsmauritius.govmu.org/English/Publications/Documents/MIF/Mauritius%20in%20figures%202014%20a.pdf> last Accessed May 2018

⁵⁰⁵ Government of Mauritius. 2013. *Republic of Mauritius Millennium Development Goals status report 2013*. Available http://www.mu.undp.org/content/dam/mauritius_and_seychelles/docs/MDG%20Status%20Report%20Mauritius.pdf [Accessed 5 January 2017].

Government of Mauritius. 2010. *Republic of Mauritius Millennium Development Goals status report 2010* [Online]. Available: <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/MDG%20Country%20Reports/Mauritius/MDG%20Status%20Report%202010%20Edited%202012%20Version%20posted%20online.pdf> [Accessed 5 January 2017].

⁵⁰⁶ Lowe-Morna C. & Dube S., 2015, *SADC Gender Protocol 2015 Barometer*, Southern African Protocol Alliance/ Gender Links:Johannesburg, pg. 103-105

Government Act 2011, ranging from the management of public services at the local level, raising revenue, maintenance and regulation of public places, organising socio-cultural events, conducting sports and leisure activities amongst others⁵⁰⁷.

According to the literature, the arguments in favour of instituting quotas rest on the fact that sets of interests are gendered, all while acknowledging that there is not a unitary category of women's interests; women politicians are viewed as transparent in terms of information management and accountability⁵⁰⁸; are successful role models in politics and well as in leadership style; and equal representation being an issue of fairness and equality⁵⁰⁹.

During the interview process in Mauritius, women councilors were asked about their views on the institution of affirmative action measures to increase the number of women at local governmental level in a view to understanding whether descriptive representation had impacted on or influenced the political agenda and underlying attitudes towards women in the formal political domain. Analysis of the transcripts reveals varying perceptions of women on gender quotas and their impact.

If you look at the numbers, yes, it (gender quota) is working. There are more of us (women) who want to come in politics, because the law says we can now, but, the conditions of the game is not for same for women and men. Men direct the debate. For me, personally, I have a low voice. I am short. It is challenging to stop a man from talking for me to raise a point⁵¹⁰ [WCLC3]

As a general perception, it was seen that the 30 percent gender quota had effectively tripled the number of women in local politics, as stated by a village council

⁵⁰⁷ Government-of-Mauritius, 2011, The Local Government Act 2011, Mauritius

⁵⁰⁸ Araujo J. & Tejedo-Romero F., 2016, Women's political representation and transparency in local governance, *Local Government Studies*, Vol. 42(6), pg. 885-906

⁵⁰⁹ Eagly A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt M. C. & Van Engen M. L., 2003, Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Leadership Styles: A Meta-Analysis Comparing Women and Men, *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 129(4), pg. 569–591

Albalade D., 2013, The Institutional, Economic and Social Determinants of Local Government Transparency, *Journal of Economic Policy Reform*, Vol. 16(1), pg. 90–107

⁵¹⁰ Interview with Mrs SB, Member of GrandPort Savanne Village Council, 3 November 2013

representative in the south of the island, yet, at the same time, the institutionalisation of the quota mechanism has seemingly not eliminated deeply engraved patriarchal attitudes nor eliminated structural discrimination⁵¹¹, both findings resonating within existing research on arguments on the effectiveness of quotas⁵¹². Concurrently, a few women mentioned what Anne Phillips⁵¹³ terms the ‘the politics of ideas’ versus ‘the politics of presence’ as summed up by one participant:

I think that women and men are complementary. As women, because we are also mothers, we tend to see things differently. Men do not think that there needs to be more women to raise an issue that is related to women. They think they know it all. But we think, we need to be here to bring the real issue to the table. We have to be present. They cannot think and decide for us. They don't understand gender. They are in power everywhere, they take everything for granted [WCLG4]⁵¹⁴

Here the woman councillor argues that the difference between having a man and woman representative is seen in terms of ideas and representation in terms of how the issue at stake reflects the interests of women on the ground. Descriptive representation, that is, a politics of presence⁵¹⁵ makes it possible for a common gendered social experience to get political, particularly in the case where such experiences are not obvious to the privileged group. It is further argued that having shared social experiences such as gendered discrimination would imply that female members in formal politics would raise issues more systematically⁵¹⁶. However, in Mauritius intersectionality plays an essential part in defining women's gendered identity. Social

⁵¹¹ Interview with Mrs SB, Member of GrandPort Savanne Village Council, 3 November 2013

⁵¹² Bacchi C., 2006, Chapter 2 'Arguing for and Against Quotas: Theoretical Issues', In: DAHLERUP, D. (ed.) *Women, quotas and politics*. Routledge: London

⁵¹³ Phillips A., 1998, *The Politics of Presence*, Oxford University Press: Oxford

⁵¹⁴ Interview woman Member of Mka/Flacq Village Council, 4 November 2013

⁵¹⁵ Mansbridge discusses the “politics of presence”

Mansbridge J., 1999, Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent "Yes", *The Journal of Politics* 61(3), pg. 628-657

⁵¹⁶ Chattopadhyay R. & Duflo E., 2004, Women as policy makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India, *Econometrica*, 72(5), pg. 1409–1443

Washington E. L., 2008, Female Socialization: How Daughters Affect their Legislator Fathers' Voting on Women's Issues, *American Economic Review*, 98(1), pg. 311-332

experiences and discourses of cultural domains relating to religion, social structure, class and ethnicity undoubtedly affects the individual's experience and hence, the way that representation is effected in formal politics.

Framing Intersectional Claims towards Representation for Justice

Having a unitary moral subjectivity and assuming a homogenous category of women remains challenging when Mauritian women define themselves in terms of their multiple subjectivities as revealed in the interviews below:

I think having a woman in the Council is very important. I am a mother, I have a daughter, and my daughter sometimes tells me about things that disturb her. Just 2 weeks ago, she said that she feels a bit shy to play volleyball when the boys use the same gymnasium court. To me this is a gender issue. So I raised it in the committee. Now we are working with the Ministry of Gender to have an after- hours slot for women's volleyball in the Women Centres. But when I raised it in the committee, a man said, the boys don't look, they are busy doing their own things, and no one has the time to look. Another woman said to me that her daughter has no problem playing in front of the boys. I looked at her, and said, I am a Hindu, we are more conservative...[WCLG1]⁵¹⁷

...I think the population holds too close of a relationship to councillors. Sometimes, because you are a woman, women come and tell you their personal stories. One Indian women's story is different to a Muslim women's story, they are different... Sometimes, everything becomes political, sometimes, you cannot make any change, because you think the woman just came to tell you a story, and it is not political. It's difficult to address all women's issues, and sometimes some issues, I just don't know if they are telling me as a friend, just a little gossip, or if I have to make it political...[WCLG2]⁵¹⁸

At the same time, having a quota system at the local governmental level that allows for women to enter formal politics is seen as a first step to increase descriptive representation, however, this section addresses whether having this affirmative action entails that women from different socio-economic backgrounds will have their issues of interest represented in a substantive manner at higher levels of politics. Additionally, it

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Women Councillor, Local Government Level, Moka, Interview held on 3 September 2013, Moka

⁵¹⁸ Interview with Women Councillor, Local Government Level, Moka, Interview held on 3 September 2013, Moka

appears that one woman councillor found it awkward to turn the personal into the political when it was mentioned that she did not know how to interpret themes raised by her fellow constituents which undermines the whole substantive representational process. Likewise, failing to consider difference amongst women based on their intersectionality, and failing to consider institutional arrangements based on male rules of reason (as the example of the shared gymnasium court) remains problematic even though gender quotas are in place, as further reflected in this interview:

Yes, ok, we have gender quota, but Mauritius is too complicated. We have Hindus, creoles, Chinese, whites. We each look after our own interest, as hypocritical as I sound. It's like each group has its own lot of interest. Sometimes I don't know what to address first, me being a woman, or my religion (ethnicity)...[WCLG6]⁵¹⁹

This echoes the idea of Iris Young who adopts normative theory stating that affirmative action (for example in terms of quota) seeks to weaken group-based oppression through affirming, instead of, suppressing social group differences. Hence according to Young, a good society is reflected through a differentiated, culturally plural network of individuals and group-differentiated policies⁵²⁰. Furthermore, it may be argued that in light of the different ethnicities co-existing in Mauritius, interest-group pluralism seems to create a fragmented society and causes Mauritians to have a politically privatised relationship with the State. Collective decisions further seem disjointed given the fact that there are so many subjectivities and intersectionalities on the island; and at the same time, that level of fragmentation appears to discourage a unified gendered perspective for collective action, or to consider the private as being political. The danger with failing to politicise an issue because of intersectionalities makes it difficult to acknowledge social and cultural relations as well as institutional frameworks that serve to perpetuate

⁵¹⁹ Interview with Women Councillor, Local Government Level, GrandPort/Savanne, Interview held on 3 September 2013, Souillac

⁵²⁰ Young I. M., 2011, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press New Jersey

patriarchy and forms of oppression and challenge one-dimensionality of issues that affect women – as one woman remarked:

...there are always more Indian (Hindu)⁵²¹ women who come to see you with a problem. You talk to the Indian woman, or Muslim woman, she thinks different as the Catholic. I try to combine both problems for one solution, but sometimes, because there are more Indians than creoles, we have to find out ways to make the mass population satisfied. Indian women and Catholic women are very different in their mindset. It's a mentality problem, but at the end of the day, we have to address the concerns of the mass population...[WCLG2]⁵²²

In Mauritius, it appears that there is some form of cultural imperialism where there is little effort to challenge the universality of claims of the dominant group. In this case, Hindus as the ethnic majority in Mauritius, and the analysis of hints in responses of the different women interviews, suggests subtly that the dominant ethnic groups reinforces its privileged position (based on majority in numbers) by ensuring that other ethnic groups are aligned to its prevailing norms, rendering one cultural mindset as the norm:

...if you ask me frankly, I would not lie, women we say we are the same. We are not in Mauritius. Each with our problem. The Indian woman has no idea what my problem is. I have no idea what her problem is. I can wear what I want to the beach. The Muslim woman, she cannot. How about the old woman. I don't know what her problem is. The handicapped woman, I don't know what she needs. So no, we are not the same. We have too many things that distinguish us. We are from a community, we are of an age, we have money, we don't." And then in Mauritius, you have an Indian majority. You know what I am saying. Voting population...[WCLG6]⁵²³

Furthermore, based on responses in the interviews, in a number of cases, the term “them” was used to refer to women who were not part of the Hindu community, leading one to understand that non-Hindu women were seen as “the other”. Additionally, during

⁵²¹ In Mauritius, Hindus are also referred to as Indians, and Creoles are referred to Catholics/ Christians in common language.

⁵²² Interview with Women Councillor, Local Government Level, Moka, Interview held on 3 September 2013, Moka

⁵²³ Interview with Women Councillor, Local Government Level, GrandPort/Savanne, Interview held on 3 September 2013, Souillac

the course of interviews, a pattern emerged where women from the non-Hindu community referred to women of a different ethnic group as “them”, creating a problematic general divide amongst women themselves. Some examples of othering experiences revolved around the issue of teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and domestic violence.

...they let their daughters who are still at school dress like that (pointing to cleavage and above knee skirt). And then they let them meet boys. Yes, it's a problem but maybe to them it is not a very big problem, there is not a very big stigma because it is so common in their community...[WCBO6]⁵²⁴

...One lady who had AIDS came to see me, she was creole lady, and said that we needed to put a syringe box in the ladies toilet. She said she saw these overseas and it could be good to have them in the city. When I raised it up with the committee, the other woman councillor, an Indian, came to talk to me in private and said, I was shocked, she said, she would not have got AIDS if she had taken better care of her husband, he would not be looking around...[WCBO11]⁵²⁵

The danger of framing women's interests in the light of stereotypes that become so deeply embedded in the society's mindset is that it then renders that issue invisible. In the same vein, Young⁵²⁶ writes that 'deviant beings, the culturally imperialized are stamped with an essence'. Moreover, the other paradox is that in marking issues as invisible or deeply stereotypical, it may tend to legitimise some issues, in this case, the problem of teenage pregnancy or the gendered aspect of HIV/AIDS. Simultaneously, those “other” women under cultural imperialism are defined and labelled against the dominant norms of Mauritian society, as may be explained by the poignant responses below

...the Indian woman thinks that all Creoles are “loose”, we like to party...we are seen as sexual or that we will not finish primary school. Sometimes, I think

⁵²⁴ Interview with representative of a women's association, Interview held on 6 October 2013, Pereybere

⁵²⁵ Interview with representative of a women's association, Interview held on 5 October 2013, Flic en Flac

⁵²⁶ Interview with representative of a women's association, Interview held on 6 October 2013, Pereybere

⁵²⁶ Young I. M., 2011, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press New Jersey, pg. 59

maybe because everyone thinks that this is the way that we creoles are, my daughter will think that is how she has to behave. I don't know. But sometimes I tell my daughter she has to study harder just to prove people wrong...[WCBO7]⁵²⁷

To this participant, it appeared that living under this form of cultural and “gendered imperialism” means that her subjectivity and practical and strategic needs and issues of interest to her as a gendered subject is shaped by race, class, and cultural imperialism, and defined from the outside through dominant cultural norms. In his theorising about slavery, Du Bois coins this sense of self as the “double consciousness”, where the subject rejects a devalued stereotypical notion of the self, and wishes to exercise a sense of agency, however, noting that the dominant culture still marks the latter as different or inferior⁵²⁸ Applying a status of “otherness” to women from the non-dominant ethnic group ultimately leads to specific set of experiences that may not be understood by women in the dominant Hindu community or the other communities for that matter, resulting in a form of social, economic and political segregation. Several members of a small women’s association with a majority of Creole women relate how they see the question of difference and representation in the following ways:

...We usually meet amongst ourselves, we go to excursions, we have sega (a traditional Mauritian dance) we dance, we have beef biryani, and we are free to act as we want. But if there was someone from another community, we would not be able to put loud sega, or dance inappropriately(smiles) [WCBO21]⁵²⁹

...so if you ask me, if Madam (name the then Minister of Women’s Rights) can go to parliament understanding my issue and tell the Prime Minister that this is the issue of Creole women, and she is (name of a ethnic community), no, she cannot, and she does not understand me. She understands only part of me. The other part of me is not seen by her, it is not understood by her...[WCBO7]⁵³⁰

...no, a woman from another community cannot understand my problem, each community is different. Ok we have a general problem,

⁵²⁷ Interview with representative of a women’s association, Interview held on 4 October 2013, Souillac

⁵²⁸ Du Bois, 1969, pg. 45-46 as cited in Dillon M., 2010, *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century*, Wiley- Blackwell:Oxford, pg 385

⁵²⁹ Interview with representative of a women’s association, Interview held on 18 October 2013, Riviere du Rempart

⁵³⁰ Interview with representative of a women’s association, Interview held on 4 October 2013, Flic en Flac

being woman, violence and all, but domestic violence is also cultural, so no, you cannot represent me and my problem in parliament...[WCBO9]⁵³¹

...sometimes I think, why would I go see my local member, I am not a big shot, I will already feel like I am a small fish in the sea just because I am creole...[WCBO22]⁵³²

These reflections contend that cultural imperialism has consequences with respect to the substantive representation of women's interests at the higher levels of decision making. It is further testimony to the fact that cultural imperialism may be perpetuated by the non-dominant group themselves through the limited sense of agency exercised to change the status quo, or perpetuated by the dominant group of women to assert their needs and experiences as being universal or even neutral. Based on the interviews, it is clear that women of the non-dominant Hindu majority felt that there was a general feeling of universality of women's issues based on what the dominant group felt was important, and these issues would be raised at the level of the parliament, constituting substantive representation of the issues of the dominant group, thereby sidelining other issues of interest to women from other ethnic communities, for example, a participant from a dominant ethnic group in a formal women's NGO stated:

...I think women's problems are the same, if you are rich, or old...[WCBO15]⁵³³

This form of complacency and embedded invisibility and on how cultural imperialism masks issues surrounding ethnicity and intersectionality based on race and class is alarming. Cultural imperialism amongst women seems to exclude the issues of women from the ethnic minority. Subsequently, issues of concern to the ethnic minority remain invisible and are not addressed through political discourses, hence affecting the process

⁵³¹ Interview with representative of a women's association, Interview held on 5 October 2013, Souillac

⁵³² Interview with representative of a women's association, Interview held on 21 October 2013, GrandBay

⁵³³ Interview with representative of a women's association, Interview held on 22 October 2013, Vacoas

of substantive representation for a minority group of women, with an impact on democratic social justice and sustainable development in the long run.

Moreover, it can then be argued that substantive representation becomes elusive, whereby shared gender based social experiences are not enough to embody a group standpoint. At the same time, whilst it is true to state that women do have a common system of oppression relating to the gendered power dynamics and a limited capacity to exercise their agency and have their interests represented in a substantive manner, it appears that groups of women are not oppressed in the same way due to the differences in the category woman itself and to define a single criteria on which women are being oppressed, and to state which issue of concern is more urgent. Engaging with the literature on post-colonialism feminist theorising, it becomes easy to unpack the universalisation of women's experiences as well as cultural imperialism raised in the interviews. It has to be noted that there is a majority of Hindus in Mauritius, and the history of colonisation in Mauritius entails that Hindus were able to acquire land and have access to more wealth as a majority came to the island as paid indentured labourers, as compared to the people of African descent who were in large part descendants of slaves. Here, there can be a similar transposition where the Hindu women interviewed have placed themselves as primary creating an othering binary distinction. However, Weedon and Mohanty⁵³⁴ state that it is only from a privileged position that it is possible to define the under-privileged, yet, without the under-privileged, there would be no privileged.

⁵³⁴ Weedon, C., 2000, Key Issues in Postcolonial Feminism: A Western Perspective, Cardiff University.

Women seem to be divided by intersectionality in Mauritius, whether age, ethnicity, social and economic status or political affiliation, as well as by the power stratification brought about as an aftermath of colonisation. They face a double colonisation⁵³⁵. They use the injustices they experience to describe what is of interest to them to be addressed at the higher levels of decision making. At times, women interviewed have described their interests and oppression relating to exploitation in the labour market. Women have also mentioned their powerlessness to approach their local Member of Parliament who is not of the same ethnicity as them and spoke of a form of cultural imperialism that makes it difficult for them to raise an issue with a Member of Parliament from another ethnic background. Women participants have further referred to matters pertaining to their ableism and privileges of able-bodies in terms of access to infrastructure⁵³⁶. This idea joins the broader literature⁵³⁷ on representation and distorted understanding individual experiences and group perspectives, that is, the idea that individuals are able to represent groups by way of their person (bodies) or behaviour. Weldon⁵³⁷ therefore suggests that group perspectives should be seen as being developed through intra-group interactions creating a collective product by social groups. In this case, the social group (women) is differentiated through their ethnic affiliation, cultural practices, or other systems of intersectionalities. Hence, according to Weldon⁵³⁸, the “body” is a limited site of representation; rather, multiple sites and

⁵³⁵ “Double colonization” is a term coined by Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford and refers to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. Peterson, K. H., Rutherford, A. (Eds.), 1986, *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-colonial Women's Writing*, Dangaroo Press: Oxford.

⁵³⁶ It is not being suggested here that women have explicitly mentioned that some groups of women are explicitly benefitting from the oppression of other women, but the point can be made that there is a privilege that is established when one category of women from the majority ethnic group is benefitting from having their interests represented in a more substantive manner by their local MP or Councillor who is of the same ethnic background

⁵³⁷ Weldon S. L., 2002, Beyond Bodies: Institutional Sources of Representation for Women in Democratic Policymaking, *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 64(4), pg. 1153

⁵³⁸ *ibid*

sources of representation should be analysed whilst looking at substantive representation- a notion which is especially significant in Mauritius, given its multi-ethnic composition and the fact that there are over 1500 registered women's associations. These include institutional structures such as women's policy agencies and women's movement become more effective sites to represent women's interests, as compared to representation in the legislature. Additionally, the involvement and collaboration and interaction of these different modes and sites of representation provide an effective avenue for substantive representation of women's interests already divided by intersectionality towards achieving gendered political citizenship.

Deconstructing Gendered Institutions

This statement by a former woman MP speaks volumes about the way that power operates within the government structure in Mauritius:

Politics and Government to me is about power...As a woman, there are too many things that combine to result in that I cannot have that total power, this affects the way that I can do politics and have change...[SWCBO23]⁵³⁹

The definition of the term politics abound, however, there seems to be a consensus amongst women interviewed in Mauritius (both at the State and community level), that politics involves the use of power to effect change, in a positive or negative way⁵⁴⁰. Lukes speaks of a three-fold definition of political power which stipulates that 'the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people from having

⁵³⁹ Interview with former women MP, Interview held on 3 September 2013, Quatre Bornes

⁵⁴⁰ This view can also be equated with Weber M., 1978, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Translated by E.Fischhoff, University of California Press:Berkeley

grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things'⁵⁴¹

Similarly, Stuart Mill's⁵⁴² essay on the subjection of women, in which Mill demonstrates how in the 1860's European women were subjects of a lifetime of socialisation underpinned through religious doctrines, educational systems and employment structures in which the traditional roles of women in a patriarchal society were institutionalised. By extension to Lukes' and Mill's ideas, this dimension of power is also seen to be relevant in Mauritius, where actors may not be expressing their issues of interest/concern due to socialisation processes (amongst others)⁵⁴³. Power is exercised in similar ways through the State Structures in Mauritius, leading to limitations in how women's interests are being substantially represented at the highest levels of decision-making as stated by one women MP talking about the topic of domestic violence:

When I first started a few decades ago, the Parliament was a very different scenario...it is not written in the rules of the game, but you know the power relations, you know your place, the boundaries to cross or not to cross, it was almost as if you are at a formal dinner with your mum and dad, each one has his place. You talk about issues that are good for the country, you respect the party, you do not single out issues and ramble on about that one issue...You can imagine the power dynamics when you are a woman...to be part of the "club", I also raised issues that were not specific, and usually women's issues appear specific, so you don't raise them often, unless it is something that you know the party will think is big, like domestic violence and the population will demand action...but anyway, in those days, as in now, Mauritius was patriarchal, so even if you raise something up, because that thing is so normal to everyone, no one

⁵⁴¹ Lukes S., 1974, *Power: A Radical View*, Macmillan: London, pg 24-27 Lukes concept of power is a scholarly response to theoretical limits of the pluralist (Dahl) and the methodological limits of the behaviourist (Bachrach and Baratz) accounts of power. Dahl, R. A. (1957). The concept of power. *Behavioural Science*, 2(3), 202-203. 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do'. To date, this definition of power remains the basis for conceptions of social power. Bachrach, P., & Baratz, M. S., 1962, Two faces of power. *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56(4), 947-952. Bachrach, P., & Baratz, M. S., 1963,. Decisions and non-decisions: An analytical framework. *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 57(3), 632-642.

⁵⁴² Mill J. S., 1869, *The Subjection of Women*, Hackett:Indianapolis

⁵⁴³ Caine K. J. & Krogman N., 2010, Powerful or Just Plain Power-Full? A Power Analysis of Impact and Benefit Agreements in Canada's North, *Organization & Environment*, Vol. 23(1), pg. 83

thinks it's an issue worth raising. ...when you do raise them, you do not know how it will go, sometimes, there are outside meetings that I cannot be part of because I am involved with other activities, ...for me going to "bases" (meetings held in houses or sheds) late at night was not common, but little by little, I started integrating in the men's club...[WMP1]⁵⁴⁴

It appears through this interview that there are different dimensions to how power over interests is exercised in the political setting in Mauritius, or how the party or party leader exercises control over decisions and types of policy preferences raised and participation of parliamentarians. First, it appears that there is a notion of power over the agenda-setting and there is an underlying bias within the Mauritian political system which in turn influences the capacity of the Woman MP to inform decision making. It therefore appears that the more powerful actors, (who remain men) are able to limit the scope of political processes and issues and exploit structural biases in their favour ⁵⁴⁵. These biases in Mauritius equate to prejudices within the values and established political procedures around political activity. Structural barriers appear to be difficult for women to navigate in, rendering the process of participation and decision-making complex, in such a way that the woman MP⁵⁴⁶ is discouraged from participating in the decision-making process⁵⁴⁷. This second dimension of power can take different shapes, for example, having meetings in small sheds at nights, where there is a majority of men present using inappropriate language as divulged during the interview.

In the third dimension, the application of power occurs via the control of knowledge through such mechanisms as socialisation, which has the potential to

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with Woman MP, Interview held on 3 September 2013, Port Louis

⁵⁴⁵ Bachrach, P., & Baratz, M. S., 1962, Two faces of Power. *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56(4), 918

⁵⁴⁶ Agents refer to both individuals and collectivities

Lukes S., 2005, *Power: A Radical View*, MacMillan:London

⁵⁴⁷ Gaventa J. & Cornwall A., 2008, Power and Knowledge, *In: REASON, P. & BRADBURY, H. (eds.) The SAGE Handbook of Action Research Participative Inquiry and Practice* 2nd ed, Sage: London

legitimise certain behaviours or issues as “normal”⁵⁴⁸, or by shaping ideologies and political beliefs. Simply, the third dimension of power is not only about keeping issues of interest off the agenda, but also out of the minds of those engaged in the political activity, thus making as if the relationship of power is normal and un-changeable⁵⁴⁹. Based on this analysis, there is an underlying assumption that the woman MP is aware of women’s interests, however, is unable to advocate in favour of these interests within public debates. Challenging the exercise of power in these instances requires more than mobilisation and advocacy, but is rather about empowering the woman MP to be able to participate within public debate⁵⁵⁰ through an attempt to challenge existing relations of power⁵⁵¹.

Political Parties and the Parliament

The political apparatus of the Mauritian State, given its plurality, is complex in nature and one alternative approach to analyse the State is to look at the structural variables including the State structures within the State, for instance, another body of literature looks at political institutions and explains the gendered nature of State structures and outcomes.

In Mauritius, there are presently seventy-one political parties with three major political parties that have dominated the political landscape and would be likely to be still in the limelight, namely, the Mauritian political landscape are the Labour Party (LP/ PTr-

⁵⁴⁸ Culley M. R. & Angelique H., 2011, Participation, Power and the Role of Community Psychology in Environmental Disputes: A tale of Two Nuclear Cities, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 47(3-4), pg. 410-426

⁵⁴⁹ Lukes S., 2005, *Power: A Radical View*, MacMillan:London, pg. 138

Lukes⁵⁴⁹ argues that all ideas of “normalised” socialisation need to be unpacked

⁵⁵⁰ Gaventa J. & Cornwall A., 2008, Power and Knowledge, *In: REASON, P. & BRADBURY, H. (eds.) The SAGE Handbook of Action Research Participative Inquiry and Practice* 2nd ed, Sage: London

⁵⁵¹ Gaventa J., 2006, Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis, *. IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 37(6), pg. 23-33

Partie Travailleuse), the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien* (MMM) and the *Mouvement Socialiste Militant*⁵⁵². These parties have periodically experienced multiple splits, generating new parties, with mostly short-lived terms; or splits and spillage have been underlined by communal/ethnic desires, while others have essentially become one-person or one-issue parties. Going into coalitions and alliances have also been a regular characteristic of Mauritian political parties, enabling the major political parties to remain or be in a more advantageous position to have access to power⁵⁵³. The practice of coalitions and alliances has been identified by participants as bearing a gendered nature and a major disadvantage whilst seeking to obtain tickets in their parties, given the limited seats available, as put forth by one woman who formed part of the Women's wing of a major political party:

I thought that I had the will, experience and stamina to get a ticket, I had worked hard in my Constituency, I was part of each electoral campaign, and even my ethnicity was an advantage, but when we have a coalition, it is understood that men come first...it's a strategy by the other men, it is all a strategy for winning the election...popularity is something that matters, men can work the field more, they get the space, they can get out to the late night meetings...[WPW1]⁵⁵⁴

The above testimony bears two dimensions, in terms of how gender and ethnicity interact as a double "burden" to put women aspiring to enter formal politics at a major systematic disadvantage to compete in politics. The fact that the Mauritian political system is based on proportional representation where all ethnicities need to be represented means that the gender identity of the candidate can work against the latter

⁵⁵² Political mobilization in Mauritius was a direct reaction to overturning the colonial power, and the first political party (LP) saw the coming together of Indo-Mauritians and Creoles in 1936; however, the unity disintegrated shortly after, seeing the creation of ethnic-based political parties. To date, it is viewed that ethnic demarcation still underlines political parties in Mauritius, although there are self-made claims of these parties practicing broad-based politics

Kasenally R., 2009 Mauritius, In: BOOYSEN, D. (ed.) *Compendium of Elections in Southern Africa 1989-2009: 20 Years of Multiparty Democracy*. EISA, : Johannesburg, pg 303-304

⁵⁵³ Kadima D. (ed.) 2006. *The Politics of Party Coalitions in Africa*, Johannesburg.

Kasenally R., 2009 Mauritius, In: BOOYSEN, D.. (ed.) *Compendium of Elections in Southern Africa 1989-2009: 20 Years of Multiparty Democracy*. EISA, : Johannesburg

⁵⁵⁴ Interview with a representative of the women's wing of a major political party, Interview held on 1 October 2013, Vacoas

as gender becomes secondary to the selection criteria to obtain a ticket. As explained by one member of the Executive of a major political party, the selection process when there is a coalition becomes a tedious process, where ethnicities and sub-ethnic affiliation becomes the main criteria, as well as placing the right candidate in a constituency bearing the higher number of individuals belonging to that specific ethnicity or sub-ethnicity, as well as evaluating the preferences of the opposing party standing in that constituency in terms of ethnicity and experience working in the field. Gender subsequently becomes an insignificant category further exacerbated by the fact that there is a strong lobby by socio-cultural associations with a caste undertone to have their representatives receiving a ticket towards election. The problem that then arises is that socio-cultural associations are inherently patriarchal in nature and a woman's chance of being supported through a lobby by a socio-cultural association becomes slimmer, unless she has had a very long-standing political involvement with that association, as put forth by one woman of a major political wing

I have been with that association for a long time, but sometimes when there are religious activities, I could not attend, I have a family, I do voluntary work, I work, it was all too much to be always there and always at the forefront of each and every single activity. Then they started dividing us along caste lines, that was it, I could not even point my nose to be in the running for a ticket [WPW4]⁵⁵⁵

The skewed nature of the gendered composition of candidate selection by political parties, and the implications in light of the caste system and patriarchal socio-religious lobby is further reflected through interviews with two women members of major political parties. Both participants stated that it was very much skewed towards male members, and can be witnessed in terms of a very patriarchal style of decision making in the Executive, so much so that it made women feel as if they were both privileged to be in

⁵⁵⁵ Interview with a representative of a women's wing of a major political party Interview held on 2 October 2013, Triolet

the Party, while being silenced or rendered invisible during meetings, closely resembling, what one participant referred to as a form of “dictatorship within a democracy”⁵⁵⁶

However, during the course of an interview with a male Member of Parliament, it was highlighted that even if there were a majority of male politicians, women still were able to exert power and have a voice within the party through the respective Women’s Wings. Following this notion, interviews were carried out with a few members of the women’s wings of the major political parties at the national level, however, this idea was slowly dissipated as women members stated that they had very little influence in the major decisions of the Party, whilst it also appeared that women remained in the political wing for personal gains:

...here we are taken for granted, they call us for all events, religious, cultural, ministry events, we fill up the room when they need us to, they take us to meetings where the leader is speaking so that it appears that the Party is in majority when the MBC (Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation) is filming, to intimidate the Opposition. We know that we are here just for the numbers, but also, sometimes if we need a favour, we know that they cannot refuse...[WPW8]⁵⁵⁷

Whilst this statement implies that some women chose to be part of the political wing for further gains, the fact remains that women have been brought into an essentially androcentric political space to extend a Party’s own political networks where women are expected to accept a subordinate position, underrating their political aptitude and efficiency. Women must conform if they want to be part and parcel of formal politics. The phrase “I owe loyalty to my leader” has been recurrent in discourses of the women interviewed, along with the stance “under leadership of the Prime Minister”, leading one to question how efficiently women Parliamentarians or women MPs are in fact able to

⁵⁵⁶ Interview with former female MP, Interview held on 2 October 2013, Vacoas, Mauritius

⁵⁵⁷ Interview with representative of a women’s wing, Interview held on 6 October 2013, Saint Pierre

effect the substantive representation of women's interests in the higher echelons of decision making in the country,. Most especially in a sphere where masculine norms have become engrained within the State and its institutions through the ideologies, rules and discourses, so much so that this shapes their policy outcomes and procedures⁵⁵⁸.

Interviews with two former women parliamentarians seemed to suggest, however, that women convey the impression that they are more confident in being present in Parliament. One women MP who has spent more than 20 years as a politician stipulates that in the nineties, women used to act with diffidence when they stood up to address their male colleagues and did not seem to want to challenge the status quo by raising questions about the gender implications of policies being debated in Parliament. Those women who did stand up to pass comment were looked at in a negative manner, and the participant recalled an instance where her "motherhood" was put into question, and the media commented on her physical appearance and clothing that she was wearing, to the extent that her female body was seen to define her abilities to perform as a political agent. A second woman MP also painted a similar grim picture of the type of gendered relations amongst male colleagues, recalling the sexual harassment of another female MP. It was mentioned that male colleagues made comments that belittled femininity, so much so that women passively dealt with such harassment. She stated that female parliamentarians by the very nature of their sex were relegated to the same status as second class citizens in Parliament. It was stipulated that the parliament was a reflection

⁵⁵⁸ Mackay F., 2011, Conclusion: Towards Institutionalism?, *In: KROOK, M. L. & MACKAY, F. (eds.) Gender, Politics and Institutions: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, pg. 181-193
Duerst-Lahti G., 2002, Governing Institutions, Ideologies and Gender: toward the Possibility of Equal Political Representation, *Sex Roles*, Vol. 47(7-8), pg. 371-388

of the mentality and social standards of the society of that time in which gender inequality was deeply rooted. In cases where women MPs played by the rules of their male counterpart, by not fighting against men's ideas of women's issues, one former female MP stated that she was admitted to the "men's club"⁵⁵⁹

However, the participants seemed to agree that with the slow evolution of the fabric of Mauritian society, there was now a very small palpable transformation in the way that male MPs openly addressed their female counterparts during Parliamentary question time and are given a space for political engagement on policy issues, and in the gendered landscape outside the Parliament, although one female MP referred to it as being "hypocritical in nature" [WP2]⁵⁶⁰. The reason given was that with the change in the economic development of the country where there had been a shift in mentality and it was now acceptable for women to go out into the public sphere to work, and the once cultural notion of men as breadwinner was slowly eroding as gender relations in the home was slowly changing. Nevertheless, as the formal parliamentary space seemed to open towards a new conducive environment for women, the fact still remains that the gender-based identity of female MPs were still linked to the type of issues that they were expected to raise- in fact, analysis of the type of port-folios that have been allocated to Women MPs since Mauritius gained independence revolved around social and gender issues and the care sector.

When I got elected as ***, my first thought was , can I actually do this, I am the only *** (title and designation of the political portfolio), will they think I am just a token, what will I do, they are all men, they will think I am just this feminist who wants to change the natural order of things..... I even had doubts on my capacity, I mean, after- all I was not handed the Ministry of Finance, nor Ministry of Public Infrastructure. I have to say, there were also not many women in Parliament.... and how the Ministry is seen in compared to other Ministries which are headed by

⁵⁵⁹ Interview with Former Female Politician, Interview held on 4 December 2013, Quatre-Bornes

⁵⁶⁰ Interview with Female MP, Interview held on 1 September 2013, Port Louis

men...and the way that the Ministry of Women is seen in the eyes of the public,
...well, you know, like , just women, women, women [Female Politician1]⁵⁶¹

The interviews carried out with Officials within the State structure immediately identified the direction of an essentially gendered State which impacted on the overall institutional and operative framework of the State. It became apparent that the nature of the gendered State was visible in terms of the “logic of appropriateness” performed through very subtle ways, and at times in an unconscious manner or even legitimised at the level of Parliament. This assumption becomes apparent in light of the participant’s claim that she had not been offered larger and “more significant” ministerial port-folios such as the Finance sector, which remain amongst the highest “ranking” Ministries in Mauritius in terms of the total budget allocation⁵⁶² and public infrastructure sector which concerns essentially building of the Government infrastructural projects⁵⁶³ . By being offered a Ministry with a “soft” portfolio, it is revealed that there are systematic gendered institutional processes such as relegating a Ministry and a female Minister to a “softer” ranking, a process coupled by mechanisms relating to the total budget and human resource of that particular Ministry which renders it less able to effect change in the short run. The gendered effect of being offered a “softer” portfolio became more evident during the course of the interview with the participant doubting her capacity to handle a larger Ministerial portfolio.

...economics, finance, infrastructure, tourism, all these sectors are men’s world, well, that’s how the public sees it, so you know, if they had to give these sectors to a Minister, it would be a Male Minister ...And what does a male Minister know about women’s needs, if I can say so, even if there was a woman Minister there

⁵⁶¹ Interview with Female MP, Interview held on 4 September 2013, Port Louis

Title and Designation of the Responded has been omitted to respect privacy and anonymity

⁵⁶² Commonwealth Network. 2017. *Nexus Commonwealth Network: Government Ministries* [Online]. Available: http://www.commonwealthofnations.org/sectors-mauritius/government/government_ministries/ [Accessed January 2017 2017].

⁵⁶³ Government-of-Mauritius. 2016. *Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport: Mission Statement* [Online]. Available: <http://publicinfrastructure.govmu.org/English/The%20Ministry/Pages/Mission-Statement.aspx> [Accessed 6 January 2017].

in these top Ministries, would she know everything about all women's needs?...probably not! ...you are seen as having a different calibre, once you enter the women's business, you can rotate to social security... [Female Politician2]⁵⁶⁴

It further appears that there is a stereotypical approach to assigning women politicians the gendered roles, or the functional gender division of labour, pertaining to the care sector. Randall refers to this as a natural extension of concerns that are seen as female in nature⁵⁶⁵, and this act of allocating women to softer nurturing Ministries can be seen as a form of gate-keeping in itself. For example, even if women have acceded to higher levels of decision-making, they are still accorded jobs that are "softer", and in some cases, do not necessarily lead to promotion to more complex port-folios such as finance and economic management or foreign affairs. However, a quick look at the budgetary allocations⁵⁶⁶ of these softer Ministries and policy areas such as Health and Social Security reveals that these areas form a significant part of the activities of the State and tend to absorb an immense part of the government's budget. Moreover, some Ministries such as the Ministry of Social Security or Gender Equality have social welfare or women centres at the grounds level in the community and should be able to make efficient use these channels to address the concerns of the community in a participatory manner, as revealed through one of the interviews

...having the ministry of *** (hidden to protect confidentiality) was in a way strategic. The network of centres that we have in the community gives an added boost, we use these centres and members to let us know what is working... that way we can use the members to conduct mass sensitisation programs... [Female Politician2]⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ Interview with Female MP, 4 September 2013, Port Louis

Title and Designation of the Responded has been omitted to respect privacy and anonymity

⁵⁶⁵ Randall V., 1987, *Women and Politics: An International Perspective*, Macmillan: London, pg. 112

⁵⁶⁶ Government-of-Mauritius. 2017. *Budget 2017-2018: ESTIMATES 2017-2018 & Indicative Estimates 2018-2019 & 2019-2020* [Online]. Port Louis. Available: <http://budget.mof.govmu.org/> [Accessed 20 August 2017].

⁵⁶⁷ Interview with Female MP, Interview held on 4 September 2013, Port Louis

Title and Designation of the Responded has been omitted to respect privacy and anonymity

At the same time, the existing literature pertaining to gender and institutions does reveal that the gendered dispositions of institutions is at play in a number of countries, including Australia and Canada, wherein women MPs are over-represented in social portfolios or “feminine” policy domains in comparison to areas of macro-economic management such as infrastructure or resource mobilisations domains such as Finance⁵⁶⁸. In Mauritius, out of the sixty-nine MPs, there are only eight women MPs, constituting a mere twelve per cent of women in Parliament, as compared to a world average of twenty-three per cent and a regional average of twenty-four per cent) and thirty per cent of women at local governmental level in 2017⁵⁶⁹. Amongst the eight women MPs, there only two women Ministers in charge of the Portfolio of Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research; and Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. Similarly, a quick overview of the women MPs nominated for ministerial portfolios since female suffrage in 1947 and independence in 1968, reveals that, for the most part, women have been nominated in the ‘soft’ sectoral areas including women’s affairs and gender equality; social security, civil service affairs, youth and sports, and arts and culture, with the exception of two portfolios related to Justice (Attorney General) and Labour and Industrial Relations⁵⁷⁰.

...social security was alright for a woman, it had a female connotation, it’s all a political game, the politics of politics, if you see what I mean, you can read between the lines, I will not be able to say it clearly...[WMP1]

⁵⁶⁸ Moon J. & Fountain I., 1997, Keeping the Gates? Women as Ministers in Australia, 1970-96, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 32(3), pg. 455-466

Trimble L. & Tremblay M., 2012, Representation of Canadian Women at the Cabinet Table, 2012, Vol. 30(1), pg. 15

⁵⁶⁹ Union I. 2017. *Women in National Parliaments: World Classification* [Online]. Available: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> [Accessed].

⁵⁷⁰ There has also been a female Junior Minister in Urban and Rural Development and a Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs and Regional Administration

Leadership W. I. 2017. *Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership: Mauritius* [Online]. Available: <http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/index.html>

<http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Mauritius.htm> [Accessed 10 January 2017].

Interview with Female MP, 8 September 2013, Port Louis

It is to be noted that one of the woman Ministers has occupied the post of several Ministries from 1983 to 2014 ranging from women’s affairs/ gender equality, labour and social security.

Once women have bypassed a number of political structural, economic, cultural and social hurdles⁵⁷¹, women's chances of getting nominated in a Ministry once they eventually get into Parliament become slimmer. As mentioned by the above female politician, the "politics of politics" performed by the male Leader of the Party to nominate Ministers tends to act as gate-keepers towards women accessing Ministerial port-folios.

Similarly, Lovenduski⁵⁷² asserts that once women get admitted in by the gate-keepers, they tend to be relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy. The same argument is echoed by Randall⁵⁷³ who states that women fade away at the highest echelons of decision-making- or what Putnam⁵⁷⁴ has termed as 'the law of increasing disproportion', or 'the higher-the fewer' whereby the proportion of women in political positions diminished as the importance of that position increased in significance⁵⁷⁵. Likewise, in Mauritius, there is a clear gender division of labour in nominating a woman to a Ministerial position. Looking at the trends across time, there seems to be a determined stance to allocate women to portfolios relating to the nurturing/ care sector (social security) by the fact that more women have been appointed to this sector than their male counterparts, or that women have been ghettoised in the Ministry of Women's Rights/Gender Equality, as a form of identity-related duty. However, at the same time, portfolios related to women's empowerment and social security are critical to women who remain the primary target groups who are affected by cuts in service delivery and fiscal/economic spending. Thus, if the female heads of these Ministries are able to

⁵⁷¹ These factors have been raised by the 3 Women MPs interviewed and have been compiled to explain some of the factors that impede on women's access to formal politics. These relate to, inter alia, culture, psycho-social attributes, stereotypes, access to finance, education, the structural institutional, legal and political frameworks and vertical mobility that impact on women's access to politics in the first place

⁵⁷² Lovenduski J., 1986, *Women and European Politics*, Harvester Wheatsheaf: Brighton, pg. 241

⁵⁷³ Randall V., 1987, *Women and Politics: An International Perspective*, Macmillan: London, pg. 109

⁵⁷⁴ Putnam as, 1979 cited in Studlar D. T. & Moncrief G., 1997, *The Recruitment of Women Cabinet Ministers in the Canadian Provinces, Governance*, Vol. 10, pg. 67

⁵⁷⁵ Bashevkin S. B., 1993, *Toeing the Lines: Women and Party Politics in English Canada*, Oxford University Press: Toronto

efficiently respond to women's claims and provide increased access, for their female constituents, to the welfare state then their presence in these portfolios should be seen in a positive light.

Policy Preferences

Another problematic that crops up is whether the State is gendered in terms of the policy preferences adopted at the level of the Mauritian parliament. Scholars such as Phillips⁵⁷⁶ have stated that the presence of women in parliament should equate to bringing in a different perspective on the content of the political agenda as well as increase the probability of addressing gender issues. This notion of the politics of presence as a medium for substantive representation is echoed in the literature stating that women and men do relate to different policy preferences in terms of initiation and follow-up through to adoption and implementation⁵⁷⁷. In Mauritius, based on the interviews, it appears that women MPs do take the initiatives to introduce different policies/ legislations at the level of the Cabinet, however, they require the very close support and collaboration of male MPs for these policies/ legislative measures to be approved, as put forth by a woman Member of Parliament (MP). For example :

...the issue of decriminalisation of abortion has been boiling for a long time...up to now, there was no ally...it took close collaboration with the women's movement to finally make it visible...not just the women's movement, but even male MPs came in to show support...in their speeches, most of the men MPs linked abortion to women's choice, they were our partners...[WMP1]⁵⁷⁸

In this case, it may be argued that some male MPs within the same political party have acted as critical actors to pursue women's interests. A thorough analysis of the available

⁵⁷⁶ Phillips A., 1995, *The Politics of Presence*, Clarendon Press: Oxford

⁵⁷⁷ Giger N., 2009, Towards a Modern Gender Gap in Europe? A Comparative Analysis of Voting Behaviour in 12 countries, *The Social Science Journal*, Vol. 46, pg. 474-492.

⁵⁷⁸ Interview with female MP, Interview held on 4 October 2013, Port Louis

documentation on the Parliamentary proceedings in Mauritius, according to the Hansard database as well as the different publications of the Ministry of Gender reveals that the successive Ministers of Women's Rights/ Gender Equality have left a legacy of legislative amendment to existing patriarchal laws and policies. For example, in 1997, the Protection from Domestic Violence Act was spearheaded by the Ministry of Women's Rights; in 2000, a National Gender Policy was adopted setting the framework for gender sensitive programming in Ministries and Departments; in 2002 the Sex Discrimination Act was enacted; the Equal Opportunity Act was passed in 2008; the National Gender Policy Framework was adopted in 2008; and Cabinet approved the decriminalisation of abortion in 2012⁵⁷⁹. Yet, it remains fair to mention that not all these pieces of legislation and policies have been initiated by female Ministers. Rather, the interviews reveal that there has been very close collaboration between the different sectoral Ministries and with Officers of the Ministry of Gender Equality. In some instances (such as the Protection from Domestic Violence Act and the decriminalisation of abortion), there has been a very active collaboration of the Ministry with grassroots women's groups. These consultative processes adopted were both from a top-down to bottom-up approach which created a conducive environment and lobby group comprising women at the community level and in NGOs supporting the Government, as will be explained in the case study on the decriminalisation of abortion later in the thesis.

⁵⁷⁹ Commonwealth Secretariat, 2016, *Advancing Gender Equality: Case Studies from Across the Commonwealth*, Commonwealth Secretariat:London, pg. 93
Kochhar K., Jain-Chandra S. & Newiak M., 2017, *Women, Work, and Economic Growth: Leveling the Playing Field*, IMF:Washington, pg. 241

Concurrently, the actions of critical actors from below (at grass-roots/ community/individual levels) have been essential to drive forward the gender legislative agenda in some instances or to take gender sensitive measures. For example, an interview held with one of the oldest participant interviewed⁵⁸⁰ spoke of how the campaign for fertility reduction was led both by the Government, a Family Planning NGO (Mauritius Family Planning), women at the level of community based associations and individual women who recognised the dangers of an economy linked to a rapid population growth in Mauritius in the sixties. The Government was concerned about the significant population growth (3 per cent annual growth rate in 1962) in a small island with an economy that relied on sugar export. By 1986, this rate was reduced to around 1 per cent⁵⁸¹. The participant revealed that a number of factors contributed to this fertility reduction, namely having universal education at the primary level, where males and females were readily enrolled at school from the age of 5 around the early seventies which in turn enabled mothers to enter the labour force, get married at a later stage and thus contributing to smaller family sizes. At the same time, the policy strategy of the Government played a big role in reducing fertility rate, with the setting up of several clinics around the island and recruiting a majority of female community workers to go across the island (substantially more in the rural community) to do door-to-door sensitisation with both women and men; targeting children's clinics and women in hospital wards following hospitalisation from complications of abortion. Moreover, a second NGO (*Action Familiale*) recruited a large number of female field-staff called "Educators" to go to individual houses to teach women about the use of contraception. It

⁵⁸⁰ Interview with Mrs. Daneshwaree Dabee, Interview held on 15 December 2013, Vacoas, Mauritius

⁵⁸¹ Jones H., 1989, Fertility decline in Mauritius: the role of Malthusian population pressure, *Geoforum*, Vol. 20(3), pg. 315-327

was mentioned that this labour intensive recruitment of female field workers canvassing from door-to-door played a critical part in decreasing the fertility rate and contributing to a short increase in economic growth⁵⁸². This sense of both top to bottom and bottom-up approach mostly by women taking control of their bodies is testimony to the positive outcome achieved through a two-way channel of collaboration with critical actors both at the levels of government, NGOs and the community.

A second example pertains to the Minister of Local Government who brought up the legislative proposals/ policy documents to amend the Local Government Act 2011 in favour of establishing a thirty per cent gender quota at the local governmental level as part of an initiative that was started by a women's NGO (Gender Links) with the support of a national women's network (Women In Networking). The Act, which is in line with Article 5 (Affirmative Action) of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008)⁵⁸³, stipulates that each political party has to field at least one-third of candidates belonging to either sex in village or municipal council elections⁵⁸⁴. The interview carried out with a representative of Gender Links⁵⁸⁵ shed some light on the processes leading up to the adoption by the Mauritian Cabinet of the said quota system in the revised Act. It was explained that the Government of Mauritius had some reservations in introducing a quota system given that the Constitution did not provide for measures towards affirmative action. Through the course of the interviews, it was revealed that the NGO Gender Links had identified the local government space as a potential site for transformation and as an avenue that would be more conducive for women to enter the

⁵⁸² This increase was short-lived as sugar prices dropped and the island was hit by 2 major cyclones in the eighties affecting sugar production, resulting in economic deficit and inflation.

⁵⁸³ Southern-African-Development-Community. 2008. *SADC Protocol on Gender and Development* [Online]. Available: http://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/show/Protocol_on_Gender_and_Development_2008.pdf [Accessed 15 January 2016].

⁵⁸⁴ Government-of-Mauritius, 2011, *The Local Government Act 2011 Mauritius*

⁵⁸⁵ Interview with Jane Valls, President WIN 5 December 2013, Ebene and Representative of Media-Watch/Gender Links, Interview held on 12 December 2013, RoseHill

political sphere and participate in local governance. The NGO had been actively conducting workshops on gender mainstreaming as a ten-stage capacity building programmes for women and men councillors at the local government level to create Centres of Excellence to mainstream gender in the day to day activities of the village and district Councils⁵⁸⁶. It was stated that whilst women at the grass-roots levels were being trained in gender and good governance, they were not able to be elected in the Council to expressly put their knowledge into practice, given the fact that the male-dominated space was quite restricted. In 2010, the Director of Gender Links expressed concern to the Minister of Local Government about the low percentage of women being able to formally be elected as Councillors at local government level whilst the NGO sustained its sensitisation campaigns with both women and men at the grass-roots level to educate them about the provisions contained in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (Articles 5, 12, 13) which called upon affirmative action, equal representation and participation of women towards good governance. The representative of Gender Links stated that the NGO had started the ball rolling and gained momentum and recognition from the Minister of Local Government for the sustained action towards sensitising women and men at the community level on the importance of gender equality in good governance, representation and participation in formal politics. In 2011, Gender Links conducted a debate on instituting a quota system for women in the upcoming elections at local government level with the participation of parliamentarians from the major political parties as well as the Minister of Gender Equality who extended her fervent support to enlarge that political space for women to

⁵⁸⁶ Gender-Links. 2016. *Centres of Excellence for Gender Mainstreaming- Mauritius* [Online]. Available: <http://genderlinks.org.za/what-we-do/governance/centres-of-excellence-for-gender-mainstreaming/mauritius/> [Accessed 3 March 2017].

enter politics at the local level, as part of an overall national electoral reform. Later in 2011, the Local Government Act was amended to include the affirmative action provisions and passed through Parliament with the support of the Opposition as well. Given the fact that the revised Act provided the space for more women to enter politics at the local governmental level, Gender Links upheld its training on leadership skills for women in politics in the Centres of Excellence around the island to equip women with the skills to enable them to communicate effectively in the media along with campaigning skills enabling them to formulate their political manifestos and action plans. Gender Links reported that a few of its women trainees have since stood for municipal and village council elections successfully.

This kind of non-linear top-to-bottom and bottom-up collaboration of stakeholders are seen as being critical in Mauritius to gain the necessary momentum to effect changes to address women's interests, as put forth by two Gender Focal Points (GFPs) in sectoral Ministries.

...In my view the role of the Gender Focal Point is to identify a gender gap, raise it up with our Minister and we work in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender... you need collaboration, you need experts in all fields, the expert knows their field, we need each other's expertise for changes to go through ...that is why, I think, the Ministry of Gender cannot by itself make huge changes...it needs the support of all the Ministries, it needs women from the field (referring to grass-roots and community level), it needs belief in saying, I am a feminist, I will take it to Parliament and I will defend it...[GFP 12]⁵⁸⁷

However, during the course of interviews with the two GFPs, it was revealed that, while the political will to effect change was present, GFPs often faced bureaucratic barriers as well as limited technical capacity on gender mainstreaming which impeded their work towards gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment; for example, it was stated

⁵⁸⁷ Interview with Gender Focal Point, Interview held on 10 September 2013, Port Louis

that in one of the sectors⁵⁸⁸, there had been a request from a community-based organisation for the GFP to conduct sensitisation programs on gender and sustainable development and climate change, however, once the request was put officially on file, it was declined due to limited resources. Moreover, another example resonates from a representative of the Participatory Advisory Committee (PAC) which is a grass-root initiative of the Ministry where women are invited to submit their ideas and participate in decisions about their communities⁵⁸⁹ set up at the level of Women Centres under the Ministry of Gender Equality mentioned that the meetings conducted with Field Officers of the Ministry appeared redundant as none of the issues raised at the community level were reaching the Head Office and as a result, it was believed that the PAC initiative would be short-lived. A similar sentiment was expressed by another member of PAC from another locality who believed that the field liaison Officers who were still young lacked the capacity to represent the issues being put forth by members of PAC⁵⁹⁰ at the level of the National Women's Council and the Ministry of Gender; and assist in the implementation of the PAC Action Plan.

At the same time, while a non-linear horizontal relationship between State and non-State actors remains vital, seniority, party politics and party affiliation remain an important factor in substantive representation of women's issues of interest, as put forth by a GFP

...the Minister of Women's Rights is mainly a symbol that says that she represents women's issues...the Mauritian context is very complicated, you need the support of the Party Leader, and if it is something that is good for politics, then you will get the support. In Parliament, my opinion is that, the rank of the Minister matters..." [GFP 3]⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁸ Name of sector is not disclosed to protect confidentiality

⁵⁸⁹ Interview with PAC Member, Interview held on 10 September 2013, Port Louis

⁵⁹⁰ Interview with PAC Member, Interview held on 10 September 2013, Triolet

⁵⁹¹ Interview with Gender Focal Point, Interview held on 12 September 2013, Port Louis

Building on the existing international literature, in Mauritius, the interviews with women politicians further revealed that party affiliation remains a good predictor of the way that legislators raise and vote on different issues of national interest, as well as towards gender-related issues⁵⁹². The interview with a female Minister pointed to the direction that the political party that she belonged to held a great degree of influence on which matters might be raised in Parliament and given that the Party had a majority of male Parliamentarians, the space available to discuss gender issues was rather limited and, as such, policies addressing women's interests are accorded less space in a Parliamentary gender hierarchy system, in which policy preferences seem to be gender-neutral. However, in a strategic bid to engender the parliamentary space, a former woman parliamentarian mentioned that women's issues had to be masked as smart economics in order to receive adequate from the Ministry of Finance for projects related to women's empowerment⁵⁹³.

...to me there is an apprehension that colleagues will say this is another women's issue.....it is more strategic to camouflage a program related to gender equality in terms of economic value, as we did with gender responsive budgeting, we said it was smart economics...that was an instant buy-in [exWMP1]...⁵⁹⁴

The same representative strategy was adopted by the Ministry of Gender when it sought to lobby for more funds from the Ministry of Finance to address gender-based violence at national level. The Ministry, with the technical support of the UNDP, conducted a study on the economic cost of gender-based violence in Mauritius with to view to having the quantitative data to present to the Financial Secretary to successfully

⁵⁹² Interview with female MP, Interview held on 4 October 2013, Port Louis

Snyder J. M. & Groseclose T., 2000, Estimating Party Influence in Congressional Roll-Call Voting, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44(2), pg. 193-211

⁵⁹³ A strong neoliberal notion at play

⁵⁹⁴ Interview with ex Female Member of Parliament, Interview held on 9 September 2013, Port Louis

increase the budget of the Family Unit and lobby for the recruitment of more staff to work with victims of gender-based violence at the level of the Family Support Bureaux.

If you look at the budget of this Unit, it seems a lot, but when you break it down, it is mostly for paying staff...we do not have enough to implement activities that would lead to transformation...we have to sometimes rely on the NGOs to assist with Women Shelters and Childcare Centres (Creche)...the government also is tightening its belt...We are told that all ministries will probably see a budget cut in this tough economic situation...We have to find means and ways...we rely on external funding...we have to improvise our strategies when we go to the committee of supplies or hold consultation with the Ministry of Finance...everything has to be quantifiable as they ask us to use the SMART system for performance indicators...this is how we get around this problem...we know they don't take women and children issues as importantly as infrastructure...[WMGE3⁵⁹⁵]

We know that our work at the Ministry may seem non-impactful...we cannot give instant result in terms of change of mind-set overnight... we look after the social side of things...women reproduce the next generation...we look after women, children and the family...[MMGE4]

This type of alternative approaches aligned within a neoliberal system has nevertheless enabled the Ministry to secure funding to carry out its activities within a very tight budget. It further demonstrates the fact that very often women's issues remain at the periphery of development where, in this case, there seems to be resistance to fund gender issues unless defined in economic terms and quantifiable through SMART indicators⁵⁹⁶. This notion may be linked to how neoliberalism impacts on gendered politics during austerity measures in Mauritius and how Officers within the Ministerial institution can challenge dominant neoliberal discourses that permeate public financial management systems. In this case, the representative of the Ministry further spoke to working in close collaboration with a woman NGO to be able to fulfil its mandate. It further portrays that women in the State Structure at the level of the Ministry are using

⁵⁹⁵ Interview with representative of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Interview held on 7 October 2013, Port Louis

⁵⁹⁶ SMART indicators are imposed by the Ministry of Finance as a performance measure in the program based budgeting exercise of Ministries. It stands for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. The application in Mauritius originates from international donors/stakeholders- in this case, there may also be a critic of the role of international donor agencies and their requirements for funding programs in the Mauritian context

different strategies to render their issues receptive within this capitalist framework articulating these concerns as part of the broader economic agenda. These strategies are carried out to counter austerity policies that impact disproportionately on women. These strategies adopted further resist what appears to be dominant neoliberal austerity narratives, and representatives of the Ministry seem to use feminist ideals to critique the neo-liberalisation of government policies and the impact of austerity measures on current gender equality discourse. State representatives also countered hegemonic processes that challenge the dominant view of the economic value of policies and programs. Concomitantly, representatives of the Ministry of Gender Equality as well as two Gender Focal Points contested the reductive use of gender policies/programs/projects as efficiency-based and simplifying the outcome of gender equality as a strategy for economic growth, thus sidelining the transformative approaches to be used to achieve gender equality. In this case, it appeared that gender equality is reduced to a business model and strategies to achieve gender equality are equated with economic narratives for growth. The social reproduction category of activities that the Ministry of Gender also seeks to address appears to remain marginal or invisible in mainstream political discourses as clearly reflected in the budgetary allocation of the whole Ministry.

Party Etiquette

Prior consultations with other Cabinet Ministers would provide a clear indication of matters that would be raised during formal Parliamentary sittings with other Members of the Opposition. The party etiquette and discipline would oblige its Members to follow

party lines, with respect to the views of the Leader and act only after consultation with the Leader and other Ministers for fear that the Party could make or break a career. Yet, there appeared to be a different turn of events when the Bill for the decriminalisation of abortion was put in front of Parliament for debate. Two Senior members of Government mentioned that they believed that the political party exerted less influence on the overall policy direction when moral issues were being discussed:

...for abortion, it is as if there was a general unspoken understanding that abortion should be decriminalised, but in the way that it is seen as a health issue...but again, the Minister knew that it had been brewing for a long time, I think by the time that the matter exploded, everyone in the party had the same ideology...[WSP2]⁵⁹⁷

Whilst this suggests that the process of how personal is rendered political remains complex, the finding resonates with the existing literature on party affiliation, where it is argued that a big proportion of free votes on moral issues are usually consistent with party lines⁵⁹⁸. In the same vein, men make up the majority of political parties in Mauritius, and one would argue that party rules may be gender neutral or gender blind, hence, by extension, this would imply that policy preferences and votes may be gendered. There further appeared to be a marked distinction in terms of what types of issues were given priority from the start of parliamentary sessions to the end, with gender issues or issues of women's interests being addressed last, in compared to "matters of national importance", as stated by a Government representative commenting on the ranking of speeches by Ministers. One woman MP stated:

...usually the proceedings are such that it almost follows a hierarchy, the bigger Ministries go first, and with bigger Ministries, I am talking about matters of national importance, the economy, trade deals. Social issues, where your women issues come in, these rest with the smaller Ministries, apart from social security

⁵⁹⁷ Woman Senior Member of Parliament, Interview held on 6 November 2013, Port Louis

⁵⁹⁸ Cowley P. & Stuart M., 1997, Sodomy, Slaughter, Sunday Shopping and Seatbelts, *Party Politics*, Vol. 3(1), pg. 127

with a big budget... Sometimes, by the time we get down to social issues, it is quite late and there is no big debate... [WP2]⁵⁹⁹

Considering women's issues as not equivalent to a matter of national importance again conveys the meaning that these are compartmentalised and not viewed as a matter of priority in a male-dominated space as the Parliament.

Furthermore, during the course of an interview with a female Senior Government Official, it became clear that there was apprehension at labelling one-self strongly as a "feminist" in Parliament, given the androcentric nature of Parliamentary space. Rather, women parliamentarians preferred to address women's issues from a non-feminist perspective, or using a human-rights based framework. In the same vein, the literature states that whilst Female MP's responsiveness and collaboration with women's groups at the community level remains an effective way to be aware of the collective interests of women at the grass-roots level, there remains alternative sites of representation that are conducive areas for promoting women's issues and remain avenues for policy changes. In this context, research on state 'feminism' discusses the role of Women's Policy Agencies as alternative sites of representation.

Nevertheless, it remains challenging to formulate a one-sided composite picture of the necessary conditions and factors that contribute to women's substantive representation at the State level. A combination of factors has been identified in Mauritius that would lead to the effectiveness of State institutional structures where women's issues of concern and importance to them are mainstreamed into Government policies and programs. The Ministry of Gender is a full-fledged State Agency with a

⁵⁹⁹ Interview with woman MP, Interview held on 1 September 2013, Port Louis

human-resource base that has the potential to be trained further in terms of gender analysis. The Ministry further has the capacity to lobby for funds from international donors and although economic efficiency arguments are being adopted to obtain funding from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry has a budget and Staff to be a policy-making body, whilst its implementing arms (the National Women's Council) can remain the link between policy implementation and linkages to women in the community through the network of women centres across the island. Additionally, until recently (2017), the Office of the Speaker (National Assembly) has started initiating dialogue with the Ministry of Gender on a policy/program component being funded by the United Nations Development Program, thus positioning the Ministry in a very strategic position to establish a very close working relationship to a central power in Government.

Assessing the Institutional and Operational Framework of the Specialised State Apparatus for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

By the mid-eighties, there were around 127 United Nations Member States with institutionalised Women's Policy Agencies, with varying institutional architecture, agendas and strategies for substantive representation. In Mauritius, the lead agency of the National Women's/Gender Machinery (NWM/ NGM) remains the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. Its implementing arms include the National Women's Council and the National Women's Entrepreneurial Council. Other Structures of the Gender Management System which includes the Gender Focal Points in sectoral Ministries, and stakeholders such as the women's associations at the level of

the community and grass-roots and formal Women's Non-Governmental Organisations, as well as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which remains a key donor agencies.

In order to situate the emergence of a full-fledged institutional mechanism for the promotion and protection of women's rights, it is deemed important to briefly locate the international and local feminist and international frameworks that led to its establishment. It then appears that ideas derived from female consciousness have been merged (without being apparent and explicitly mentioned in Mauritian discourse) in the overall development of the country. This essence of feminism has been detected whilst speaking to most women participants during interviews, where women have stated that they know they have rights that the State needs to respect. In Mauritius, women were seen in greater numbers in Parliament around the late-eighties through to 2010⁶⁰⁰, which one may argue relates to the international and regional movement towards women's rights and gender equality as specifically stated by one participant and echoed throughout interviews with women activists⁶⁰¹.

...with Beijing, it is as if we had legitimacy in saying that , yes women's rights are human rights. It gave us the working guidelines to tell the Government, this is what the Ministry should be doing... [exWMP 2]

The Ministry was established, as mentioned previously, in the wake of the International Women's Decade in 1976, with programmes geared towards meeting the practical

⁶⁰⁰ Leadership W. I. 2017, *Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership: Mauritius* [Online]. Available: <http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/index.html>

<http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Mauritius.htm> [Accessed 10 January 2017].

⁶⁰¹ This greater percentage of women in parliament during the late eighties through to the millennium seems to coincide with the United Nations series of World Conferences on the Rights of Women and the Millennium Development Goals as well as State Obligations towards reporting to UN and SADC treaty bodies. The participant was referring to the 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing 1995, which saw the formulation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its resulting 12 critical of areas that were identified to improve the status of women , Interview with Female MP, 4 September 2013, Port Louis. Title and Designation of the Participant has been omitted to respect privacy and anonymity

needs of women. The Government of Mauritius was one of the first in the southern African region to establish a women's machinery and the Ministry has always been led by a female Minister. The first Ministry for Women's Affairs was established in 1976 and was headed by a woman parliamentarian having the portfolio of consumer protection. The Ministry was however short-lived and replaced by a Women's Desk at the Prime Minister's Office, until the setting up of a full-fledged Ministry for Women's Rights in 1982, endowed with its own budget and an expanding infrastructural base of decentralised women centres. Since the establishment of the first Ministry in 1976, the latter has been headed by a female parliamentarian.

Addressing the capability of the Gender Unit of the women's policy agency to pursue feminist ideologies and issues of women's interests, and its effectiveness in engaging with NGOs given the limited staffing of the Gender Unit and marginal budget allocation is essential. Moreover, activities performed by the Gender Unit of the Ministry of Gender Equality are still being implemented to address mainly practical gender interests, as opposed to both strategic and practical. It is important to look at the ways in which the State structures are able to promote women's political empowerment in the contexts of cultural beliefs, and the ideologies of the States elites, or whether "party feminism" is shaping policy preferences.

In terms of policy formulation and implementation, since its establishment, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (MGE)⁶⁰², as a specialised apparatus of the Mauritian State, was mandated to protect women's rights and promote gender equality, had a strong palpable focus on catering to the practical needs of

⁶⁰² See Figure 2 – Organigram of the MGE in Appendix

women. Presently, the budget of the Ministry in relation to the overall national budget is approximately only 0.565 percent⁶⁰³, with 285 funded positions for the period 2015/2016 at the Head Office (based at the premises of the MGE); and 347 staff based in its delocalised Centres in the 3 parastatals under its aegis (68 in National Children's Council, 259 in National Women's Council and 20 in National Women Entrepreneur Council)⁶⁰⁴. Projects that were previously implemented between the period 1975 to 2000 include, inter-alia, kitchen gardening, floral arrangement; tailoring, beauty care, adult literacy and home economics classes. Over the years, the Ministry witnessed a shift in paradigm from a women in development approach to that of gender and development, focussing more on women's strategic needs. In 2000, the Ministry spearheaded the setting up of a Task Force to carry out a comprehensive review of legal provisions to protect women's human rights, which identified discriminatory laws and practices as well as gaps between de-jure and de-facto equality. As a result, a number of measures were implemented, such as the enactment of the Sex Discrimination Act (2002), which covered direct and indirect discrimination, the Protection from Domestic Violence Act 1997 (amended in 2004), which imbedded gender -based violence in the definition of discrimination, the Education Act (amended in 2005), which increased the age of free, compulsory education to 16 years, and the amendment (1995) to 16(3) of the Constitution, which included sex as a prohibited ground of discrimination⁶⁰⁵.

In 2005, the Government of Mauritius adopted the Commonwealth Gender Management System (GMS). With a change of Government in 2010, the appellation of

⁶⁰³ Ministry of Finance and Economic-Development. 2016. *Summary Table of Expenditure by Programme* [Online]. Available: <http://mof.govmu.org/English/Pages/PBB2014.aspx> [Accessed 19 January 2016].

⁶⁰⁴ Ministry of Finance and Economic Development 2015. *VOTE 19-1: Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare* [Online]. Mauritius. Available: <http://mof.govmu.org/English/Pages/PBB2014.aspx> [Accessed 19 January 2016], pg. 291-298

⁶⁰⁵ Ministry-of-Gender-Equality, 2008, *The National Gender Policy Framework*, Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare: Mauritius

the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare (MGE) changed to that of Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. A National Gender Policy Framework (NGPF) was further adopted by the new Government. The mission and vision of the MGE was to strive towards a:

A society in which all girls and boys, women and men live together in dignity, safety, mutual respect, harmony and social justice; thrive in an enabling environment in which they are able to achieve their full potential, in full enjoyment of their human rights; are equal partners in taking decisions to shape economic, social and cultural development, in determining the values that guide and sustain such development and equally enjoy its benefit⁶⁰⁶.

In line with the change of Government in 2015, the new strategic direction of the MGE were to redress existing gender gaps for women's full social, economic and political empowerment; strengthen policies for the welfare and development of the child; and eliminate gender-based violence and foster family welfare. In turn, the specific outputs of the different delivery Units are to monitor the implementation of the National Gender Policy Framework; adopt a Children's Bill to harmonise the different existing legislation into one legislative provision; strengthen the capacity of the National Women's Council to operate as a full-fledged implementing arm of the Gender Unit through the introduction of the National Women's Council Bill; and improve immediate response to reported cases of children victims of violence and ensure that existing Child Day Care Centres comply with overriding regulations⁶⁰⁷.

Thus, new political parties in power can introduce policies to engender programmes and discourses to address unequal power relations in society, as was the case in changing the name of the Ministry from "Women's Rights" to "Gender Equality";

⁶⁰⁶ Women U. 1995. *CEDAW Committee, Fourteenth session, Summary Record of the 268th Meeting, CEDAW/C/SR.268* [Online]. Available: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports.htm> [Accessed 17 December 2015].

⁶⁰⁷ Ministry of Gender Equality C. D. a. F. W. 2017. *Departments* [Online]. Available: <http://gender.govmu.org/English/Department/Pages/default.aspx> [Accessed 8 March 2017].

or revamping the National Women's Council Act, or putting in place programs to support women entrepreneurs.

What was positive was changing the designation of the Ministry from Women's Rights to Gender, that was a big step, and it was not something popular to be done, but they did it, then they had to embark on this campaign to sensitise women and men (on the difference between sex and gender), men felt threatened, there was a threatening letter received at the Ministry. Articles in the newspaper, I don't know if you've read them, but it was not something easy to do, but the new Minister did it. And Staff of the Ministry convinced the Minister and she probably convinced her (party) Leader. That was bold, but good for the country, meaning that we could understand that women's conditions was a result of unequal power relations ...once gender equality was seen as part of the work of the Ministry, then they could work towards redressing the gap" [WMGE2⁶⁰⁸]

The question remaining, however, is how effective a change of name is in practical terms. Interviews with representatives of the Ministry shed some light on the effectiveness of the different Units. The conceptual framework for these Units remained that they would complement each other in terms of policy formulation and strategic implementation, however, during the course of interviews it was revealed that these Units lacked internal coordination with each other as well as with implementing partners and related NGOs. The Planning and Research Unit (PRU) was established as the overall think-tank and coordinating unit to service the Child Development Unit (CDU), the Family Welfare and Protection Unit (FWPU) and the Gender Unit (GU) as well as liaise with the para-state bodies for program implementation. Its main aim is presently to formulate policies, programmes and projects in consultation with the Heads of Units and other sectoral Ministries with a view to promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, welfare and development of the child and safeguarding harmonious family relationships. However, the PRU is under-staffed with three technical cadres, and seems to be a coordinating Unit that collects information from the other Units of the

⁶⁰⁸ Interview with Woman Head of State Structure, Interview held on 5 December 2013, Port Louis

MGE to compile data to comply with the Government's reporting obligations to the different human rights bodies in relation to relevant treaties and conventions which the State is party to. Whilst the PRU works in close collaboration with an in-house statistician from the Central Statistics Office⁶⁰⁹ based at the Ministry to compile all gender disaggregated data, one Officer at the MGE mentioned that this readily available data is not being explicitly used to inform policy-planning to redress gender gaps; implementation and monitoring⁶¹⁰.

Likewise, the Family Welfare and Protection Unit implements programs to promote the welfare of the family and puts in place strategies to combat gender based violence and intimate partner violence. However, the Unit works in partial isolation from the Gender Unit sometimes resulting in project duplication. In fact, it was stated that the Gender Unit should have oversight of the different Units of the MGE, given that all the Units of the Ministry address gender issues. A complete internal re-structure of the MGE was even proposed by one of the Ministry's Official, which bears legitimacy in light of its overlapping mandate with the Gender Unit.

...as it stands, gender is supposed to be mainstreamed in all the Units...but we work in a disjointed way...the gender unit should be the brain of the ministry, it should work with the PRU, we have stats, we address the gaps, we guide other ministries to formulate their action plans to close these gender gaps...[WMGE5]⁶¹¹

Another Official went further to stipulate that the Gender Unit of the MGE should be located at the level of the President or Prime Minister's Office so that it holds the necessary power to direct other Ministries to implement their gender policies.

⁶⁰⁹ The appellation of the Central Statistics Unit has now changed to Statistics Mauritius

⁶¹⁰ Interview with a representative of the MGE, Interview held on 9 September 2013, Port Louis

This publication is available online at http://statsmauritius.govmu.org/English/Publications/Pages/Gender_Stats_Yr2016.aspx, Last Accessed May 2018

⁶¹¹ Interview with a representative of the MGE, Interview held on 9 September 2013, Port Louis

The Ministry itself is not at a location where it influences policy making. We are only 19th in the hierarchy. The Gender Unit would have worked miracles if it were at the level of the Office of the President ...or maybe if our President holds power.. [laughs] and she is a woman, you tell me what we can expect, what does it mean to be a female President [WMGE2]⁶¹²

Another idea put forward by a GFP related to the fact that the Gender Unit should fall under the Ministry of Finance so that it would have proper weight and legitimacy to instruct all Ministries to implement gender responsive budgeting.

...the location needs to be ideal, with a better strategic location, Finance, it will have more weight, it (the Gender Unit) will not be a peripheral Unit...[GFP7]⁶¹³

Based on interviews at the level of the Ministry as well as with Gender Focal Points, the clarity of its mission, vision and portfolio was called into question. A number of GFPs asserted that the Ministry (through the Gender Unit) appeared to have cross-sectional mandates with various other Ministries in terms of its role associated with gender mainstreaming in all policies and programs of Government. This notion was strongly expressed so much so that the relevance of the Gender Unit was brought into question given the institutionalisation of the GFP mechanism, which to them, appeared to have a similar Terms of Reference as the Gender Unit. The idea of having a Gender Unit was seen as a waste of resources, instead participants expressed the fact that such technical and finances resources should be re-invested in sectoral Ministries to enhance the technical capacity of the GFP of that Ministry to mainstream gender into their respective sectors as stipulated below:

...I have read the ToRs (terms of reference) of my role as a GFP. I understand that I am here to mainstream gender, how, I still don't know, but what intrigues me is that the GFP seems to be doing the work of the Officers of the Ministry. Why is there a Ministry if the work is then dumped on the GFP, remembering that

⁶¹² Interview with Woman Head of State Structure, Interview held on 5 December 2013, Port Louis

⁶¹³ Interview with Gender Focal Point, Interview held on 20 September 2013, Port Louis

they get paid as their scheme of duties, and for us it is extra unpaid workload...[GFP7]⁶¹⁴

However, whilst the ideas expressed by GFPs cannot be dismissed, there also needs to be an appreciation of having a specific Agency and Unit endowed with its own budget for gender mainstreaming that oversees all activities of Government geared towards women's empowerment and gender equality. Based on the overall opinions expressed in interviews with participants at the level of the State, women NGOs and women's associations, it may be argued that the ambiguity in clarity of the mandate of the MGE arises amongst different stakeholders as there are different expectations as to what the said Ministry should be working towards- either gender equality and/or women's empowerment; and its role in the overall goal of the Government towards democracy and sustainable development. One representative from a Women's network mentioned that the Ministry should be collaborating with NGOs and women at the community level to achieve participatory democracy and sustainable development; while a representative of the Ministry stated that the mandate of the Ministry should be to formulate gender sensitive policies based on existing statistics to redress gender gaps; and another representative of the Ministry mentioned that the Ministry should keep its focus on women's empowerment projects. Likewise, a representative from the Ministry stated that the Ministry should act as an advocate for issues that were being expressed from women at the community level⁶¹⁵. These competing perceptions of what the mandate of the Ministry should be is problematic but it appears that there are two distinct views – that of the role of the Ministry in gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment

⁶¹⁴ Interview with GFP, Interview held on 23 August 2013, Port Louis

⁶¹⁵ Based on an analysis of the interview responses carried out with women NGOs, representative of the Ministry of Genders and a member of a women's network, as well as sentiments echoed from women in associations

through either a participatory-based approach involving women from the grass-roots or a bureaucratic technical expertise process recruiting gender experts. In the Ministry's case, it appears that the institutional structure is set up in such a way that it allows for both a participatory approach to addressing women's issues of interest through the decentralised system of Women Centres and the National Women's Council. Moreover, the Gender Unit has multiple functions of policy-making, coordinating, evaluating and monitoring the status of gender equality on the island. Its twin-track approach further seeks to put in place programs that address women's practical needs through courses on self-empowerment amongst others, as well as carrying out sensitisation campaigns on gender issues such as women's sexual and reproductive health or giving free legal advice⁶¹⁶.

At the same time, the determination of the Staff working at the MGE was called into question. A few GFPs of sectoral Ministries mentioned that in order for the MGE to push through its agenda, it had to recruit more overt gender advocates that would work inside the system and with sectoral Ministries to mainstream gendered perspectives in public policy formulation and implementation. It was reported that when the Ministry was established, there was a clear determination and commitment to feminist principles, with the recruitment of Staff from past feminist organisations, yet, as time went by, the MGE weakened its ties with radical feminist organisations, with the exception of a few femocrats working at the Ministry.

...The Ministry is not what it used to be, it used to be the lobby force for us women, it rallied women and lobbied for women's rights...it took the commitments made at Beijing seriously, inviting NGOs to be part of this equal rights process...you cannot find the

⁶¹⁶ Activities mentioned by an Official of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Interview held on 29 August 2013, Port Louis

same spirit at the Ministry now, it is now mostly civil servants doing business as usual. You have a few women who push forward the agenda but they are the select few...[NGO5]⁶¹⁷

This notion of having “femocrats”⁶¹⁸ entering the Ministry seemed to have influenced policy making and implementation in the earlier days. However, studies on femocrats in Australia, the United States and Canada suggest that there have been varying levels of success in feminist engagement from inside the State due to the political opportunity structure⁶¹⁹. In Mauritius, whilst digging further, through the interviews, into the reasons why a majority of Officers within the public service seem to be disengaged with feminism or be labelled as feminists, it was uncovered that in the earlier days of the establishment of the MGE, some staff with overt commitments to feminism had indeed been recruited to guide the work of the different Units of the Ministry, drawn from women’s NGOs, and even though some of the ties of the women to a particular NGO weakened, they still worked to pursue a feminist agenda while still being aware of activities of women’s organisations at the community level. These women “femocrats” were responsible for instituting policies and legislation relating to domestic violence, or raising awareness on women’s choice and right to their bodies in terms of the right to abortion. It is reported that even though the public sector in general was a substantially gendered institution, the Ministry of Women’s Rights was seen as essentially a female domain, thus acted as a buffer to enable women femocrats to enter the State structure and effect changes from within.

⁶¹⁷ Interview with member of a large women’s Network (WiP), Interview held on 18 September 2013, Ebene

⁶¹⁸ The term femocrat has been contested, whilst some women see it as relating to women in the public service sector working towards women’s interests, others have criticised femocrats on the basis that they have sold out the women’s movement and seek to benefit from women’s subordination. I use this term with a more positive meaning, “ as a powerful woman within government administration with an ideological and political commitment to feminism” Eisenstein H., 1996, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State*, Temple University Press:Philadelphia

⁶¹⁹ Chappell L., 2002, The Femocrat Strategy: Expanding the Repertoire of Feminist Activists *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 55(1), pg. 85-98

However, with the successive Governments, each appointing their own representatives, feminist influence in the Ministry was slowly diluted, and “femocrats” seemed to leave the women’s machinery to go into other sectors such as education or pursue other political interests. Furthermore, the work of the Ministry is a reflection of the political stance of each successive Minister focusing more on strategies that relate to sensitisation campaigns, rather than strategic measures or economic interventionist programs⁶²⁰. Moreover, Officers are cautioned not to engage in partisan politics and are expected to implement policy decisions in line with the political party in power. In an interview with a high ranking public officer of the Ministry, it was further stated that women who had inherent feminist principles or even strong opinions about the Government are expected to toe the line or risk being side-lined. At present, the situation at the Ministry is such that there is an undertone of neutrality so much so that Officers follow Ministerial policies and remain prudent in forming alliances with activists at the level of the community or NGOs.

Nevertheless, the few present day self-defined femocrats working at the level of the Ministry state that they take advantage of the fact that the Mauritian Government has signed a number of international and regional Conventions that cover women’s social, economic and political empowerment to draft strategies which honour these commitments, whilst feminist women Councillors in local governmental level mention that they take advantage of the fact that they are less bound than women

⁶²⁰ Analysis in light of interviews with (a) a former representative of the Ministry who was employed at the time of the setting up of the Ministry, she identified herself as a feminist working inside the State; (b) a former Consultant of the Ministry also identifying as a feminist working inside the State during the early days of the Ministry
Confidentiality of participant has been preserved
Interviews held on 15 September 2013, RoseHill

Parliamentarians to effect changes that would empower women, a notion that closely resembles Galligan's idea of "double democracy"⁶²¹

Gender Programs and Coordinating Mechanisms

The Gender Unit acts as the policy making body and implementation is undertaken at the level of the National Women's Council, the National Women's Entrepreneur Council and through the 15 community based women centres. At present, the staffing of the Gender Unit (18 members of Staff) and its funding (\$2.5m) is far too limited to carry out the mammoth tasks in its programme based budget exercise, with a Head of Unit, 2 Coordinators, and 16 Family Welfare and Protection Officers who are located in the 15 Women Empowerment Centres delocalised across the island^{622 623}.

Concurrently, in line with the international paradigm shift, from a "women in development" to a "gender and development" approach in policy making and programming, the National Gender Policy Framework (NGPF) was launched in 2008⁶²⁴. The NGPF was adopted by Cabinet following consultations with the 18 sectoral Ministries. The services of an International Expert was enlisted with financial support from the United Nations Development Programme to draft the final document and a

⁶²¹ Galligan B., 1995, *A Federal Republic*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pg. 51 Galligan used the term "double democracy" to refer to federalism with a multi-tiered Government. The literature states that the strength of the Australian femocrat strategy was further related to federal structures which created an opportunity for infiltrating and operating at different levels. Chappell L., 2002, *Gendering Government: Feminist Engagement with the State in Australia and Canada*, University of British Columbia: Vancouver, pg. 151

⁶²² Women's Empowerment Centres offer a range of capacity building and recreational activities for women. Beauty care training enables women to set up their own at-home business; wellness activities aim at creating a healthy body/mind and leadership programs focus on giving women self-assertiveness skills and legal advice are given to women free of charge. These are some of the programs that were being conducted during my field trip.

⁶²³ Government-of-Mauritius. 2016. *Mini-revolution' in Women Centres with Introduction of New Courses to Empower Women* [Online]. Mauritius: Government of Mauritius. Available: <http://www.govmu.org/English/News/Pages/%E2%80%99Mini-revolution%E2%80%99-in-women-centres-with-introduction-of-new-courses-to-empower-women,-says-Minister-Perraud.aspx>, Last Accessed 10 February 2017

⁶²⁴ *It is to be noted that I formed part of the team that extended technical assistance to the Ministry and drafted a number of strategy papers, namely towards the setting up of the GFP mechanism, as well as their Terms of Reference.*

Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, 2008, *The National Gender Policy Framework*, Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare: Mauritius

National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming was established under the chairpersonship of the Hon. Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. The objectives of the Committee are to monitor the progress of Gender Cells at the level of their Ministries, and evaluate the overall implementation of the NGPF; provide a forum for exchange of views and discussions on current and emerging gender issues and on engendering of the Programme Based Budgeting (PBB) exercise, amongst others; identify gaps towards successful implementation of the NGPF and provide solutions for redressing gender gaps; establish, where necessary, sectoral working groups at the level of Ministries, to formulate gender policies; and promote a culture of gender responsiveness in the work-place.

Since 2008, the NGPF stands as a generic policy document that is guided by State action towards human-centred and sustainable development in line with its commitments towards the Sustainable Development Goals. It further provides the guidelines for each Ministry/ Department and Agency to derive their organisational gender specific policy which will guide their strategic framework for programmes and budgeting. The revised policy framework provides the guiding principles of the policy; the broad operational strategies; and the institutional arrangements for achieving gender equality. Given the cross cutting nature of gender issues, the policy framework calls upon a strategic partnership at the levels of the State; within organisations; among the private sector; the media; political parties; and civil society organisations to consolidate resources to achieve gender equality. As at 2017 the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (MGECDFW) has extended technical assistance to all Ministries to formulate their respective gender policies as at the

operational level, each individual government department bears the main responsibility for ensuring the effective implementation of their Gender Policy. Interviews with some Gender Focal Points⁶²⁵ revealed that whilst sectoral gender policies have been formulated, there has been no professional interest by Officers of respective Ministries in taking the leadership towards formulating an Action Plan to implement their gender policies although a sum of \$10,000 has been allocated in their respective budgets to implement activities for gender mainstreaming in their sectors. Delving further into the reasons behind this limitation, it was revealed that staff believed that gender mainstreaming was not an actual requirement specified in their scheme of duties and did not believe that implementing the policy would result in any transformation. The latter part of this section also addresses the limitations identified in implementing sectoral gender policies.

Following Government approval in June 2010 for the setting up of a National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming (NSCGM), the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare chaired a first meeting in July 2010 to instruct GFPs on the pertinence of mainstreaming gender in policy formulation and implementation. The implementation of the National Gender Policy Framework and measures spelt out in paragraph 128 of Government Programme 2010-2015 relating to the formulation of gender sectoral policies by all Ministries were also highlighted. However, it was noted that there was a high turnover of GFPs because the latter were from an administrative and human resource background and moved around in other Ministries/ Departments, often leaving behind unfinished gender mainstreaming

⁶²⁵ Interviews with 6 GFPs resonated along the same lines. A follow-up interview with a GFP at the level of Ministry of Finance revealed that \$6000 has been allocated to each Ministry as part of gender responsive budgeting, however, GFPs struggle to formulate targeted activities to implement their gender policies through an action plan.

agendas. Hence, as a way of turning the GFP mechanism into a permanent structure, it was deemed important to institutionalise a structure that is sustainable over time, whilst ensuring that the concept of gender permeates in all policies and programmes of Government. The concept of Gender Cells was therefore introduced as a sustainability measure⁶²⁶. The Gender Cells were seen as being a holistic team in all sectoral Ministries comprising a Gender Focal Point (either male or female, not below the rank of Deputy Permanent Secretary); A Senior Technical Officer; Senior Officers of the Human Resource and Finance Sections; A Senior Officer of the Statistics Division; and any other co-opted Officer, as deemed necessary. The Gender Cell would be spearheaded by the GFP. The GFP would also be called upon to adopt a two-pronged approach whereby he/she will trickle down information received at meetings of the NSCGM and provide feedback to the NSCGM on the status of gender mainstreaming at the level of his/her respective Ministry. GFPs would further ensure that gender is mainstreamed at the different levels of policy analysis, formulation, implementation and budgeting, as well as monitoring and evaluation. The different Officers comprising the Gender Cells were given specific tasks.

The Senior Technical Officer would identify gender gaps and propose policy measures to redress such gaps; He/she would inform gender sensitive policy and programme formulation; ensure that gender is mainstreamed in day-to-day work and that the concept of gender mainstreaming is disseminated amongst staff of the Ministry. Likewise, the Senior Officer of the Human Resource Section would ensure that the Performance Management System is rendered gender sensitive; he/ she would ensure

⁶²⁶ Interview With Head, Gender Unit, Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, Interview held on 19 November 2013, Port Louis, Mauritius

that the work environment is conducive to the practical and strategic gender needs of both women and men; and strive to ensure gender balance and equal opportunities for both men and women in nominations for training/seminars and workshops at the local and international levels. The Senior Officer of the Finance Section would ensure that the programme-based budget of his/ her Ministry is engendered, namely through the formulation of gender sensitive indicators and outputs, as well as costing of outputs in a gender sensitive manner; and would need to understand the concept of gender responsive budgeting to ensure an equitable allocation of funds for the implementation of projects and programs. The Senior Officer of the Statistics Division would strive to collect both administrative and technical data that are sex disaggregated; and would ensure that whenever gender gaps are prominent, effort is made to notify the GFP to redress such gaps. In so doing, each sectoral gender cell for each Ministry would remain guided by existing documents and commitments such as government policy and action plans, international/ and regional or any other commitments, and blue-print documents pertaining to their respective sectors. Such documents would then form the basis to draft a sector specific situational analysis, and identify gender gaps in their sectors, constraints as well as challenges to be addressed in the gender policy statement to be adopted. In relevance to women's substantive representation the setting up of Gender cells entails that each Ministry would be able to identify gaps in their sectors and raise these issues at the level of their Ministry and to the respective Ministers who would in turn raise these at Parliamentary level.

By looking at all these different structures and strategies put in place at the level of the Ministry and sectoral Ministries with a view to promoting gender mainstreaming in

policies and programs of the Government, one is lead to believe that gender mainstreaming could be successfully implemented. However, further interviews with the Gender Focal Points revealed a number of concerns with respect to the overall coordination and function of the national gender machinery and gender cells, as stated below:

...I did not know that Government had a National Gender Policy Framework. I read of it in the file, one day before going to the meeting...[My job as a GFP]... I think it would be much easier to implement strategies, but there is no coordination among GFPs, we only meet during meetings. Gender is cross cutting as they say, but there is no coordination among GFPs. It is also not taken seriously at the level of the Ministry. We have a ToR (terms of reference) but we are actually not clear what exactly we have to do and how and why. Sometimes it seems that's the role of the Ministry of Gender, so why do we have to take on that mandate too, to mainstream gender... I think that the Ministry (of Gender) just expect us to liaise with them, but it does not occur to me that the Ministry (of Gender) itself goes out of its way to give us direction on how to actually mainstream gender, there is no coordination...[GFP8]⁶²⁷

Furthermore, interviews with women's community based organisations and NGOs revealed a very concerning gap in terms of lack of coordination amongst the Ministry and the grass-roots level and a lack of proper framing of women's interests. All of which questions the Ministry's ability to substantively represent the "real" issues that women are facing. Moreover, women's community based organisations expressed deep concern about the fact that the Ministry was mostly involved in addressing its commitments towards the international community instead of framing their "true" practical and strategic needs.

Institutional structures differ in their location, autonomy, ability to coordinate and liaise with other institutions, staffing, and resources in terms of their ability to fund their

⁶²⁷ Interview with GFP of Sectoral Ministry, Interview held on 8 August 2013, Port Louis

own internal programs, let alone external programs, their ability to influence policy-making, and the degree of marginalization from the main delivery centres where decisions are taken. Having such a structure as a Gender Cell institutionalised at the level of sectoral Ministries conceivably speaks of a commitment to gender equality. Furthermore, based on the interviews with the Gender Focal Points, it is revealed all Ministries do have in place their sectoral gender cells and respective gender policies. Moreover, Officers have attended numerous capacity building workshops to build their skills in gender mainstreaming strategies in their respective sectors, some sponsored by the UNDP and regional bodies such as the African Union and SADC.

However, the validity and effectiveness of the GFP mechanism were immediately called into question by participants. Interviews with approximately half of the existing GFPs⁶²⁸ revealed that being a GFP was merely an additional unpaid duty that was not recognised as part of their performance appraisal system, and these tasks were assigned alongside their regular schemes of service, combining gender mainstreaming duties with sectoral responsibilities in their normal workload. It appears that not legitimising gender mainstreaming as a valid task in itself puts the whole programmatic notion into jeopardy, as put forth by a GFP

...Being a GFP should be paid. We have a scheme of service, and we are expected to report in quarterly Steering Committee meetings. As such, we are already overburdened with daily activities...[GFP11]⁶²⁹

In most cases, it was felt that most GFPs were nominated solely because they are women, although both males and female Officers are eligible to be in this position.

⁶²⁸ 3 Interviews held on 25/09/13; 2 Interviews held on 27/09/12; 3 Interviews held on 28/09/13; 3 Interviews held on 30/09/13; 2 Interviews held on 01/10/13; 1 Interview held on 15/10/13

⁶²⁹ Interview with GFP, Interview held on held on 27 September 2013, Port Louis

GFPs indicated that the capacity building workshops that they had been attending were too generic in nature and not tailored to address specific differences between the sectors. Additionally, a very poignant response by a former male GFP questioned whether and how men⁶³⁰ would be positive and efficient allies and whether these women and men operating at the level of the WPAs would see the value added in supporting change towards women's empowerment and gender equality and addressing existing unequal gendered power relations⁶³¹

...I was nominated, it was much against what I wanted to do, but when your Permanent Assistant Secretary nominates you, you have to attend. I just did not see what the problem was, where were we discriminating against women...if you ask me, up to now, I don't understand what it is that we have to do, where is the gender issue in ***(name of sector)? Maybe if someone had sat down and explained what the gap was, ok I would have understood, but all I kept hearing is that gender equality contributes to sustainable development...[GFP11]⁶³²

Effectiveness of the Ministry of Gender as a Lead Agency

The power, effectiveness, coordinating function and performance of the National Gender Machinery lead by the Ministry of Gender was also called into question by a Gender Focal point, who argued:

...I think we need an institution, which has more authority than the Ministry of Gender to spearhead gender mainstreaming. It's as if it is only teasing us with ideas at the moment, we need more authority...it (the Ministry) says, "here's the framework, write your policy, implement it" ... and at our level, we think, HOW, with what budget, who are we accountable to ... it (the NGPF) is just an eye-wash almost, for reporting to the UN...[GFP12]⁶³³

⁶³⁰ The analysis can be extended to even women, given that women is not a homogenous category differentiated by their intersectionalities

⁶³¹ A similar sentiment is expressed by Connell R., 2011, *Confronting Equality. Gender, Knowledge and Global Change (1st edition)*, Polity Press: Cambridge, pg. 17-19

⁶³² Interview with GFP, Interview held on held on 27 September 2013, Port Louis

⁶³³ Interview with GFP, Interview held on held on 27 September 2013, Port Louis

Clearly, there is a lack of coordination mechanism between the Lead Agency and the sectoral Gender Cells and amongst GFPs themselves. Furthermore, it can be acknowledged that, whilst the setting up of the Gender Focal Point mechanism, and/or Gender Cell in practice seems to be a holistic approach, nevertheless, it appears that GFPs themselves remain clouded by their mandate, and still have to build up their capacity to practically mainstream gender in their respective sectors, as well the formulation of gender-disaggregated data. This is reflected in an example of the program of the Ministry to implement gender sensitive budgeting which remains an issue of concern to GFPs given the already limited budget that they have been allocated to fulfil their existing mandate and their limited gender mainstreaming skills:

...When it comes to PBB (Performance Based Budgeting), it becomes difficult to quantify the performance indicators to measure gender equality, and we do not even know how to come up with gender disaggregated data for the PBB and we are expected to engender the PBB...[GFP3]⁶³⁴

Concerns regarding the lack of power of the Ministry of Gender Equality have also arose, as well as the question of the strategic location of the Gender Cell/ GFP mechanism. A further poignant issue is the lack of knowledge about women's practical and strategic needs in the sectoral areas. Whilst gender disaggregated data is available through the Central Statistics Office, it appears that Officers of the technical and administrative cadre are not in touch with women at the level of the community, and there is no linking mechanism, according to these Officers, apart from the Ministry of Gender Equality which would operate through the National Women's Council and Women Centres to be able to discern these issues of interest. There appears to be a lack of coordination between the Lead Agency and the sectoral GFPs and most

⁶³⁴ Interview with GFP, Interview held on 16 August 2013, Port Louis

importantly a lack of belief that change may be effected through the present system, unless directives are given through a higher Authority, such as emanating from the Prime Minister's Office or the Ministry of Finance.

These findings resonate with the findings conducted on the needs assessment of the GFP mechanism in the African region for example in Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia, Angola, Botswana⁶³⁵. Perhaps, it may be stated that for the GFP mechanism to work, the Ministry would need to consider a best practice that has emerged based on a review of relevant literature reveals that South Africa has an all-encompassing network of institutions working towards gender mainstreaming for equality, including GFPs in all governmental bodies in which the formulation and implementation of the National Gender Policy Action Plan occurs within in their respective sectors. The GFP mechanism is strategically located in the Office of the Director General/ Chief Accounting Officer in each Department facilitating access to programs/activities of their departments, thus creating an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming. In Tanzania, GFPs are located under the Director of Policy and Planning of each Governmental Institution and are recognised in the organisational structure, giving them added legitimacy and weight to carry out gender mainstreaming activities⁶³⁶. This idea of having a Ministry with an additional positional power would be consequential in the Mauritian context to address its effectiveness. It can be argued that the Ministry for Gender Equality has a lesser degree of influence as compared to the Ministry of

⁶³⁵ Gad-Consult. 2012. *A Needs Assessment of the Gender Focal Point System* [Online]. GAD. Available: <http://gadconsult.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/needs-assessment-of-gender-focal-points.html> [Accessed 04 February 2016].

⁶³⁶ Gad-Consult. 2012. *A Needs Assessment of the Gender Focal Point System* [Online]. GAD. Available: <http://gadconsult.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/needs-assessment-of-gender-focal-points.html> [Accessed 04 February 2016].

Finance or directives from the Prime Minister's Office, first and foremost, given its budget allocation⁶³⁷.

GFPs interviewed mentioned that the present institutional structures in place for gender mainstreaming are limited. Concurrently, the literature explains that institutions which are independent or have an advisory role tend to be more able to influence policy making and bear a higher authority. However, equally, they may face the risk of being marginalised if the directives do not resonate well with the political parties in power. It may also be argued that Ministries/ Governmental department may bear a type of legitimacy in shaping gender sensitive policy, yet, being a part of an "official" governmental body also implies that a women's NGO may feel reticent in interacting and sharing information with Governmental bodies⁶³⁸. In the same vein, within the Governmental system and its hierarchy, Women's agencies are ranked lower in this hierarchy of "prestige" or standing, with a lesser portion of the national budget and limited staff. Moreover, the budget of a Ministry, is an indicator of the strength of that Ministry's input into policy debates vis à vis other sectoral Ministries. It is claimed that location at the level of the Prime Minister's Office may give added weight to gender equality issues on the agenda, given the strategic positioning, however, at the same time, there may also be a loss in impetus should the priorities change; for example, the literature reveals that the Women's agency in Canada originally located within the Office of the Central Privy Council was sent to the periphery as a separate entity, resulting in a

⁶³⁷ The literature reveals that the Spanish Institute for Women which is well served in terms of staff and budget
Threlfall M., 1996, *Feminist Politics and Social Change in Spain, Mapping the Women's Movement: Feminist Politics and Social Transformation in the North*. Verso: London & New York, pg. 124

⁶³⁸ Sawer M., 2003, *Women's Policy Machinery in Australia*, In: RAI, S. M. (ed.) *Mainstreaming Gender, Democratising the State: Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women*. Manchester University Press: Manchester, pg. 253

lack of coordination and political influence⁶³⁹. Correspondingly, limited standing may also imply that the Women's Agency would be relatively vulnerable to restructuring changes, as was the case with the United Kingdom Women and Equality Unit which moved from the Department of Trade and Industry to the Department of Communities and Local Government with no apparent linkage to that portfolio in 2006 and was expected to work as in a collaborative manner in a "joined-up government" where Ministers and Ministries would work together, however, this has been criticized because '...[Ministers for Women] have been expected to combine a proper job with the woman's job, thus reducing it to the status of political housework'⁶⁴⁰.

In terms of the shift of the Mauritian Government from line budgeting to Performance/Program Based Budgeting, the same issues about the formulation of gender disaggregated data and the monitoring of progress seem comparable and resonate with the Australian context. In the Australian context, it is reported that the New Public Management System is detrimental to women's policy agencies in three ways, namely in terms of resulting in an increased volatility in administrative structure which would impact on long-term gender equality projects and impede on prior gender-impact assessments of policies. Concurrently, the new PBB tends to be geared towards measurable outcomes, through performance indicators, whilst gender equality issues are rather qualitative issues, and similarly, performance indicators being used for measurable outcomes may not necessarily be gender-disaggregated⁶⁴¹.

⁶³⁹ Chappell L., 2002, The Femocrat Strategy: Expanding the Repertoire of Feminist Activists *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 55(1), pg. 87

⁶⁴⁰ The Economist, 2000, Bye-bye Blair's Babes, 21 December 2000

⁶⁴¹ Sawer M., 2003, Women's Policy Machinery in Australia, In: RAI, S. M. (ed.) *Mainstreaming Gender, Democratising the State: Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women*. Manchester University Press: Manchester, pg. 250

In the same vein, the technical capacity of Officers of the Ministry of Gender themselves to guide sectoral Ministries to implement gender policies was interrogated by several GFPs. One interview in particular summarised a two-fold notion relating to lack of technical capacity of the Officers of the Ministry of Gender and lack of Ownership of the process of sectoral gender mainstreaming:

...We always hear of “gender”, “gender, gender”, we have to mainstream gender, but how! Each time we go to a workshop, we hear the same story, about what is gender. I know what gender is now, but not one workshop by the Ministry has been able to give me a specific way to mainstream gender in land transport...if we ask the Ministry of Gender, we get told, identify the gaps in your sector, to me this sounds like they don’t know and expect us to know...they are the gender ministry, they have to guide us, it is their initiative...[GFP4]⁶⁴²

Digging deeper into the technical capacity of the Staff of the Ministry of Gender to perform gender mainstreaming reveals that there is indeed a capacity limitation by Officers themselves in terms of understanding what gender mainstreaming was and how it should be undertaken:

How do we do gender mainstreaming? Do we re-do all our policies? Because they are mostly neutral? Or do we just include something in there for women... What about the laws? As part of the gender policy, we have to amend our discriminatory laws, so how do I do that? Just change the words? He/she? Do we repeal the law, its complicated, or just add it to policies? [GFP9]⁶⁴³

It was clear that Officers felt that they needed additional training on gender mainstreaming strategies, however, this gap was explained in terms of either the limited budget of the Ministry to send Officers to regional training institutions or the high workload of Officers that acted as a barrier for them to do personal research on gender mainstreaming techniques. The will of Officers, however, remained clear- there was a

⁶⁴² Interview with GFP, Interview held on 19 August 2013, Port Louis

⁶⁴³ Interview with GFP, Interview held on 22 August 2013, Port Louis

definite commitment to the work that they were undertaking towards gender mainstreaming as stated by one Officer:

...I do believe that the Ministry should take the lead to address women's issues, but we face too many obstacles...we are dependent on donor agencies to give us the funds to go do a training...there are a lot of institutions, like the ILO (International Labour Organisation) and the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) that offer capacity building workshops, but there is no time, there is no money. The Ministry should invest in its Staff...[MGEWS]⁶⁴⁴

Whilst it remains clear that there is a flagrant gap relating to technical capacity of Officers to perform their duties, a second set of challenges as put forth by a Senior Officer from the Administrative cadre, and reflected in three other interviews, in relation to the mobility of Government staff which in turn impacts on the sustainability of the Gender Focal Point Mechanism

...My PAS was named GFP for one month, and she set up the Gender Cell, and then she changed Ministry! It's as if it was also a waste to send her to a regional workshop. What I am saying, the turnover of GFPs is high [GFP6]...⁶⁴⁵

Having a high turnover of Staff in turn implies that GFPs who are being trained are not able to put their gender mainstreaming skills into practice resulting in a loss of technical skills which in turn impacts on the overall effort towards implementing gender sensitive policies

Towards a Collaborative Effort for Substantive Representation?

...Why bother with approaching, the Ministry? We have our own way of distinguishing ourselves, we take matters in our own hands to address issues that are important to us, we are on the ground, the Ministry deals with issues that they think are important to us...[WCBO21]⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁴ Interview with Woman at the Level of the State, Interview held on 23 August 2013, Port Louis

⁶⁴⁵ Interview with GFP, Interview held on 30 August 2013, Port Louis

⁶⁴⁶ Female Representative of a Community Based Organisation, Interview held on 1 August 2013, Souillac

Starting this section with this very poignant statement sets the tone for the subsequent arguments about the type of collaboration entertained between the Ministry and women's organisations acting at the community level. During the course of interviews with around fifteen women's organisations, it was revealed that women at the community level do not necessarily feel that there is an effective channel of collaboration with the Ministry. Whilst the Ministry has put in place a structure entitled "Participatory Advisory Committees" (PAC) at the level of all its women centres, where members of civil society organisations would be able to have a medium of communication to raise issues that are important to them, the fact remains that members of the PAC feel that their concerns are not being adequately addressed. The PAC had been set up in 2009 at the level of Women Centres by the Ministry of Gender Equality through the National Women's Council as a platform comprising women (and initially men) of different socio-economic backgrounds to discuss and identify projects to cater for their overall welfare. Deliberations of the PAC would be passed on to the Ministry in a bid to adopt a bottom-up approach to development and tailor-make programs that are seen to be more in tune with what women perceived as being relevant to address their practical and strategic needs. An action plan had been drafted by members of the PAC for the period 2009-2010 highlighting eight priority areas relating to economic empowerment, addressing social, environmental, legal and health issues as well as sports and physical activities and education and training, as the basic themes to improve women's livelihoods. This initiative spearheaded by the Ministry is seen as good democratic practice as stated by a representative of PAC. However, it was also mentioned that the implementation of the Action Plan has yet to yield the

expected results in light of the very bureaucratic reporting process involved in bringing issues put forth by members of PAC up to the level of the National Women Council and the Ministry, let alone at the Parliamentary level

...We started very enthusiastically...as the meetings happened over the months, I realised that this committee was yet another idea of the Ministry that was not working for us. Our concerns were being only partially raised at the level of the Council...(PACRep1]⁶⁴⁷

The capacity of the Government Officer in charge of raising issues expressed by PAC was also put into question, where the PAC member stated that the Officer was too young and not holding enough power to raise issues up at the level of the Council. In this context where a mechanism instituted by the Ministry that sought to adopt a bottom-up approach to decision making, is itself being seen by members at the community level as failing, this raises concerns as to democratic decision-making in favour of members at the grass-roots level. Hence, a look at the other sites of representation that women have resorted to, given the fact that their issues of interests are not being accounted for by the State remains critical.

Throughout interviews, participants seemed to express a level of reticence in stating whether they collaborate effectively with the Ministry of Gender Equality, or whether there was an established level of trust amongst the NGOs/women's association and the Ministry. Whilst a few bigger and more formal NGOs have revealed that there is a very low level of collaboration, the smaller women's associations seemed more discrete in commenting on their relationship which may also pertain to the fact that they receive seed money and commenting on their working relations with the Ministry would seem hypocritical. However, representatives of formal NGOs and even the

⁶⁴⁷ Interview with member of PAC, Interview held on 5 August 2013, Flacq

representatives of the Umbrella Organisation for NGOs have diplomatically stated that there should be a strengthened collaboration with the Ministry, but at the present time, they would not venture to collaborate with the Ministry as stakeholders on formulating and implementing national programs for women's empowerment, as one participant stated⁶⁴⁸

...We do not want to thread on their territory, the Ministry has its *raison-d'être*, but as an institution, it has its *forte*, us as NGOs we have our own agenda and expertise...[WNGO6]⁶⁴⁹

In terms of the collaboration of women MPs and women councillors at the local governmental level, a similar disconnection was identified by a woman councillor who stated in a sarcastic manner that she believed that individual women had more access to their women MPs than women councillors.

The arguments so far have looked at the key aspects the Ministry of Gender Equality in Mauritius, its political context, its political and bureaucratic leadership, and its institutional design as being important features in discerning both the Ministry's resilience and the limits on what it has been able to achieve to represent women's interests. Looking at the State Structures and their capability in representing women's interests, it can be argued that fundamentally, there are dilemmas arising within the structures of the different mechanisms within the Gender Management System. In the case of Mauritius, based on the findings from the interviews with representatives at the State level, it is revealed that the main structures such as the Ministry for Gender Equality, and its para-state bodies bear legitimacy by their very existence, in in setting

⁶⁴⁸ It is to be noted that there is also a greater level of difficulty in critiquing work that one is involved in
⁶⁴⁹ Interview with R.Lallah, Representative of LALIT, Interview held on 10 December 2013, Petite Riviere
Interview with Project Officer MACOSS, Interview held on 21 October 2013, Port Louis

the agenda, formulating and implementing policy and costed programs, however, they are equally highly influenced by the ruling political powers. They are also seen as being “outside” a channel of co-operation and information sharing by NGOs and women’s groups. The limited effectiveness of State Structures hence leads to the question of how to conduct substantive representation in Mauritius.

RECONCILING THE STATE AND NON STATE ACTORS

Overall, it can be argued that Women’s Policy Agencies (WPAs) are crucial in representing women’s interests, in terms of setting the overall policy framework for women’s empowerment and gender equality. According to the literature, one of the main *raison d’être* of WPAs are ‘presence, process and voice’⁶⁵⁰. The idea of ‘presence’ leads to the view that issues of women’s interests and gender equality are given legitimacy and visibility; whilst process would entail giving critical actors and advocates of gender equality access to State processes (from policy making to implementation) to be able to influence decision-making towards gender equality from within the State. Voice provides critical actors with a legitimate position and power to operate both within and outside State Structures. Ideally, the Ministry should operate as a value-added- an institutionalised and budgeted structure within the political apparatus and processes as well as the State’s administrative structure to advance women’s interests at the higher echelons of decision-making/Government/Parliament where to counteract established male-centric institutional norms, legislation⁶⁵¹.

⁶⁵⁰ Squires J., 2007, *The New Politics of Gender Equality*, Palgrave: United Kingdom, pg. 15

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid*, pg. 29, pg. 269,pg. 5

In Mauritius, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare has been set up as a response to a couple of different factors and ideological reasons or obligations, such as the First World Conference on Women, and operates in light of its international and regional commitments, as per a number of WPAs around the world⁶⁵². It does remain the one institutional vessel that deals with women's issues and gender equality and its institutional architectures are used to serve different interests, for example, the National Women's Council ideally should link up with women's associations and address the practical needs of women, whilst the Gender Unit should provide the overall strategic framework for gender equality by addressing strategic gender interests. At the same time, the Ministry is seen as fulfilling the demands of party politics and for the benefit of political parties in electoral campaigning and canvassing female voters⁶⁵³. Hence, whilst the Ministry has been acknowledged as an essential vehicle used for women's empowerment and gender equality, it has also been assessed as an agent for a number of other opportunities, whether in favour of women's interests or not. Furthermore, its technical and administrative capacity to actually address all women's and feminists' interests has questioned its capability (and that of the State) of being an ally for all women in any given time or context. Additionally, it remains unclear how the Ministry and its structures can be accountable to women's movements, apart from publishing their annual reports, or presenting overall achievements at election times, or presenting their periodic report to treaty bodies. The ministry itself also becomes a focal point for international and outside funding – relieving

⁶⁵² Rai S. M., 2003, *Mainstreaming Gender democratizing the State? Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women*, Manchester University Press, Manchester

⁶⁵³ A similar idea is also addressed by Squires J., 2007, *The New Politics of Gender Equality*, Palgrave:United Kingdom, pg.10

it of finding the money to meet its international obligations under the treaties it is signatory to.

It remains fair to say that the Ministry of Gender Equality in Mauritius has institutionalised a number of systems in place to address women's needs, however, the Ministry is confronted with a number of obstacles. Analysis of the interviews with the GFPs and women in State structures in Mauritius reveal that the type of structures, the proximity to Units of Power, administrative, technical, financial and leadership capacity are critical for the Women's Machinery to substantively represent, promote and protect women's issues of interest⁶⁵⁴. These aspects have impeded the way that programs for gender equality and women's empowerment have been implemented at the State level in Mauritius. Additionally, Mauritius is at a juncture where it is engaging in economic re-structuring and trade liberalisation which may bear negative consequences on gender mainstreaming in policy making as State Structures (Ministries and Departments) first and foremost seek to achieve their business port-folio outcomes, rather than prioritise gender mainstreaming. These processes are intertwined in a complex manner embedded in the socio-economic and political structures with the way that policy-making processes are undertaken, and have negative consequences on effective gender mainstreaming. It may be argued in this case, that if addressing women's interests cannot be solely undertaken by the State, the roles of other actors and sites of representation need to be delved into with a view to assessing whether

⁶⁵⁴ These conclusions based on the interviews in the Mauritian context echo the findings in the literature, for example, the Women's Machinery in Australia in 1990 is coined as an example due to its strategic location in the Prime Minister's port-folio which remains the main policy Centre of any Government; its links and good working relationship to state and federal agencies, encouraging representation from the community on advisory bodies; funding essential services for women; incorporating "femocrats" in the State Structures to specifically advance women's interests; and introducing gender-responsive budgeting. However, it is reported that these features have proved to be highly volatile in light of changes in Government and political and ideological frameworks and settings, for example, in 1997, the Women's policy machinery in Australia was transferred out of the central locations and have had a cut in funding.

there is a potential for substantive representation of women's interests (at all) in Mauritius.

While institutionalised voices, provide a way of substantive representation, as they specifically seek to address the institutionalised gendered policy-making, it can be seen that there is a lack of capacity to do so. Moreover, whilst there is an acknowledgement of the critical role of political institutions at the level of the State to address women's interests, there is also a recognition that institutions contribute to imbalances of power and gender remains a pivotal axis for structuring institutional dynamics. Masculinist ideologies permeate through the working of institutions in Mauritius, and forms of masculinist ideologies remain embedded as gender-neutral norms. The way that gendered norms are engrained into institutional systems present obstacles to framing claims for substantive representation of women's interests and challenging underlying masculinist systems. Recognising that gender remains a process by participants becomes encouraging as there is the potential to engender political processes and institutions and re-think gendered power dynamics.

In the same vein, interviews with the Gender Focal Points (GFPs) have revealed that all Ministries receive a sum of around USD6,000 for gender responsive budgeting, however, a number of GFPs have stated that the judicious use of this allocated budget remains challenging given their lack of technical capacity for sectoral gender mainstreaming to address women's issues. Given this gap, it is argued that broadening the concept of representation into one that takes into account the power to engender institutional frameworks as well as the capacity of State institutions in Mauritius to address women's interests through an accountability framework remains important to

carry out substantive representation. Assessing the gender responsiveness of the whole policy-making and implementation cycle, through a gender audit, in the public sector as well as the institutional culture, in that regard represents a more holistic way of seeing substantive representation⁶⁵⁵. Similarly Goetz⁶⁵⁶ calls for a shift from analysing the way that women MPs and civil society organisations perform substantive representation to looking at how representation is being effectively performed within institutions. By transposing Goetz idea, in this context, the strong focus on accountability of institutions holding the legislature and executive accountable in respect with their performance towards gender equality in Mauritius should form part of discussions around substantive representation. Goetz thus explains two dimensions of accountability, namely, “soft” and “hard” accountability which could be adopted in Mauritius. Furthermore, adopting a structure of vertical accountability which holds institutional and processes accountable, for example, whereby civil servants and MPs become answerable to the electorates on gender sensitive measures; and horizontal accountability relating to close scrutiny of the administrative and financial processes and redistribution of resources would further thicken the process of substantive representation.

Analysis of the interviews by GFPs further reveals that policy tends to be gender blind. Yet, recognition of women’s interests by State institutions and actors remains an important element in the process of substantive representation. Recognition of women’s interests and women further impact on women’s full citizenship status. Through gender

⁶⁵⁵ For example, there are soft (answerability) and hard accountability (enforceability) Measures in Uganda the Equal Opportunity Commission holds the Permanent Secretary (PS) personally responsible for gender mainstreaming, failure of which, a the PS pays a fine, according to the Financial Management Act 2005

Interview with the Equal Opportunity Commissioner, Interview held on 13 February 2018, Kampala

In Rwanda, the national budget is not voted if sectoral Ministries do not provide a Gender Budget Statement to the Gender Monitoring Office to stipulate how gender gaps will be redressed within their sectors.

Interview with Officers of the Gender Monitoring Office, Interview held on 16 February 2018, Kigali

⁶⁵⁶ Goetz, A., 2003, ‘Gender and Accountability’ in Dobrowolsky, A. and Hart, V. (eds) (2003) *Women Making Constitutions*. London: Palgrave, pg. 52-67

blind or gender neutral policies being implemented, it appears that there is a certain degree of non-recognition of women's specific interests further diluted by cultural norms.

Regarding the existing gender blind policy making, it remains essential to identify and highlight those issues that Mauritian women see as being important to the legislature and the executive. For substantive representation to take place, there needs to be a homogenous framing of women's issues or interests, however, as it has been argued throughout the thesis, women in Mauritius are divided by their intersectionalities. Moreover, there appears to be a disconnect between the Ministry and women at the grass-roots level. This poses a further challenge in the way that interests would be effectively addressed in different sites of representation.

CHAPTER 6

Considering Other Sites of Representation

I have always considered myself as an agent of change. I am not a politician, I am not the Director of a big company, but I think that I am doing something to make my life better, to make the life of my family better... No I don't think it is political...it is an action that I do but its contributing to making the life of my surroundings and community better... [WCBO11]⁶⁵⁷

The different pathways adopted by women to enter institutional and non-institutional politics in Mauritius reveal that women have a form of female political consciousness even if most women who were interviewed at the community level mentioned that their acts were not political in nature. The women interviewed at the grass-roots level have adopted different strategies and pathways to enter formal and informal politics. Some women interviewed have made the transition from non-institutional to institutional politics, whilst those interviewed at the level of NGOs and women's associations have remained in non-institutional politics, however, both categories of women have revealed that whether they are in either domain, this has not occurred haphazardly or within a vacuum. Some women's associations have emerged from a larger mixed (women and men) movements when women came to the realisation that gender differences resulted in and exacerbated their oppression, resulting in women's sections of some larger associations as is the case with the Muvman Liberasyon Fam which arose from LALIT- a larger political organisation that seeks to, amongst other things, redress class imbalances in Mauritius⁶⁵⁸. Some women have been cultivated from a very young age to be politically engaged. For one participant who is the Secretary of the Mauritius Alliance of Women, one of the first Women's NGOs in Mauritius, the Girl's Scout was her first

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with representative of women's Senior Citizen Association, Interview held on 11 October 2013, Quatre-Bornes

⁶⁵⁸ Interview with Representative of LALIT, Interview held on 10 December 2013, Petite Riviere

point of entry into activism⁶⁵⁹, or another member explained that she had followed the footsteps of her mother who was a member of a women's wing at the level of the village council⁶⁶⁰. Similarly, one former member of a political party explained:

I was always interested in politics. The burgeoning of ideas in Europe around women's political citizenship and the student movement in 1969 in Mauritius played a major role to push me towards joining some form of political movement or express a form of political sentiment. I joined a group of friends to give support to the student movement in Mauritius and got a taste of political activism. In 1976 at the age of 30, I was asked to join the MMM (a major political party) and won a seat as a Deputy...following which I served as a member of parliament for 5 years for the Opposition...[exWMP3]⁶⁶¹

In the same vein, a fifty three year old woman councillor stated that she had been involved in social work since her twenties and it was through her membership and involvement at the level of her local women's association that she managed to pave her way into formal politics at the local governmental level⁶⁶², while another member of a women's association stated that she had been involved in school as a Class Prefect⁶⁶³. These actions remain political in nature as they carry with them the potential of doing political acts, although women interviewed did not link their acts and pathways as being political.

Retracing the Waves of Women's Organising and Political Acts

There appears to be different forms of waves of women's organising in Mauritius as revealed through interviews with different groups of women- the older and younger

⁶⁵⁹ Interview with former active member of MAW, Interview held on 2 December 2013, RoseHill

⁶⁶⁰ Interview with Mrs. Puchooa, Member of the MAW, Interview held on 16 October 2013, Quatre-Bornes

⁶⁶¹ Interview with V.Nababsing, former women MP, 4 December 2013, Quatre-Bornes

⁶⁶² Interview with Woman Councillor, 4 December 2013, Flacq

⁶⁶³ Interview with representative of MAW, 17 November 2013, Quatre Bornes

generation⁶⁶⁴. The first wave of women's organising started in 1940, a number of women's associations were set up by the Mauritius Labour Party in its struggle towards independence and to get women the right to vote. However, the percentage of illiteracy was high amongst women in Mauritius and women's associations were established at the grass-roots level to dispense literacy courses to women. At the same time, women's organising was seen to have emerged as part of the national movement towards independence where women were considered an electoral force for independence. Hence, the first wave of women's organising was related to politics, civic duty and literacy. The second wave of feminist organising such as the *Muvman Liberasyon Fam* that arose around the late seventies revolved around addressing patriarchy and capitalist systems which contributed to a system of double oppression towards women.

Following the First World Conference on Women in Mexico (1975), the Government established the Ministry of Women's Rights and the country saw the emergence of a new form of women's organising where a number of women's NGOs with formal structures were born and worked in close partnership with the Ministry to address women's practical needs. This period also saw the formalisation of women's association in terms of having to be registered in order to receive seed allowance from the Government. Presently, the fourth movement which cohabits with the women's associations of the first movement remains a form of women's organising through NGOs. However, these NGOs have been criticised on the fact that they operate within a system of neo-liberalism where women are seen to compete within the patriarchal

⁶⁶⁴ Interview with Mrs. Dabee, 93 years old, a women's activist who describes herself as a feminist. She recounted the story of how women's associations came into being, Interview held over a period of one week, 15-22 December 2013, Vacoas
Interview with Mrs Goorah, a woman activist, who is now in her eighties. She also recounted the historical coming into being of women's associations in Mauritius, Interview held over a period of 3 days, 13-16 December 2013, Rose Hill

hierarchy⁶⁶⁵. Presently, Mauritius has 368 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) registered under the Mauritius Council of Social Service (MACOSS), the umbrella organisation set up in 1965 that acts as the focal point for the NGO sector providing coordination and capacity building for its members⁶⁶⁶. At the same time, MACOSS falls under the purview of the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Environment and Sustainable Development, which provides registered NGOs with seed money to undertake activities relating to social welfare in Mauritius. On the other hand, 1500 women's associations are registered with the National Women Council under the aegis of the Ministry of Gender Equality, and are also provided with annual grants to implement activities of interest to them. Whilst the provision of seed money by the State to non-State actors can immediately raise red-flags about the autonomy of the NGO sector and women's associations in Mauritius, participants from women's association argued that receiving a token financial support to conduct their activities did not hamper any advocacy or lobbying initiatives⁶⁶⁷, rather it demonstrated the fact that NGOs and women's associations acted as a complementary entity to support the Government to address national issues of interest. Concurrently, the representative of MACOSS argued that granting seed money to non-State actors was seen as a way to encourage NGOs and Government to engage in a form of dialogue and collaborative effort to improve national developmental efforts⁶⁶⁸, although at the international level, donor

⁶⁶⁵ Interview with R.Lallah, Representative of LALIT, Interview held on 10 December 2013, Petite Riviere

⁶⁶⁶ Information obtained from the Secretary of MACOSS, Interview with MACOSS Secretary, 1 November 2013, Port Louis

⁶⁶⁷ Information about the granting of seed money obtained through various interviews with women's associations

⁶⁶⁸ Information obtained by the Secretary of MACOSS, Interview with MACOSS Secretary, Interview held on 1 November 2013, Port Louis

agencies do not encourage a joint government\non-government partnership in a bid to maximise impact of lobbying activities⁶⁶⁹.

When viewed in isolation with one another, it would appear that the activities of women's associations and NGOs would not have a major impact in addressing women's needs and interests and improving their livelihoods, however, as the interviews revealed during the course of the fieldwork, each activity when added together over a period of years has represented incremental steps for change for women at the grass-roots level, with a cumulative impact at the State level.

Traditionally the idea of the multiplicity of women's identity in Mauritius has formed the basis of women organising at particular points in time and the socio-economic and political context they were evolving in. Women's organising has been present in Mauritius since the colonial and post-colonial days and has been undertaken in light of the structures and relations of power that have been present in those periods. In contemporary Mauritius, the same type of organising is seen where women's organising emerges in response to daily challenges that they are experiencing, or act in relation to challenges posed to their families. Their organising in present day Mauritius is also in response to relations of power such as motherhood, the gendered division of labour, as well as in response to economic systems of inequality. While women's identity is not culturally and ethnically neutral, nevertheless women of different communities do engage in collective action to address the political economy⁶⁷⁰ in terms

⁶⁶⁹ Silliman S. & Garner Noble L., 1998, *Organizing for Democracy: Ngos, Civil Society, and the Philippine State*, University of Hawai'i Press:Honolulu, pg. 70

⁶⁷⁰ Political economy as is currently used refers to the relationships between individuals and their society and between markets and the State. See Caporaso J.A., Levine D.P., 1992, *Theories of Political Economy*, Cambridge University Press, pg. 1 Political economy in this thesis is linked to a feminist political economy analysis of the politics of everyday life, focusing on the interrelationships among gender, race and class as they are shaped by households, markets, and states, and the transnational

of the modes of production and the class system. In Mauritius, women are engaging in critical political acts, although they do not necessarily term their acts as essentially political in nature, but at the same time, the findings need to be understood in light of the existing political, ethnic, economic and cultural constraints that affect their political mobilisation and political acts. Yet, the interviews reveal that women give meaning and act in response to the structural and social context and through a political interpretation of their daily lived experiences to regroup themselves in small women's associations in a process of political activity to address their needs, revealing a sense of feminist consciousness

Forms of Critical Political Acts at the Grass-root level

In the absence of a critical mass of women in Parliament, it remains necessary to study how women are effecting changes to address challenges facing their families, their communities and their own lives. Adopting the concept of "critical acts" thus becomes a useful framework to look at the ways in which women are engaging in . Dahlerup explains that a critical act is one in which the position of the minority will be changed in a positive manner and in turn initiate further changes at a macro level⁶⁷¹. Critical acts further imply that the minority (women in this case) are able to form alliances and act on behalf of the women who are part of that group. Traditionally, the literature stipulates that critical acts encompass voting, the introduction and supporting of Bills to be introduced at the level of Parliament, engaging in lobbying activities with the State, or

women's activism. See Also ; Inter Pares (2004). "Towards a Feminist Political Economy." Inter Pares Occasional Paper, No. 5. Available Online at: <http://www.interpares.ca/en/publications/papers.php> Last Accessed April 2018

⁶⁷¹ Dahlerup, D., 1988. From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 11(4), pg.296

debating policy contents⁶⁷². However, in this section, it is argued that the notion of critical acts may be broadened to reflect other forms of activities and political engagement that women in Mauritius participate in, however, small. These critical acts may simply take the form of consciousness raising, capacity building programs that give women additional skills to perform their daily activities, assisting sensitisation campaigns on gender issues, participating in rallies and signing of petitions. Additionally, the critical act may even encompass an unfinished agenda, for example, framing a claim in terms of a proposed bill, even if it is not translated into law.

The common terrain for women's political action in Mauritius remains activism at the grass-roots and community level. Women's organising in Mauritius is a result of this kind of multiplicity of expressions and, in a number of smaller women's associations further reflects the divisions across ethnic, social and class lines. This is evidenced in the fact that there are religious women's associations as well as cultural women's associations, and youth associations. Moreover, women are engaged in Trade Unions and effect changes at the level of the State. The types of activities that women engage in remain multifarious. While there appears to be a lack of "feminist orientation" in the type of activities organised by women at the level of associations, and the fact that women's associations have been regrouped into semi-governmental and socio-religious organisations in Mauritius⁶⁷³, there appears to be a pride in the multiplicity of activities that they are undertaking as a women's collective and a rejection of the fact that they

⁶⁷² Celis, K., 2009. Substantive Representation of Women (and improving it): What it is and should be About? *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 7(1), pg.101.

⁶⁷³ Muvman Liberasyon Fam, 1988, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Mauritius*, Mauritius. One argument from the literature states that women in some women's associations act as agents for political parties in terms of regrouping women to attend political meetings performing a form of "directed mobilisation". Molyneux M., 1985, Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, State and Revolution in Nicaragua, *Feminist Studies*, Vol.11(2), pg. 227-53

cannot effect change-they rather be effecting changes at the grass-roots level as stated by a long standing member of the Mauritius Alliance of Women- a women's alliance organisation bearing the status of NGO.

I am a very proud to be part of change in Mauritius, it may not be a big change, people think we just go out, but by being in a group, we have a friendship, we have solidarity, we do what is best for us...here we are all senior citizens, the other associations have other types of members, so our activities are different to them...we organise activities that concern us...but we do fundraising activities by selling cakes and then we give the money to charity. Recently we visited an orphanage and gave books to the kids. Books are too expensive for the orphanage to buy, so we help to educate these kids... [WCBO21]⁶⁷⁴

This strand of discourse arising at the level of small women's associations across the island speaks to women's solidarity and raising female consciousness and has been a recurring theme amongst almost all of the women's associations. The type of organising that is being undertaken by women is also divided by their intersectionality based on age, socio-economic status and ethnicity. In one women's association where fifty elderly women meet on a monthly basis, activities revolve around touring the different parts of the island in a spirit of women's solidarity and exchange of experiences and sharing of personal stories along the way as a form of female consciousness-raising. Cultural Programmes organised by the Association target members of the groups and their families. It was argued that these cultural programmes serve to sustain the social and cultural values and norms pertaining to each of the women of different ethnicities present with a view to contributing to instituting a culture of tolerance and acceptance in Mauritius. Similarly, various women's associations organise similar types of cultural programmes, which they stipulate serves to preserve harmony and understanding

⁶⁷⁴ Interview with President, Mrs Ramtohul and Mrs Nundloo, Vacoas Senior Citizens Women's Association, Vacoas, Interview held on 1 October 2013, Vacoas, Interview with Member, Senior Citizen's Women's Association, Vacoas, Interview held on 1 October 2013, Vacoas,

amongst all the ethnic groups. Each year the Association organises a gathering on the occasion of International Women's Day where they address specific themes such as Road Safety for Women, Violence against the Elderly, Mental health, and Drug Abuse so that members can pass on the information to their grand-children in their roles and identities as family elders. As one member of the Association reported:

...people think that we are just old women gathering for gossip, but we know that we are making change even if we are old. We take care of grandchildren, we have children, so what-ever we learn here with the sensitisation talks, we pass the information down to those people we know. This is our way of contributing to society by telling our stories to the next generation... [WCBO22]⁶⁷⁵

It may be argued that having activities of female consciousness raising are political in nature, despite the fact that all of the women who were interviewed did not think their actions were political in nature, yet it appears that every day women in these small women associations perform unconscious political acts by the very nature of women being able to leave the private sphere and access the public sphere. Regrouping in associations represents a form of political activism in itself. Similarly, women members of these associations may be viewed as political individuals who act on their female consciousness and their values as women of different ethnicities to empower other women in a spirit of solidarity and sisterhood amongst women. Telling their stories may even relate to the narrative being a socially symbolic political act where the personal becomes political. Personal problems and lived experiences of many of these women who have participated in the struggle towards independence become political discussions and their actions become political in nature.

⁶⁷⁵ Interview with President, Les Abeilles, Clairfonds, Interview held on 29 September 2013, Clairfonds

At one of the meetings women talked about the issue they were facing in the home which related to the rising cost of vegetables in the local market. As the issue was raised by one woman, a number of other women expressed the same concern as senior citizens on meagre pensions.

Oh my god, tell me about it, I am a vegetarian, this is just too much, especially after raining, the sellers think they have the right to increase price, they justify the price increase by the weather!..you know what I did, I have my own little garden, you don't need to walk with your heavy basket to the Market, it will save your money. You can even see that the rain doesn't affect your harvest! I followed a course by the Ministry on Kitchen Gardening and Composting. I will call them later to see if they can come and show us again, maybe we can organise a talk on Kitchen Gardening and Composting, I will call the Women's Centre later...Apparently, growing our own vegetables like we did back then is good, it is called organic or bio food, it is better for your family, maybe you can puree the food you grow yourself for your grandson, it is better for his health instead of these glass pots we buy with preservatives...[WCBO14]⁶⁷⁶

It quickly became apparent that there was no “personal” problem as such, rather these were “politically charged” issues, and as the discussions amongst women ensue, there appeared to be a collective action by women to reach a consensus for a collective solution. For the women, the action of having a kitchen garden did not represent a political act, however, women were acting out of necessity in response to external factors. They were taking a political position as consumers by engaging in subsistence farming and composting. Moreover, the dialogue initiated by women did not simply relate to sharing of personal stories in a public space - on the contrary the dialogue turned into a co-operative activity which developed consciousness that had the potential power to transform the way that women went about their daily livelihoods and built

⁶⁷⁶ Interviews with Members, Golden Age Senior Citizen Association, Interview held on 1 October 2013. Interview was followed by phone conversation on 10 October 2013 with one member of the Golden Age Senior Citizen Association as a follow-up to thank the Association for having welcomed me to attend their meeting. During the phone call, the lady informed that the Association had already organised a Talk on Kitchen Gardening.

social capital. As Freire would argue, women were being transformed into “conscious beings”⁶⁷⁷, and where they saw their actions as complementing the role of the State, and helping the State in terms of keeping harmony in the status quo. Concurrently, during the course of the interview, it was noted that there were five men present who were sitting at the back of the Hall where the meeting was taking place. As they were approached, the latter mentioned that they were waiting for their wives to finish “solving the world’s issues and everyone else’s problems”, which strikingly is linked to the idea that “The personal is political”. At the same time, the triple role of women appears to stand out in this case, where women are seen to be involved in community issues, productive life and unpaid work.

Women’s organising in Mauritius takes various forms, as well as the size of the associations/ NGOs and type of activities conducted. NGOs with more formal structures as well as smaller women’s associations are registered under the national Women’s Council or the Mauritius Council of Social Service and have to be formally registered under the Registry of Associations of the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training. In order to have a legal status and operate within the legal frameworks, Associations/ Unions are further expected to submit their records of proceedings and returned accounts⁶⁷⁸ when deemed necessary. Small Women’s Associations comprising fifty members or less are regrouped according to their towns and localities, for example, in the district of Plaine-Wilhems, there are around 40

⁶⁷⁷ See Freire’s pedagogy and Taylor’s notion of the power of consciousness
Freire P. 2005. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed- 30th Anniversary Edition* [Online]. New York: Continuum. [Accessed 20 March 2017].
Perry P. H., 2000, CHAPTER TWO: So What Is Consciousness?, *Counterpoints*, Vol. 101, pg. 37-56
Taylor P. V. T., 1993, *The Texts of Paulo Freire*, Open University Press: Buckingham, pg. 52

⁶⁷⁸ Government-of-Mauritius, 1978, The Registration Of Associations Act 1978, amended in RL 4/465 – 24 April 1982, Available Online at https://www.imolin.org/doc/amlid/Maurituis/registration_of_associations_act.pdfLast Accessed May 2018
Government-of-Mauritius, 1979, Registration of Association Regulations 1979- Regulations made by the Minister under section 38 of the Registration of Associations Act 1978, *GN 50/1979*, Mauritius

women's associations affiliated to the Municipal Council of Quatre-Bornes with an average of 25-50 women members. Activities of associations vary from organisation of sensitisation campaigns to conducting outings. Whilst a quick overview of some interviews of women in these community associations may suggest that the activities performed tend to be recreational, a deeper analysis has led to the recognition that there is an underlying form female consciousness permeating through the activities where social cohesion has taken over the notion of individual gain and protecting and promoting their quality of life has been a central axis in their organising as stated below by a woman part of a community based organisation:

...as women, we have to safeguard our family, we need to carry on the values...the association organises moral value classes for younger and old members, on Tuesday we have a Pandit (priest) talking about marital relationships and we also have readings from the Gita (indian holy script), this is not because we are promoting Hinduism or we are fundamentalist, but we want to preserve peace in the family and community... [WCBO21]⁶⁷⁹

At the same time, women of these smaller associations revealed that they were not fully aware of the contents of regional and international human rights instruments that the State was party to, such as CEDAW, however, recognised that women had basic human rights⁶⁸⁰. Three small women's associations interviewed have acted in response to structural economic constraints of the larger economy and performed what would appear to be non-transgressing acts that have nevertheless challenged their deeply engrained gender roles by leaving the private sphere to enter paid employment, and emphasising the fact that women of different socio-economic groups interpret their gains differently such as the statement below

⁶⁷⁹ Interview with member of Vacoas Women's Wing of Arya Samaj Movement, Interview held on 31 August 2013, Vacoas

⁶⁸⁰ Responses of Interviewees have been compiled from Interviews held with 11 women's associations over the period August-December 2013

...my husband lost his job because he was drinking, alcoholic and continues to be one, I have 3 young children, I never in my life worked...not even as a servant...but my children have to go to school, and we did not have that much money and did not want to ask my in-laws, so I talked to the women in the association, we said why not start our business, like a small cooperative, I started first selling "gateau-piments and Dupain frite" (fried foods) at that street corner...after a month my sister came to help me...the days that she could not, my mum came to help and as the business grew, we had more customers, as the fried food was delicious, so then we involved more women in the association to help, we each got a small salary from the profit... as the business grew some women working had to look after their children, so then we had to have a little system going, one woman would cook, one would look after all the other woman's children, it was a good system, we organised ourselves, then we registered the association as a small business, got more grants from the government, now we are expanding...it is not big money, but it is sufficient...anyway, you only need that much money, you do not need more... I am happy of what I have achieved, I am not a politician, like the type of other big shot women you are interviewing, but I think that I have made a change for my family [FBUS1]⁶⁸¹

This kind of activism which redefines women's traditional place in the private sphere can also be retraced to the seventies in a deeply patriarchal Mauritius where women were called upon to enter the Export Processing Zone to work in factories with very low pay to contribute to the Mauritian economy. Subsequently, as a consequence of the dismantling of the multi-fibre agreement⁶⁸², and the closure of the EPZ sector, a large proportion of the women were retrenched. However, meeting with a group of four former women factory workers who are now regrouped under a small enterprise, they revealed that despite the economic constraints, they regrouped in an association where they were able to extend the necessary support to each other and were able to tap into capacity building programmes being organised by the Government in order to be re-skilled. These women explained that it was essential for them to have regrouped themselves as this notion of the collective provided with an independent power-base

⁶⁸¹ Interview with representative of small women's association now registered as a business, Interview held on 11 December 2013, Grand-Bay

⁶⁸²The multi fibre agreement was an international quota trade agreement relating to textile and clothing from the period 1974-2004

and through mutual support, they gained additional confidence and autonomy to re-train and build their own business⁶⁸³.

Moreover, it may be argued that women are addressing their practical gender interests in various ways and also defending the strategic gender interests underlying the intersection or symbiosis of the two - in turn, performing political acts as reflected in the case below

...there was a case in Sodnac where a young girl was raped, the President of the MAW organised a peace walk to denounce rape as something to do with unequal power relationship, we mobilised women at the level of the Association, got good press coverage and I think that this was a way for us to say that we are taking a stand...not in our community...not to any girl...[WNGO13]⁶⁸⁴

Placing women's experiences at the centre of analysis at the community level reveals how women are actively addressing their immediate needs; for example, a group of women interviewed mentioned that they were undertaking fund raising activities to be able to provide charity donations to Convents and have taken the lead to engage in "intergenerational dialogue" with younger women to inculcate leadership skills. Another group of women have engaged in civic actions to maintain a green area for families to gather together⁶⁸⁵. A group of Senior Citizens have engaged in kitchen gardening and composting in a bid to contribute to food security, whilst another group of younger women are actively engaged in protecting the environment by collecting trash on the public beaches. The way that women have defined their actions places them as actors seeking to redefine the ways that they are seen with respect to a particular issue.

⁶⁸³ Interview with representative of SME, Interview held on 7 September 2013, Fond du Sac. See also article explaining the fall of the EPZ in Mauritius
Tandrayen-Ragoobur V. & Ayrga A. 2011. *Phasing Out of the MFA: Impact on Women Workers in the Mauritian EPZ Sector* [Online]. Available: sites.uom.ac.mu/wtochair/Conference%20Proceedings/56.pdf [Accessed 5 December 2016].

⁶⁸⁴ Interview with representative of MAW, Interview held on 17 November 2013, Quatre Bornes

⁶⁸⁵ Interviews with women's associations held on 23 October at Quatre Borne, 14 October at RoseHill, 16 October at Moka, 17 October at Flacq and 26 October at Vacoas respectively

Rather than being viewed as survivors rather than victims of injustices; as one woman from a senior citizen association stated:

...our society is changing, we used to be an extended family, now with all the changes, we are faced with nuclear families, what this means is that, our children get married and leave our homes, we are then left alone in our old age...when we regroup at the level of the association, we have moral support and if we have a problem, we know that we can rely on each other, three months ago, one of the members had her house destroyed by a fire, we organised a charity run and provided her with the essentials she needed, she went to stay with one member who had a bungalow in the north...we also see ill-treatment towards the elderly by their own children, so sometimes we have intergenerational talks with the younger members of the family so we can see eye to eye so they can respect the elderly...we now also organise premarital counselling which is one of the best activity I have been involved in...we are also planning to set up an elderly watch in the community to look after abused senior citizens...[WSC1]⁶⁸⁶

Thus, senior citizen women are seeking to actively empower themselves, to combat emerging social problems and confront the after effects of a rapidly evolving Mauritian society. Likewise, given the nature of an ethnically heterogeneous Mauritius, different community contexts have resulted in a variety of activism and strategies that women are using to address problems arising in their communities as reflected below:

....we live in a region where there is a majority of (**name of religious community)...we thought this was an opportunity for us as (**name of religious affiliation) to invite these women to talk about their religious beliefs and we can exchange our philosophies, that way, maybe they can educate their kids about us and we can educate our kids about them, what they believe in ...we thought maybe that would contribute to harmony amongst communities, we do not want our religious beliefs to divide us as women...we look at family and moral values...[WSC4]⁶⁸⁷

Activism in Mauritius is also being defined in terms of economic class, whereby in blue collar communities, women are now engaging in shared community work to address and compensate for the lack of infrastructure related to child-care they have conducted sensitisation talks on energy saving strategies to reduce their electricity and

⁶⁸⁶ Interview with representative of MAW, Interview held on 16 October 2013, Quatre-Bornes

⁶⁸⁷ Interview with representative of a Woman Senior Citizen's Association, Interview held on 18 October 2013, Quatre-Bornes

water bills⁶⁸⁸. In spite of the fact that none of these women interviewed saw their acts as being political in nature yet, they were actively engaged in improving the quality of life of their communities, despite the fact that this type of political activism originated from community grass-roots activism remain unrecorded. The type of activism that women are engaged in is in direct response to their daily lived experiences, transforming their lived experiences into political acts- an idea reflected upon by a young woman member of an international NGO and reiterated in another interview:

...a few friends and I joined in this initiative to preserve and protect the environment. Right now in Mauritius, because we need to develop economically, the Government is simply selling the land to investors, there is no consideration towards conservation, there is no link to global warming, this is the land that we will grow up on as the next generation of Mauritian citizens, and we need to protect it... I mean some of our trees is now so rare...the activities we do is replanting of trees. We need to get the eco-system alive again, this is part of what sustainable development is, not only economic, but it needs to be holistic...[WNGO11]⁶⁸⁹

...we had started as a small gathering to share ideas about how to address this physical handicap problem. My child had been diagnosed with (name of condition) since the age of 11. My husband works in a high pressure environment and I had quit my job to look after (name of child). I was finding it difficult to cope myself and was questioning myself as a mother. I did not know how to deal with my child condition and how to deal with this problem personally. At the market, I was talking to a relative who said that she knew someone else whom she thought had a child with the same problem....I spoke to her on the phone and we met and sympathised. We shared tips and how to help other mothers facing the same situation with their child...we had an advert in the newspaper saying that there is a support group for mothers with children suffering from (name of disease). From there, we grew, we went abroad once to talk to an expert, and really I think that I am more confident in being a mother with a child with (name of disease) now. People now just know this support group and even men call us sometimes, few men, mostly mothers...we are empowering ourselves as mothers and this reflects on us as wives.....[WNGO24]⁶⁹⁰

Moreover, the type of activism that women are involved is shaped by their gendered social identity, and further constructs their social identities. Looking at the narratives of

⁶⁸⁸ Interview with representation of women's association , Interview held on 23 October 2013, Flacq

⁶⁸⁹ Interview with member of Junior Chamber International, Interview held on 28 August 2013, Interview held in Port-Louis

⁶⁹⁰ Interview with Member of a Support Group for Children suffering from a severe condition, Interview held on 04 September 2013, Quatre-Bornes

women's grass-roots politics has contributed to rendering women visible in the non-traditional definition of politics in Mauritius, and provides a way to transform the way that politics has been defined as stated by a member of a women's community based organisation:

...yes I would say that the path I took with the association makes who I am, with the association, I have assisted so many talks and seminars, they have taught us how to write projects, I have learnt about healthy eating, nutrition, I use these tips in my family while making meals, a balanced diet, I have listened to talks about legal provisions for women, it has definitely made different, I feel empowered...[WCBO]⁶⁹¹

Women's Associations and Collective Identity

A number of the Presidents/Secretaries of the women's associations that were interviewed began by proudly stating that their associations started from small beginnings to growing in numbers in a short period of time. Presidents and Secretaries of Associations (except for religious women's groups) further emphasised the fact that the membership was heterogeneous in terms of ethnic difference, but their momentum to act comes from acknowledging and respecting each other's differences. Concurrently, it further appeared that members of the women's associations were committed to not only acknowledging their differences, but also maintaining an image of internal homogeneity as a collective, but also externally distinctive in terms of their intersectionality

... The MAW was previously the Indian Women's Association. It was mostly Indian Women who joined the association to learn how to cook Indian food, but over the years, more women from different cultures joined in ...I can proudly say

⁶⁹¹ Interview with member of women's association, Interview held on 8 October 2013, Triolet

that we are doing our part to make women's lives better. Sure it does not seem like we are engaging with the Government, but little by little we are addressing women's needs...we are all different in Mauritius, but when we come to the association, it is like we know we are different, but we are also sisters, like the good old days, we act as one, you have Muslim women, Catholics, Hindus, very few Chinese but they are present! ...we do have clashes, women have opinions, (laugh) we all want to be heard, we all have our differences because we are not all the same, you have many cultures in Mauritius, but this harmony inside the group is what kept the Alliance standing for so long. But also, we don't want to be seen as All the same, I mean we each have our identity, but when we go to meetings, we consult each other before attending the meeting to make sure that we have the same opinion as a group...[WNGO13]⁶⁹²

This notion of a "collective identity" amongst women in Mauritius was also taken up by a representative of another NGO called LALIT who stated that women's solidarity is mostly seen amongst the past generation of women who regrouped in associations, however, women showed less solidarity in a hierarchical institutional structure. This idea was reflected through interviews with women in the State structure where it was mentioned that the limited resources in terms of power and privileges climbing up the hierarchy meant that women had to compete amongst themselves. This finding leads one to question what brought women together in some associations. During the course of the interviews with representatives of that women's alliance who were mostly in their fifties to seventies, it became evident that members formed part of the first wave of the women's movement in Mauritius where collective action by women irrespective of their intersectionality was a sine qua non for resource mobilisation and addressing structural inequalities and patriarchal ideologies of that period, as compared to their weakened forms of solidarity in contemporary Mauritius.

The MAW was established in 1978 following a gathering of around thirty women's organisations. A number of representatives of these organisations had been

⁶⁹² Interview with Secretary, Mauritius Alliance of Women, Interview held on 3 September 2013, Quatre-Bornes

present at the first World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975 where a World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year⁶⁹³, which offered a blueprint to address women's integration in developmental efforts. However, as one member of MAW states

...I attended the meeting, it was an eye-opener, the conference acknowledged the historic contribution of women, but there were so many gaps that were identified...equal participation of women in decision making, women's equal rights and adopting laws, racial discrimination, having women entering the labour force and establishing infrastructures such as childcare centres to allow them to go to paid work...when we came back, it was as if we had gathered a momentum meeting all the other women in the world facing same issues as us women in our little island paradise. But after three years, nothing had changed, the Ministry was not doing what it committed to do in Mexico...[WNGO13]⁶⁹⁴

It was reported that there had been slow progress made by the Ministry for Women's and Consumer Protection three years after the First International Women's Year especially in terms of reviewing marital laws on the island. This gap in the law had negative gendered consequences as the women's associations witnessed recurring instances where men did not contract civil marriages after undertaking religious marriages with their wives, and subsequently abandoned them and their children. Women were thus left to fend for themselves and their families. Moreover, the fact that organisations were duplicating activities gave the impression of a fragmented vision of the women's movement in Mauritius. Representatives of around thirty women's organisations who differed in terms of their class, ideologies and political positioning regrouped themselves as a Federation on the occasion of International Women's Day in 1978 with one of the first tasks being to reform the 1977 Immigration and Deportation Act that

⁶⁹³ United-Nations, 1975, Report of the World Conference on the International Women's Year, United Nations: Mexico City

⁶⁹⁴ Interview with Secretary, Mauritius Alliance of Women, Interview held on 3 September 2013, Quatre-Bornes

discriminated against all Mauritian women who chose to marry foreign men, whereby the men would not be naturalised. The MAW along with its two more active partners, the *Muvman Luberasyon Fam* (a more leftist party) and *Solidarite Fam*, submitted a Communication to the United Nations Human Rights Committee on behalf of three Mauritian women married to foreign nations after exhausting all domestic remedies. It was stated that the Immigration Act, 1977, and the Deportation Act, 1977 constituted flagrant discrimination based on sex against the Mauritian Female citizen. Both Acts further hampered the rights of women to start a home and family and these Acts also breached a number of Articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁶⁹⁵. In 1981, the Committee ruled out that there had indeed been discrimination based on gender bias with respect to women who married foreign nationals under the two 1977 Acts and recommended that the Mauritian State provide immediate resolution for the three women who fell victim under these legal frameworks⁶⁹⁶. This win by the MAW validated the type of feminist consciousness at the national level which transcended the intersectionality of women from around thirty women's organisations.

Women of the Alliance developed a collective identity to achieve a new or quasi autonomous presence enabling them to represent a united force that would transcend the private sphere to demand changes from the State. Another form of collective action with a liberal feminist undertone undertaken by the MAW revolved around lobbying, protesting and signing of petitions with a view to changing the 1804 Code Napoleon (French civil code). The Napoleon Code instituted the status

⁶⁹⁵ Interview with V.Nababsing [WMP3], former women MP, Interview held on 4 December 2013, Quatre-Bornes UN-HumanRightsCommittee, 1981, *Shirin Aumeeruddy Cziffra v Mauritius*, R.9/35

⁶⁹⁶ United-Nations, 1975, Report of the World Conference on the International Women's Year, United Nations: Mexico City

of “minor” to women and was characterised by patriarchal norms and values which restricted women to the private sphere by making them properties of their husbands or fathers. Under the Napoleonic Civil Code, women were essentially viewed as second class citizens. In light of the protest actions undertaken by the MAW, in 1980, the Mauritian State amended the Code in regard to women’s marital rights and in 1981, amendments were further made to the Civil Status Act for religious marriages to have civil effect.

As the Alliance gained momentum through the successes of its actions vis a vis the State, In fact, the Alliance was a major force present at the United Nations Beijing Conference on Women which remains a cornerstone in Mauritian women’s history in terms of the importance accorded by Government to integrating the resulting Beijing Platform for Action in the program of the Ministry of Gender Equality. Another participant of the Alliance stated:

...coming back from Beijing, we felt a new force, there was a global sisterhood even if there were all types of women from all background, but we were all committed to women’s rights as human rights. We gave sensitisation talks to other women in our Alliance...[WNGO14]⁶⁹⁷

With a new collective identity, members of the Alliance were able to engage in varying degrees of political acts to push forward a feminist collective identity. It was further mentioned that because women in the Alliance appeared to have this homogenous collective identity, they were able to establish close support and collaboration with the Governor’s Office and meetings were held at the Governor’s residence at the State House and presided by the First Lady. At the same time, the Alliance worked closely

⁶⁹⁷ Interview with Member, Mauritius Alliance of Women, Interview held on 3 September 2013, Quatre-Bornes

with the Women's Policy Agency (which was then a Women's Bureau) on projects related to the question of sexual and reproductive health as Mauritian women were called upon to reduce their family size. This form of collective identity in the Alliance acted as a major factor to gain recognition as a consolidated women's movement as well as give rise to a form of feminist consciousness to its members that enabled the Alliance to put in place structures to empower women in the social and economic sphere.

This is reflected in the way that the Alliance managed to obtain State land and send a project to the European Union to build a multi-purpose complex to house the different activities undertaken by member of the Alliance. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) funded the setting up of a Secretariat at the Complex and with the establishment of a proper infrastructure and structure, the Complex was able to carry out fund-raising activities to self-support and self-finance its subsequent efforts. Such fund raising activities included the selling of potted plants (Jungle Sales) by women who grew the seedlings. Given the growing recognition of the Alliance by the Government, women dignitaries who visiting the Island in the eighties also paid visits to the Complex to look at its activities and at different times provided additional financial support. Members of the Alliance were subsequently trained on project write-ups so that they would be better equipped to apply for funding from donor agencies such as the UNDP. A Documentation Centre was set up to empower women by giving them access to information, education and communication materials such as pamphlets and videos on women's rights. As the Mauritian economy called upon younger women to enter the labour force, the Alliance realised that because of the support-net that young women

provided in terms of caring for their elderly, a day-care centre was established for the latter from funding provided by the European Union to enable younger women to enter the labour force, in particular the Export Processing Zone- clothing manufacturing). To that effect, the Alliance sought the support of the Ministry to acquire twelve industry type sewing machines to train more women to work in the EPZ sector, offering women greater economic independence. In the same vein, a not-for-profit child-care centre was set up. Leadership courses were also organised to equip women with the skills to be more assertive and negotiate their place in the labour force, which in turn saw an increase in women's paid employment.

By looking at the first example of women's organising at the level of the Alliance and from the interviews, it may be argued that in the eighties the Alliance and the Ministry of Women held a close collaboration and that the activities undertaken by the Alliance constituted political acts that have empowered the older generation of women to gain entry into the labour force and be economically active in the absence of similar programs by the Ministry of Women that would have otherwise addressed the needs of women. However, in the nineties, with the establishment of the National Women Council (NWC) operating under the aegis of the Ministry, it was noted that the level of collaboration between the Alliance and the Ministry was greatly reduced as the NWC started implementing similar projects and the collaboration with the Ministry to date remains tainted. The representative of the Alliance stated that to date, collaboration with the Ministry remains a grey area as the bureaucratic processes, combined with hierarchical processes, at the level of the Ministry, delayed the success of any joint collaboration.

Bringing Feminist Theorising to the Ground

Further examples of a silent political act relates to the activities conducted by *LALIT*, a left-wing political party established in 1976 that started advocating for the rights of workers as well as working class women having as its close ally, the *Muvman Liberasyon Fam* (MLF)⁶⁹⁸. A Women's Manifesto had been drafted by the MLF in the seventies that sought to address women's oppression as a result of the deeply engrained patriarchal nature of the Mauritian society. The Manifesto was revamped in 2011 to further address the dangers of capitalising on women as a cheap and dispensable labour force. Similar articles have been released by *LALIT* that seek to warn and educate the population of the disproportionate effects of capitalism on women and gender relations, for example the Women's Commission on the Question of Women, as a branch of *LALIT* emitted a document that was circulated amongst working class women during the electoral campaigning period to raise feminist consciousness on the political program of a political coalition (MMM-MSM) that sought to run for Office. The document denounced the various proposals of the Coalition stating that the programs being proposed would relegate women back to the private sphere, or create a higher level of unemployment amongst women or even warning women that with the impending closure of factories proposed by the Coalition and their dubious deals with the private sector, women would lose their jobs and be forced to eventually enter the informal sector⁶⁹⁹. By raising levels of awareness and creating a feminist consciousness, it may be argued that challenging existing discourses remains a political act in itself.

⁶⁹⁸ Interview with Rajni Lallah, Representative of LALIT, Interview held on 10 December 2013, Petite Riviere

⁶⁹⁹ Collen L., 2002, LALIT Women's Commission on the question of women and Low wages, free zone sackings, cane field unemployment, small-scale entrepreneur ideology, the informal sector and housework, LALIT:Mauritius

It is evident from these two examples, that critical political acts have varied in nature, but it can also be argued that they include action that encompass more than a concrete outcome, or can instead be referred to as “acts of empowerment”⁷⁰⁰ which can be seen as a richer and broader analysis of women’s substantive representation at different levels. In Mauritius, these acts of empowerment are constantly conducted by women’s associations or women’s NGOs ranging from empowering women through capacity building, or lobbying towards bills to be adopted in Parliament. The collaborative actions of two NGOs immediately stand out in this context- that of Women in Networking (WIN) and Gender Links⁷⁰¹. WIN was founded in 2006 by six formal organizations in Mauritius, namely Soroptimist International, the Junior Chamber International (Civil Society Organisation), the *Association Mauricienne des Femmes Chefs D’Entreprise* and the UNDP and evolved as a network of women. With more than one thousand women members irrespective of class, political affiliation and ethnicity (even if men do attend WIN gatherings), it may even be argued that WIN constitutes a women’s movement in Mauritius. One of main objectives of WIN through its 2009 “Women in Politics” (WIP) program was to transform the way that formal politics is undertaken in Mauritius by encouraging more women to enter politics at the local and parliamentary levels. Strategies adopted by WIP in that regard has been to lobby for electoral reform; educate Mauritian women about voting and civic rights; conduct capacity building programs on electoral campaigning skills targeting women councilors and individual women; as well as conduct training on different aspects of engendering governance.

⁷⁰⁰ Dahlerup, D., 1988. From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 11(4), pg. 297

⁷⁰¹ Interview with Jane Valls, President WIN 5 December 2013, Ebene and Representative of Media-Watch/Gender Links, 12 December 2013, RoseHill

Since its formation, WIP has undertaken a number of actions since its creation in 2009 that may be situated as empowerment and critical acts. These relate to organizing debates on electoral reform with a view to gathering a national momentum for electoral reform and act as a lobby group vis a vis the government to reform the existing electoral system at the Local Governmental level; coupled with conducting capacity building workshops for WIP Trainers to deliver training to those individual women wanting to stand for election at the local and national level, as well as women Councilors. Through its advocacy with the British High Commission, WIP managed to secure sponsorship to deliver this related training. In 2010, WIP initiated the signing of petitions by women and men towards a “1 in 3 campaign” which sought to institute a 30% of quota for women at Local Governmental levels whilst working with other women’s groups such as Gender Links and the National Women’s Council to sustain its lobbying efforts towards holding the Mauritian State accountable to its commitments under the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) (Article 5- Affirmative Action). At the same time holding meetings with the Minister of Local Government on the potential of instituting Affirmative Action in the Local Government Act, WIP, in collaboration with Gender Links as a strategic partner, undertook a series of actions to advocate towards a 33% quota of women candidates at the local government level, including holding meetings with the Electoral Commissions to better understand the processes involved in electoral reform initiatives, writing letters to all political parties on being more conducive to women in their selection criteria to enable women to gain access into the Party; organising Information and Education Campaigns across the island in the form of live radio shows, press conferences, roundtables and writing articles in the press. In parallel, WIP and

Gender Links organised capacity building workshops across the island for around 500 women who were seeking to enter the political sphere in forthcoming general and local government elections. Voters Education Campaigns were further promoted through radio messages, billboards, press releases and roadshows encouraging women to vote for women and calling upon all Mauritian women to act as a united front and support women candidates in the local government election. Poster messages were also printed on buses with a view to disseminating information about supporting more women in politics. These IEC materials appeared to be “omnipresent” whereby IEC campaigns were seen across the island and heard on the radio at different intervals in order to reach a large target group of women. These efforts culminated in the State amending the Local Government Act in 2011 to allow for affirmative action in terms of requiring political parties to field a minimum of one in three (1/3) candidates of either gender in the village and municipal council elections thus instituting a 30 per cent women’s quota at the local governmental level. This initiative contributed to women comprising 26.2 percent of Councilors at the local government level in 2012⁷⁰².

Interviews with women councillors who followed the training extended by WIP and Gender Links reveal that participants felt that they had gained more confidence to speak during meetings through the practical leadership ideas imparted in the capacity building workshops. Likewise, individual women felt the same sense of personal

⁷⁰² Interview with Jane Valls (WIN) 5 December 2013, Ebene and Loga Virahsawmy (Gender Links) 8 December 2013, Rose Hill. Gender Links reports that of the 90 councillors needed in municipal councils, 33 women (36.6%) out of 90 Councillors won seats. In the 130 villages, 3984 candidates, including 1183 women stood for election for the 1170 village council seats. 297 women (25.4%) and 873 (74.6%) men won. Overall, out of the 1260 seats contested for in municipal and village elections, 330 women (26.2%) made it into local government after the December 2012 elections. Gender Links, 2012. *Yes, We Can- Mauritius Quadruples the Level of Women in Local Government* [Online]. Available: <http://genderlinks.org.za/programme-web-menu/a-press-releases/yes-we-can-mauritius-quadruples-the-level-of-women-in-local-government-2012-12-14/> [Accessed 24 March 2017].

empowerment and autonomy. One twenty year old woman aspiring to become a female politician stated:

...the workshops have built my confidence, my planning and organisation skills, and I can speak confidently at University now, and interact with a range of people, the courses have given me strategies on how to adapt to different personalities and new ways of thinking. I want to become a politician and learning about Ethics and Good Governance have opened my eyes on how to be a transparent politician [WIPRep4]⁷⁰³

Looking at the collective action of WIN/WIP and Gender Links, it can be argued that the parliament is not the only site of substantive representation for Mauritian women. Advocacy and Lobbying represents a major form and force of substantive representation. It may be argued that lobbying and advocating may also be rooted in holding the State accountable towards its international and regional commitments, and perhaps using human rights based framework may also imply that the two NGOs had gained additional legitimacy in framing their claims. Moreover, by enlisting the support of individual women to sign petitions to be forwarded to representatives of the State, feminist activism in Mauritius had moved from the streets to the institutions. It may be further stated that women's activism through collective action resulted in a reconfiguration of the electoral structure of the State, through State and Civil Society relations.

⁷⁰³ I was invited to attend a WIN Leadership Training program for 25 Women Councillors of the Souillac District Council on Ethics and Good Governance. I was also invited to attend the Graduation Ceremony for 30 Women aspiring to enter formal politics who followed the WIP Course. The gathering saw the participation of 80 women and men, Interview with WIP Course Participant, Interview held on 12 December 2013, RoseHill. Interview with Women Councilors and WIP candidates, Interview held on 14 December 2013, Souillac

Enabling Conditions for Critical Acts

Based on the interviews and types of activism undertaken by the various women's NGOs and associations at the community based level, in Mauritius, it may be argued that women's collective action and activism represent a form of critical act or acts of empowerment for women. Whilst the type of organising varies from strategic feminist interests such as demanding the right to abortion to consciousness raising or addressing practical needs, there appears to be specific conditions that have enabled women's community based organisations and NGOs to make significant changes or act in a substantive manner to represent issues of interest to women. The findings of the fieldwork have revealed that there may be optimal conditions that enable successful women's organising for change and addressing women's interests.

The first condition relates to the ability of women's groups to engage in collaborative partnerships and alliances with one another, or with other movements as has been the case with instituting affirmative action in favour of women at the local government level. Secondly, substantive representation is made possible when women's groups navigate in policy areas or seek to frame claims that are specifically related to women's practical and strategic needs as reported in the decriminalisation of abortion example. Thirdly, it appears that when the political discourse has been framed in a gendered manner or where the centrality of gendered differences in the issue at stake are acknowledged, as has been the case when women were called upon to control their fertility in the sixties, women's groups are in a better position to advocate for their rights. Fourthly, with the number of women's associations implementing activities related to addressing the strategic and practical needs of women, in Mauritius,

it appears that smaller women's associations act at the level of policy/program implementation, rather than participate in their formulation as reflected in the limited collaboration with PAC members and the Ministry which in turn impeded on the way that PAC members viewed that their issues were being addressed at the level of the State; as well as with interviews with women in smaller associations across the island.

The media and information and education materials comprising booklets, pamphlets and stickers remain an important medium and tool adopted by women's groups to create feminist consciousness amongst women at the grass-root levels as has been reflected through the intensive media campaigns adopted by WIP/Gender Links. Similarly, whilst visiting the Documentation Centre of the Ministry of Gender, the MAW, *LALIT* during the fieldtrip, it was revealed that all of the latter had published a vast collection of educational materials to sensitise women on their rights and issues surrounding their sexual and reproductive health. It appeared that there was a numerous educational materials produced (such as brochures) during the eighties and nineties to raise feminist consciousness, also in line with the general global women's movement politics.

In conclusion, the most important factor that enabled substantive representation to take place remains the actions of critical actors and partners. The example of one program of the Ministry of Gender that seeks the collaboration of men and boys as partners in an effort to address gender based violence may be cited in this context. The "Men as Partners" Program which is being run by the Ministry in collaboration with the Mauritius Family Planning Association seeks to sensitise men on gender relations, marital relations, masculinities and their duties in reproductive health, family and in the

community at large. A similar initiative was launched in 2011 by WIN entitled “Men against Violence” with a view to changing men’s attitudes towards women to combat Gender Based Violence⁷⁰⁴.

An overview of the programs of the Ministry of Gender Equality in Mauritius revealed that donor agencies remain critical in the context of a Ministry with a very small percentage of the national budget. External donor support has mainly been from United Nations Development Program (UNDP) support in an effort to achieve MDGs Goal 3 (Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women) due to the fact that other donors such as the European Union, World Bank, or African Development Bank have had alternative priorities to the question of gender equality and women’s empowerment. The UNDP has extended financial assistance and technical support to the Ministry of Gender Equality since its presence in Mauritius, as reflected in its Country Programs. Given the limited technical local expertise on gender mainstreaming in Mauritius, the UNDP has systematically extended donor funds to the Ministry through the recruitment of Consultants to implement activities such as women’s social, economic and political empowerment; formulation of gender policies and in parallel provide funding support for Officers of the Ministry to attend capacity building programs at the international or regional levels. There appeared to be an excellent channel of cooperation amongst both the UNDP and the Ministry whereby Officers of the Ministry extended their deep appreciation on UNDP funding, without which some mandates of the Ministry would

⁷⁰⁴ These programs are ongoing as of 2017. However, a brief consultation with Officers working at the level of the Ministry of Equality has revealed that there is a very small portion of men who attend sensitisation campaigns in the “Men as Partners” initiative due to a number of reasons including inconvenient hours. Consultation with Officer of Family Welfare and Protection Unit, Interview held on 15 September 2017, Port Louis

have remained unaddressed; and likewise, the Senior Program Manager of the UNDP Country Office stated:

...the UNDP has excellent working relations with the Officers of the Ministry and the Minister. We have been supporting the Ministry for more than 20 years, we will continue to do so because we realise that we will not be able to reach the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) without the empowerment of Mauritius and gender mainstreaming in all sectors of society...we have invested a considerable sum of money to support the Ministry and its Officers to achieve their mandate..." [DON1]⁷⁰⁵

However, while donor support from the UNDP has been critical, an interview with a Gender Focal Point revealed that the programme-based budgeting exercise of the Government (which also included a component on gender based budgeting) was seen as a western imposition of ideas which did not work in the Mauritian context⁷⁰⁶. Hence, while donors can act as critical actors, the terms of aid effectiveness needs to be addressed so that programs of donor agencies do not lead to a specific type of empowerment discourse, nor should they dictate the type of activities that need to be implemented. Donor funding should be obtained to implement activities that are contextual to Mauritius. Likewise, a statement by a woman representative of a larger women's NGO cautioned against the fact that presently there is a trend to formulate activities in line with the Donor Organisations areas of intervention as stated below:

...what we do is that, we know this agency is funding an activity on, say, women and drug abuse, so we write up our project and submit it to them, we know this is what they will fund, so that's how we come up with our activities, I mean, if the funding is there, we might as well use it for the good of women...[WCBO]⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁵ Interview with Senior Program Manager, UNDP, Interview held on 2 December 2013, Port Louis

⁷⁰⁶ Interview with GFP [GFP3], Interview held on 30 August 2013, Port Louis

⁷⁰⁷ Interview with representative of women's association, Interview held on 3 November 2013, Paillotte

In fact, women's activism at the community level and through NGOs has been crucial in perhaps one of the most important gains for women in Mauritius, in relation to the decriminalisation of abortion in Mauritius.

Framing a Claim for Substantive Representation- Bottom-Up Non Linear Approach⁷⁰⁸

In May 2012, Cabinet Ministers approved the partial decriminalization of abortion in four specific cases only, however, women at the community levels and women in NGOs who have been interviewed saw this attempt as a step in the right direction⁷⁰⁹. The Amended Section of the Criminal Code⁷¹⁰ now provides for abortion in the event that it jeopardises the mother's life; if the pregnancy may lead to permanent damage to the physical and mental health of the mother; in the case of foetal abnormality; in cases of rape with a pregnancy of no more than fourteen weeks; and minors of sixteen age or less having had sexual relationships. The issue of abortion in Mauritius showcases that there is potential for collaboration amongst the different stakeholders in substantially representing women's interests. In this case, more specifically, abortion was framed as an issue of interest from women from the ground up and successfully represented at the level of parliament.

In 2009, a young woman was charged with illegal abortion, risking prison time.

Given that this issue found its way into the popular media, this was raised at the level of

⁷⁰⁸ History of events retraced from Interviews with the individuals concerned and a member of LALIT (political party) , Gender Links (NGO) as well as an Officer of the Attorney General's Office and the Head, Gender Unit, during the field trip, from the period September-3 October 2013

⁷⁰⁹ Women interviewed as Presidents of women's associations (23 women); Secretary of the Umbrella Organisation regrouping some 1500 Women's Associations; Senior Program Manager, UNDP; President, Mauritius Alliance of Women; and 6 Presidents or Secretary of formal Women's NGOs; 21 Gender Focal Points of Sectoral Ministries

⁷¹⁰ Government of Mauritius, 2012, Available Online at <http://dpp.govmu.org/English/Documents/Legislation/crmcode2012.pdf>, Last Accessed 04 April 2016

a couple of women's NGOs and the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) dropped charges after the mobilization of a number of women's NGOs and women's associations across the island, led by long standing and "influential" women's NGOs such as *Muvman Liberasyon Fam* (MLF), Gender Links, and a political party (LALIT). The DPP stated that the wording "quick with child" contained in the section relating to "abortion" was too ambiguous to arrest and charge the young woman. Section 235 of the 1838 Criminal Code⁷¹¹ defined "abortion" as

(1) Any person who, by any food, drink, medicine, or by violence, or by any other means, procures the miscarriage of any woman quick with child, or supplies the means of procuring such miscarriage, whether the woman consents or not, shall be punished by penal servitude for a term not exceeding 10 years.

The 1838 British Colonial law further penalised abortion as follows:

(2) The like punishment shall be pronounced against any woman who procures her own miscarriage, or who consents to make use of the means pointed out or administered to her with that intent, if such miscarriage ensues.

(3) Any physician, surgeon, or pharmacist who points out, facilitates or administers the means of miscarriage shall, where miscarriage has ensued, be liable, on conviction, to penal servitude.

Following an analysis of the jurisprudence on the term "quick with child", it was stated that this related to the 20th week of pregnancy, instead of simply being pregnant, as the DPP had assumed for around 174 years given that the French translation of the law merely used the word "*enceinte*"⁷¹². Following the case dismissal, shortly after, the death of a woman journalist caused by back-street abortion stirred concern amongst women at all levels of society, leading to the formation of a common front comprising women at

⁷¹¹ Independent Commission Against Corruption and Government of Mauritius, Criminal Code Act 1838, Act 6/1838, (235 Unlawful pregnancy 235A Authorised termination of pregnancy) Available Online at <https://www.icac.mu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/140318-Criminal-Code-Act.pdf>, Last Accessed 20 September 2017 Dorsett S., McLaren J., 2014. Legal Histories of the British Empire: Laws, Engagements and Legacies, Routledge: Taylor & Francis, New York

⁷¹² "enceinte" is directly translated from French to be "pregnant"

the community level, in women's associations, in NGOs, and at parliamentary level. Members of the Press also decided to mobilise and advocate towards a change in the archaic law. It should be noted that a couple of private companies that run the local press have close-knit relationships with the Catholic Church. There were silent protests in front of the Parliamentary House as well as in a public park in the Capital with women holding candles and speeches on the dangers of unsafe abortions as well as the rights of women to control their bodies, the conventions that the Mauritius has ratified and the implications of the State's control over women's bodies.

The Ministry of Gender Equality organised a Workshop to seek the views of different stakeholders on whether abortion should be legalised at the National level, and passed on its findings to the Attorney General's Office. The deliberations of the workshop revealed that most NGOs, women's associations and religious bodies were in favour of decriminalizing abortion. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church and one Catholic women's NGO vehemently opposed the passing of the Abortion Bill. From the beginning of the campaign until the Abortion Bill was read in Parliament, groups of women stood outside Parliament holding banners, or press conferences to sensitise the population at large on the importance of the subject matter. Women's organisations were then backed by the Nursing Association as part of the biggest Union in the Health Sector and the women's wing of the Nursing Association gave strong vocal support to the cause calling for a complete decriminalisation of abortion so that women would be freely able to come to hospital in the event that they have had unsafe back-street abortion. There was a particular emphasis on the fact that back-street abortion was also a class issue where women from lower socio-economic backgrounds were at higher risks of dying of unsafe

practices and the repressive legal provisions, whereas women who could afford to go to the neighbouring French Island of Reunion were at a lower risk of complications. Other Union bodies and their women's wings joined in the advocacy campaigns including the Government Teachers' Union, Federation of Para-state bodies including a Confederation of Workers from the Private Sector. A commercial opinion poll survey revealed that during the on-going debates on abortion, two out of three women in Mauritius were in favour, almost reflecting the outcome of the debates in Parliament.

Members of Parliament (both men and women) held press conferences and other interviews on the radio and in the Media. They expressed their support to advocate for the decriminalisation of abortion, speaking from a secular point of view. Hansard⁷¹³ records of the period reveal that 80 per cent of men and women MPs placed emphasis on the health, human rights, women's rights, and secular aspects of the issue. Two parties (forming part of the island of Rodrigues, a Mauritian colony) spoke from the working class women's perspective⁷¹⁴. The Hansard record⁷¹⁵ show that there were only three political parties that showed concern towards decriminalizing abortion, quoting holy scripts as the Bible, and spiritual connections between the body and living souls inside the woman's womb. These parties were led by fundamentalists, with a strong connection to religious institutions. However, members of these parties agreed that abortion should be permitted in cases where the mother's life was at risk or there was foetal abnormality⁷¹⁶.

⁷¹³ Government of Mauritius, 2012, Fifth National Assembly- Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), Second Session Tuesday 05 June 2012, <http://Mauritiusasembly.Govmu.Org/English/Hansard/Documents/2012/Hansardsec0712.Pdf>, Last Accessed 06 April 2016

⁷¹⁴ *ibid*, pg. 111

⁷¹⁵ *ibid*, pg. 102, 106

⁷¹⁶ *ibid*, pg. 114

Clearly, abortion is an issue of interest and concern to women. The issue was conceptualised by women from the grass-roots and brought up at the level of parliament through the active collaboration of the women's movement and actors in and outside the State structure. This bottom-up and top-down (through revision of the law) collaborative approach contributed to successfully addressing the issue of the decriminalisation of abortion in Mauritius. Critical actors in the process included not only women's associations, but also male and female parliamentarians and a range of other stakeholders. This nexus created the necessary momentum to influence policy making in terms of changing the law in favour of an issue that relates to women's bodies and choice. An interview with a woman Parliamentarian reveals that the potential of Government to collaborate with non-state actors in terms of achieving a people-centred development agenda

Government can be limited in its actions...we are elected for a period...there are a number of things that we can do, and others that we say we will do in the next electoral period...sometimes, having a presence, an outside force, who puts us to tasks is important, it cannot be business as usual...we need people on the ground to tell us what is going on in the community...Mauritius needs to progress with its people at the centre of development, so we need to make sure that these people's rights are respected. NGOs and other outside institutions should be our partners, but also they can hold us accountable...[WMP3]⁷¹⁷

This collaborative approach to people centred development based on the needs, interests and rights of women remains central to achieving the substantive representation of women. The democratisation of the decision-making process at the level of parliament and through critical actors articulating and representing an issue of women's interest contributed to successfully decriminalising abortion in Mauritius. However, at the same time, there is a need to understand women's activism in a

⁷¹⁷ Interview with Woman MP, Interview held on 6 October 2013, Port-Louis

framework that allows both accommodation of their gender roles and resistance to gender norms and a form of female and feminist activism across a universal feminist theorising continuum. It appears that women in Mauritius understand their gendered positioning in society, and they also seek to retain some of the ideas about their motherhood and their triple roles, yet, are adding discourses of women's rights to these notions. Women at the grass-roots seem to act in a way that reflects the process of gender socialisation and a tacit acceptance of the patriarchal gendered hierarchy, yet at one and the same time they subvert the system in order to address their practical interests. The women interviewed in this study had regrouped in associations acting upon their rights to enter the labour force, in campaigns to end rape; and others seeking their rights towards political empowerment. At the same time, the bigger NGOs act in a more collaborative manner on political grounds to redefine and address women's subordination. Both types of organising have contributed to constructing Mauritian women as political subjects in multiple sites of representation where they are engaged in political acts.

Nevertheless, the interviews do not give rise to a claim that there is a common unified identity, not a mutual political agenda in every instance. The interviews provided in this Chapter reveal that individual experiences are cross-cutting with the different forms of social divides and identities, namely in terms of ethnicities, age, location and class. However, there is a delicate link in terms of shared gendered interests that stem from women's gendered positionings and experiences, but there are also varied opinions on gendered political concerns. Yet, it appears that there is a common concern in access to participation in national agenda setting so that women are able to articulate

their issues of interest, or contest the *status quo*. In Mauritius, given the diversity in the category of women, there is a readiness by women and it remains imperative that they are present in the political agenda setting so that they are able to guide the ‘politics of ideas’, especially those issues that remain to be addressed for various political and religious reasons. One such issue of concern that was raised in the Concluding Comments of the CEDAW Committee⁷¹⁸ relates to the Constitution and Muslim personal law. The Civil Status Act (sections 26 and 30) provides for the celebration of religious marriages with civil effect. Similarly, an interview with a woman representative of an NGO mentioned:

I am not against the religious doctrines, I consider myself religious, I practice my religion, but a re-interpretation of Sharia is needed so that women married under the Sharia Law do not lose their power...I think there is a sort of reticence to bring this issue up, but as Muslim women, not even feminist, but as women, married women or not, we can regroup, talk about our problems and start to talk with Government to say that there is something to be raised, let us not hide out of reprisal. Maybe not all of us will think that Sharia has challenges but we need to voice out concerns. This is for us, for our daughters and their daughters and their daughters-in-law. [WNGO26]⁷¹⁹

The interview shows that despite the fact that the Sharia Law remains a sensitive issue, and is not yet part of the present political agenda, there are “shared social perspectives”⁷²⁰ which become a starting point to initiate dialogue and formulate a shared understanding and give consideration to the gendered and intersectional experiences of women. The interview reveals that there is a latent potential to mobilise and act around shared interests that are articulated in a collective manner by women.

⁷¹⁸ CEDAW 2011, Concluding Comments of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW/C/MUS/CO/6-7, Available Online at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/co/CEDAW-C-MUS-CO-6-7.pdf>, Last Accessed May 2018

⁷¹⁹ Interview with Woman Representative of an NGO, held on 7 October 2013, Port Louis

⁷²⁰ Young, I.M., 2002, Inclusion and Democracy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pg. 137

Even in the absence of a feminist agenda, gendered experiences disaggregated by other divisions have provided women participants with informational benefits and acted as a platform for political agenda setting and enhancing vertical as well as horizontal substantive representation. Nevertheless, whilst a group perspective alone cannot be seen as a reflection of substantive representation, its quality remains improved through dialogue and interaction with the collective. Thus substantive representation is improved through both a diverse group of women and their interaction with representatives in parliamentary spaces at the higher levels of decision making, as one participant stated:

“...it is not because I am a woman, I mean physically, I mean biologically, that I know everything about women. I need to consult with my friends so that we agree on our agenda and how to address these issues together, even if we are affected differently...”[WNGO14]⁷²¹

⁷²¹ Interview with Woman Representative of a women’s association, Interview held on 3 October 2013, Port Louis

CONCLUSION

Research on women's representation has grown over recent years, with a focus on the causal link between descriptive and substantive representation. A number of research studies have argued that the descriptive representation of women (in terms of the numbers of women parliamentarians) in formal institutionalised political spaces is an important factor in making visible women's interests and achieving women's friendly policy outcomes and women's substantive representation⁷²². Moreover, women's substantive representation has been further measured against the goals of feminist interests. However, this link has become tenuous given other factors at play in light of homogeneity of women's interests, women's multiple identities, party politics and capacity of women members of parliament to directly influence policy agenda. This has led scholars to introduce the term "critical actors" and "critical acts" in examining women's substantive representation at a deeper micro-level to analyse who is contributing to making a difference, and the contexts in which these are rendered possible in different sites of representation; for example ,as reflected in the fact that effectiveness of gender quotas at the parliamentary level necessitates women's activism, in the same way that the effectiveness of a women's policy agency requires multifarious women's activism both in the formal and informal spheres.

⁷²² Wängnerud L., 2009, Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation, *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 4(12), pg. 51–69

Kittilson, Miki Caul. 2008. "Representing Women: The Adoption of Parental Leave in Comparative Perspective." *Journal of Politics* Vol.70(2)

Cowell-Myers, Kimberly and Langbein, Laura. 2009. "Linking Women's Descriptive and Substantive Representation in the United States." *Politics & Gender*, Vol.5(4), pg. 491-518.

This thesis has started off by arguing that whilst the descriptive representation of women in the formal political arena is vital, it is not, however, the only condition for women's substantive representation in terms of representing an array of women's interests. Hence, it has used and built up upon the existing literature to redefine the substantive representation of women by arguing that that descriptive representation is not necessarily *sine qua none* for women's substantive representation, and women's substantive representation further occurs in other sites where women exercise their sense of agency by performing different critical acts. It has thus argued that women's active political activism in autonomous non-institutional separate spheres are also essential, and has argued that when women's activism at the grass-root level converges with that of women in formal political spaces to form strategic alliances for significant change to occur in favour of women. Subsequently, this thesis has adopted newer conceptions of women's substantive representation by looking at other claims that are being addressed in other sites of power by actors at different levels of society; namely at State levels, in Structures of the State and at community/grass-roots levels, as well as the mechanisms of democracy that would enhance this process.

Based on these existing newer conceptions of substantive representation, the thesis has then has focused on the Republic of Mauritius, which makes for an interesting case due to the fact that no such related research on this topic has been undertaken therein. Existing literature in the area of women in politics in Mauritius has

converged towards the descriptive representation of women in formal institutions, gender quotas, leadership training, and factors explaining women's low descriptive representation. Other academic research has concentrated on the ageing aspect or strength of the conglomeration of women's associations and civil society activism in Mauritius. The link between descriptive and substantive representation had remained unaddressed, what constitutes women's issues of concern/interests or representative claims in the Mauritian context, as well as define how women's substantive representation is being effected at different levels as well as any channels of collaboration between different critical actors at the State and community levels in a pluri-ethnic society where women's intersectionalities define their subjectivities and issues of practical and strategic interest.

Using the theoretical framework described in detail in the first Chapter, a feminist methodology and phenomenology have been used as a political paradigm to look at ways how women have challenged the public and private divide. By adopting a feminist lens enhanced by an intersectional feminist framework and post-colonial feminist theory, the thesis has thus asserted that the personal is political and has redefined the public/private divide and of what was previously considered as being "political" in conventional scholastic literature. By redefining what is political, the project has then identified what is considered as women's interests, and how these claims have been formulated by critical actors through political consciousness, and are still being defined by women at the levels of the State and non-State levels. In so doing, the case study on Mauritius has explored the history of women's activism in Mauritius, and looks at the

tapestry of actions and mechanisms adopted by women both during the colonial and post-colonial period to address their practical needs. It has explored the early forms of women's organising in Mauritius, revealing that the women's movement in Mauritius has seen its early days since the colonisation period where women from various walks of life irrespective of their intersectionality were framing political claims in the non-institutional political space to address their immediate needs and practical gender interests. Early forms of agency related to eliminating child marriages and the dowry system and literacy programs. Whilst there were explicit claims such as the right to their sexual and reproductive health, to security of the person to campaigning for equal citizenship rights, to equal representation at the local government level, some other claims are being made in different sites of representation by women at the grass-roots level in the community based organisations, socio-religious and cultural groups and women's associations, amongst others.

As the thesis has progressed, whilst it is revealed that the concept of patriarchy is intricately engrained in the culture and translates into asymmetrical gendered roles in Mauritian society, the findings nevertheless reveal that women find ways to enter the public and private divides and act upon issues that put their motherhood, their roles as mothers and wives at stake by moving from a female consciousness to feminist political consciousness within a collective, further understood in terms of women's intersectionalities within that collective. At the same time, in a multi-ethnic society as Mauritius, it was seen that gendered interests are further framed in terms of intersectional identities. The issue of intersectionality has cropped up as a crucial

aspect of identity formation in Mauritius as revealed during fieldwork where the research process and methodology have been transformed by understanding intersectionality from a different standpoint⁷²³ within the specific social location⁷²⁴. It has been revealed that a politics of difference as a theoretical standpoint has been vital to encapsulate an inclusive view of women's positions acknowledging the substantive intersections of other categories of difference such as ethnicity, age, class⁷²⁵- hence revealing that discourses on gender are underpinned by a multi-layered dimension of social identity and social structure that in turn shapes gendered identity in Mauritius. This undertone of intersectionality is apparent in all interviews conducted, where the very first and last name, and appearance of an individual immediately resonates with connotations of markers of identity intersecting to shape the individuals experiences of inclusion and/or exclusion in political participation and representation⁷²⁶. Understanding subject positions within the framework of intersectionality has broadened the analysis on the ways in which social positions and group membership can overlap and subsequently change the experience of one's social and political identity. Interviews with participants revealed that the latter's identities⁷²⁷ were informed by their intersectionality, which is especially relevant in a social location that is informed by different categories of intersection such

⁷²³ Walker A., 2003, Methods, Theory and the Practice of Feminist Research: A Response to Janet Chafetz, . *Journal of Family Studies*, Vol. 25, pg. 990-994

⁷²⁴ The methodology section is guided using an intersectional approach, as posited by Shields S. A., 2008, Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective, *Sex Roles*, Vol. 59, pg. 309-311

⁷²⁵ Moraga C. & Anzaldúa G., 1981, *This Bridge called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Persephone:Watertown, MassachusettsHull G. T., Scott P. B. & Smith B. (eds.) 1982. *All the Women are White, all the Blacks are Men, but some of us are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, New York: Old Westbury.

Dill B. T., 1983, Race, Class and Gender: Prospects for an Inclusive Sisterhood, *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 9, pg. 131-150

⁷²⁶ Crenshaw K., 1989, Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics, *University of Chicago Legal Forum* Vol. 14, pg. 538-554

Crenshaw K., 1991, Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43(6), pg. 1241-1299

Crenshaw K. (ed.) 1992. *Whose Story Is It, Anyway? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill*, New York: Pantheon Books.

⁷²⁷ Identity as defined by Ashmore *et al.* referring to the social categories within which the individual claims membership to a category, including the personal meaning associated with those categories

Ashmore R. D., Deaux K. & McLaughlin-Volpe T., 2004, An Organizing Framework for Collective Identity: Articulation and Significance of Multidimensionality, *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 130, pg. 80-114

as race and class. Adopting an intersectionality approach to this case study on Mauritian women's participation in institutional and non-institutional politics has thus enriched analysis on forms, methods and actors in the representative process⁷²⁸. It has provided a framework to reveal that there is a divide between the number of women from ethnic minority groups participating in institutional politics and non-institutional politics. Women from the ethnic majority (Indo-Mauritius) seem to be more readily able to enter institutional politics, while women from the ethnic minority are more active in non-institutional politics or politics at the local governmental levels. Subsequently, the thesis has revealed that ethnic identities affect the way that individual subjects perform critical political acts. The findings further reveal that intersectionality has both served to develop women's solidarity both in the colonial period and in contemporary Mauritius. This solidarity has been illustrated by the coming together of women of different ethnicity to decriminalise abortion, however, at the same time, intersectionality divides women in terms of the way that they conceptualise their issues of concern (interests).

Similarly, in order to perform critical political acts to address their issues of interests, that is the issues that are of importance to them, the thesis has conceptualised those issues in terms of women's practical and strategic needs and has revealed that there is a difference in how the organs of the State formulate these

⁷²⁸ Shields S. A., 2008, Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective, *Sex Roles*, Vol. 59, pg. 309-311

Cole E., 2008, Coalitions as a Model for Intersectionality: From Practice to Theory, *Sex Roles*, Vol. 59, pg. 300

Collins P. H., 2000, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge New York. Furthermore, Mauritius being signatory to the intersectional analysis contained in the United Nations (UN) Beijing Platform for Action has also committed itself to : "to intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls who face multiple barriers to their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability or because they are indigenous people

interests, as well as how representatives of the State Structures (that is representatives of the women's policy structure- the Ministry of Gender Equality) and Gender Focal Points in sectoral Ministries frame and substantively address these claims. It has been revealed that there is a big disconnect between what the State and its structures see as being issues of interest to women, based on the contents of international human rights instruments to promote and protect women's rights; and what women at the community level see as being important to them. Essentially, women's interests in Mauritius have to be understood as being constituted in a historical and cultural manner, as well as being politically and discursively constructed according to their emerging needs and interests in present day Mauritius.

At the same time, the thesis has examined whether having female Ministers/ Members of Parliament and a gender sensitive quota at local government level actually work towards the substantive representation of female citizens, and what they claim are the pressing issues of interest to women and how they have been able to act on these issues and needs. This analysis is important in the Mauritian context to make sure that current legislative provision and policies being formulated and implemented by the State are based on valid assumptions of what women's needs are. Moreover, it also answers the question of whether having sustained effort to promote more women in Parliament/ formal politics is justified. Whilst the findings have found evidence that women Members of Parliament do bring up issues of pertinence to women, for example, in enacting the Protection from Domestic Violence Act and decriminalisation of abortion, their definitions of what constitute women's interest have diverged from those of women at

community levels and have been based on their own subjectivities and lived experiences. Moreover, the structures of the State has been found to be intrinsically gendered which in turn produce policies that are not always gender sensitive, and in turn contribute to structuring gendered relations. Concurrently, the findings reveal that in light of the differences amongst the categories of women in a pluri-ethnic society, there is a danger for women at Parliamentary level in representing and speaking for women as a homogenous category. Framing intersectional claims becomes challenging as women are further divided based on their ethnicity, class and socio-economic status and run the risk of inclusion and exclusion of certain groups of women from the minority ethnic category.

Concurrently, the institutional and operational framework of the Ministry of Gender Equality has been analysed to assess the effectiveness of the institutionalised State apparatus in substantively representing women's interests. Yet limitations of the Ministry were also identified. The thesis has considered the way in which the policy debate is rendered gendered sensitive, and in the process has revealed that the working definition of the terminology of "gender" remains clouded amongst Officers in the State structure and women at the grass-roots levels. The term has been attributed different meanings, ranging from equating gender to women, to women and men and to the social relations between women and men- at times, even as a synonym for "sex". Participants in most cases failed to link the term gender to its cultural meanings, which remains problematic in a plural society where women have defined themselves in terms of their intersectionalities- implying that gender equality is not being addressed in a

holistic manner. Moreover, a number of participants missed the link between how gender articulates and influences the rapport between women and men as exhibited in the differences and opportunities in access to political power, (whether at the institutional or non-institutional level), the gendered social roles, the dynamics of power between the two sexes, and how gender changes over time and is significantly different across cultures and ethnicities. The fact that participants saw gender as an attribute but missed the fact that gender is also a process (engendering or gendering), also remains challenging.

Another limitation of effectively enacting substantive representation also revolved around a failure to liaise effectively with women at the community levels to address their concerns at State levels. The same sentiments have been echoed by representatives of women's associations and NGOs who have stated that their relationship with the Ministry needs to be strengthened whilst some NGOs have mentioned that they would be in a better position to work on issues occurring on at the grass-roots level without the technical and financial assistance of the State. In this context, the issue of autonomy of NGOs linked to the funding they receive from Government remains significant to be able to lobby and advocate for women's practical and strategic interests. Similarly, whilst the technical capacity of the Gender Focal Points to mainstream gender into their respective sectoral policies has also been called into question, women in associations have mentioned that some Ministries do not have outreach programs for them to be able to bring up their issues to the State.

Given these dynamics at play where this is an over-dichotomisation between the organs of the State and community organisations, the thesis has thus tried to look into the potential of a collaborative effort between different entities. Looking at the case of decriminalisation of abortion, it was revealed that when agencies of the State and non-State actors work in close collaboration with each other, issues of concern to women are substantively represented at the highest level of decision-making. Thus, the case study revealed that both a top to bottom and a bottom-up approach remains critical for the promotion of activities for women's empowerment and gender equality.

The findings of the thesis have strong implications for citizenship. Women's descriptive and substantive representation within the Mauritian political remains a testimony of the state of democracy and good governance that prevails. It may be argued that any claim that women make for their representation, or towards conceptualising their needs and concerns are claims towards their citizenship and represent a form of political act and political engagement whether at the State level, within State structures or at the grass-roots level. The practice of active political citizenship could unite women beyond their identity politics through alliances and dialogue, exercising a sense of agency and sisterhood solidarity amidst their differences, or create strategic solidarities towards a common struggle⁷²⁹.

⁷²⁹ Lister R., 2003, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*, New York University:New York, pg. 82 Mohanty C. T., Russo A. & Torres L., 1991, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Indiana University Press:Bloomington, pg. 7 Dean J., 1997, *Feminism and the New Democracy: Resisting the Political*, Sage:London, pg. 17

There is still a lot of work to be done to address substantive representation in Mauritius. Based on interviews with women at the grass-roots level and those at the level of the State, there appears to be a general consensus on the need to consider an electoral reform and amending the Constitution so as ethnicity is no longer a formal factor in electoral processes. Whilst there is no formal discrimination in the Constitution that excludes women from entering institutional politics, in practice, both gender and ethnicity become at play in a manner in which women candidates are then discriminated against. To counteract the combined effect of gender and ethnicity, political parties have to be called upon to improve women's descriptive representation and build the capacity of both women and men within the party to lobby and advocate for women's rights and gender equality. It may be argued that the formation of cross party gender caucus with a close link to women at the grass-root level provides an opportunity to influence how policy is framed as well as how actors in institutional politics are made accountable for their actions. Hence, substantive representation in a multi-ethnic society is affected by the overall policy environment; the state of patriarchy; gendered characteristics of the State; the framing of interests both at the grass-roots and higher levels of decision making; the technical capacity and financial status of the women's policy agency; the way that gendered intersectional identities of women affect the way that they define their issues of interests and the way they participate in formal and informal politics; and the impact of the women's movement as well as its working relationship with the women's policy agency.

The thesis has hence paved the way for more in-depth research on analysing the strength of the women's movement in Mauritius, as well as engendering the electoral reform process, including the effectiveness of quotas. It has also provided the background information to analyse further at the role of the Parliamentary Gender Caucus and their ability to advocate for women's empowerment and gender equality. Concurrently, the role of local governments as being the critical link as a State agency between actors at the community level and at the State level may be explored further to enhance the process of substantive representation.

The role of international organisations in agenda setting needs to be addressed. The interviews with women at the community level have exposed a disjuncture in the way that women's interests are framed at the State level. In this context, the thesis can go further in stating that in Mauritius, the challenge of framing women's interests in line with international commitments such as those in CEDAW should not be made in a simplistic manner linked to essentialism and linked to the international agenda. Instead, conceptualising women's interests should take into consideration the complex realities of women's lives and their identities. Understanding this complex situation calls upon approaches that can place women as political actors with varying needs and interests. The key role and significance of global policy frameworks and regional commitments should service as guidelines or entry points to guide conceptualisation of women's interests, however, there should be recognition of the particular national context. Concurrently, the plurality of women's experiences should also be mediated through other organisations such as community organisations and the private sector as well.

In the same vein, women's empowerment has been identified as a crucial goal of successive Government, through the passing of legislations and implementation of programmes at the level of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare and provision of resources (even though limited). Women's empowerment is a critical component of substantive representation. However, as the discussions have revealed, there is a disconnect between what the government and development partner perceive to be the interests of women and that of the perception of women at the community level differs. There needs to be consensus regarding what women's empowerment in Mauritius means for the beneficiaries of programmes. If Governments and development partners are to be held accountable for women's empowerment, then there needs to be a systematic framework or indicators to measure and assess the effectiveness of policies and programmes and changes in women's empowerment, as perceived by women themselves. In the first chapter the discussion with respect to the empowerment paradigm has revealed that there is a broad consensus on women's empowerment as being an improvement in women's ability to make strategic life choices and the thesis has asserted that there needs to be a twin track approach to equality, both women's empowerment and gender equality. In Mauritius, significant progress has been made to achieve the Millenium Development Goals (Goal 3) (now Sustainable Development Goals), and arguments based on human rights have been used to put in place policies and programmes for women's empowerment. However, a measurement of empowerment and substantive representation should comprise gender sensitive indicators and also gender responsive

budgeting should be institutionalised to ensure that resources are sufficiently allocated for these programmes. Moreover, empowerment does not only operate at the micro level, but also at the macro level and multiple indicators should be used to assess the impact of policy efforts. Lastly, the pathway for women's empowerment and substantive representation through critical actors should be made through normative change and collective action.

This thesis has built on other the work of other scholars on women's political representation as well as descriptive and representative representation in a rigorous, precise way. Whilst the literature review has revealed that idea of substantive representation of women is not a new field amongst scholars, the significant original contribution emerges from looking at the gaps within the field of women in the political sphere in Mauritius solely based on the idea of descriptive representation. The literature review has established that there has been little research done in Mauritius on substantive representation, rather women's participation in politics has been limited to their descriptive representation. The thesis thus represents a novel interpretation of women's political engagement by looking at how women have undertaken substantive representation through non-institutional politics and how the different ways that representation is undertaken in Mauritius, namely, through the State Structure (Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, and through Gender Focal Points) and the gaps that need to be addressed for effective substantive representation to take place. It has therefore concluded that for effective substantive representation to take place, there needs to be a link between the higher levels of decision-making,

namely, representatives in Parliament, the State Structure and actors at the grass-roots level. Moreover, the thesis has mentioned that there needs to be critical actors, even if these are not women, who can push forward issues of concern to women at the highest levels of decision making. This thesis is not expected to lead to an immediate and fundamental paradigm shift in the field; however, it seeks to bring a new way of understanding of substantive representation in Mauritius. Moreover, the ideas contained in the thesis does not revolutionalise the existing discourse on substantive representation, but brings in an added-value in mainstreaming a new perspective in terms of adopting a feminist intersectional perspective to the analysis of the findings.

Lastly, the implications that arise from this thesis relates to policy, practice and avenues for further research. The research undertaken in Mauritius asserts that the process of substantive representation encompasses a complex set of actors both in institutional politics and non-state actors; a complex set of relations, institutions and gendered norms. Yet, the different approaches to substantive representation involve active performing of claims. These claims seek to address women's practical and strategic interests in light of their intersectionalities. Yet, these different approaches to performing representation remain molded by gendered institutional arrangements.

“Decision-making is a dialogical process, whereby all participants must be provided with opportunities to participate equitably, in order to make decisions in a reasoned manner”⁷³⁰

⁷³⁰ Gouthro P. A., 2007, Active and inclusive citizenship for women: democratic considerations for fostering lifelong education, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol. 26(2), pg. 144

APPENDICES

Figure 1: Map of Mauritius

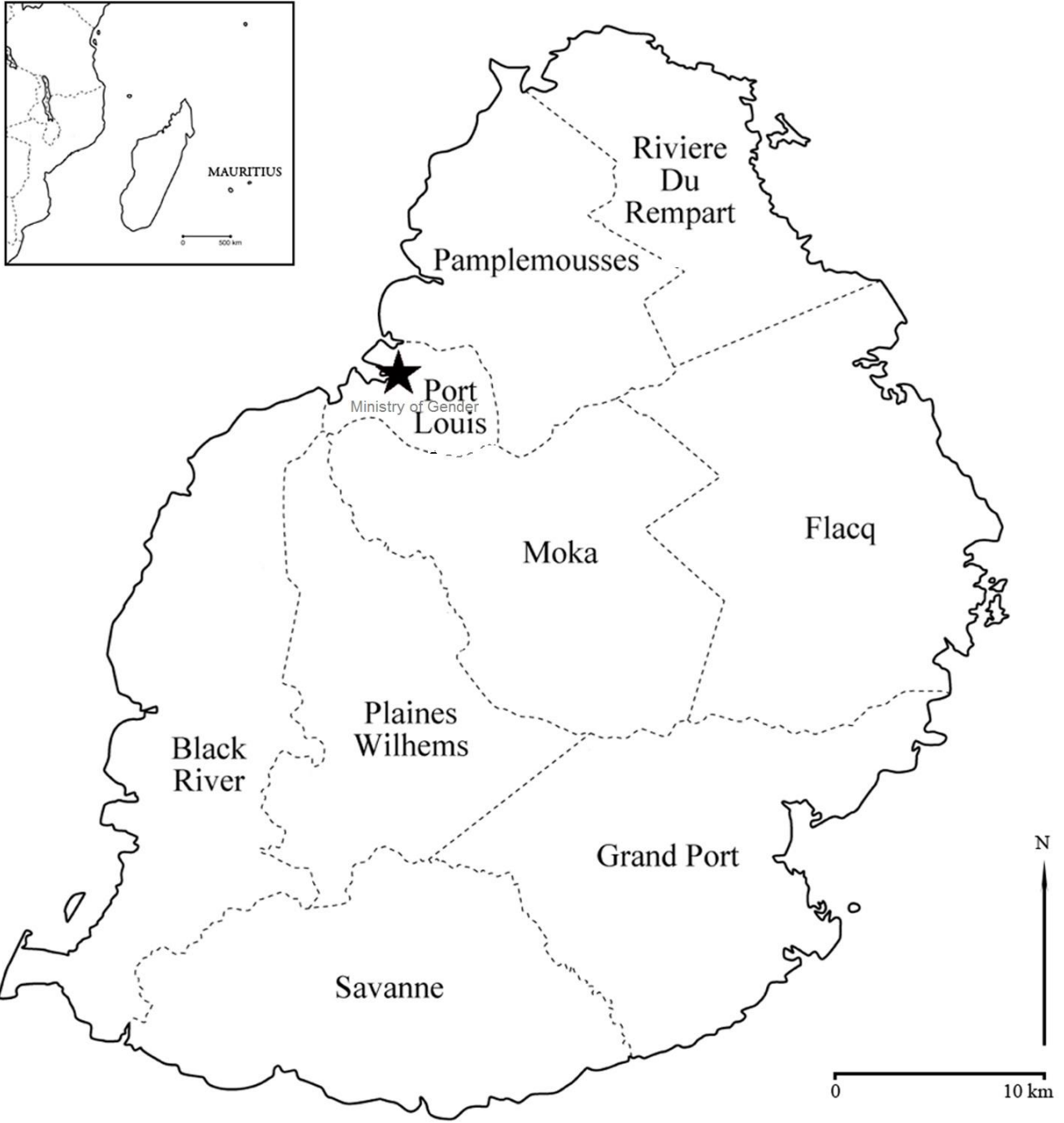


Table 1- Demographics of Participants (Confidentiality Agreement Respected)

Note: The women I interviewed throughout the research process were those who had been active in both institutional and non-institutional politics both in the past and present.

Level	Structure	Category and Number of Participants
State Level		
National Assembly	Parliament	4 Women members of Parliament
Local Government Level	Municipal Councils	5 Women Councillors
	District/ Village Councils	8 Women Councillors
Women's Policy Agency	Units of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare	1 Permanent Secretary 2 (Head and Coordinator) Planning Unit (1 Man) 2 (Head and Coordinator) Family Unit (1 Man) 1 (Head) Child Development Unit

Political Wing	Women's Political Wing of 3 Major Political Parties	3 (Head and Coordinators) Gender Unit (2 members from each) 6 members
Implementing arm of State Agency	National Women's Council National Women Entrepreneur Council	4 Project Officers and 2 Secretaries and 1 Advisor (1 man)
Gender Focal Points	Ministries and Departments	16 Gender Focal Points (8 administrative and 8 Technical Cadres) 4 Men (3 from the administrative and 3 from the technical cadres)
Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)	Women's Associations Women's Network Women's community Based Organisations	23 (Secretaries, Members including Focus Group Discussion) (1 man)

	Umbrella Organisation for NGOs	
Donor Agency	United Nations Development Programme	1 Senior Manager (Development)

Table 2–Elected Members at National Assembly Elections, 2000 - 2014

	2000		2005		2010		2014	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Men	66	94.3	58	82.9	56	81.2	62	88.6
Women	4	5.7	12	17.1	13	18.8	8	11.4
Total	70	100.0	70	100.0	69	100.0	70	100.0

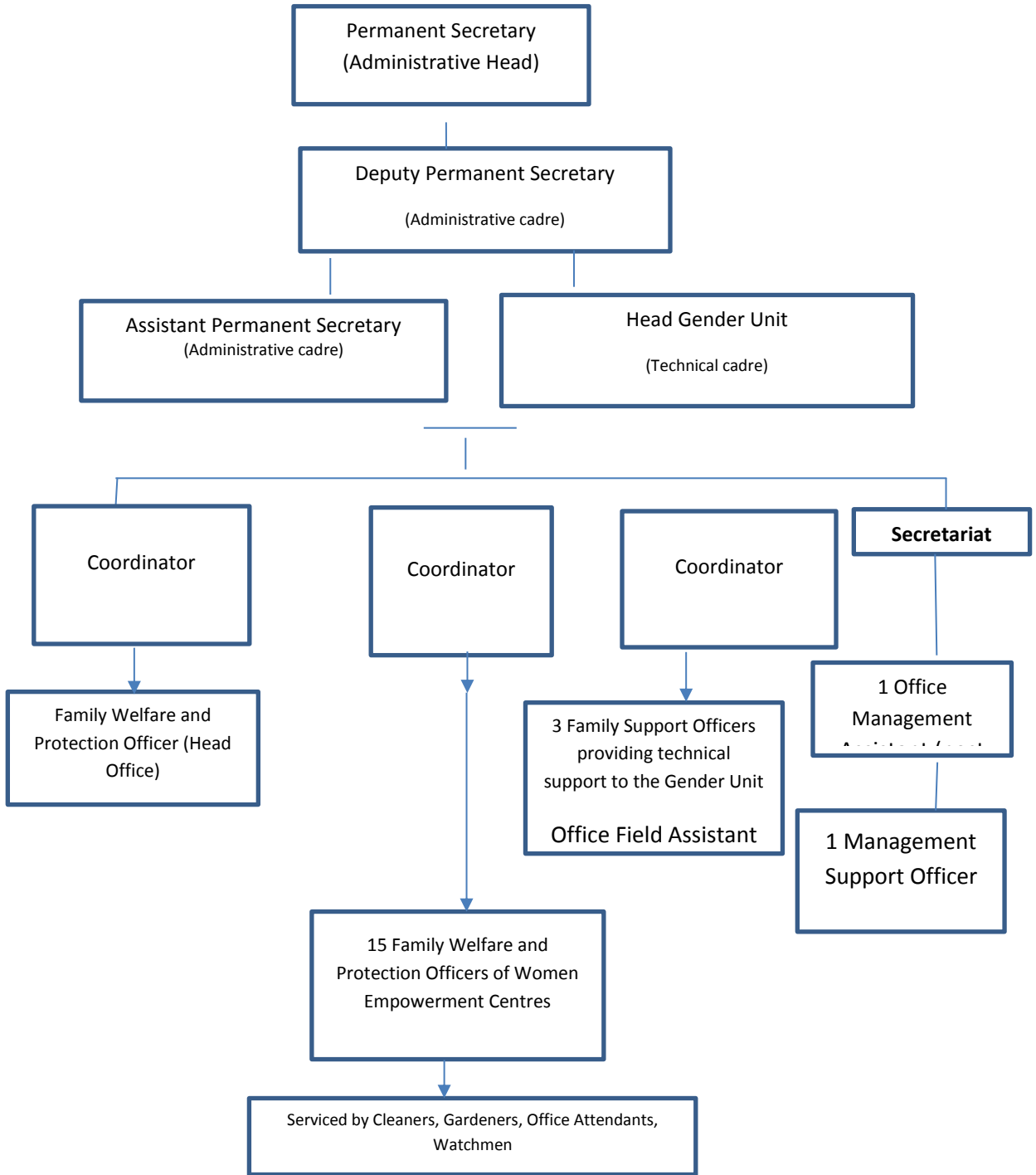
Table 3 – Senior position¹ in Government Services, 1999 - 2014

	1999		2004		2009		2014	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Men	252	80.8	216	63.5	334	65.4	331	54.7
Women	60	19.2	124	36.5	177	34.6	274	45.3
Total	312	100.0	340	100.0	511	100.0	605	100.0

Figure 2- State Agency Ministry of Gender Equality

The Gender Unit of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare remains the lead agency of the National Gender Machinery at country level. The Gender Unit is responsible to work towards the attainment of gender equality. This process entails a dual approach, i.e., women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming. More specifically, the Gender Unit oversees and coordinates the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies in all Ministries' policies and programmes; and implements policies/programmes to empower women socially, economically and political, thereby addressing "*de facto*" inequality and bridging all outstanding gender gaps. The organigram⁷³¹ of the Gender Unit is depicted as follows: -

⁷³¹ Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development, Family Welfare, 2017, Port Louis, Mauritius



Harmonisation of Policies in relation to Human Rights Instruments.

The Ministry of Gender seeks to harmonise Government policies with a number of International and Regional Human Rights Instruments that the State is party to⁷³². These include:

➤ **International Instruments**

- i. Outcome recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women
- ii. The Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW; 1984)
- iii. The Beijing Platform for Action (BFPA; 1995)
- iv. Outcome document of the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting
- v. The Sustainable Development Goals

➤ **Regional Instruments**

- i. African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1986)
- ii. The COMESA Gender Policy (2002)
- iii. Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (2003)
- iv. The African Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality (2004)
- v. The African Union Gender Policy (2009)
- vi. Revised SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2016)

⁷³² Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development, Family Welfare, 2017, Port Louis, Mauritius

General Interview Schedule

Formal Politics- Women in Local Government (District and Village Council levels)

Formal Politics- Political Representatives

- Name/Position/Role
- How long have you been in politics
 - At what level
 - Can you elaborate on your political background
 - Which political party are you a member of
 - What are your other responsibilities in the party
- What prompted you to be involved in politics
 - Are there any key moments that you can remember
- Have you been involved in other forms of political activism
 - Can you elaborate on these

Redefining the Boundary of the Political

- What according to you is considered as a political action

Conceptualising Women's "Interests"

- What do you understand to be an issue of interest to woman
 - How does it influence your personal life
 - How does it influence your political career
 - How do you act for/stand for women in Mauritius

- During your political campaigning towards election, what were the important issues on your political agenda?
 - Were these issues representative of your party's ideology
 - What other issues were taken up during your campaigning
 - How were these issues framed?
 - Were there any consultation with the other members of your party
 - Were there any consultation with members of the community/ your ward
 - Were these women/men
 - How do these issues relate to your personal beliefs

- Once elected, what were the issues of key importance that have been raised by you
 - What do you understand to be an issue of interest to women
 - Do you consider these issues to be of feminist relevance
 - Do you consider these issues to be of interest to women only
 - Are these issues related to achieving a gender equality agenda
 - Have these issues been given priority by your party
 - How have these issues been framed? (consultation with members of your party/women at community level, women in State structures)
 - Can you elaborate on how these issues are raised at the level of parliament
 - Do you believe you have the support of other members of your party in raising these issues
 - In your view, do you have the support of women members of parliament only when women/gender issues are being raised
 - What are the critical actors involved in enabling these issues to be raised at the level of parliament
 - What are the other critical actors involved in enabling these issues to be raised at the level of the State structures (sectoral ministries, local governmental level)
 - How do women in parliament appropriate an issue
 - Would you say that there needs to be collaboration of different stakeholders?
 - Who are these stakeholders

- What is the present level of collaboration between you, as a MP, and women in community based associations
- What is the present level of collaboration between you and members of NGOs
- Do you think there is a convergence of ideas to further women's issues in Mauritius
- Is there any disconnect between formal and informal politics
 - If so, what is the reason behind this disconnect
 - What, in your opinion, would need to be redressed to create partnership
 - Or a conducive environment for a collaboration between these two level of politics

Party ideology

- What is the party dynamics that enable a women's issue to be raised at the level of parliament
- Do you think that party dynamics affect how an issue of interest to women is framed and debated
- Do you think that ideological diversity creates different definitions of women's interests
- Do you think that the dynamics of the political environment enable how an issue of interest to women in framed and debated
- What are the other critical actors that make possible these issues to be framed/debated
- Is there any attitudinal difference between women and men MPs in what constitute a women's issue
 - What do you attribute these differences to
- Would you say that the presence of a sense of solidarity between women and men MPs enable a women's issue to be raised
- Once an issue of women's interest is raised, what is the expected outcome
 - Framing of legislation
 - Policy formulation
 - What is the level of consultation and collaboration between actors in parliament and
 - Women at the grass root level
 - Women in state structures
 - What enables this collaboration
 - What can be done to further this collaboration
- Can you give me an example of such consultation and collaboration, and the outcome
- In your view what are the present pertinent issues of women's interest that remain to be addressed, and at what level
- In your opinion, what are the emerging women's issues in contemporary Mauritian society
- How are these issues being taken up at these levels
 - Community
 - State
 - Parliament

Connection between women in parliament

- Do you think there is a coalition between women MPs in framing issues of interest to women
- In light of your experience, would you say that when a women's issue is being raised, there is a sense of comradery between women of different political parties

Representing Women

- Being a woman, would you say that you have a sense of personal identification to all women in Mauritius
 - Does your identity as a woman make you feel that you are connected to Mauritian women's needs/concerns/life experiences
 - What are the other factors that shape this connectedness?
 - What is the role of women's associations in this case
 - Do you feel like your men colleagues also feel this sense of connectedness
 - What influences this sense of connectedness ?
 - what is the role of women's associations in shaping this
- Would you say that women in parliament are expected to represent women
 - In your opinion, is there a conceptualization that political women are a group with shared experiences / common concerns
 - Are you expected to define a women's issue
 - What according to you are perceived as general women's concerns
 - In light of the multi-ethnicity of Mauritian society, would you say that there are specific concerns to the different categories of women in Mauritius
 - Are these being effectively raised at the level of parliament
 - By whom
 - How are these issues being brought up to the attention of women MPs

Institutional Ideology

- Are there exchange of ideas outside the formal party structures
 - How are these effected
 - By whom
 - Are there common grounds
 - What is the interplay of party difference in defining and framing these issues
 - Would you say there is a partisan's difference in the meaning accorded to women's issues

- amongst political women
 - Amongst political men
 - Would you say there is a partisan's difference in the meaning accorded to gender issues
 - amongst political women
 - amongst political men
- Would do say that the definition of a women's issue that changed over time
 - In what sense has this change occurred
 - Would you say that this is a result of the actions of women's associations and NGOs/increased feminist lobbying
 - Government direction
 - A broadened scope that includes issues with a gendered stake
 - International/regional pressure

Connection between descriptive and substantive representation

- According to you, does more women in parliament (across party line)
 - mean that more women's issues will be raised and debated
 - If yes/why
 - If no/why not
- Would you say that women's presence in parliament made it easier to challenge previously unchallenged norms, with the capability to succeed
- What are the implications of having more women in politics
 - If this is important, why/why not
 - Does it necessarily mean that women's presence will lead to infusion of feminist perspective in policy making
 - What are the factors that affect women MPs in representing women's interests

Intersecting identities

- Would you say that your identity as a woman, provides guidance to your party about women's issues
- In your opinion, do you think that being a member of a religious community imply that you have more affinity to a specific issue
- How are other issues brought to your attention

Would you say that your sense of commitment, connection and responsibility to women is shaped by your identity as woman

What are the other factors that shape this sense?

Ideological perspective

Gender consciousness

Connection to grass-root mobilization

Institutional environment

Role of women's associations

- Have women's associations/NGOs brought to light new issues of interest to women
- Were these issues considered as private
- How have been private issues been rendered "political"
- Would you say that women's associations shape gender consciousness of
 - Women MPs
 - Men MPs
 - Across the political spectrum

Priority to women's issues

- What is, according to you the level of priority given to women's issues relative to other concerns
- What are the factors that influences this level of priority
 - Personal commitment
 - Party support
 - Across party lines
 - Competing priorities
 - Are there any trade-offs
 - Influence of pervasive masculinist values
 - Extra-institutional pressure by whom?
 - How do you challenge these pressures
- What is the role of grass roots mobilization in this connection

Women's grass-root mobilization and institutional politics/the policy process

- Do you think that the actions of women at the grass root level help to support your case in representing an issue of women's interest
- Do you think that party unity on specific issues help to support your case in representing an issue of women's interest
 - Can you think of any such example

The Case Studies

The abortion debate

Mauritius recently made an amendment to the legislation pertaining to abortion. Whereas previously, abortion was considered as a criminal matter, the law now recognizes abortion as being legal in cases where it puts the life of a mother or the child at risk. Can you elaborate on

- How this matter was brought up at the level of parliament
- How did this become a unifying issue across party lines
- What contributed to a willingness to address this controversial issue
- What were the key actors involved in the different stages leading to policy deliberations
- What was the role of different NGOs/women's associations/external forces in successfully raising this issue
- Do you think that mass mobilization from different stakeholders contributed significantly in raising this particular issue

Signature of the SADC Gender and Development Protocol

- How this matter was brought up at the level of parliament
- What were the key actors involved in policy deliberations
- What was the role of different NGOs/women's associations in raising this issue
- What according to you would lead to Mauritius to sign the Protocol

Concluding Comments

- Are there any important issues that you would like to raise that have not been addressed in this interview

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