

Title: Colour and class inequality in Seychelles
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Abstract:

This thesis is concerned with the various aspects of social and material inequality in Seychelles. More specifically, it seeks to examine the relationship between the distribution of resources and the division of the population into class and racial groups. On almost all dimensions of inequality, the white minority is shown to enjoy a privileged position by comparison with blacks and coloureds. Despite the clear connection between colour and class, there have been very few signs of racial animosity on the part of the disadvantaged black majority. Seychelles has, in fact, enjoyed something of a reputation as a model of inter-racial harmony. The thesis seeks to investigate whether this reputation is warranted and how the absence of violent conflict could best be explained. The investigation took the form, principally, of a sample survey of the population carried out in 1981, supplemented by archive materials and other documents relation to the period of slavery and subsequent emancipation. Respondents' answers to the questionnaire, and their elaborations during interviews provided the basis for discussion and analysis of most of the key issues relation to social inequality, class and race. The questionnaire was designed to elicit, among other things, how respondents perceived inequality and whether they regarded it as just or morally unacceptable; whether they tended to judge their own and others' material condition in class or racial terms; whether they had personally experiences discrimination on class or racial grounds; whether they felt that colour was of any social relevance, and so on. These personal, subjective assessments of the social system were examined against the background of the factual distribution of resources and opportunities in the society. Data were provided on the existing pattern of landownership, income distribution, housing and educational opportunities. It was shown that perceptions of inequality almost always underestimated its actual extent, and that the least advantaged section of the society – the blacks – were not necessarily the most critical of existing arrangements. It was also found that most blacks and coloureds accepted the aesthetic and moral values espoused by the white elite. This provoked a consideration of whether the existing consensus arose from a genuine community of interest or whether it was 'manufactured'. Although much of the thesis concerns the attitudes and behaviour of the black majority, considerable attention was also paid to the white elite. Of particular interest here, is the ability shown by this elite in maintaining its power intact throughout the entire period of Seychelle's history. The extent of this power is illustrated both in the opening chapter dealing with the slave origins of the society, and the concluding chapter dealing with the establishment of an egalitarian socialist state.