Introduction

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The articles in this special issue of Research Online publication titled '*Lame dan lame? La main dans la main? Hand in Hand?'* are drawn from presentations at the colloquium held at the University of Mauritius (UoM) on 13 September 2018. The colloquium itself was organised following discussions about the need to focus on the theme of *lame dan lame* adopted by the Mauritian government to mark its fifty years of independence from British rule and the spirit of a united Mauritian nation built made by walking hand in hand since 1968. This issue brings together articles by researchers from Australia, France and Mauritius who analyze the concept of *lame dan lame*, its challenges and opportunities across disciplinary fields of Linguistics, Education, Identity, Politics and History. The publication of this special issue expands on collaborative links built between academics at the Universities of Mauritius (UoM) and Wollongong (UOW) at the International Conference of the Mauritian Academic Diaspora (ICMAD) organized by UoM in February 2018 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Mauritian independence.

What does the concept of *lame dan lame* mean today? Has it remained 'lettre morte', empty rhetoric and wishful thinking or has it been translated into the reality? Have fifty years of independence from colonial rule resulted into a firmly united nation, which is truly multilingual and multicultural and not divided across ethnolinguistic lines? The famous Gowry brothers' original song 'Donn to lame, pran mo lame, lame dan lame ....', recorded in the aftermath of the race riots of January 1968 and sung in Kreol, invited Mauritians to reach out beyond their ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious differences to create a new nation and look towards the future hand in hand. Soogreeve and Bahal Gowry, who were well-known for singing in Hindi and Bhojpuri at cultural gatherings called 'gamat', turned to lyrics in Kreol mixed with a Bhojpuri beat (using instruments such as the harmonium, tabla and dholak) in this song to address the whole population. The shift to Kreol symbolising the cultural blending of Mauritius is significant in the Gowry brothers' attempt to inspire social cohesion and peace. The song was such a success that it became the brand of independence. It is indeed with a remix of this same song by a group of Mauritian artists that the government chose to celebrate its fiftieth independence day on 12 March 2018 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyoRKKBDPA0).

Beyond ideology of nation building and expressions of good sentiments, what can we say today about positions of withdrawal or openness? What forms can linguistic and cultural productions take when underpinned by an ideal of 'vivre-ensemble main dans la main'? Researchers during the study day explored and reflected upon a range of practices and representations, which have during half a century affected relations of partnership and/or competition in multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural Mauritius.

Mauritius may run the risk of losing what political scientist Miles (2000) refers to as 'language equilibrium' if language planning is not grounded in realism, as economic development, globalisation, ethnic tensions and political changes take their toll. For anthropologists such as Eisenlohr (2006), the state engineered policy of 'cultural citizenship' in Mauritius is based on the Indian ideology of language, culture and identity. Linguist Hookoomsing (2009) on the contrary argues that Mauritians of Indian descent have included European languages to their multilingualism to display multiple identities based on sharing the Creole language as well as identifying with a multicultural heritage. For linguist Asgarally (2015), Mauritius can be cited as an example of successful multilingualism for European nations since the majority of Mauritian children are trilingual (Kreol, English and French) by the end of their primary schooling. He sees a challenge for stakeholders in education and government in building a multilingual nation, where language would not be associated with ethnicity. In the same vein, anthropologists Eriksen and Ramtohul (2018: 10) point out that the Mauritian model of multiculturalism is founded on a 'politics of compromise' and that cultural and ideological paradoxes will have to be addressed if Mauritius wants to make the most of its human capital.

In this issue, Bissoonauth examines the linguistic paradox among young Mauritians in secondary education. Although Asian languages are not popular school subjects and their use is steadily declining, they nonetheless represent identity markers for Mauritians of Indian and Chinese descent who are proud of their multicultural heritage and display positive attitudes towards Kreol in the education system. Lefort's study of the sociolinguistic situation of Chinese languages reveals a decline in the ancestral languages such as Fukien and Cantonese. Since the Chinese community in Mauritius is not a homogenous one, she predicts a shift from Chinese heritage languages towards Kreol as well as Mandarin, influenced by migration from mainland China.

Jeanjean analyses the monolingual ideology, which has underpinned language policy, national memory and political discourse of successive governments in France since the French revolution. He raises the question of why a multilingual country such as Mauritius has not adopted its lingua franca, Kreol, as a medium of instruction and assessment in schools. Florigny partly provides the answer in

his paper by highlighting that discrimination and conflict have marred inter-ethnic and community relations in Mauritian society in the last thirty years. Since independence, the reforms advocated by various education reports have not resulted in long-term transformation because of political changes and social inequalities. His evaluation of the introduction of Kreol in primary schools has shown positive results on students' learning of languages, especially French.

Ahtoy's article in this issue describes the variety of French spoken in Mauritius resulting from language contact. The influences from Kreol, Asian languages and English have contributed to the development of a distinctive variety with its own idiosyncrasies or 'mauricianismes' embedded in the cultural fabric of Mauritian society. In his article, Oozeerally discusses tensions surrounding 'innovative' and traditional research methodologies facing scholars in the social sciences and humanities. He proposes an anarchist approach based on his research in pre-primary education to deal with social, cultural and epistemological complexities and paradoxes in education research in Mauritius.

The articles in this issue explore challenges to the concept of *lame dan lame* by crossing disciplinary and methodological boundaries to give an insight into cultural, linguistic, political and social underpinnings that characterise the Mauritian society. Although social change in Mauritius has been rapid in the 1980s and 1990s (Eriksen, 1998), Mauritians have been 'successful at managing complexity in diversity (MRC, 1999 quoted in Ramtohul and Eriksen, 2018: 9). Understanding complex negotiations between ethnic, linguistic and other social identities is not easy, not even for Mauritians themselves. Perhaps we might agree that achieving a subtle balance is due to what Miles (1999) calls 'the Mauritius enigma'? Whatever it is, the complex code of this enigma, built around an ideal of 'vivre ensemble main dans la main', will need to be passed on to future generations if Mauritians do not want to slide back into political and ethnic conflicts and violence of 1968 or 1999.

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