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# THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL, ECONOMICAL AND JURIDICAL CONTEXT ON IDENTIFICATIONS IN INDIAN GUJARATI “DIASPORA”. EXAMPLES FROM WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS AND FRANCE<sup>1</sup>

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What is “Indian diaspora”, “Gujarat diaspora”? Do people of this diaspora identify themselves as Indian or Gujarati people? Does Indian-ness exist?

Here are the issues we want to discuss, at a time when the Indian state is initiating a new policy towards people of Indian origin living outside of India. My focus will be on people of Indian origin (PIOs), and more precisely of Gujarati origin (PGOs), living in the western Indian Ocean: in Reunion Island, a French island, in Madagascar, which was a French colony until 1960, and also in France<sup>2</sup>. These people have been living outside India for several generations and most of them have now obtained another nationality<sup>3</sup>.

## ***Diaspora and identity from an anthropological perspective***

From an anthropological perspective, it is necessary to acknowledge that the two words “diaspora” and “identity” are constantly mixed up and used in both popular and scientific circles, to describe a social category or an analytical category.

I would like to highlight first that the term “Indian diaspora” has only been in use since 1976 (according to Leclerc 2004<sup>4</sup>). “*Diaspore*”, a Greek word meaning “dispersion”, was first used to describe the dispersion of Jews, before being applied, in the late 1960’s, to other religious groups, followed by ethnic groups such as Armenians. In the 1990’s, the number of studies about « diasporas » increased (Dufoix 1999) and encompassed migration networks such as the “African diaspora” and now the “Indian diaspora”<sup>5</sup>. As a common noun, the word has been secularised and therefore has a wider definition than initially intended.

In a 1994 edition of a French dictionary ‘diaspora’ is defined as “all the dispersed members of a community” (Dufoix 2002). English dictionaries defined the word earlier as being: “dispersion (as of a people of common national origin or of common beliefs), and: “exile, scattering, migration, that is, the process of dispersion”. The definition of the word also encompasses the people dispersing themselves: the people of one country dispersed into others countries (Webster Dictionary 1961 quoted by Dufoix 2002). As we can see, the word defines a process, a physical space [area], a population, and/or a condition.

The review entitled “Diaspora” created in 1991 contributed to the spread of the word in social sciences. It retains the definition given by Walter Connor for diaspora: “the part of a people living outside the homeland”, a definition which emphasizes the dispersed people as opposed to the action of dispersing. As a category, the term diaspora apply to communities of expatriated minorities whose members share precise characteristics<sup>6</sup> : dispersion from a centre to several places; collective memory

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<sup>1</sup> International Conference on “Global Gujarat and its Diaspora” (January 17-19, 2008), Patan University.

<sup>2</sup> Their regional network extended to Mauritius Island, and to East and South Africa.

<sup>3</sup> They are distinct from Non Resident Indians (NRIs) which are also part of Indian diaspora.

<sup>4</sup> Leclerc 2004, quoting Baumann (2001) state that the first use of the term has been made in 1976, in the conclusion of an article by A. Bharati entitled « « Tolérance et rigueur idéologique comme paradigme des expatriés hindous en Afrique de l’Est (Tolerance and Ideological Rigor as Paradigms of Hindu and East African expatriated in East Africa) », and that the use of the word itself has not been explicitly defined.

<sup>5</sup> The Hight Committee for Indian Diaspora was created by the Indian government in 2000.

<sup>6</sup> W. Safran quoted by Dufoix 2002; Mishra 2006. This is exactly the definition attributed to the Jewish diaspora.

of homeland; unwelcome reception by the incumbent society; goal of returning to an idealized homeland; belief in a necessary collective engagement to maintain relations with homeland .

The word “identity” will quickly appear in this debate. It has a philosophical and psychoanalytic origin, but since the 1960’s, its usage spread in social sciences and public speech, so that it is now recognized as a pure “cliché” without real content or with contradictory meanings. Rogers Brubaker and *al.* (2001) suggested that the word identity, utilised either in a hard essentialist meaning of “enduring permanency”, or in a soft meaning of “negotiated construction”, should be replaced by other terms, the first of which should be “identification”.

The recent introduction by the Indian state of a set of identification documents to some people living outside India and not to others, assigning them into defined categories (namely, Person of Indian Origin (PIO), or Indian Citizen Overseas (ICO), is a good illustration of the power of states to identify and define “who is who”. This power is the heart of ‘governmentality’ (as a Foucault’s concept). The colonial state and colonial society had used the same process for official papers; identifying PIOs under a variety of denominations and granting them their relevant categorisation accordingly.

A second term can replace “identity”: self-understanding, as a situated subjectivity, linked to the “practical sense” of P. Bourdieu. It means the representation, both intellectual and affective, that one has of oneself and of the social world in which one interacts. Self-understanding, which may be tacit, and fit more or less with external categorisations, takes the form of a feeling of belonging to a specific and limited group. One can question individual interpretations of the boundaries defining the external groups.

Brubaker and *al.* suggests that a third set of terms may usefully replace “identity”: that is “commonality” (to share a common attribute), and “connectedness” (concerning links attaching people), the combination of these two concepts producing “groupness”, or “catnet”, for “category” and “network”, catness and netness<sup>7</sup>. Further to this, Brubaker highlighted the feeling of common belonging as a very important element, stressing that it depends on how the events are interpreted and therefore coded into the public lexicon. I think this is true for the Muslim groups of PIOs, who regularly hear such normative discourses about themselves when they attend weekly religious rituals.

### ***The PIOs in Madagascar and Reunion Island***

I will try to present here how the Indian Gujarat diaspora in Madagascar and Reunion Island has been identified and categorized, and how they understand and present themselves inside and outside their group.

It is important to note that most of the PIOs living in Reunion Island, a French overseas district, are eligible to the new Indian citizenship law, and that a large part of those living in Madagascar are not.

#### **Characteristics**

Compared to other groups in the Indian diaspora, the Gujarati diaspora of which I will speak about presents several characteristics:

Its members are PIOs and not NRIs. They left British India long before independency and, for Muslim ones, before the creation of Pakistan.

But they are not part of the “Girmit” diaspora (descending from indentured labourers of the 19th century)<sup>8</sup>, which is also present in Reunion Island with more than 200,000 persons. As they came freely, the Gujarati Muslims could build mosques, while the Girmit Muslims (who accounted for 10% of the population of Girmits) could not<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Brubaker and *al. ibid.*, quoting C. Tilly

<sup>8</sup> Charma and *al.* 2006, Introduction, p. xi

<sup>9</sup> Most of them were converted back to Hinduism in which they introduced Islamic features, as seen in the Nargoulan ritual (see C. Barat, 1989).

Another characteristic is that they followed two routes, one by the East-African coast and Zanzibar, arriving mainly at Madagascar, the other by Mauritius island, arriving at Reunion Island.

At the time the Indians arrived en masse at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Madagascar and Reunion Island were both French colonies: one big and one small. Madagascar was, in some ways, more prosperous than Reunion Island, but in 1946, the Reunion Island colony was upgraded to the status of a French overseas department), and all inhabitants became or could become full citizens of France. The Malagasy colony became an independent state in 1960, and people of Indian origin had to choose between several citizenships: Malagasy, French, Indian or Pakistani.

Successive political crises in Madagascar caused several waves of departure of PIOs towards Reunion Island and France: in 1972, then in the 1990's and 2000's.

### Composition and categorization

The Gujarat diaspora, which accounts for 20,000 to 25,000 people in Reunion Island (3% of the population), and for 20,000 in Madagascar (0,13% of the population), is composed of five socio-religious groups, four of which are Muslim :

In Reunion Island arrived one group of Sunni Muslims, mainly originating from Surat district, which first referred to themselves as “sunni surti vohra”. But in the little French colony, they were categorized as Muslims and thus confused with Arabs, so they were called “Z’arabes”, a local pronunciation for “Arabs”. Some of them also came from Broach district and were called Baissabs inside the group. The Sunni Muslims Gujarati arrived in the 1870s and obtained in 1898 the authorization to construct a mosque in the main town, which was completed in 1905<sup>10</sup>. Two other migration waves occurred from 1910 to 1935, and after 1946 when the colony became a fully fledged French department.

They were for a long time the only Gujarati groups in Reunion Island, before Shiite Gujarati established in Madagascar joined them more recently.

I do not speak about the Hindu Tamil (also called Malbars) from south India who arrived in Reunion Island as indentured labourers between 1848 and 1885 (Weber, 2006)<sup>11</sup>, or those who came freely through Mauritius, like the jewellers of the *jati* Pather or Tattan (see J. R. Ramsamy, 1999). Zarabs do not want to be compared with indentured labourers, since they came freely, and became shopkeepers and merchants in Reunion Island although most of them were peasants in India. Muslims know where they come from, while Tamil did not have any memory of their past in India.

PIOs are also numerous in two others overseas French departments, Guadeloupe and Martinique in Caribbean sea, where their ancestors were brought as indentured labourers in the 1850s. In France, most of the 60,000 people forming the Indian diaspora are descendants of indentured labourers. There are also 6,000 NRIs<sup>12</sup>.

Indians arrived in Madagascar following merchant networks shared with Arabs, and we have historical proof of their presence as early as the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They became permanently established at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and they brought wives and families at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with French colonisation.

Muslim and Hindu Indians were called Karanas and Banyans by Malagasy people. They appear in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Malagasy archives as “The Association of Muslims” (*fikambanan'ny Mahomedana*) (Blanchy 1995:76). The French colonials identified them as Asian, Muslims or Hindu, and as British subjects, all good reasons to suspect them of some disloyalty.

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<sup>10</sup> In Mauritius island, a first gujarati Parsee merchant seems to have come to Mauritius at the time of the British capture in 1810. The historian Kader Calla found in his papers that he acknowledged a boy born in June 1812 from a Creole woman from Reunion island as his son. Cader Kalla : The Gujarati Merchants in Mauritius C. 1850-1900, 10th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia, Singapore, 1986 (<http://www.barbodhan.org.uk/>). I thanks Roucaya Safla, librarian of Indian Origin in Reunion Island, for giving me this reference. The author is from Barbodhan.

<sup>11</sup> A vast majority originated from the five French trading posts, from where recruitment occurred : Pondichéry, Karikal, Mahé, Yanaon et Chandernagor.

<sup>12</sup> Indian Embassy website, 2007.

Sunni Indians in Madagascar refer to themselves according to their geographic origin, Surti, Sindhi or Kutchi, or to their ancient *jati* (work group) in India, such as Sunni « *khumbar* » who were Hindu potters before becoming Muslims.

Three groups of Shiite Muslims are mainly established in Madagascar, and are now establishing themselves in Reunion Island:

Bohras Daoodi, « Ismaili » or ‘seven-imams Shiites’,

Khodja Ismaili, followers of Aga Khan, also ‘seven-imams Shiites’, with differing opinions regarding the succession of representative imams;

Khodja ithna asheri, ‘twelve-imams Shiites’.

Indians of Hindu religion also came to Madagascar, and are called Banyans. Most of them belong to the Wania caste of traders<sup>13</sup>, other are Soni jewellers, and some are of other castes, from Brahmins to the lower Motchi (shoemakers) (see Blanchy 1995: 242-3). Few of them came to Reunion Island for business, especially jewellers, in the last decade. From Madagascar, these Gujarati began to settle in France from 1973.

## Links with India

These groups have very different links with Gujarat and Gujarati culture, given the juridical, political and historical context of their lives, which determine for each person or family different course of action. After the long distance relations of the first migrants travelling by boat, and the years of independence from ancient colonies, who set national identities and severed some links, air travel has facilitated new relations for some PIOs in the 1950s.

In Reunion Island, Zarabs maintained personal links with their home village and began re-enforcing them by a formal process with the creation of village association (the first one in 1945). In Madagascar the Shiite PIOs, seven-imams or twelve-imams Shiites, Bohra or Khodja, have only rarely maintained ties with their original town or village.

In Reunion Island, the PIO’s social and political integration is now complete, but they do not speak Gujarati in their every day life anymore and suffer this important loss. In comparison, in Madagascar, most of the Shiites maintained the use of the Gujarati language, but they lack a defined position in the society, and ultimately some relocate to Reunion Island.

The Bohras have closer links with Gujarat due to their religious centre in Surat (and Mumbai close by). It is not the case for the two other Shiite groups (Khodja). From the 1960’s, Khodja Aga Khani religious centre relocated from Mumbai in India to Karachi in Pakistan (Boivin 1997).

The tombs of the Shiite imams scattered between Iran, Iraq, Syria and Egypt form religious centres and remains points of pilgrimage for the three groups: seven-imams Bohras, seven-imams Khodjas and twelve-imams Khodjas (Blanchy 1995, 2001, forthcoming 2008).

Linguistic practices and links with the homeland are dependant on the success of local integration, which is much determined by other criteria such as citizenship and nationality.

## Nationalities

PIOs living in Reunion Island are French by descent or by the place of their birth.

In Madagascar, PIOs are very few compared to the total population, but very visible in commercial and industrial life. Malagasy citizenship is not often awarded to PIOs, to avoid economic consequences such as effects on real estate; only 1,000 PIOs were granted citizenship at independence.

Meanwhile about 7,000 PIOs from Madagascar have Indian citizenship; they are Hindu or Bohras, who continued to maintain relations with India.

When India became independent and Pakistan was created, the Pakistani nationality was offered to Muslims of the Indian Diaspora; many of twelve-imams Khodja took it, although at the time most of them had never even been to Pakistan.

French citizenship law changed many times during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and can be obtained if certain conditions of residence are met. About 5,000 PIOs have French citizenship, particularly

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<sup>13</sup> The word ‘banyan’ is derived from ‘wania’ and is used in a general sense.

twelve-imams and seven-imams Khodja. Due to visa limitations, only French PIOs can easily establish in Reunion Island in order to escape political and economical insecurity in Madagascar.

Lastly, less than 200 PIOs took up British citizenship.

About 5,000 PIOs in Madagascar are without citizenship, especially in rural areas, creating a difficult juridical situation. The new Indian citizenship laws give them no hope as Madagascar is not among the nominated countries.

The afore mentioned PIO card valid for a period of fifteen years, created in 2002, is said to answer to “the sentiments of persons of Indian origin to be closer to their original country and to reinforce their emotional bonds.../... Besides making their journey back to their roots simpler, easier and smoother, this Scheme entitles the PIOs to a wide range of economic, financial, educational and cultural benefits”<sup>14</sup>. It is valid for PIOs up to the fourth generation (great grand parents) settled throughout the world except in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Now this rule set aside numerous twelve-imams Khodja in Madagascar had to take up Pakistan citizenship, the only one offered to them at the time<sup>15</sup>. For those who hold it, the PIO card facilitates business and investment in India. About 150 people are said to have it in Reunion Island.

Since 2004, PIOs residing in 16 countries are eligible for the status of Indian Citizenship Overseas or ICO (Citizenship Amendment Act, 2003), which is valid for life<sup>16</sup>: this “Overseas Citizenship” is not a full citizenship of India (no Right to Vote, to hold Constitutional Offices, nor appointment to Public Services), so it does not amount to dual citizenship.

## ***Constructing diaspora: discourses, facts and feelings***

The International network calle GOPIO (Global Organization of People of Indian Origin) acts as a 'voice' of the Indian diaspora to the world, and give in its newsletter the virtual image of a worldwide village for a worldwide community, the NRIs and PIOs, with emphasis on those Indian living in the USA. Some Indians from Madagascar and Reunion Island appear in 2007 in a book detailing biographies of successful businessmen or charismatic figures, published by K. Sital, a member of GOPIO. In this book entitled “100 Global Indian Entrepreneurs and Achievers”, besides personalities such as Lakshmi Mittal, are quoted the Hindus jewellers Krishna Khalidas and Anil Pala, from Rajkot origin, and Muslim businessmen Ylias Akbaraly and Asgar Barday; all of them established first in Madagascar.

GOPIO, using NRIs and PIOs networks, followed the calendar of the ‘Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2007’ event to include session to discuss: “Identity Preservation & Adoption of New Values in Pluralistic Societies”.

Many PIOs from Madagascar and Reunion Island were drawn by the inaugural Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention, but some came back very disappointed by the level of control exerted by the American contingent and their financial power. The French speaking PIOs felt marginalised. The Hindu PIOs from both Reunion Island and Madagascar showed the most interest in this annual meeting, registering their Hindu Samaj (or association) on the network’s mailing list

In Reunion Island, which is a « European ultra-peripheral region » and a member of Indian Ocean Rib Association and Indian Ocean Commission, PIO businessmen would like to play an economic role by means of these new links.

An Encyclopaedia of the Indian Diaspora was published in 2007 by B. V. Lal, (I quote) “charting growth of the Indian Diaspora and consolidating their achievements and contributions to global culture, business and arts”<sup>17</sup>. The book (I quote again) “surveys the worldwide spread of the

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<sup>14</sup> Official India State information, <http://www.gopio.net>

<sup>15</sup> With French intercession when violent crises occurred in Madagascar, as in 1982.

<sup>16</sup> 1. Australia , 2. Canada , 3. Finland , 4. France , 5. Greece , 6. Ireland , 7. Israel , 8. Italy , 9. Netherlands , 10. New Zealand , 11. Portugal , 12. Republic of Cyprus ,13. Sweden, 14. Switzerland, 15. United Kingdom; 16. United States of America.

<sup>17</sup> Source : [http://www.gopio.net/news\\_113006.htm](http://www.gopio.net/news_113006.htm)

Indian communities that set out to maintain their 'Indian-ness' in a range of ways - through music, language, religion and dress"<sup>18</sup>.

"Indianness", in French and in its plural form (Indianités), is the name of a poetry book published in Reunion Island by the Gujarati PIO Idriss Issop Banyan. But what is indianness?

Martin Baumann stressed that the word diaspora conceptualised « a certain type of consciousness » and encompassed « identificational references » (ibid.: 326). He sees two relational facts constitutive of a diaspora: « a perpetual recollecting identification with a fictitious or far away existent geographic territory, and its cultural-religious traditions ».

Various degrees of integration, as observed in Madagascar, Reunion Island and France, provide illustrations of a consciousness of being Indian or Gujarati; of belonging to a diaspora; of being linked with a homeland; and of demonstrating objective conditions allowing these relations to exist.

The holders of Indian citizenship, mainly Hindu or Bohras, feel strong links with their homeland; Hindu think to the whole country, while Bohras look more to Gujarat, where is their religious centre. The Hindu of Madagascar (as few as 2,000 people representing 10% of the PIOs) – have never severed ties with India and often go to their Embassy for cultural events. They believe that other holders of Indian citizenship, especially the Bhoras, identify themselves more with their religious network than with the Indian national community as a whole.

For French citizens living in a French territory, the feeling of their French citizenship is dominant even for the very few holding an ICO card. Some of them reveal that they possess this card as if it were a confession, although they do not hide their feelings of happiness to have got it. This demonstrates that for this Muslim group, French identification is an ongoing process and that they are fearful of betraying it by identifying again to their roots. As French Muslims they feel they had and still have to struggle to preserve some particularism.

The trip "back" to India is made on the pretext of tourism, business, or even humanitarian action. There is a mixed feeling of removal, caused by the loss the language, and closeness, given the familial history<sup>19</sup>.

Muslim PIOs were rejected by the Indian homeland after independence. They are not warmly welcomed in Madagascar although they have been living there for a long time: they are in fact maintained in categories identifying them as foreigners. Speaking Gujarati in everyday life makes them feel Gujarati, but they have difficulties travelling to India and Gujarat. In Madagascar, PIOs have no real social network except for their religious affiliations, which are their first "identification reference". Some of them try to act as one single group offering social help to Malagasy people, with the "Association Karana Malagasy" (AKM).

In France, especially among the young highly educated PIOs, the religious network is less important than "indianness" and the feeling of belonging to the Gujarat Diaspora. This is evident by the creation of an association called NAGIN (Nouvelle Amicale Gujarati Intercommunautaire), a little group founded by intellectuals, and highlighting links between Gujarati PIOs irrespective of their religion<sup>20</sup>. Liberated from the constraints associated with their specific social position in Madagascar and Reunion Island as a prominent minority group (merchants and Muslims), PIOs in France are interested in Indian cultural events, outside of religious frontiers (as shown by « Club-Gujarat », an academic conference network). Also of interest is the history of familial migration, which they realize has not yet been collected and written, and so they try to discover India and Gujarat directly from their social position, via tourism and humanitarian help - a modern and "universal" language (Appadurai 1996).

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Criteria of distance and proximity (Saint-Blancat 1995).

<sup>20</sup> NAGIN have some members in Madagascar too.

## ***Identifying oneself and others: categorisation and agency***

PIOs in Madagascar and Reunion Island adapted to external categorisations to develop specific feelings of belonging to a group and transmitting values and practices of 'Indianness', mainly through language, religion, dress, food, cinema and music.

Categorisations made by states (citizenship) combine to work with self-understanding of groups, as expressed by the naming of their associations.

In Madagascar, PIOs are not the first nor the only Muslims in the country, and associations are named after groups such as those quoted above (Bohras, Khodjas etc... see annexe at the end), except rare projects like AKM. Facing tacit or expressed hostility from Malagasy people, who do not understand their mercantile ethos and are afraid by their economical success, each group is closed and endogamic, opposed to external marriage. Bohras matrimonial rules became stricter under the last Da'i's authority. The matrimonial laws for Hindus are such that they have to go to India to marry their children with the help of specialised Hindu offices (especially to Bangalore). The regional matrimonial network of seven-imams and twelve-imams Khodja spreads through East Africa, as far as Pakistan's large cities. The collective withdrawal and a lower education level have helped to maintain the use of Gujarati language, along with Malagasy and French (but with a poor knowledge of English). Rich Hindus and Bohras used to go regularly to India, but many Khodja due to their Pakistani citizenship cannot and therefore have no links. The paradox is that they are considered as preserving more of their Indianness, while they are not allowed to go to India.

The history of Sunni associations in Reunion Island demonstrates how identifications have changed. In St Denis, the main town, the first association called "Association Islam Surti Sounatte Djamatte" was founded in 1915 by people dominantly "originating from Surat district". After 1970, the status precise: "originating from Surat town, and from towns and villages of Ankleswar district" to avoid participation of Baïssabs in the mosque management<sup>21</sup>. In 1980, this conflict was resolved and the association was called Islam Sounatte Djamate" without any more geographical indication.

In St Pierre, the second largest city<sup>22</sup> (see Ismael-Daoudjee, 2002), geographic and socio-religious groups' boundaries explain the first association's name, "Surti Sounnie Mouslim Vohra Jamaate", founded in 1961. The word Vohra appeared in the 1950s for internal strategic reasons (see above). According to A. Jahangir Chojoo (1997)<sup>23</sup>, the Surti Vohras live in 114 villages in Surat and Bulsar districts, in the south of Narmada river, Broach being situated in the north<sup>24</sup>. In 1989, the association became "St Pierre Sunni Muslim Association" ("Association des musulmans sunnites de St Pierre").

The second association called St Pierre Islamic Sunni Association ("Association islamique sunnite de St Pierre") was created to manage the broad issues related to annual religious celebrations. The Islamic teachers or Ulema founded A third association was founded in 1990 : the Reunion Islamic Centre (« Centre Islamique de la Réunion »). A branch of Tabligh Djamaate which is present in Reunion Island has no official registration<sup>25</sup>.

Parallel to the groups showing Islamic reformist tendencies, the younger generation have founded non-religious associations: the football club "Jeunesse Musulmane du Sud" in the 1950's and the "Olympique Gymnase Club du Sud" in 1966. Recently, in 1996, the association "Info Jeunes" opened to all youth, even non Muslims, for cultural, intellectual and sporting activities. In 2000, the

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<sup>21</sup> Surti and Baïssabs were opposed by conflict since the 1930s for religious and perhaps socio-political reasons. They follow respectively deobandi and barelwi religious schools, which were connected in India with social criteria (Bourget-Mourregot, 2008; M. Gaborieau, oral communication).

<sup>22</sup> The St Pierre mosque was built in 1913 on a land bought in 1905. It has been renovated in 1937 and 1965, and then replaced by a new mosque in 1975.

<sup>23</sup> I thank Roucaya Safla for giving me this reference. The author is from Mauritius Island.

<sup>24</sup> A. Jahangir Chojoo quote the names of Sunni Indians' caste or sect origin in Mauritius, from where they came to Reunion: Cutchi Memans, Hallaye Memans, Sunni Sourati Vohras. Among the Sunni Vohras in Gujarat were also Patani Vohras, Kadival Vohras, Charotar Vohras.

<sup>25</sup> Missionary conservative movement (see Gaborieau 1998) targeting women and operating with home based gathering in Reunion (Bourget-Mourregot 2008).



association « Jeunes du centre-ville RUN-Muslim » declared « to believe in the bringing together of people, cultures and religions », with the aim of transcending the religious barriers that adults have strongly fixed. These barriers are tightly held by the elders, as the Islam introduced by them to Reunion Island is their distinctiveness, as marked by the name given to them: “Zarab”.

The modern translation of Zarabs, ‘Indo-Muslims’, maintain this identification, and they are known, along with the Ismaili Shiites coming from Madagascar, as one group under the name of Reunion Muslim Association (“Association Musulmane de la Réunion”).

A third type of self-understanding, which concerns all generations, is expressed by home village associations, such as « Bourbon Kholvad Anjuman Islam » (BKAI)<sup>26</sup>. Founded in 1945 (before Indian independence) by Muslim PIOs coming from this village, its goal was to help those still living in the home village<sup>27</sup>.

The paradox for these French PIOs, who lost their Gujarati language and acquired modern occidental citizen rights and social welfare, is that their removal from India now allows them to return and have an impact. Due to their exposure to juridical, political and economic fields, they are able to organise humanitarian help to the benefit of the extended family network (for example: assistance to the elderly and disabled, and education for children, by the way of medersa and public schools). This helps them in fulfilling a remembrance obligation to their ancestors who once lived like the villagers today – and to Islamic rules. For its 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, the association published a book with text, photos and testimonies. The authors introduced themselves as “Kholvadian”, even as the “Kholvad diaspora”, as they were linked with other Kholvadians in South Africa, the UK and Canada. They showed how the action was continued over three generations, how professionals managed to get necessary resources to help Kholvad; how some Kholvadians became successful in Reunion Island as civil servants (a consequence of their full French citizenship), or as « philanthropic » businessmen. The book also related the emotional experience of going « back to the roots » as told by travellers to their « homeland ». Quotations from the poetry book “Indianités” written by a Kholvadian shows, at its best, the affective part of this self-representation.

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The organisation of meetings for overseas Indians and the ease of travelling to India and Gujarat offered by the 2003 Indian citizenship law awakened profound feelings in PIOs’ hearts and opened opportunities for establishing networks through business, tourism and religious travels in India.

The economic criteria underlying the law is not always the reason for PIOs’ desire to go “back” to Gujarat, even if it has importance. The theme of impossible return, which is a part of the diaspora definition according to Safran, was an objective reality for generations. Young generations who neglected to collect the elders narratives about family past and their roots, want and can experience more easily now the discovery of ancestral places and the worldwide diaspora originated from their village.

The offer of the PIO and CIO cards occurred in some points of the Indian diaspora network, where auto-representation and categorisation is varied, given the national and local context and individual social positions. Carefully examined, the diaspora is far from being united and homogeneous : each group has its own history, brought from Gujarat and developed in the periphery. Madagascar and Reunion Island are very contrasting examples of this context and provide detailed examination of the subjective and social process of categorisation and identification in which the Indian state offer of more “Indianness” takes place.

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<sup>26</sup> Bourbon was one of the first names for Reunion. Anjuman means Society.

<sup>27</sup> Three other village associations were founded : Tadkeswar Anjuman, created in the 1940s and more active since 1980, Association Philanthropique Musulmane de Kator in 1954, Association Réunion-Panoli in 2004.

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#### **Apendix:**

(from Blanchy and *al.* 2006, *Source* : Ministère de l'Intérieur de Madagascar, published in *Taratra* 2 octobre 2004)

#### **Registered muslim association in Madagascar (accepted as cultural associations) (7 out of a total of 72) and the date of official registration, from 1963 to 2004**

- 16 Association cultuelle musulmane de Tananarive 10 oct. 1969
- 22 Assemblée spirituelle nationale Baha'is de Ma/scar 4 juil. 1973
- 27 Fikambanana Silamo Malagasy Mahabibo Mahajanga 24 avril 1974
- 33 Association Djama'al islamique de Manakara 29 janv. 1991
- 36 Ligue féminine islamique de Madagascar 10 janv. 1992
- 45 Association islamique de Vohipeno 5 déc. 1995
- 54 Association musulmane Ahmadiyya de Madagascar 6 avril 1998

#### **Registered Indian or muslim associations in Madagascar (non accepted as cultural associations), (11 out of 12) and the date of official registration from 1964 to 1998.**

- 1 Conseil régional des Khojas Ithna Asheri Jamates 9 oct. 1964  
de l'océan Indien
- 2 Association des Sounis Surtis Jamat de Mahajanga 3 oct. 1973
- 3 Association des Khojas Shia Ithna Asheri Jamate 17 oct. 1984  
de Mahajanga
- 4 Association des Khojas Shia Ithna Asheri Jamate 24 janv. 1985  
de Fianarantsoa
- 5 Association des hindous Sanatana Samaj 25 nov. 1986  
de Mahajanga
- 6 Union des fédérations et des missions adventistes 2 mars 1990  
du septième jour de l'océan Indien
- 7 Ligue islamique mondiale 5 sept. 1990
- 8 Faiz e Mohamedi 19 août 1993
- 9 Association des musulmans Sunnis Hanafi 9 févr. 1996  
d'Antalaha
- 10 Association des hindous Samaj d'Antananarivo 20 févr. 1996
- 11 Sounis Kumbar Jamat de Mahajanga 15 nov. 1996