**Abstract**

**BEYOND A BOUNDARY? CREOLE IDENTITIES FROM MAURITIUS TO THE CAPE**

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A major theme in contemporary critical social theory is the questioning and destabilisation of established boundaries – self/other, culture/nature and male/female being the most obvious ones. Not least for this reason, creole identities, ostensibly premised on openness and mixing, deserve close attention.

Creole social identity formation eschews boundaries, embraces impurities and rejects purity and origins as criteria for inclusion. Can creoles be considered ethnic groups at all, or do they represent a social form incompatible with a social theory assuming that groups need boundaries in order to perpetuate themselves?

Although the term creolisation, borrowed from linguistics, is sometimes used in a broad comparative sense, Creoledom tends to refer to the outcome of displacement, slavery, emancipation and its aftermath reverberating into the present. Creole intellectuals in the Caribbean have celebrated the cultural creativity characteristic of these societies, but have been criticised for ignoring class, racism and gender issues. By embracing the egalitarianism and openness of creoledom, they have become vulnerable to criticism of being handmaidens of neoliberalism or neocolonialism. Controversies over creole identity can be used to address basic questions in social theory.

The talk will mainly draw on material from the Indian Ocean, with tentative sideways glances to certain collective identity formations in South Africa.