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Between 1901 and 1973 immigration to Australia was governed by the White Australia policy, which prevented non-Europeans from entering Australia for residence except under special circumstances. Its relaxation in 1964 and 1966 has usually been explained within two overlapping frameworks: the context of Australian domestic politics and the wider context of Australia’s relations with its Asian neighbours. Writers have argued that in the mid-1960s the White Australia policy was substantially revised because it was no longer supported by a broad consensus at home. They have also suggested that from the 1950s the sustained criticism advanced by Asian governments had a profound impact on the formulation of the policy because the Australian government became increasingly concerned about the damage the White Australia policy was doing to Australia’s reputation overseas. This article examines how the Australian immigration authorities reacted to sustained attempts by people who were not considered ‘white’ and ‘European’ to migrate to Australia. It suggests that the authorities’ response involved changes to Australia’s immigration policy, and that an attempt to understand these changes must take into account, not only domestic and international opinion, but also the contexts which motivated people affected by the White Australia policy to migrate to Australia. This issue is explored by way of a case study: the migration (and attempted migration) of Mauritian gens de couleur (literally: people of colour) to Australia.

When members of Australia’s freshly constituted federal parliament passed the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901 and thereby put the White Australia policy on the new nation’s statute books, they did so to keep out Chinese and other non-European immigrants and to retain Australia’s character as a country reserved for ‘white’ settlers and their descendants. Until the Second World War the 1901 Act and subsequent legislation lived up to expectations. Minor exceptions aside, non-Europeans were effectively barred from entering Australia
for residence, and the number of non-Europeans already in the

country declined. The war proved a turning point. During the early 1940s more
than 5,000 Asians entered Australia as so-called wartime refugees; some of
them remained in Australia permanently.

Until the end of the Second World War the administration of the White
Australia policy was comparatively straightforward because the immigration
authorities considered it to be unproblematic to identify those to be excluded
from migration to Australia on account of their race. Only non-Europeans were
summarily prevented from entering the country for residence on account of not
being ‘white’. Maltese, Italians, Greeks and Jews, whose ‘Europeaness’ was
sometimes contested, were often unwelcome, and their immigration was
frequently subject to restrictions such as quotas and landing money
prerequisites. But these restrictions tended to be motivated by and justified with
the argument that southern European and Jewish immigrants would compete
unfairly with Australians of Anglo-Celtic ancestry for employment and business
opportunities, rather than the argument that southern Europeans and Jews were
not sufficiently ‘white’ to qualify as Europeans. In 1926, for example, in
response to a complaint by Queensland cane growers about the immigration of
Italians, the assistant secretary of the Department of the Interior, F.J. Quinlan,
pointed out ‘that in giving effect to the “White Australia” policy it was never
intended that the administration of the Immigration laws should be directed
towards preventing persons of European race or descent from entering Australia
merely on racial grounds’.

After 1945 the administration of the White Australia policy became more
complicated. The Australian immigration authorities had to contend, not just
with Europeans and non-Europeans, but also with a large number of prospective
immigrants who were of mixed descent and could not easily be placed in either
the European or the non-European category. Many of them were British
nationals and considered themselves to be Europeans, but their appearance and
ancestry supposedly belied such identification – at least in the eyes of Australian
immigration officials. Mixed descent migration to Australia was largely a
consequence of decolonisation. Most of these prospective immigrants were
residents of former British colonies in South Asia, of former Dutch colonies in
Southeast Asia, or of Mauritius. Most were trying to emigrate because they had
lost, or feared to lose, the privileged position they had enjoyed under colonial
rule.

Colonial societies were usually stratified according to ‘race’. Those who
occupied a privileged position in British colonies did so not least because of
their ancestry and its visual evidence. Even if held in low regard on account of
their race by their European compatriots, those of partly European descent
usually identified with the colonial masters rather than with either the country’s indigenous people or those whose ancestors had been imported as slaves or indentured labourers. They considered themselves to be ‘white’ – to be Europeans, rather than Asians or Africans.

Within the context of colonial Ceylonese society, for example, those who identified as Burghers, and whose ancestors included Singhalese as well as Dutch or Portuguese, saw themselves as Europeans, not as Singhalese. They spoke English at home, and their style of dress was informed by what was fashionable in Paris and London rather than by the types of garment worn by most indigenous Ceylonese. They emphasised and carefully guarded their Europeaness, demonstrating their unbroken European descent through genealogies and discouraging their sons and daughters from marrying somebody whose Europeaness was doubtful.

When dealing with applications from Ceylonese Burghers, Anglo-Indians and others like them, Australian immigration officials were faced with a dilemma: should the applicants be classed as non-white in spite of their strong self-identification? Should an objection to their racial appearance alone be sufficient reason to prevent them from migrating to Australia? (When Australians objected to the immigration of Chinese – or Italians, for that matter – they did so also because they opposed the import of cheap labour. Such objections were hardly ever raised in relation to Ceylonese Burghers, Anglo-Indians or Mauritians.) And precisely how could officials ascertain whether a person of mixed descent belonged in the European or the non-European category?

The ensuing discussion illustrates the challenges posed to the White Australia policy by prospective immigrants of mixed descent by exploring Australia’s response to Mauritian immigration. In the Australian context, the number of immigrants from Mauritius has always been comparatively small. In the 1947 census only 236 residents of Australia claimed to have been born in Mauritius. By the end of the 1950s about a thousand more Mauritians had migrated to Australia. Mauritian immigration increased during the 1960s. In the 1971 census 9,870 Australian residents said they had been born in Mauritius. But even at the height of Mauritian migration to Australia, in the late 1960s, there were only about 2,000 a year. They then constituted just over 1 per cent of Australia’s overall planned migrant intake, and less than 1.5 per cent of net overseas immigration. Australia never encouraged Mauritian immigration; the Department of Immigration considered Mauritius a ‘low priority’ area. But this migration to Australia is significant when regarded from a Mauritian perspective; in the 1960s Australia became the primary destination of Mauritian emigrants. From an Australian perspective, Mauritian immigration in the 1960s is also significant when considered in relation to the immigration of other
comparable groups, namely so-called ‘mixed descent arrivals’, about one-fifth of whom were Mauritian.

II

The island of Mauritius was uninhabited when it was first sighted by Malay, Arab and European seafarers. In 1638 it was settled by Dutch colonists from the Dutch East India Company, accompanied by slaves of Malagasy and Southeast Asian origin. The Dutch, who gave Mauritius its current name, abandoned the island in 1710. Five years later the French claimed the island and renamed it Île de France. French settlement, again with the support of slaves, began in 1722 under the aegis of the French East India Company. The British took over the island from the French in 1810. Under the terms of the surrender negotiated by the French governor and the commanders of the British expeditionary force, the island’s European settlers were guaranteed the right to retain their language, customs, laws and religion. As a result, the island remained essentially French even as a British colony. In 1968 Mauritius gained its independence.

While Mauritius was a French colony, the island imported between 1,000 and 3,000 slaves annually, most of them from Mozambique and Madagascar, with a small contingent from India. The slaves, who were essential to the functioning of the island’s economy, were freed in 1835, 28 years after the British parliament had abolished the slave trade. That same year saw the beginning of the large-scale recruitment of indentured labourers in India to satisfy the demands of the Mauritian plantation economy for cheap labour. During the 1850s alone, about 170,000 indentured labourers arrived in Mauritius from India, compared with about 42,000 who left the island during the same ten-year period. It was only in 1917 that the indentured labour system was formally abolished, eight years after the last indentured labourers from India had arrived in Mauritius.

The population of Mauritius grew from 77,768 in 1807 to 180,823 in 1851 and to 378,195 in 1901. There were no further significant increases until the end of the Second World War, when the population rose sharply to reach half a million in 1952 and 750,000 in 1965. Over the past two hundred years the population’s ethnic composition has undergone significant changes. In 1807 more than three-quarters of the population was comprised of slaves of predominantly southeast African and Malagasy origin. The remainder consisted in about equal part of Franco-Mauritians, that is people of exclusively European descent, on the one hand, and freed slaves, a small number of Indian immigrants and the so-called gens de couleur, that is descendants of liaisons between French colonists and slaves, on the other. By 1901 about 70 per cent of the population was of Indian origin. Throughout the twentieth century Indo-Mauritians accounted for about two-thirds of the population.

In the 1962 and 1972 censuses the Indo-Mauritian population was divided
into a majority Hindu and a minority Muslim component. But more complex than the division of Indo-Mauritians into the adherents of different faiths has been the enumeration of what in the census statistics between 1846 and 1972 was termed the ‘General Population’ – for its ‘heterogeneous character’, and not because it constituted the majority of the Mauritian population, as the 1891 Census Report explained. It included the descendants of European settlers, of African and Indian slaves, and of liaisons between European settlers on the one hand, and slaves and indentured labourers on the other. During the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the decades of particular interest for the issues discussed in this article, the General Population was generally thought to be comprised of two distinct components: a European minority and a Creole majority.

The General Population’s European segment has usually been equated with the island’s Franco-Mauritian population. Indeed, even though Mauritius was a British colony for more than one-and-a-half centuries, the overwhelming majority of Mauritians of European descent trace their ancestry back to French settlers. Franco-Mauritians were at the top of a social hierarchy. ‘In Mauritius’, the Australian-Mauritian author Maryse Duyker remembered, ““whiteness” was a prerequisite for higher social status.” In the twentieth century there was little intermarriage between Franco-Mauritians and members of other ethnic communities. In 1965 the anthropologist Burton Benedict observed that the ‘Franco-Mauritians are highly endogamous and take spouses only from other Franco-Mauritian families, in which there is reputed to be no taint of African or Asian ancestry, or from families from Europe’. But the Franco-Mauritians themselves were divided into the grand blancs, the island’s oligarchy who controlled the sugar industry, and the petits blancs. Unlike in Re‘union or the Antilles, the latter were not impoverished but instead formed part of the middle class. Genealogical knowledge played an important role in demarcating the Franco-Mauritians from ‘whites’ whose ancestry included African, Malagasy or Indian elements.

In the nineteenth century the term ‘Creole’ denoted a person of French descent born in Mauritius. In the twentieth century the term came to refer to Mauritians of African and mixed descent. The Creole community was (and still is) a heterogeneous group: it included a French-speaking middle class of predominantly European ancestry and a Kreol-speaking proletariat of predominantly African ancestry. Members of the former were variously referred to as gens de couleur, ‘coloureds’ or ‘mulattos’. In the 1950s the social hierarchy among Creoles was based on colour, education and ancestry. Maryse Duyker observed that ‘[w]ithin the coloured population ...one group would classify another as darker in skin colour and thus less socially acceptable’. Those at the top of that hierarchy considered themselves ‘white’ even if they were not accepted as such by the Franco-Mauritian elite. They were as concerned as Franco-Mauritians about intermarriage; Burton Benedict observed that ‘[i]n choosing spouses, light skin colour and education play a large part’.

Arriving in Port Louis in the late nineteenth century, Mark Twain was
dazzled by ‘the largest variety of nationalities and complexions we have encountered yet. French, English, Chinese, Arabs, Africans with wool, blacks with straight hair, East Indians, half-white, quadroons – and great varieties in costumes and colors’. But rather than a colourful melting pot, colonial Mauritius was rigidly stratified along racial lines. Particularly among the upper and middle classes, status was based on one’s reputed racial origins. For those of the same ‘race’, however, wealth often became the final measure of purity.

Occupation, religion and language have also been associated with ethnicity. In the 1950s and 1960s Indo-Mauritians provided the bulk of the workforce on the sugar plantations. Gens de couleur dominated the public service; other Creoles worked as artisans, tradespeople, fishermen and waterside workers. Franco-Mauritians and Creoles tended to be Catholic. Franco-Mauritians and gens de couleur spoke French as their first language; Indo-Mauritians grew up with Hindi, Bojpuri, Tamil, Urdu, Telegu and other languages spoken on the Indian subcontinent, whereas the Mauritian lingua franca, Kreol, was traditionally the language of the Creole proletariat. But as Thomas Eriksen’s anthropological research has demonstrated, the Mauritian ethnic landscape has been very complex, because of the number of potentially intersecting languages, religions and ancestral provenances and because of the existence of allegiances and groupings that cut across ethnic lines.

Two push factors explain why Mauritians began emigrating in large numbers from the late 1940s onwards: demographic developments which occasioned the widespread belief that Mauritius was overpopulated and that overpopulation would have disastrous consequences for the island’s economy and Mauritian standard of living, and political developments which eventually led to independence from Great Britain in 1968. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries population growth was due to net immigration gains. After the end of significant immigration at the turn of the twentieth century, the size of the population remained more or less constant for about 20 years, and then slowly grew for the next 20 years. But from 1946 birth rates rose sharply while death rates fell. In the five-year period from 1946 to 1950 the island population’s natural increase amounted to 52,411 (compared with 15,498 in the preceding five-year period); between 1951 and 1955, it reached 77,376. This development was triggered by a boom in the sugar industry, which led to a significant rise in living standards, and by the eradication of malaria. Both factors meant a rapid improvement of health standards which, according to the human geographer Harold Brookfield, affected ‘not only mortality, but also conceptions and the proportion of conceptions leading to live births’.

When the island’s population began to grow in the second half of the 1940s at a rate of almost 3 per cent per annum, Mauritius was already comparatively densely populated. Thus the case of Mauritius was different from that of other islands in the region, such as neighbouring Réunion, which experienced a similar population boom in the post-war period. From the early 1950s, the rapid population growth not only attracted the attention of demographers, but was
also recognised as a major problem by the Mauritian government. In 1955 a committee on population submitted a report to the legislative council that included a detailed assessment of the current situation and a prognosis about future population growth. Demographers disagreed about the rate of future increases but agreed that the birth rate could not be lowered in the short term. Strong opposition from the Catholic Church meant that the introduction of birth control programmes would be a protracted affair. In 1954 the Colonial Office predicted that Mauritius would have a population of 1,065,525 by 1982.

In 1959, the governor of Mauritius commissioned two further reports: the Meade Report (named after its principal author, the economist James Meade) was to ‘survey the present economic and social structure of Mauritius and to make recommendations concerning the action to be taken in order to render the country capable of maintaining and improving the standard of living of its people’; the Titmuss Report (written chiefly by the sociologist Richard Titmuss) advised the government ‘as to the provisions made for social security, bearing in mind the resources of the territory and the needs of its people’. Both reports argued that as the island’s economy was incapable of absorbing the increase in the number of people of working age, unemployment and under-employment, which were already major problems in the late 1950s, would become even more pronounced, and living standards would continue to fall.

Meade and his co-authors explored several options to deal with population growth on Mauritius, including emigration. They found that since the end of the Second World War, emigration had been held up as one possible solution, but that it could not be considered ‘a solution of any significant importance to the economic difficulties of Mauritius’, because the countries which needed immigrants, such as Australia, did not accept Mauritians in significant numbers. Titmuss and his co-author, Brian Abel-Smith, put it more bluntly: while they called for the urgent development of ‘policies on as broad a scale as possible to slow down the rate of population growth’, they maintained that the ‘answers must be found within Mauritius; to hope for emigration as a solution is to invite catastrophe’.

In the late 1940s the Mauritian colonial administration had explored the possibilities of emigration schemes as a solution. But in the 1950s and 1960s ministers and advisers did not believe that mass emigration could solve the country’s problems. Their extensive and public deliberations nevertheless contributed to a debate on emigration, which was prominent in Mauritius throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Dire predictions about the island’s future left their mark on how Mauritians assessed their individual prospects. Many of them felt that emigration would solve their predicament, and were anxious to leave the island for a new home, in a similar way in which German, Italian and Irish migrants had left Europe for New World countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Those seeking to emigrate wanted to better themselves – in relation either to
their present situation or to imagined future circumstances. Given their privileged and secure status, the grands blancs were less disposed to pursue emigration for economic reasons. Without government support, or assisted passage schemes offered by countries seeking immigrants, those most likely to be able to emigrate in the late 1940s, the 1950s and the 1960s either had to rely on being sponsored by family members who had emigrated before them, and/or they had to meet the cost of their fare and first weeks in the new country. Prominent among those most keen and able to emigrate were middle-class petits blancs and gens de couleur.

That Indo-Mauritian members of the middle class were less inclined to emigrate also reflected their expectations that their status would rise rather than diminish. Until 1948 Mauritius had been governed by a British colonial administration allied with the island’s Franco-Mauritian oligarchy. Creoles represented the main political opposition. In 1948 the British introduced a new constitution which provided for a legislative council with 35 members, 19 of whom were elected, and for a new franchise, with anyone aged over 21 and literate being eligible to vote. The election of August 1948, the first held under the new constitution, returned 13 Labour Party candidates, 11 of them Hindus. The conservative press warned of “the Hindu menace,” and both Franco-Mauritians and Creoles feared that they would be ruled by an Indian majority whose allegiance was to India rather than to Mauritius. Universal suffrage was introduced in 1958. In the parliament resulting from the 1959 elections, 30 out of 40 members were Indo-Mauritians.

When the travel writer Michael Malim, who visited Mauritius in 1948, struck up a conversation with three young Franco-Mauritians, he learnt that they all intended to emigrate. “Personally, I’m off to Australia as soon as I can get a passage,” one of them declared. Asked why they wanted to leave, the young men cited problems in the sugar industry and constitutional reform. “England has given our Island to the “Malabars”,” one of them complained, referring to the majority Indian population. “We are the natives of Mauritius, not the Indians and the Chinese.” Anxieties about the effects of changes to the Mauritian political system – from the introduction of the 1948 constitution to independence 20 years later – were a major motivating factor for the emigration of petits blancs and gens de couleur.

III

The first two post-war decades saw first a tightening and then a relaxation of Australian rules. Until 1950 those responsible for issuing landing permits for Australia acted on the assumption that anybody whose ancestry was more than 50 per cent European, counted as European and was therefore in principle eligible for migration to Australia, whereas all others were ineligible on account
of their race. In 1947, for example, the secretary of the Department of Immigration, Tasman Heyes, advised the Australian consul general in Batavia that ‘Eurasians even though married to Australian women will not be permitted to remain in Australia unless evidence is produced that they are more than 50 per cent European blood’.

The influx of Anglo-Indians and Ceylonese Burghers in the late 1940s prompted much public concern in Australia. In January 1949, Labor’s minister for immigration, Arthur Calwell, directed his department to screen out anybody who was not of ‘pure European descent’. He believed that ‘such persons are not suitable as settlers in Australia’, and did not want to allow them to immigrate even in cases where they were ‘predominantly of European extraction and in appearance’. Calwell’s ‘strictly secret’ directive encountered strong opposition from the Department of External Affairs. There is no evidence to suggest that it had been implemented by the time the Labor Party was voted out of office in late 1949.

Calwell was succeeded by Harold Holt, whose approach to non-European immigration was marked by pragmatism rather than zealotry. But during his first term in office the Immigration Department tightened the existing regulations because ‘[g]enerally speaking Eurasians do not, on the whole, prove a very desirable type of migrant’. The new conditions stipulated that in order to be eligible for permanent admission to Australia:

(i) a person shall be approximately 75% or more of European descent and furnish documentary evidence thereof;
(ii) he shall be fully European in upbringing and outlook;
(iii) he tends to be European rather than non-European in appearance.

In 1957 the requirement to provide documentary evidence of European ancestry was dropped; instead the Department of Immigration now required of immigrants that ‘their appearance must be such as to satisfy the officer that they are of 75% or more European descent and that they will have no difficulty in being accepted as Europeans in Australia’.

By then the policy governing the migration of people of mixed decent had been applied also to migrants whose Europeaness had previously been taken for granted. Before the war, restrictions imposed by the immigration authorities affected prospective immigrants as members of communities rather than as individuals – that is, individual German Jews or Maltese, for example, were rejected not on account of their individual non-European appearance but because the quota for Jewish or Maltese immigrants had already been filled. After the war, in response to applications from Ceylonese Burghers and other
so-called ‘mixed-race’ migrants, whose claim to be Europeans tended to be far
more contested than that of, say, German Jews or Maltese, the Immigration
Department decided applications on their individual merits – namely, by
assessing the extent to which an applicant was European and ‘white’. The policy
guidelines that were developed to facilitate such decisions were then extended to
other prospective immigrants, including people of Middle Eastern origin (such
as Palestinians or Lebanese), South Americans, Greeks, Cypriots, Maltese and
southern Italians. In 1957, the chief migration officer based at the Australian
embassy in Rome reported to the Department of Immigration:

South Italians, including Sicilians, as well as Maltese, are of very mixed
descent. Most of the mixture occurred centuries ago, but whatever the
genetic theory about such things may be, the inherited non-European
physical characteristics seem to have persisted or recurred right up to the
present. The result is that a good many undeniable Europeans come in
front of the selection officers looking like non-Europeans. They are rarely
negroid in appearance, but the Arab type is pretty common and very dark
(though not black) colouring is very common. It is possible that the South
Italian of the purest descent may look to the non-technical eye something
like the North African type.

While no immigration restrictions applied to Mauritian petit blancs, gens de
couleur were assessed under the rules governing the admission of persons of
mixed descent. As a result, most of those migrating from Mauritius to Australia
during the late 1940s and 1950s were Franco-Mauritians. But during the 1950s
Mauritian gens de couleur who did not meet Australia’s racial criteria were
sometimes able to circumvent Australian immigration requirements. In 1951, for
example, several Mauritian families, including persons ineligible for entry into
Australia according to immigration policy, arrived in Bombay en route to
Australia. Shipping companies and airlines servicing Australian ports had
agreed to refuse booking passages to Australia for British subjects who did not
meet the Australian immigration requirements. But at the time, Mauritians were
not able to travel directly to Australia, and the Australian authorities were not in
a position to request shipping companies operating between Mauritius and India
to screen passengers whose ultimate destination was Australia. Being British
nationals, these Mauritians held passports valid for Australia. As they had left
Mauritius for good in the expectation of being able to migrate to Australia, the
Australian authorities in India apparently felt that they had to allow them to
proceed. Once the immigration authorities had become aware of this loophole,
they swiftly moved to close it. But Mauritian gens de couleur continued to look
for and find loopholes to bypass Australia’s 75 per cent rule.
By the late 1950s, if not earlier, the Australian authorities had become increasingly wary of the claims of prospective Mauritian immigrants that they were Europeans, and on several occasions rejected suggestions that the immigration of Mauritians be encouraged and facilitated through an assisted passage agreement. The Immigration Department’s experience had helped to consolidate a common image of prospective Mauritian immigrants as not quite ‘white’ enough. In response to an enquiry from a fellow parliamentarian regarding the prospects for a migration scheme for Mauritians, the minister for immigration, Alexander R. Downer, wrote in 1961: ‘I should mention that the Department’s experience is that the majority of the population of Mauritius is of mixed racial ancestry and, although they tend to regard themselves as Europeans, they are to European eyes far from being of European appearance.’

‘The problem, in brief’, as Downer put it in response to a similar enquiry the following year, was ‘one of mixed blood’. But whether or not somebody of ‘mixed blood’ was predominantly European or predominantly non-European was a matter of perception. As Downer recognised, Mauritian applicants who did not meet the Immigration Department’s requirements in terms of descent or appearance tended to identify as Europeans. Their European identity accounted for both pull and push factors: they considered Australia – as well as South Africa, another major destination of Mauritian emigrants at the time – a suitable refuge for whites who were leaving a country supposedly on the verge of being taken over by Indians; and many of them felt compelled to leave Mauritius because they were afraid of losing their comparatively privileged position once the country’s non-European majority took charge of the island’s affairs.

The Europeaness of prospective immigrants from Mauritius was thrown into sharp relief in 1958 when the government commissioner in Rodrigues, Captain Rochecouste, proposed the establishment of a group settlement of Rodriguans in Western Australia. The island of Rodrigues, located some 600 kilometres east of Mauritius, is a Mauritian dependency. In the late 1950s its approximately 20,000 inhabitants belonged almost exclusively to the General Population. Under the Australian policy of assimilation, group settlements were considered undesirable. But without having met Rochecouste, officers of the Department of Immigration had other reservations about the proposal. When discussing the idea with a representative of the British high commission in Canberra, a senior immigration officer explained that ‘it would seem likely, despite [Rochecouste’s] reference to “pure European descent” that numbers of the people in question could not be accepted ...[O]ur experience of people from Mauritius and Seychelles suggests that there would have been much intermarriage of Europeans and non-Europeans in Rodrigues’. This assessment was confirmed by the Australian chief migration officer in London. Summarising a conversation with Rochecouste, he reported.
The population derives from Spanish and French settlers and from African slaves. It therefore varies from completely European to completely coloured. The people that Captain Rochecouste has in mind, he assured me, were all 100 per cent European. However, as he apparently included himself in this category, I would have some doubt that we would classify them similarly.

Captain Rochecouste is himself quite impressive, very sincere and very obviously has the welfare of his people very much at heart. Nevertheless, in appearance he is rather sunburnt and one gains the impression of some African traces in his origin from the shadows round his eyes, particularly when seen in profile.

The case of the Rodriguans highlights the malleability of attributes such as ‘white’ and European, and the gulf between Mauritians’ self-identification as ‘white’ and their assessment by immigration officers. For Mauritians, ‘white’ and ‘European’ were not necessarily synonymous. In a book published in 1971, the Mauritian writer Alfred North-Coombes, who was living in Australia by then, distinguishes between ‘black’ and ‘white’ Rodriguans:

The blacks ...have a dark brown, velvety skin. Their hair is deep black, woolly and curly, the eyes are dark, the nose short and fairly flat, the teeth beautifully white ...The whites are more powerfully built, and generally their features more closely resemble those of Europeans than of negroes.

Be it that favourable decisions were comparatively rare, be it that Mauritian gens de couleur believed that they were unlikely to be granted a landing permit if they applied to travel to Australia for permanent residence, in the early 1960s the number of Mauritians who arrived as tourists and applied for permanent residence once in Australia exceeded the number of Mauritians who officially arrived as immigrants.

As British nationals, Mauritians wishing to visit Australia as tourists did not need to obtain a visa prior to their arrival. It appears that in most, if not all, of these cases the immigrants were allowed to remain in Australia in spite of their having entered the country under false pretences.

In the early 1960s the Department of Immigration considered immigration from Mauritius to be unsatisfactory on three accounts: first, immigrants tended to enter Australia as tourists, thus circumventing the Department’s selection procedure; second, immigrants who had been thought to comply with Australia’s requirements regarding race turned out on arrival to be less ‘white’ than expected; and third, the methods for distinguishing between ‘predominantly European’ and ‘non-European’ applicants of mixed descent proved increasingly inadequate.
The Australian authorities reacted to this state of affairs in several ways. In 1964, the Department of Immigration decided that all Mauritians travelling to Australia, including temporary visitors, needed to apply for a visa in Canberra, thus preventing Mauritian immigrants entering Australia disguised as tourists. The department was less successful in dealing with the second issue, namely the unreliability of assessments based on documentary and photographic evidence. The department considered two options: the stationing of a migration officer in Mauritius or occasional visits from an Australian official based in Dar es Salaam. But an Australian representative sent to Mauritius to seek approval for either of these options returned empty-handed, reporting that the chief secretary, Tom Vickers, had rejected them ‘mainly for political reasons’.

The ensuing correspondence between Vickers and the secretary of the Department of Immigration, Peter Heydon, reveals how isolated the Australian authorities had become in their defence of the White Australia policy. Initially Heydon failed to understand why the vetting of applicants in Mauritius would be politically impossible. In a personal letter, which accompanied his official reply to Heydon, Vickers spelt out the problem:

> your proposal of periodic visits – the underlying purpose of which would very soon become suspect, if not apparent – would be personally embarrassing for the marginal applicants concerned, politically explosive for Ministers and members of the Legislative Assembly and damaging to the general cause of good relations between Mauritius and Australia.

A third option, namely the vetting of applicants by a representative of the colonial authorities, had been favoured by the department more than ten years earlier but ruled out at the time because the authorities in Port Louis refused to cooperate.

The difficulties and disadvantages associated with assessing applicants in the ‘mixed descent’ category according to their skin colour were not confined to Mauritians. In 1964 the Department of Immigration recognised, as Heydon recalled two years later, that

> The 75 per cent rule had in many cases worked to our disadvantage in rendering ineligible deserving cases (on grounds of skills, qualifications, etc.). It had led to difficulties between members within the same family group. It had resulted in the approval of people who could qualify under the 75 per cent rule but who, in other respects, did in many cases compare favourably with applicants who failed to pass the test on appearance.

In order to overcome these problems, the department proposed a review of the
‘mixed descent’ criteria. In September 1964, while rejecting wide-ranging reforms of the White Australia policy as had been suggested by the immigration department and strongly supported by its minister, the cabinet authorised the minister for immigration at his discretion and consistent with the need to maintain the predominantly European character of the Australian population, to admit for permanent residence persons of mixed-race where:

(a) humanitarian considerations, involving close family relationship or hardship on grounds of discrimination, are present; or
(b) the applicant has special knowledge, experience or qualifications useful to Australia; or
(c) the applicant has the ability to make a contribution to Australia’s economic, social and cultural progress;

if the applicant shows by appearance, education, upbringing, outlook, mode of dress and way of living, that he is capable of ready integration into the Australian community.

Perhaps aware of the significance of these amendments, and of their potential to erode the White Australia policy, the cabinet decided that ‘these changes should be made administratively, i.e. without public announcement’. The government went to great lengths to avoid any such announcement. When a few weeks later a member of the opposition Labor Party asked in parliament whether ‘appearance [is] still considered one of the most important factors in reaching a decision on the entry of Eurasians’, the Department of Immigration’s draft reply stated that the ‘policy with respect to the admission of persons of mixed-race ...has recently been reviewed’. But ‘as the Minister (in view of the direction given to him by Cabinet) did not wish even to imply that there had been a recent review of policy’, the answer provided by the minister in parliament confirmed that appearance was no longer the most important selection criterion but made no reference to the policy review.

The 1964 policy, which had seemed to provide only for exceptions to the 75 per cent rule, became the main framework according to which prospective immigrants of mixed descent were assessed. When implementing the cabinet decision of September 1964, the Department of Immigration tended to pay close attention to evidence of close family ties in Australia; few applicants were admitted on the grounds of discrimination, special qualifications, or their ability to make a positive contribution to Australia’s progress. Thus departmental practice ran counter to the new policy’s initial intention, which would have favoured Ceylonese Burghers and Anglo-Burmese. When Billy Snedden replaced Hubert Opperman as minister for immigration in 1967, he told his departmental head that he was willing to sanction more cases on compassionate grounds and to increase the number of immigrants approved under the 1964
‘mixed descent’ formula. As a result, the phrase ‘close family relationship’ was given ‘a more liberal interpretation’: an applicant was to be accepted if he or she ‘had in Australia a parent, brother, sister or son – even though he or she has more close relatives abroad than here, and whether or not he or she is married, with children’. As Anglo-Indians and Ceylonese Burghers had been migrating to Australia in substantial numbers since the late 1940s, and were therefore more likely already to have several members of their family living in Australia, this interpretation favoured Mauritians, who constituted the most recent community of immigrants of mixed descent.

IV

In the second half of the 1960s the number of Mauritians trying to migrate to Australia rose dramatically. Applications peaked in 1967–68, with 14,166 mixed descent and non-European applicants in one 12-month period. This increase reflected the growing interest in emigration to Australia by Mauritians belonging to the General Population, which in turn was a response to internal developments in Mauritius. In May 1965 communal rioting broke out, a state of emergency was declared, and British troops based in Aden were despatched to restore order. The riots, involving Hindu supporters of the Labour Party on the one side and Creole supporters of the Parti Mauricien on the other, represented ‘the first serious outbreak of clearly racial violence in Mauritian history’. The intervention of British troops confirmed many of the minority Creoles and Franco-Mauritians in their view that they would be unprotected once Mauritius became independent. Also in 1965, after consultations with Mauritian representatives in London, the Colonial Office decided – against the wishes of the Parti Mauricien – that Mauritius was shortly to ‘take her place among the sovereign nations of the world’. The anxieties of members of the General Population only increased as Mauritius approached independence. ‘In the minds of the remaining Franco-Mauritian and mixed-race population,’ writes the historian Edward Duyker, ‘independence was equated in a paranoid fashion with Mauritians of Indian descent “taking over”.’ Emigration was seen by many as their only option.

The 1964 reforms, while not in themselves responsible for a rise in the rate of applications, contributed to an increase in the number of successful applicants and thus of Mauritians migrating to Australia. Together with the introduction of visa requirements for Mauritians visiting Australia as tourists, they also to some extent regularised Mauritian immigration. Mauritians were no longer able so easily to circumvent the Immigration Department’s control, and they were no longer assessed primarily on the basis of their presumed racial background. But these two measures could not prevent the arrival of more Mauritian immigrants whose eligibility was contested.

This was the result of three factors. First, it took several years for the new policy to be uniformly implemented by immigration officers. Well into the second half of the 1960s, immigration inspectors at the Port of Fremantle and at Perth Airport, the two most common points of entry to Australia for Mauritian immigrants, seem to have had the 1957 policy, rather than the 1964 policy, in
mind when screening migrant arrivals. Frequently they complained about
individual immigrants being ‘wholly non-European in appearance’, ‘very
swarthy’, or ‘predominantly negroid.’ Sometimes the same immigrants
attracted little attention at other Australian ports. Second, the frequency of these
complaints reflected a structural problem. The 75 per cent rule was merely
supplanted by another rule that presumed successful applicants had to be of a
certain racial background. As it was as impossible to establish objective criteria
for somebody’s capacity to integrate readily into the Australian community as
much as it had been impossible to measure European appearance in percentage
points, there would always be disputed cases.

Third, the comparatively large number of disputed cases among Mauritian
immigrants arose because the Australian immigration authorities were not
represented on Mauritius. The Australian authorities used two methods to
distinguish those Mauritians who were eligible to immigrate. First, the
immigration officers considered the applicant’s name. If it did not sound
European, applicants were informed that they could not migrate to Australia. If
it did, then applicants were invited to submit further details. Applications had to
be accompanied by photographs, and on the basis of these photographs, a
further selection was made. If the photograph indicated that the applicant was
European, then the outcome of the application depended only on his or her
compliance with the medical and character requirements. Applications of those of evidently partly European descent were decided
according to the 1964 rule.

Both methods were extremely unreliable. ‘In point of physiognomy
Mauritius is quite a little museum and the same type of face may answer to the
name of Peter, Raoul Issop, Sinnatamby or Ramparsad’, the Mauritian writer
Jay Narain Roy observed in 1960. He also reported that ‘[j]ust as some people
are eager to beg, borrow or steal a European grandfather, others are eager to blot
out the ancestry’ by frenchifying or anglicising their Indian or African surname
or by taking entirely new names; ‘almost every week there are dozens of people
changing their names and surnames.’ In Mauritius itself, the 1962 census
therefore for the first time asked householders to identify the population group
to which they belonged; previously the census enumerator had relied on the
surname, among other factors, in determining a person’s ethnicity.

The identification of supposedly non-European names functioned primarily
to exclude applicants; the Australian authorities were therefore barely troubled
by the accuracy of this criterion. But photographs were used to select immi-
grants, and the Department of Immigration was acutely aware that photographs
were rather dubious instruments for the assessment of racial appearance. In
1964 an External Affairs report noted that ‘unsuitable immigrants’ had been
able ‘to obtain entry permits to Australia as a result of the false impression they
were able to give on paper. For instance, an Indian had recently obtained a permit because he had had photographs taken of himself under bright light which made him appear paler than in fact he was. Six years later an immigration officer observed after a visit to Mauritius:

[It] is absolutely useless to consider any applicant from the country on appearance from the photographs. Light brown wigs are sometimes worn by women for the purpose of being photographed which together with makeup applied to the faces of persons of either sex and overexposure of the films can produce results which are a tribute to the photographers [sic] art.

Time and again, immigration officials admitted that selections made on the basis of photographs were unsatisfactory. In fact, it seems to have been common for applicants of mixed descent to have been adjudged ‘European’, which enhanced their chances of being granted a permit for permanent entry.

The authorities of newly independent Mauritius proved an easier match for the Immigration Department than the British colonial administration. Following independence in March 1968, Australia suspended the processing of Mauritians’ applications for permanent entry. When the suspension was lifted, it was to herald a new regime. From late 1968 Australian visa missions visited Mauritius about once every year to interview applicants who had been considered eligible by the Department of Immigration. When assessing the ‘integration prospects’ of applicants, interviewing officers took into account factors such as manners and English language skills, but paid particular attention to skin colour. In one case, for example, the interviewing officer found that the applicant and his wife ‘have deep brown pigmentation but are of [mixed descent]. They should integrate with only minor difficulty’. Their son, however, was considered to have ‘very deep colouring & his integration prospects are not all that good’.

In the case of another family the interviewing officer commented that all members but one were darker than on the photographs, and that some of them were predominantly non-European. They were nevertheless approved for migration to Australia, perhaps because the officer also found: ‘All fairly well presented and very well behaved.’ The interviews ensured that applicants who did not qualify under the 1964 rules were screened out; they did not remedy the problem that many eligible applicants were excluded because either their applications or their requests for application forms supposedly suggested that they were non-Europeans.

In 1966 the White Australia policy was relaxed further when well-qualified applicants of non-European descent became eligible for admission for residence. This change had little impact on the number of Mauritian immigrants: between 1966 and 1969 only nine Mauritians were admitted under the new rules; over the same period, about 1,300 Mauritians of European descent and more than twice as many of mixed descent migrated to Australia. When in 1973 the Whitlam government abolished the White Australia policy, it did not so much
remove restrictions placed on non-European applicants as end positive
discrimination vis-a`-vis prospective immigrants of European and partly
European descent. It once more regularised immigration policy. That it did so
was undoubtedly the result of public opinion in Australia and Australian
concerns about public opinion overseas. But, in small measure, it also reflected
the difficulties the Department of Immigration had experienced when dealing
with applications from people who considered themselves ‘white’ or
‘European’. Partly in response to pressure from Mauritian gens de couleur,
Ceylonese Burghers, Anglo-Indians and Anglo-Burmese, the department had
changed the 75 per cent rule in an attempt to regularise the immigration of
people of mixed descent. But the 1964 reforms had done little to end complaints
from customs and immigration officers about the ‘colour’ of approved
immigrants. There had been no solution to the question of how ‘white’ a person
must be to qualify under the department’s criteria for immigrants of mixed
descent. Cases of siblings who were assessed as ‘European’, ‘of mixed descent’,
and ‘non-European’, respectively, which had been used to highlight the
shortcomings of the policy since the early 1960s, continued to occur.

The number of applications from Mauritians declined markedly from the
early 1970s. Fears that independence would mark the birth of a nation ruled by
its Indian majority had proved unfounded. Democracy flourished, and race
relations were comparatively harmonious. The spectre of overpopulation
gradually began to fade into the background. From the mid-1960s, Mauritius
experienced a spectacular decline in its fertility rate. The diversification of the
economy, which was pursued vigorously by various Mauritian governments
after 1968, led to a decline in unemployment and in the long term proved that
the island was able to support its population. In Mauritian public debate,
emigration came also to be regarded as a scourge which deprived the country of
some of its most capable citizens. Mauritian immigrants who arrived in
Australia from the mid-1970s were more likely to come because their family
and friends were already in Australia than because they tried to escape their
homeland.

V

Migration is the result of a combination of push and pull factors. Immigration to
a country seeking migrants, such as Australia or Canada, is also the outcome of
a combination of the initiative of prospective immigrants and the initiative of
the country’s immigration authorities. The initiative of prospective immigrants
tends to be greater when push factors compel them to leave their country of
origin. Australia always tried to control immigration. The Australian authorities
have been anxious that immigration be determined by the initiative shown by them, rather than by the initiative shown by prospective migrants. Assisted passage schemes, whereby Australian immigration authorities actively recruited Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian Displaced Persons, ‘Ten Pound Poms’ and others are the best examples of programmes to safeguard Australia’s autonomy in selecting immigrants.

The more push factors have compelled people to develop initiative and to seek migration outcomes independently of those officially on offer, the more likely it has been that Australia lost control of the immigration process and that Australian immigration policies have been compromised. The most obvious example is that of refugees arriving in Australia as ‘boat people’. The attempts of Anglo-Indians, Ceylonese Burghers and Mauritians to travel to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s represent another example. They felt compelled to leave their native countries because they experienced or anticipated discrimination, or because they lost, or feared the loss of, privileges held under British colonial rule. Their initiative, too, compromised established immigration policy, threw into relief its inherent contradictions, and eventually contributed to the erosion of the White Australia policy.

Recently practitioners of Australian history such as Mein Smith have convincingly argued for ‘interactive’ or ‘transnational’ approaches to understanding Australia’s past. This article has attempted to present a transnational history that shows how the histories of (Mauritian) emigration and (Australian) immigration are linked and can be fruitfully combined. The White Australia policy features in accounts of Mauritian emigration and of Mauritian immigrants in Australia. The discussion has tried to show that the story of why and how Mauritian gens de couleur left their native country for Australia not only has a place in a history of Mauritius or of Mauritians in Australia, but is also relevant in the context of a history of the White Australia policy and its administration. Not only could a transnational history of Australia’s restricted immigration policies add analytical depth; it could also go a long way towards ascribing agency to the subjects of these policies, namely prospective immigrants.

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NOTES

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1. On the origins of the White Australia policy, see Andrew Markus, Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California, 1850–1901 (Sydney, 1979); Charles Price, The Great White Walls Are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australia 1836–1888 (Canberra,
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1. A.T. Yarwood, Asian Migration to Australia: The Background to Exclusion 1896–1923 (Melbourne, 1964); and Myra Willard, A History of the White Australia Policy (Melbourne, 1923). A.C. Palfreeman’s The Administration of the White Australia Policy (Melbourne, 1967); and H.I. London’s Non-White Immigration and the ‘White Australia Policy’ (Sydney, 1970) are the two key studies on changes to and the administration of the White Australia policy.


4. Barry York has provided a detailed analysis of the impact the White Australia policy had on Maltese migrants; see his Empire and Race: The Maltese in Australia 1881–1949 (Kensington, 1990), particularly chapters 4 and 5.

5. F.J. Quinlan to Sec. Prime Minister’s Dept, 5 Aug. 1926, A1 1926/14582, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA).


8. Ibid.


Overall, the immigration of Anglo-Indians and Ceylonese Burghers has been more substantial than that of Mauritian gens de couleur, and this article does not try to make the immigration of the latter appear more significant than that of other communities of mixed descent. Most of the general observations made in this article, however, could be made in relation to immigrants of mixed descent from South Asia.


16. In the 1960s, the historian Auguste Toussaint still counted the Franco-Mauritians among the
Creole population, History, 71; see also Benedict, Mauritius, 14.
18. See, in particular, Eriksen, Common Denominators, 103–36.
27. Quoted in Titmuss and Abel-Smith, Social Policies, xi.
28. Meade et al., The Economic and Social Structure of Mauritius, 70.
29. Titmuss and Abel-Smith, Social Policies, 63.
30. R.C. Wilkinson, Report on the Project of Emigration from Mauritius to North Borneo (Port Louis, 1949).
42. Mauritians’ preoccupation with emigration as a solution to their woes was highlighted by the Trinidadian writer V.S. Naipaul in his essay ‘The Overcrowded Barracoon’, in V.S. Naipaul, The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles (London, 1972), 255–86.
31. Michael Malim, Island of the Swan: Mauritius (London, 1953), 106–08; see also Commins, ‘The Impasse’, 290. The reference to the ‘Malabars’ does not indicate that Indo-Mauritians are mainly descended from people from the southwest of the Indian subcontinent. In fact, most of the indentured labourers came from North India. Durand and Durand, L’Île Maurice, 46. Indians and Mauritians of Indian descent were referred to as ‘Malabars’ from the eighteenth century. A suburb in Port Louis with a high concentration of Indians was referred to as ‘Camp des Malabars’. Hubert Gerbeau, ‘The Indians of the Mascarenes: A Success in Diaspora: Mauritius and Reunion (17th–20th Centuries)’, Bengal Past and Present, 116, 1–2 (1997), 40.
33. See, for example, Heyes to Sec. Dept of External Affairs, 9 Aug. 1946, A1838 401/3/6/1/1, NAA.
35. T.H.E. Heyes to Sec. Dept of External Affairs, 20 Jan. 1949, A1838 1531/1 part 1, NAA.
36. J.W. Burton to Sec. Dept of Immigration, 16 Feb. 1949, A1838 1531/1 part 1, NAA.
37. Ibid.
38. Heyes to Minister, 21 March 1957, A446 1970/95021, NAA.
39. See also David Dutton, One of Us? A Century of Australian Citizenship (Sydney, 2002), 60; Andrew Markus, Australian Race Relations (St Leonards, 1994), 167–68.
40. G.V. Greenhalgh to Sec. Dept of Immigration, 24 May 1957, A446 1970/95021, NAA.
41. Edward Duyker, Of the Star and the Key: Mauritius, Mauritians and Australia (Sylvania, 1988), 89.
42. Heyes to Chief Migration Officer London, 19 Nov. 1951, A446 1969/72043, NAA.
44. Downer to W.S. Bovell, 10 May 1962, A446 1969/72043, NAA.
45. H. McGinness to Sec., 14 July 1958, A446 1969/72043, NAA.
46. G.C. Watson to Sec. Dept of Immigration, 1 Sept. 1958, A446 1969/72043, NAA.
47. Alfred North-Coombes, The Island of Rodrigues (Port Louis, 1971), 272.
48. See also Rene’e Perrin, quoted in Monique Dinan, Une ı́le éclatée: Analyse de l’émigration mauricienne 1960–1982 (Port Louis, 1985), 123.
50. P.R. Heydon to Principal Immigration Officer Mauritius, 25 June 1964, A446 1969/72044, NAA.
52. Heydon to T.D. Vickers, 9 July 1964, A446 1969/72044, NAA.
53. Tom Vickers to P.R. Heydon, 27 July 1964, A446 1969/72044, NAA.
54. Heyes to Chief Migration Officer London, 19 Nov. 1951; R.R. Sedgwick to N.W. Lamidey, 26 May 1952, both A446 1969/72043, NAA.
55. Heydon to Minister, 19 Dec. 1966, A446 1970/95043; see also Hubert Opperman, Cabinet submission, ‘The Policy for the Admission of Persons of Mixed Race’, 1 Sept. 1964, A6980 S250888, both NAA.
56. Cabinet minute, decision no.481 re submission no.406, 15 Sept. 1964, A446 1970/95021, NAA.
57. Ibid.
58. Beazley, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Representatives 44 (16 and 17 Nov. 1964), 3055.
60. Heydon to B.C. Ballard, 23 Nov. 1964, A446 1970/95021, NAA.
61. Opperman, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Representatives 44 (16 and 17 Nov. 1964), 3055.
63. W.K. Brown to Asst Sec. Entry Policy Branch, 11 Dec. 1968, A446 1970/95043, NAA. In 1971, only 1.8 per cent of all immigrants of mixed descent were admitted on account of discrimination in their home countries, whereas 76.5 per cent were admitted on account of having close relatives living in Australia. A.J. Forbes, ‘Report on Immigration to Australia of Non-Europeans and Persons of Partly Non-European Descent’, 15 June 1972, A5908 713,
77. In 1965, following a report from the Australian Trade Commissioner in South Africa, an immigration officer thought that ‘discrimination may become a factor to be considered in deciding certain cases’ from Mauritius. S.R. Lewis to Charles, 2 Aug. 1965; see also J.L. Chapman to Sec. Dept of Immigration, 26 May 1965, both A446 1969/72044, NAA. There is no evidence to suggest that it did.


65. Brown to Sec. Dept of External Affairs, 4 Nov. 1970, app., p.4, A1838 146/10/1 part 2, NAA.


67. Simmons, Modern Mauritius, 162.

68. Quoted in ibid., 169.

69. Duyker, ‘Mauritians’, 595; see also Duyker, Of the Star and the Key, 90–92; Simmons, Modern Mauritius, 159; and Adone Resch, ‘La communeauté mauricienne en Australie’, 222–32.


71. Castle to Assistant Secretary, 29 Dec. 1967; Castle to Secretary, 11 Jan. 1968, both A446 1969/72045, NAA.

72. [name illegible], memorandum to Asst Sec., 17 June 1966, A446 1969/72045, NAA.


74. Ibid., 381.

75. A.J. Christopher, ‘Ethnicity, Community and the Census in Mauritius, 1830–1990’, Geographical Journal, 158, 1 (1992), 59–60. Commenting on the 1911 census, the then census commissioner explained that ‘[t]he classification of the population is effected principally by means of the surnames as, for obvious reasons, it cannot be made a subject of direct census enquiry’. A. Walter, quoted in Kuczynski, Demographic Survey, vol.2, 803.


78. See, for example, K.R. Dodsworth to Asst Sec. Operations Division, 24 July 1966, p.2, A446 1969/72045; W. G. Powrie to Senior Migration Officer, 19 Oct. 1966, A446 1966/22935; both NAA. Some applications included statements by the Passport and Immigration Officer saying that the applicants ‘are to the best of my knowledge and belief of EUROPEAN ORIGIN’. See, for example, Passport and Immigration Officer, 10 March 1966, A446 1966/12989, but the Immigration Department does not seem to have insisted on such statements – possibly because it did not trust them. In 1970 a Mauritian immigrant informed the Minister for Immigration’s private secretary that ‘[b]lood certificates’ could be easily purchased from corrupt Mauritian police officers; an officer of the Department of Immigration commented in a marginal note: ‘We know this from experience’. M. Migus to Sec., 14 April 1970, A446 1970/75117, NAA.

79. Castle to C.M.O., 23 June 1966, A446 1969/72043, NAA.


81. Interviewing officer’s comments, 28 May 1970, A446 1966/6460, NAA.

82. Interviewing officer’s comments, 2 Oct. 1968, A446 1966/7235, NAA.

98. A 1972 case involving a Mauritian family is cited in a book by the Labor Party politician responsible for the abolition of the White Australia policy: Al Grassby, The Tyranny of Prejudice (Melbourne, 1984), 48–49. When arguing the case for the 1964 reforms, one of Grassby’s predecessors, Hubert Opperman, had also drawn attention to this problem.

E.L. Charles to Treloar, 5 March 1964, A446 1970/95021, NAA.


