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A Mauritian tribute to Professor Thomas Hylland Eriksen

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Abstract: Professor Thomas Hylland Eriksen is possibly the main scholar whose work Mauritian social science students encounter closely while studying at university. His contribution to social science scholarship on Mauritian society is colossal. Thomas has particularly focused on ethnicity and nationalism in Mauritius. Apart from his scholarly work on the island society, he was particularly fond of Mauritius, and I often teased him that his island home awaited his next visit. This piece is a reflection on the seminal scholarship that Thomas has left us and his significant contribution to the social science literature and knowledge on Mauritian society. His writings also explored the wider implications of the Mauritian case study which he saw as an example of 'good practice' that the world could learn from. In his more recent work on the Indian Ocean island states, he focused on scale in both Mauritius and Seychelles. Apart from his scholarship, the paper also offers glimpses of my experience of working with Thomas the person, his kindness, as a mentor, and the friendship we shared.

Keywords: Ethnicity, nationalism, globalization, scale, Mauritius, Creole, language, identity

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Introduction

Thomas Hylland Eriksen's scholarly writings and research are interdisciplinary, ranging from Trinidad to Australia to Norway and the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and Seychelles. Much of his work zoomed on ethnically and culturally complex societies where he explored a variety of thematics including ethnicity and the dynamics of culture and identity, cosmopolitism, human rights, globalisation and its implications for the study of culture and society as well as the effects of scale on small Indian Ocean societies, including Seychelles and Mauritius. Thomas became a world-renowned scholar and prolific social anthropologist and his writings are widely read. Yet, the island of Mauritius held a special place in his heart and mind. I was among the lucky and blessed ones who had the chance to work with him; but mostly to have been his friend.

I remember first discovering his work as a first year social science undergraduate student at the University of Mauritius back in 1994. The clarity and depth of his writing amazed me, triggering my curiosity to know more about the author of such a clear, concise and accurate analysis of the diversity in Mauritian society. I first got in touch with Thomas in September 2007 when I was a PhD student at the University of Cape Town, researching women and politics in the Mauritian plural context. I had sought his views on my ideas on the influence of identity on the nature of political activism women were engaged in at the time of independence. Being the generous and kind professor, he replied with some advice and interesting points to consider. He was eager to know more on the new research being carried out on identity and social issues in Mauritius. His benevolence and selflessness poured through the words in his email and I remember regretting that he was not my doctoral supervisor as I read his message. I however decided not to pursue the email discussion out of respect for my actual supervisor and also because I did not want to take advantage of Thomas's generosity and time. Yet, fate had it that we got to work together again nearly a decade later.

My reconnection with Thomas happened largely through chance or luck in early 2015, through Facebook. A notification popped up on my newsfeed showing that one of my academic friends had become 'friends' with Thomas on Facebook. I decided to try my luck and sent him a friend request; which he kindly accepted. Exchanges over Facebook messenger or chat morphed into longer academic discussions on email, as well as an exchange of text messages and shared links to newspaper articles and social media posts related to burning issues on the island. Thomas was keen to stay updated on what was happening in Mauritius as he had been out of touch on island issues since the 1990s. He was very supportive of younger Mauritian scholars and of my work, while also providing constructive and critical reviews of draft articles and book chapters. This led to a wonderful scholarly connection, sharing of ideas, mentorship and most importantly, a deep and trusted friendship.

Thomas's contribution to scholarship on Mauritian society is outstanding. He remains a figure of authority in the field of Mauritian studies, with his detailed and in-depth contribution to the body of knowledge on Mauritian society. What is also remarkable about the scholarly work of Thomas is that it is accessible even to non-academic audiences. This is important in the Mauritian context especially because Thomas's analysis of Mauritian society is scientific and devoid of any form of bias of local identities. While the writings of Burton Benedict (1957; 1961; 1965) focussed on the plurality of Mauritian society, Thomas took the analysis further, looking at the interplay of ethnicity with nation-building and the practice of compromise among the different communities in Mauritius. Thomas examined what were the 'common denominators' that held Mauritian society together. Thomas's scholarly work on ethnicity in Mauritian society is highly pertinent and relevant to the country. It is an essential read in Mauritius and beyond especially for those interested in the areas of multiculturalism, ethnicity and identity. Thomas's deep connection with Mauritius and interest in the island's social issues are also reflected in his more recent work on globalization and overheating. These issues are further discussed in the next section.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen's 'discovery' of Mauritius and the Creole world

Thomas had initially planned to undertake fieldwork for his MPhil in Kenya. A diplomatic fallout between the Kenyan and Norwegian governments in the 1980s, however, compelled Thomas to switch focus and search for another suitable study site for his research. In 1985, Thomas was gifted a copy Trinidadian born British writer V.S. Naipaul's collection of essays *The overcrowded barracoon* (1973). In that book, V.S. Naipaul had a chapter that focused entirely on Mauritius, described as "the overcrowded barracoon" (pg. 255-286). After reading that chapter, Thomas became intrigued by the social complexities of the island and decided to conduct fieldwork for his MPhil in Mauritius. Naipaul's writing on and assessment of Mauritius was rather gloomy and pessimistic, not very different from those of Meade (1961) and Titmuss and Abel-Smith (1968) who had forecast a Malthusian nightmare and doom for the island. Nonetheless, *The overcrowded barracoon* stirred up his interest, especially because, at that time, it was rare to find a comprehensive anthropological study of Mauritius except for the work of Burton Benedict (YouTube, 2019). Benedict was the only anthropologist who had undertaken significant anthropological research on Mauritius, although his writings focused mainly on Indians and economic anthropology. Thomas described Mauritius as a "Caribbean Island located in the Indian Ocean" (YouTube, 2019). The island of Mauritius became the place where Thomas undertook his first 'proper fieldwork', from February to November 1986, which he described as a big adventure that changed his life and shaped him both intellectually and personally (Youtube, 2019). He made many friends in Mauritius, some which became lifelong friendships.

Thomas originally planned to focus nearly exclusively on Mauritian Creoles and to compare their culture and social organisation with areas in the Caribbean: this would have been a comparative study of the African diaspora in the Caribbean Sea and in the Indian Ocean (Eriksen, 1988, p. 222). This explains his initial choice of sites for fieldwork in the fishing villages in the south-west of the island. He was surprised by the simplicity of the people in the fishing villages of Case Noyale and La Gaulette, situated along Mauritius' south-west coast. He described the people in the villages as being poor but nonetheless optimistic and positive about their lives, smiling, cheerful and enjoying every little positive moment they had. After having spent a week in Mauritius, for Thomas, "there was no turning back" (YouTube, 2019). The island and its people had a profound impact on him, both personally and as a scholar. He described Mauritians as hospitable, friendly and sympathetically inclined to his project (Eriksen, 1988, p. 222). The pace of social change in Mauritius and realities on the ground led him to alter the focus of his research towards ethnicity. He described ethnicity as "such a striking feature of life in Mauritius that it could rarely or never be ignored in the process of accounting for a situational context" (Eriksen, 1988, pp. 222-223).

Thomas was intrigued by Mauritian society as it was one where people of different ethnic and religious identities lived together in a very small and confined space without much friction in general. He observed that Mauritians had found ways of adapting and living together which were viable and compatible with democracy, economic growth and a high level of life satisfaction. He spent four months in the fishing villages in the south-west of the island and then moved to the town of Rose Hill in June 1986, where he resided during the rest of his field visit (Eriksen, 1988). Thomas split his time between data collection in Rose Hill and in the capital city Port Louis. His early research on Mauritian ethnicities included three community studies carried out in the fishing villages already referred to, a mono-ethnic section of a suburb of Port Louis, and an ethnically mixed ward in Rose Hill (Eriksen, 1988, p. 225). He also grew fond of and became attached to the town of Rose Hill (Eriksen, 1988). While undertaking fieldwork in 1986, Thomas contributed to local Mauritian academic journals. His article on Creole culture and social change, published in the *Journal of Mauritian Studies,* was in fact the first article that he had written on Mauritius (Eriksen, 1986).

Thomas completed his MPhil in 1987, and the title of his thesis was *Ethnicity in Mauritius: its meaning, organisation and relevance* (Eriksen, 1987). His focus was on the relationship between ethnic identities and overarching national identity in Mauritius. He received a fellowship to undertake doctoral research which took him to Trinidad and Tobago for the next stage of his fieldwork. On the island of Trinidad, he stuck to the same theme as his research in Mauritius. The combined research produced a comparative ethnography and anthropology of Mauritius and Trinidad (Eriksen, 1991). He noted large similarities between Mauritius and Trinidad as both countries had been affected by the same waves of migration. His focus was on the relationship between different forms of identification and the ways in which people articulated similarity and difference in these complex societies. He concluded that cultural diversity was far less significant whereas ethnic diversity remained salient (Eriksen, 1991).

Thomas returned to Mauritius to carry out fieldwork for research on mixed marriages from December 1991 to March 1992 (Harelle, 2018a). He travelled to Mauritius again in October 1999 to study the causes of the riots that happened in February of that same year (Eriksen, 2004). After a prolonged absence, his next visit to Mauritius was in 2011 (Eriksen, 2014). This time, Thomas delivered a keynote address at the *International Conference on Contemporary Mauritius* held from 14 to 16 September 2011, organised by the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) in Moka. While in Mauritius, he also studied the development and

changes that had taken place on the island since his last visit. These observations and data fed into his later scholarly work on globalization.

During most of his visits to Mauritius, Thomas gave interviews to the local press. Some of the key Mauritian newspapers, including *Mauritius Times* and *L'Express*, published multiple interviews with him over his different visits. Just like in his home country Norway, Thomas was also a public intellectual for Mauritius and Mauritians, a reflection of his strong connection with and fondness of the island and its people. Yet, he was always careful not to tread on local and political sensitivities and provided an academic and professional analysis and commentary on social issues including ethnicity, politics, the 1999 riots and overheating in Mauritius. Thomas also spoke on national television, the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation during his visit in February 2018. His wish and message to Mauritius and Mauritians on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the independence of Mauritius appeared on the front page of *L'Express* on 23 February 2018:

> My wish for Mauritius is that it continues on its path while resolving the problems of inequality and the environment. Bon anniversaire! (L'Express, 23.02.18)

Thomas Hylland Eriksen's seminal work on ethnicity in Mauritius

Thomas Hylland Eriksen is an authority in the social science scholarship on ethnicity in Mauritius. It is indeed extremely rare to come across a social science scholarly article on Mauritius that does not refer to his work. His in-depth research and writings on ethnicity in Mauritius cover a range of themes including linguistic diversity, national identity, and ethnicity. Although mostly undertaken in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, his research remains highly relevant to contemporary Mauritian ethnic realities. His initial research was a comprehensive analysis of ethnicity in Mauritius, examining its impacts on social organisation and identity in a variety of social contexts and levels (Eriksen, 1988, p. 10). Thomas believed that Mauritius could serve as an example to other countries of the successful handing of cultural complexity and of the maintenance of peace in a pluri-ethnic society (Harelle, 2018a).

Thomas's analysis of ethnicity in Mauritius is painstakingly detailed and succinct. One can only wonder how he even achieved this challenging task being a Scandinavian researcher who was physically and culturally distanced from Mauritius and in the absence of the world wide web at that time. Thomas was actually able to smoothly and effortlessly integrate within local communities. He was able to dissect the highly controversial topic of ethnicity in Mauritius and successfully get locals to speak candidly about sensitive issues and gather invaluable data from local communities. In fact, carrying out in-depth research on ethnicity may prove to be challenging to homegrown Mauritian researchers. The latter may struggle to obtain the same level of depth and richness of data on Mauritian ethnicities due to the high level of sensitivity around the topic. Moreover, as Mauritian scholars, we also carry our own local ethnic and religious identities which invariably influence the responses of informants or interviewees. Thomas had a friendly, kind, generous and down-to-earth personality which made Mauritians feel at ease and comfortable to speak to him and share their thoughts and experiences.

Thomas observed that Mauritian ethnicity was locally associated with family origins, language, religion, physical appearance and/or lifestyle (Eriksen, 1998, p. 49). He took note of the different ways in which Mauritians marked the boundaries of their real estate, arguing that this was linked to both class and ethnicity (Eriksen, 2022, p. 267). He identified four important structuring principles for ethnic identity and boundary maintenance in Mauritius namely: the labour market, religion, language and party politics (Eriksen, 1997, p. 6). His detailed and accurate description of prevailing ethnic stereotypes in the country and analysis of the

prevalence of ethnicity within different social institutions, from politics to the family, are fundamental for anyone seeking to understand and/or studying Mauritian society as well as ethnic identities in plural societies generally. Thomas spoke of a "shared symbolic system" which formed the basis for compromises and movement of information across ethnic boundaries (Eriksen, 1998, p. 55). He also noted the flexibility in stereotypes in the Mauritian context, highlighting the significance of interpretation as well as the weakness of national symbols. In Mauritius, there exists an informal policy of avoidance towards discussing controversial subjects, especially concerning ethnicity and religion, outside of trusted inner circles, which contributes to the maintenance of peace and stability, which Thomas termed the "highest common denominator" (Eriksen, 1998; 1992).

The search for national symbols was another issue highlighted by Thomas in his writings on ethnicity in Mauritius. His contention was that symbols of national unity were difficult to construct and justify in independent Mauritius as they needed to be non-ethnic in character and appeal to the larger population (Eriksen, 1994, p. 555). Thomas also wrote on the riots in Mauritius that happened in February 1999 and the 'malaise creole': a term coined by the Creole priest Roger Cerveaux to describe the sense of alienation felt by Creoles in the country (Le Mauricien, 15 May 2013; Moonien, 2025). The riots were sparked by the death of the Creole singer and icon Kaya while in police custody after having participated in a peaceful protest for the legalisation of cannabis while smoking it. The death of Kaya in police custody angered the Creole community and led to riots across the country and the vandalism of government property as well as looting and arson. While he was not in Mauritius at the time the riots happened, Thomas travelled to the island in October 1999 to carry out more research on this issue (Eriksen, 2004). His analysis of the riots contends that this was not a proper ethnic conflict in the usual sense and the Creoles had revolted against particularistic practices in the public service that had curtailed their individual social mobility and had deprived them of equal treatment (Eriksen, 2004, pp. 93-94).

Thomas also analysed the contentious issue of language in Mauritius. His conclusion was that language was "a marker of ethnic difference" on the island (Eriksen, 1990, p. 3). He analysed the complexity of the language situation in Mauritius, describing it as "more complex that any African or Asian country" (Eriksen, 1990, p. 4). The contention surrounding the language issue has expanded as language is being increasingly associated with ethnic and communal groups. There has been a proliferation of more than 60 speaking unions (e.g. Hindi Speaking Union, English Speaking Union, French Speaking Union, Urdu Speaking Union, Bhojpuri Speaking Union, Tamil Speaking Union, Marathi Speaking Union, Creole Speaking Union, Mandarin Speaking Union, Arabic Speaking Union and Sanskrit Speaking Union) and cultural centres since independence to preserve and promote the various languages and cultural groups (Thornton, 2017, p. 8). As Thomas astutely explained, the concept of 'ancestral language' in Mauritius has replaced the category of 'ethnic membership' (Eriksen, 1990, p. 6). He saw Mauritian Kreol – a French-lexicon creole developed in the second half of the eighteenth century (Eriksen, 1997) – as a symbol of cultural continuity: it facilitated communication between and across different ethnic groups and it therefore could lead to the foundation of an informal national identity (Harelle, 2018a). This state of affairs has become even more complex as the lobby for the inclusion of Kreol in parliament is primarily emanating from representatives of the Creole community (Thornton, 2017; Le Mauricien, 2020): an association that, sadly, Thomas argued was fundamentally problematic because it dilutes the probability of Kreol becoming a national language (Harelle, 2018b). Thornton (2017, p. 264) argues that the "identity dimension" of Kreole that was promoted by Creole ethnic activists placed it in a precarious position for government consideration. Indeed, Hindu activists such as Suttyhudeo Tengur from the Government Hindi Teachers Union and Dr Sarita Boodhoo from

the Bhojpuri Speaking Union countered by starting to lobby for the inclusion of Hindi and Bhojpuri in parliament (Tengur, 2015; Daby, 2025).

In his more recent analysis of ethnicity and identity in Mauritius and on the way forward, Thomas wrote:

> Mauritian multiculturalism remains paradoxical in at least three ways: (1) the encouragement of ancestral cultures renders it difficult for individuals to liberate themselves from cultural traditions, even if they should want to; (2) multiculturalism at the ideological and political level may conceal continued, or even increased, class inequalities at the social and economic level and; (3) the acceptance of multiculturalism can be a recipe for nepotism and corruption since it encourages kinship networks and ethnic obligations at the expense of more individualist and meritocratic practices. There is no simple solution to any of these problems, but they have to be dealt with, certainly if Mauritius is going to make the most of its human capital in the decades to come (Eriksen and Ramtohul, 2018, p. 10).

This reference remains relevant to Mauritius and for a peaceful and sustainable management of diversity in the country and for reflection on the way ahead.

Mauritius in his more recent scholarly work on globalization

Thomas often referred to Mauritius in his more recent scholarly work on globalization. He illustrated different points such as hybridity and creolization with examples from Mauritius. In his classic text *Globalization*, he stated:

> In societies like Mauritius, creolization is considered unproblematic and virtuous. The absence of clear boundaries is not seen as a problem, and the emphasis is on the individual's freedom to adapt or adopt the values and practices that he or she deems valuable" (Eriksen, 2014, p. 130).

Mauritius was a key example in Thomas's illustrations of the unevenness of speed and how development and change had taken place at an uneven pace in different locations in the country, despite the smallness of the island and it having always been part of the global system (Eriksen, 2014, pp. 53-54).

In his book *Overheating: An anthropology of accelerated change*, Thomas included examples from his fieldwork in Mauritius. One hailed from the fishing village of La Gaulette, where he had carried out fieldwork in 1986. He explained how people in the village, at that time, could not afford piped water and electricity and households lit up their homes with kerosene lamps during the night. Most villagers went to sleep early, children did not do homework after nightfall and nobody watched television (Eriksen, 2016, p. 53). Moreover, in his discussion and analysis of the growth of the global tourist industry, Thomas once again drew from the example of Mauritius explaining how, in the 1990s, the authorities realised that the key attraction of the island was its azure waters. They therefore passed a law that banned buildings higher than the tallest coconut tree (Eriksen, 2016, p. 68). Here, Thomas highlighted the 'overheating' of tourist destinations such as Mauritius which have been too successful and have now become crowded, noisy and polluted.

In another piece on the electronic media in Africa, Thomas included an addendum from Mauritius where he discussed the effects of electronic media on social relationships (Eriksen, 2020). Given the strong influence of ethnicity on Mauritian politics and social relationships, he questioned whether the growing presence of Mauritians on social media would either strengthen and extend existing social relationships and social groups or else establish new ones (Eriksen, 2020, p. 225). Mauritians across all age groups and communities are indeed very

active on social media platforms – this was highly visible during the last elections in November 2024 when taped telephone conversations between politicians from the then government and other high ranking officials and police officers were leaked on social media. This led the government to block all social media platforms on 1st November 2024, with the ban meant to remain effective until the announcement of the results of the election on 11th November. Thomas's reaction to this unprecedented action was that what had happened was "not worthy of a democracy" (personal correspondence with T. H. Eriksen, 1 November 2024). Fortunately, the ban only lasted one day due to the widespread public outcry (Agence France Presse, 2024). The ban also backfired because many Mauritians, young and old, had installed a Virtual Private Network (VPN) application on their mobile device and were thereby able to bypass the ban and continue to access social media platforms. The social media ban is believed to have been a major contributing factor towards the heavy defeat of the MSM-PMSD-ML alliance in the last election (Aljazeera News, 2024).

Thomas argued that the new media situation had enabled Mauritians to distance themselves from community-based identities on discursive and symbolic levels, and increased the potential to enhance diversity such that individual variation assumed greater significance than group boundaries (Eriksen, 2020, p. 229). Indeed, through social media, Mauritians easily communicate with others across ethnic and religious groups, which ushers in an illusion of the dissolution of communal barriers. However, he cautioned that, although communal identities might appear to have grown weaker due to greater online interaction between different ethnic and community groups, real life situations might differ significantly as people could still be communally oriented (Eriksen, 2020, p. 229).

During what turned out to be his last visit to Mauritius, in December 2022 and January 2023, the island experienced torrential rains and flash floods that led to the closure of schools and ultimately a countrywide lockdown on 28th January 2023. Thomas wrote on this episode and his experience of the flash floods; it appeared in *Anthropology Today* (Eriksen, 2023). In that article, he discussed the effects of rapid transformation on social life and, in the Mauritian context, the growing real estate sector and increased construction on land that was previously cultivated with sugar cane. Thomas argued that real estate contributed to the loss of flexibility in Mauritius: rapid and often unplanned urbanisation in the name of progress and prosperity had increased the risks of flooding in the country (Eriksen, 2023, p. 16).

Thomas's unfaltering commitment to his 'island home'

A few days before he left us forever, in our correspondence Thomas wrote "And as you know, there is nowhere I'd rather be than in Mauritius. But I'm still capable of dreaming…" (personal correspondence with T. H. Eriksen, 18 November 2024). Thomas had a long-standing and deep connection with Mauritius and its people. Mauritius remained on his mind during the tough battle he had with cancer. I remember texting him pictures of sugar cane fields, beaches or mountains of Mauritius to cheer him up when he was in hospital. This common interest of ours also deepened the friendship that we shared for nearly a decade.

In July 2015, I began planning a book and an international conference in honour of the 50th anniversary of the independence of Mauritius, celebrated on 8th March 2018. Thomas was very supportive of both ventures and was happy to participate in these projects. We discussed tentative titles and contents of the book as well as potential contributors. Nonetheless, before he formally committed to the book project, Thomas asked me to begin drafting the book proposal. Thinking back, I can only reflect, with nostalgia, on what a great mentor he was. He encouraged younger academics to think independently, take initiatives and lead major projects as well as to go through with these. Thankfully he was happy with my writing and he

contributed to the draft before we looked at potential publishers to send it to. This was my first experience of co-authoring a piece with him and we worked well together. Preparations were ongoing for the book and also for the international conference on *Mauritius after 50 years of Independence: Charting the way forward* scheduled for 28th-30th June 2017 at the University of Mauritius. Thomas was invited to deliver the keynote lecture at the opening plenary session on 28th June. The conference also marked the beginning of the formal collaboration of Thomas with the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Mauritius.

Sadly, Thomas was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in September 2016 when we were deep into preparations for the conference and planning the co-edited book. This came as a shock to me as I had just lost my PhD co-supervisor and close friend Dr Elaine Salo a few months earlier. During these tough moments, I could only find solace in prayer and to be there for my friend in the midst of health challenges. Apart from our academic collegiality, we also shared a deep spiritual connection. Our discussions often went beyond social sciences and academics, to touch upon destiny, prayer and deeper meanings of life. Thomas was a role model for anyone facing major health challenges and terminal illness. He refused to let illness stop him from living and did his best to manage the illness and live his life fully. During the period when he was a cancer patient which spanned almost a decade, Thomas was very prolific and churned out an admirable number of publications, from academic to more general.

Despite his health challenges and having to undergo major surgery followed by chemotherapy, he was determined and resilient to recover and return to Mauritius to deliver the keynote address and attend the conference in June 2017. Mauritius is far from Oslo, the commute requiring at least 15 hours of travel. Thomas's exemplary courage and determination was simply astounding, also highlighting his strong connection with the island of Mauritius and its people. We were honoured to have him visit and deliver a keynote lecture titled *Small is beautiful, but is it viable? Scale and Mauritian options for the next 50 years*. Thomas's keynote lecture was published as a chapter in the co-edited book we were working on.

Figure 1: Conference dinner at Opium restaurant, Bagatelle, Mauritius: 30th June 2017. From left to right: Dr Jean Claude Autrey, Dr Jhanki Andharia, Mr Yacoob Ramtoola, Prof. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Dr Ramola Ramtohul, Prof. Francis Nyamjoh, Dr Aveeraj Peedoly, Mrs Lisha Peedoly.

<u>Figure 2</u>: Honouring our keynote speaker, Prof. Thomas Hylland Eriksen. 30th June 2017. Photo shows from left to right: Dr Ramola Ramtohul, Prof. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Dr Roukaya Kasenally, Dr Jean Claude Autrey.

Our co-edited book, *The Mauritian paradox: Fifty years of development, diversity and democracy* was launched on 22 February 2018 by the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius, Professor Dhanjay Jhurry. Thomas travelled to Mauritius to be present for the book launch and spoke at the event. He also delivered a guest lecture to the social science students at the University of Mauritius on "Mauritius is an overheated world: Globalisation, smallness and the art of punching above one's weight" on 23rd February 2018. During his final visit to Mauritius in December 2022-January 2023, Thomas delivered another guest lecture at the University of Mauritius on 26 January 2023. The topic of the guest lecture was "Are we becoming less globalized". During this trip, Thomas revisited the sites where he had first carried out fieldwork in 1986 and shared memories with his family and friends.

<u>Figure 3</u>: Prof. T. H. Eriksen guest lecturing at the University of Mauritius (26th January 2023).

Figure 4: The author with Prof. T. H. Eriksen at the University of Mauritius, after the floods (26th January 2023).

On May 9, 2024, a few months before he left us, Thomas delivered a public seminar titled 'Beyond boundary: Creole identities from Mauritius to the Cape' at the University of Cape Town, South Africa (University of Cape Town, 2024). His interest in and closeness to Mauritius never faltered. We had also begun working on a new funded research project on street harassment as a silent form of gender-based violence in Mauritius and South Africa. This is a collaborative research project involving the University of Mauritius, University of Pretoria and University of Oslo. For Thomas, this would have been a new area of work he would engage in and he was happy to be part of the team. I met Thomas in Oslo in August 2024, which was sadly the last time I saw him in person. He had been in a car accident a few months earlier and had suffered from fractures to his vertebral column and ribs. Nonetheless, he came to meet me at Oslo central station upon my arrival by train from Uppsala and he was keen for me to visit some of the scenic places of his hometown. Thomas was frail and the injuries he had suffered put him in considerable pain but he was looking forward to returning to Mauritius and working on the new research project. He was booked to be in Mauritius from 16 to 23 November 2024 to attend the first project team meeting and had reserved a room at the Aanari hotel in Flic en Flac, on the Mauritian west coast. However, he had a health setback in October which weakened his body, prevented overseas travel and rendered him critically ill. His passing on 27 November 2024 meant that an anchor of my life was gone leaving an emptiness that nobody and nothing could fill. Yet Thomas wanted us to move on with our lives and do the things we wanted to and for me, at this point in time, to finish the project we had started working on together.

<u>Figure 5</u>: Prof. T. H. Eriksen in Oslo (30th August 2024).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shared some vivid personal reflections of my friendship with Professor Thomas Hylland Eriksen and also on his scholarship on Mauritius. Thomas was a world renowned scholar, one who had won many awards for his colossal work. Yet, at the same time, he was a kind and generous person, always willing to help. This was obvious during his last three visits to the island, when students of the University of Mauritius benefitted from his lectures. Mauritius was his 'island home' as I often teased him. He was fond of the people, food, culture, beaches and even the warm tropical climate. Thomas's contribution to social science scholarship on Mauritius remains unparalleled. It can be safely said that students and anyone interested in ethnicity in Mauritius will be reading Thomas's work for many years to come. His more recent work on globalization, overheating and scale ushers in a new dimension to his scholarly analysis of Mauritius. Even if he is no longer here with us in person, Thomas Hylland Eriksen remains very much with us in spirit as we continue to refer to his writings in our research and teaching.

<u>Figure 6</u>: The author at the grave of Prof. Thomas Hylland Eriksen in Oslo, Norway (28 August 2025).

Postscript:

I just returned from Oslo yesterday. … We also met Thomas's family and paid our respects at his grave. I also showed this draft paper to Kari, Thomas's wife. She liked the contents and tribute to Thomas - (1st September 2025).

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