■ *Patrick Eisenlohr*
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Temporalities of Community: Ancestral Language, Pilgrimage, and Diasporic Belonging in Mauritius

Temporal indexicality is deeply involved in the production of imagined communities. This article shows how the cultivation of Hindi as an "ancestral language" among Hindus in Mauritius mediates between two different modes of temporality while shaping diasporic identities. Diasporic ideologies of ancestral language are further shown to articulate with the creation of sacred geographies in the context of an annual Hindu pilgrimage. [language and temporality, nationalism, Hindi, Indian diaspora, Mauritius]

Language ideologies are inescapably implicated in the temporality inherent in social life. One the one hand, they are the complex product of the historical contexts in which they arise, on the other hand they themselves contribute to the temporal structuring of social worlds by establishing relationships between linguistic forms, communicative practices, and sociocultural valuations. There are few instances in which this double-faced embeddedness of language ideologies in temporality is as apparent as in the modes of linking experiences of time and nationhood through language, which figure prominently in contemporary theories of nationalism.

In Mauritius, standardized Indian "ancestral" languages, promoted by Hindu activists, are fundamental to the building of ethnonational communities among the Indo-Mauritian majority population. The nostalgic use of ancestral languages for creating ethnolinguistic identities represents a different way of figuring community through language-mediated chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981) as compared to the notion of "empty, homogenous time" proposed by Benedict Anderson. Indo-Mauritian ancestral languages as a mediating base of national and diasporic communities for Hindus in Mauritius are presented as providing a strong link to ancestors who left a homeland in India in order to settle in Mauritius. In this article I analyze how ideologies of such ancestral languages in Mauritius are involved in processes of group identification by projecting notions of a Hindu community through a particular regime of temporalization. These do so by locating the meaning of Hinduness in Mauritius in an ancestral time, combining ideas about language with ritual performance evoking an ancestral homeland in India.

At the same time, they also represent an answer to questions of historical consciousness among Hindus in Mauritius. In several ways, the identification with ancestral Hindi addresses questions of historical change, which can be located along the axis of Anderson's "empty, homogenous"—that is, linearly progressing time measurable in uniform units. In constituting themselves as a diasporic community concerned with

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questions of ethnolinguistic authenticity, Hindu Mauritians are aware of the profound transformations of a history of indenture, colonialism, and the rise of Hindus from poor indentured laborers in the sugar-cane fields to a position as the politically dominant group of the country, now on the average enjoying reasonable prosperity. Hindu activists and their followers in Mauritius cast what they regard as the heroic maintenance of Hindi under the pressure of new historical circumstances as part of the story of Hindu success in the diaspora. The triumph over adversity and hardship during and after the period of indenture is the leading theme of historical interpretation of a past which many Hindus remember not just in terms of economic exploitation and political repression, but as displaying the successful "preservation" of religious traditions and ethnoreligious group identity. Ancestral Hindi then negotiates the differences between two chronotopes of community, closely resembling the contrast Benjamin drew between "empty, homogenous" time and "messianic" sanctified simultaneity across time: Hindus in Mauritius as one with their ancestors versus an understanding of a Hindu community as progressing through time, in a narrative of political and economic rise and heroic preservation of ancestral traditions in dramatically changing circumstances.

I demonstrate the interplay between these processes of temporal reckoning by discussing the relationship between ideologies of ancestral language and Hindu pilgrimage in Mauritius. Highlighting the parallels between the celebration of ancestral Hindi and the Shivratri pilgrimage as a reenactment of Hindu pilgrimage to sacred bodies of water in India in a reconstituted sacred geography in Mauritius, the discussion focuses on the semiotic processes enabling the negotiation of the spatiotemporal disjuncture between diasporic Hindus and the world of their Indian ancestors central to the pilgrimage. Inspired by Michael Silverstein's discussion of "nomic calibration" (1993:48–53), I argue that the pilgrims' performance of iconic likeness between the world of the ancestors and their diasporic descendants can be understood as a *calibration of displacement*. This particular form of indexical-iconic regimentation of signs facilitates a ritual experience of temporal equivalence between the contexts of diaspora and the ancestors' India on the occasion of Shivratri.

Hindi and Bhojpuri in Mauritius

Mauritius is a predominantly Mauritian Creole-speaking society in which over two-thirds of the population are of Indian origin. Hindus alone comprise 52 percent of the total population, whereas Indian Muslims constitute 16 percent. The vast majority of Indo-Mauritians are the descendants of indentured laborers, who entered Mauritius between 1834 and 1915, replacing slave labor on sugar plantations after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire (Carter 1995; Tinker 1974). Other ethnic groups are the Creoles (28 percent), who are Catholics and mostly the descendants of African slaves, the Sino-Mauritian community (less than two percent), and an even smaller but economically powerful Franco-Mauritian group. Apart from Mauritian Creole, Bhojpuri, a North Indian language of the Bihari group, in its local Mauritian variety is also spoken among many Indo-Mauritians (roughly a quarter of the population) in a bilingual situation. Although English is the official state language and medium of education, it is primarily used as a written, bureaucratic medium and is rarely spoken. In many ways, French overshadows English in Mauritius, not just because of a small native-speaker group among Franco-Mauritians and upper-class Creoles, but because of its central position in the private-sector economy and the mass media, especially print.

Nevertheless, the Mauritian state apparatus, which is not monopolized but is otherwise largely dominated by members of the Hindu ethnic group, has especially since independence from Britain in 1968 been very interested in the teaching and support of Indian ancestral languages, in particular Hindi. One the one hand, this policy has been a response to long-standing demands of Hindu organizations in Mauritius, which in recent decades have become part of a transnational network of Hindu nationalism.

On the other hand, in pursuing this policy, the government of Mauritius has seized the opportunity to portray itself as a defender of tradition in a situation of rapid socioeconomic change and economic growth in Mauritius since the mid-1980s.

Hindi is officially—that is in the education system, in the state-controlled television network, and in the allocation of funds to Hindu organizations—recognized as the ancestral language of Hindus in Mauritius.[1] Hindi had already been a central issue of political mobilization for Hindu nationalists in India since the 19th century (Brass 1974; Lelyveld 1993). In fact, it can be argued that modern Standard Hindi in its sanskritized form is a direct product of the rise of nationalist ideologies among elites concerned with defining a Hindu nation and the rewriting of the past in colonial India (Dalmia 1997; King 1994). While sketching the relationship between Standard Hindi and Bhojpuri, it is important to distinguish two uses of the category "Hindi": the first the way it will be used in this article, referring to modern Standard Hindi, the other more loosely functioning as a cover term for a chain of cognate dialects stretching across Northern India, from Rajasthan in the west to Bihar in the east (Gumperz and Naim 1960; Siegel 1988:2). Standard Hindi, like Urdu, draws on varieties of Hindi (in the second sense), known as *khaṛībolī* of the western part of Uttar Pradesh, the area to the east and northeast of Delhi, whereas Bhojpuri forms part of the Bihari group at the eastern end of this chain of linguistic varieties. The relationship between Hindi and Bhojpuri, however, is not only one of near-opposite poles in a linguistic continuum stretching west to east across the Gangetic plain. It is also a matter of politics: attempts to standardize Bhojpuri have not been successful, and Standard Hindi has the status of a national language in India and is the official language of administration and education all the way from Rajasthan in the west through the Gangetic plain to the border with West Bengal, including the state of Bihar.

In Mauritius, Hindi is never used in everyday contexts and is often not well known by the people claiming it as their ancestral property. However, Hindi as an ancestral language is understood to be an emblem of Hindu group identity, which needs to be preserved and protected, regardless of the fact that most ancestors of the Indo-Mauritians were speakers of varieties of Bhojpuri. As a presumed ancestral language, Hindi is taught to Hindu students in state schools. Students are automatically assigned to Hindi classes on the basis of their names, from which their ethnoreligious identities are inferred. Hindu organizations in Mauritius such as the Arya Samaj, the Sanatan Dharm Temples Federation, and the Hindu Maha Sabha, as well as other smaller Hindu bodies connected to the globally operating Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), seek to inhabit the role of purportedly protecting Hindi as a crucial element of what is considered a Hindu ancestral culture in Mauritius. Hindi evening schools known as *baithka* have played an important role in religious instruction and communal mobilization among Mauritian Hindus since the early 20th century. The Hindu reformist movement Arya Samaj, whose Mauritian branch was established in 1910, provided much of the initial impetus to spread Standard Hindi on the island. Sanskritized Hindi, referred to as *ārya bhāṣā* ('language of the Aryas,' that is, of the true Hindus) by the movement is also the language of its main religious text, the *Satyārth prakāś*. Starting in the 1920, the Sanatan Dharm movement, the orthodox reaction to the reformism of the Arya Samaj, also promoted Hindi as a medium of religious instruction and countermobilization and as an emblem of an emerging Hindu identity in Mauritius (Ramsurrun 1984; Ramyead 1985:41–55). Later, the demand for state support of Hindi, especially for instruction of Hindi in state schools, became a key issue in the struggle for voting rights for the Indo-Mauritian population led by Hindu organizations and the Hindu-dominated Labour Party after the Second World War (Eisenlohr 2001; Ramyead 1985).

Hindi is involved in the production of a Hindu community in Mauritius in a double way. Hindi provides a discursive field through which ideologies of a shared ancestral language contribute to processes of group identification, resulting in the imagining of a Hindu community in Mauritius. On the other hand, Hindi plays an important role in public performances of Hindu belonging in Mauritius. These combine religious ritual

with a collective enactment of a link to an ancestral homeland of Mauritian Hindus in India.

At the same time, the ideology of Hindi as an ancestral language ties the notion of a Hindu community in Mauritius to particular notions of temporality. The celebration of the ancestral language constitutes a chronotope, which locates the idea of a Hindu community in Mauritius within a temporal order centered on the collapsing of the world of the Indian ancestors into the world of present-day Hindus in Mauritius. Here I examine this process by focusing on the annual Shivratri pilgrimage, which combines the celebration of an important Hindu festival and the performance of a diasporic relationship to a homeland with the celebration of Hindi as the language of the ancestors and founders of the Hindu community in Mauritius. As I will explain, an indexical order is established in which a Hindu homeland in India, a Hindu community, and Hindi as the emblem of Hindu group identification in Mauritius point to one another in the performance of pilgrimage. The integration of these disparate elements is then naturalized through a particular temporal regime.

Language and Chronotopes of Community

Benedict Anderson (1991) has suggested a close interrelationship between the rise of nationalism and changes in the linguistic mediation of concepts of community. Anderson claims a direct link between widened processes of literary communication under print capitalism, resulting in expanding publics of co-readers, and the emergence of national consciousness. However, this is not the only language-based argument in Anderson's influential model of nationalism. Equally central to his account is his analysis of new literary genres, such as the realist novel, as enabling a new conception of "empty, homogeneous" time. This new form of experiencing time as linearly moving forward and measurable by clock and calendar provides an abstract yardstick on which otherwise disparate and disconnected events can be conceived as linked by virtue of simultaneity relative to such an axis of time. Anderson argues that this way of conceiving time also enables modern subjects to imagine a national community as progressing forward through history, in a manner somewhat analogous to characters in a novel, whose disparate lives and actions are connected by virtue of being locatable on the same temporal measure of an unfolding plot (1991:26). This chronotope of "empty, homogeneous" time underlying Anderson's model of nationalism is borrowed from Benjamin and stands in contrast to the latter's concept of "messianic time," a sacred simultaneity across past, present, and future always containing the potential for revolution and redemption. Anderson sees the rise of the conception of "empty, homogeneous time" as engendered by the modernist genre of realist reportage in the novel. Through this new experience of time, subjects can experience themselves as existing in a synchronized manner together with other subjects in temporally and spatially bounded yet homogeneous units of "nations."

This is not the only way language works in order to create ethnonational consciousness in a particular temporal mode. The link between language and the national imagination is mediated by varying cultural ideologies making use of linguistic images and tropes, and there is no inevitable link between the national community and the particular language-mediated sense of time described by Anderson. Silverstein (2000) has shown how a Whorfian "Standard Average European" conception of Newtonian space–time, homogeneous, mensurable, and creating the effect of "unisonance" or "one voice" for the subjects inhabiting it, underlies the Andersonian model of nationalism. But Andersonian "Standard Average European" space–time is not the only possible, nor even the most plausible, chronotope of the nation (Kelly 1998). In contrast to Anderson, the Mauritian case draws attention to a rather different mode of linking experiences of time and nationhood through language. Indo-Mauritian ancestral languages, which are the mediating base of national and diasporic communities in Mauritius, are presented as providing a strong link to ancestors who left a homeland in India in order to settle in Mauritius. The cultivation of ancestral languages

is a way of feeling oneself to be one with the ancestors in a manner not so different from what Benjamin described as "messianic" simultaneity across time. I suggest that ideologies of ancestral languages evoke a vision of the present, "which is shot through with chips of messianic time" (Benjamin 1968:265) and characterized by an "explosion" of the continuum of history (Benjamin 1968:263). The emphasis here is not on the synchronized progression through homogeneous time with other national co-subjects, but on the ever-present quality of heroic and virtuous ancestors. Since languages with ascribed ancestral qualities like Hindi form the basis of new ethnonational solidarities, Anderson's claim that the experience of nationality is dependent on one particular form of temporal regimentation needs to be reconsidered. Not just "empty, homogeneous" but also "messianic" modes of temporal structuration can be conducive to the formation of ethnonational communities. That is, while nationalism is a modern phenomenon, it does not necessarily rest on the kind of radical modernist reorientation of experiencing time highlighted by Anderson.

Benjamin, while discussing the new regimentation of time of the French revolutionary calendar, also suggested that festivals and sacred days represent instances of "messianic time," since "basically, it is the same day that keeps recurring in the guise of holidays, which are days of remembrance" (1968:263). This also attests to the fundamentally cyclical character of "messianic time," which is nowhere as apparent as on such ritual occasions.

The Shivratri Pilgrimage

The particular ethnographic example of the instantiation of an ancestral trope of community that I would like to discuss here is the annual Hindu pilgrimage to Grand Bassin, a mountain lake in the southwest of Mauritius known to Hindus as Ganga Talao ('Ganges pond') on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Shivratri. The Shivratri pilgrimage to Grand Bassin is, together with Divali, one of the two main Hindu festivals in Mauritius and unrivaled in the scale of public religious performance on the island. Shivratri is an official national holiday in Mauritius. Every year around 300,000 pilgrims, out of a total population of less than 1.2 million, make the pilgrimage to the sacred mountain lake, many of them in processions on foot, from distances of up to 40 miles, staying in Hindu temples on the way. Official figures for the 2002 pilgrimage even reached the mark of 400,000 participants (*Mauricien* 2002). The main ritual consists in the collecting of sacred water from the lake, which is then offered to *śivling*, a phallic representation of the deity Shiva. This is performed in the two Shiva temples at Grand Bassin, as well as in temples of the pilgrims' home communities after their return, especially at the all-night prayers and worship dedicated to Shiva during the night of Shivratri known in Hindi as *cār pehar kī pūjā*. The Mauritian state is heavily involved in the organization of the pilgrimage, from regulating traffic and providing public transport to the site, to the provision of infrastructural amenities to pilgrims at Grand Bassin, to extensive media coverage of the pilgrimage through the government-owned and -controlled Mauritius Broadcasting Cooperation. Since independence, the state has also played a pivotal role in turning Grand Bassin into a major and well-endowed site of Hindu pilgrimage, working hand in hand with Hindu activists and organizations from Mauritius and India.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the pilgrimage to Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao is the performative and spatial recreation of a sacred geography resembling that of the Hindu pilgrimage sites on the sacred river Ganges in North India. Steps leading down to the lake have been built in the manner of bathing *ghāṭ* common at Hindu places of pilgrimage located at sacred bodies of water, which pilgrims use when they perform ritual worship on the banks of the lake and collect amounts of the sacred water. The *ghāṭ* are overlooked by four main temples and other shrines whose roof architecture is designed to resemble what is considered the shape of a typical Indian temple. There are four main temples at Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao, two of which are primarily dedicated to Shiva, one to Ganga, Jamuna, and Sarasvati, and the remaining

one to Hanuman. In addition to these four larger temples, there are also five smaller shrines. The two Shiva temples, however, feature prominently at Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao both with respect to their location as well as their significance for the Shivratri pilgrimage. They are also both centrally involved in the recreation of a sacred Hindu geography in Mauritius, and each features a large *śivling* brought from India.

One of the two temples dedicated to Shiva is the oldest and largest temple structure at Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao, directly overlooking the most elaborate part of the *ghāṭ* leading to the shore of the sacred lake. The temple, established in 1964, is named Kashi Vishvanath Mandir after the most prominent temple of the holy city of Banaras on the Ganges in North India. The other temple, more recently built and located directly on the lake shore, is officially known as Mauritiuseswarnath Mandir. As in the case of the Kashi Visvanath Mandir, the name of this second Shiva temple signals a claim of religious authenticity by postulating a direct link to prominent centers of Hindu worship in India. According to the keepers of the temple, the government-subsidized Mauritius Sanatan Dharm Temples Federation, the sacred *śivling* in the temple is on a par in religious significance with twelve other famous *lingam* or manifestations of Shiva in India. A table in the temple lists these located in prominent places of Hindu pilgrimage across India such as Kedarnath, Banaras, Somnath, Ujjain and Nasik, while; number 13 reads: "Mauritiuseswarnath ji: On the bank of Ganga Talab, Mauritius" (*talab* being the Hindi equivalent for Bhojpuri *talao*).

This very explicitly formulated claim of continuity with a sacred Hindu landscape in India is also echoed by the location of the Hanuman Temple on top of a hill directly overlooking the lake of GrandBassin/Ganga Talao. The location of the Hanuman temple on the steep hill overlooking the lake is understood to be an allusion to an episode in the *Ramayana* in which Hanuman lifts an entire mountain.

Another important element in the recreation of an Indian Hindu sacred geography in the uplands of Mauritius is the fact that the mountain lake has long been imagined in local Hindu folklore to be an extension of the sacred river Ganges in India. Soon after the discovery of the site in 1898 as a place of ritual by a group of pilgrims led by the Brahman Pandit Sajiwon of the northern village of Triolet, stories circulated to the effect that this remote lake, at that time known as Pari Talao ('fairies' pond') among Indians, was in fact linked to the river Ganges by a subterranean connection beneath the ocean. According to another legend the origin of Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao is due to a tear the goddess Ganga shed when she saw her children, the Indian emigrants, leave for faraway Mauritius. Vayu, the god of the winds, then carried the tear to the place in the uplands of Southwest Mauritius that is now known as Ganga Talao. At the educational display in the Kashi Visvanath Mandir during the celebration the 100th anniversary of the pilgrimage in February 1998, a text retelling the legend was the first item visible to visitors on a board when they entered the display. And in 1972, a public ceremony headed by the Indian pandit Vidya Nidhi Pandey officially and performatively proclaimed the existence of a concrete link of Grand Bassin to the river Ganges. A vessel of Ganges water flown in from the pilgrimage city of Hardwar with the assistance of the Indian government was ritually worshipped and then discharged into the lake, officially consecrating the latter as Ganga Talao.

In other words, Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao as a site of pilgrimage stands in an iconic relation to a sacred religious geography in India, while the Shivratri pilgrimage to the site can be seen as a diagrammatic reenactment of Hindu pilgrimages to sacred sites on the river Ganges. This iconicity is manifest in multiple kinds of likeness between the sacred Hindu geography of India and its replication in Mauritius. It is evident in the assumed consubstantiality of the water of Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao with the Ganges in India, in the location of the temples by the sacred lake, overlooking *ghāṭ* rimming the shore, as well as in the functions and names of the temples, some of which directly embody a claim of continuity with particular sites of the Indian Gangetic sacred homeland. Finally, the annual movement of pilgrims from all over the island to the mountain lake can be considered a diagrammatic icon of similar itineraries followed by Hindu pilgrims in India on their way to and from holy sites situated at sacred

bodies of water (*tirth yātrā*), especially the Ganges. Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao and the Shivratri pilgrimage are not just sites of Hindu religious practice, they embody a particular diasporic orientation toward a Hindu homeland evident in the attempt to replicate an Indian sacred geography in Mauritius.

Hindi and the Shivratri Pilgrimage

As one of the most important occasions for the celebration of Hindi as the language of the ancestors of Mauritian Hindus, the pilgrimage represents an attempt to project a unified Hindu community through a strategy of temporalization focused on ritual performance and the use of Hindi as reenactments of ancestral practices. The Shivratri pilgrimage to Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao provides a privileged and presupposed context for the use and celebration of Hindi in religious songs (*bhajan*), sermons, and speeches, which are simultaneously broadcast on national television and radio. The role of Hindi in mediating between Mauritian Hindus and the homeland of their ancestors is highlighted regularly in the context of religious rituals and events, speeches, and the teaching of Hindi in state schools and temples throughout Mauritius. However, no other event provides such a centralized and nationwide focus on the ancestral qualities of Hindi as the annual Shivratri pilgrimage, which is itself understood to have been initiated by the immigrating ancestors from India.

Nevertheless, the simultaneous celebration of the pilgrimage and of Hindi as instances of Hindu ancestral culture is subject to contradictions and always remains a problematic performative achievement. The propagation and use of Hindi by a network of Hindu organizations and representatives of Mauritian state authorities combined in a Shivratri "task force" appears strangely at odds with the linguistic practices of the mostly Creole-speaking pilgrims and is confined to official performances of Hindu belonging in the context of the event. However, these events feature prominently in state-controlled television and radio reporting of the pilgrimage.

The aim of the organizers both to unite all Hindus in Mauritius and to have them reenact what are represented as the actions of their ancestors is also in permanent conflict with the fragmented nature of the Hindu "community." Hindus of South Indian background have their own sociocultural organizations, which are not engaged in the Shivratri pilgrimage, and they are involved in the propagation of different ancestral languages, Tamil and Telugu. In contrast to the massive participation among Hindus of North Indian background, far fewer Tamil and Telugu Hindus join in the pilgrimage. Tamils and Telugus in the community in which I lived sometimes expressed suspicion about the close relationship between North Indian-dominated Hindu organizations and prominent members of the government and rejected their claim to represent a united Hindu ancestral culture. The emblematic use of Hindi in the context of the pilgrimage was also interpreted as a political act, calculated to justify the political dominance of Bihari Hindus over the rest of the Hindu community. Further, the celebration of ancestral culture and ancestral language stands in a relationship of potential disjuncture with people's everyday projects, which motivate them to join the pilgrimage. While showing their devotion to Shiva by fasting and by the long march to Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao, the pilgrims I knew spoke about the benefits they hoped for in health, professional success, and the passing of crucial school exams rather than a desire to reenact the deeds of the ancestors or to cultivate Hindi.

On the other hand, several residents of the community in which I lived affirmed the linkage between Hindi and Hindu identity as they went on pilgrimage to Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao. Although he did not know Hindi well, Rakesh, a man in his mid-forties, referred to Hindi as "our language," thereby engaging in an act of identification shared by numerous other people in the village. After the return from the pilgrimage, Sadna, a woman in her late sixties, declared herself offended by a pandit in a neighboring village who would not always use Hindi in the temple, saying, "What will become of our religion if everybody speaks Creole while worshipping?"

Another middle-aged male pilgrim, Vinod, worrying about the loss of Hindu tradition in conversations with me approvingly quoted the motto of the Hindi Pracarini Sabha, "When the language (Hindi) is gone, the culture (*sanskriti*) is also gone," switching from Creole to Hindi while doing so. He was also concerned that his children showed little interest in Hindi classes at school and ensured that they attended a local Hindi Sunday school in a Hindu temple.

That is, the attempt to project a unified Hindu community emphasizing the copresence of Mauritian Hindus and the world of the ancestors through ritual performance and ancestral language has to gloss over such contradictions and diversity of views in order to be successful. This strategy of temporalization represents a denial both of everyday Hindu linguistic practices and of Hindus' internal differentiation as a community in Mauritius. Hindu organizations, in conjunction with transnationally operating Hindu nationalists, seek to impose a vision of what is understood to be Hindu ancestral culture in Mauritius in which North Indian traditions predominate and their own central position as guardians of tradition is affirmed.

How Are Hindus Persuaded That Hindi Is "Their" Language?

I have described the pilgrimage to Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao as a complex sign in which pilgrims are engaged in a reenactment of Indian sacred relations and in which at the same time Hindi functions to emphasize the diagrammatic relationships between the ancestors' sacred practices in the homeland and the annual Shivratri pilgrimage in Mauritius. Few of the immigrating ancestors from India had knowledge of Hindi, and the cultivation of sanskritized Hindi under the label of "ancestral language" was introduced from 1910 onward by Hindu nationalist organizations from India, such as the Arya Samaj, at a time when migration to Mauritius had effectively ended (Barz 1980; Ramyead 1985).

How is an ancestral language not used in daily interaction made relevant to the experience of being Hindu in Mauritius? More particularly, against the backdrop of a situation in which participants' concerns during the Shivratri pilgrimage do not always perfectly match the official representation of a diasporic relationship to a homeland and ancestral world as effected in the pilgrimage, how are many Hindus in Mauritius persuaded that Hindi is finally "their" language? On the one hand, following similar patterns of mobilization in India since the late 19th century, Hindu activists in Mauritius, now well connected to state institutions, have championed standard Hindi as an emblem of an emerging Hindu identity in Mauritius for over 90 years (Buckory 1988; Ramyead 1985). But for many Mauritian Hindus, there is also a different level of awareness apart from the institutionalized promotion of Hindi on which Hindi can be experienced as one's own.

In order to explain this dynamic, it is useful to go beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the pilgrimage and to focus on what might best be termed an ethnicization of Bhojpuri as a Hindu language. Bhojpuri, the only Indian vernacular language still used in Mauritius in a bilingual situation with the dominant Mauritian Creole, is subject to attempts at purification in which the boundaries between Standard Hindi and Mauritian Bhojpuri are blurred. This is particularly evident in linguistic practices in which otherwise frequently used lexical items of Creole origin are deleted and replaced by sanskritized Hindi items (Eisenlohr 2001). One of the effects of such practices is not just to ethnicize Bhojpuri by representing an Indian language spoken by both rural Muslims and Hindus as Hindu property, but also to make ancestral Hindi conceptually accessible as part of everyday linguistic practices.

Here I want to draw on a particular example from a rural community in Northern Mauritius, a village of approximately 3,500 inhabitants whose population is over 90 percent Hindu. In this community, membership on the temple board and a leading role in organizing temple activities such as the celebration of major Hindu festivals are alternative routes to social recognition. This is especially the case for men

who otherwise lack the credentials of the state education system and the access to higher-paying jobs in the government service that such credentials provide. Leadership roles in the temple association involve the directing of devotional activities, which cannot entirely be left to a *pandit*, who only travels to the temple once a week from another village. An important part of such duties of directing worship is the performative opening of the two main regular Hindu devotional activities in the temple, singing devotional songs and chanting from the *Ramcaritmanas* (the vernacular version of the *Ramayana*) which often start with an address or brief speech by one of the board members. This kind of performance involves the speaking of purist Bhojpuri, while the use of Creole or ordinary Bhojpuri is frowned upon. The ability to speak purist Bhojpuri is in turn usually contingent on some training in Hindi, either through the school system or through temple schools.

The setting for the following example is the home of a retired *sirdar* (an overseer in the sugar industry) in his sixties (Speaker 2) who is known in the village for his engagement in the temple. The *sirdar* had invited worshippers to his home for a *kirtan*, the singing of devotional songs in Hindi, which was normally scheduled to take place in the temple. While the devotees were sitting on the floor of the living room of the *sirdar*'s house, the principal of the temple board, a man in his forties who is also employed as a *sirdar* by the nearby sugar mill (Speaker 1), opened the gathering by thanking the members of the temple society for coming and the host for opening his home to the worshippers. Finally, a woman in her thirties sitting in the audience joined in (Speaker 3), interrupting the host's performance in order to thank him on behalf of the worshippers for his engagement in the temple. In this context, the switch from Creole and ordinary Bhojpuri to purist Bhojpuri marked the change to a new speech genre, signaling the beginning of a performance of address embedded in Hindu moral discourse. A central situational focus emerged and the audience fell silent. (Hindi lexical items are in boldface; Creole is in italics; Bhojpuri is in roman. Personal and place names have been changed.)

(Mother to her children in the background):
olog bhitre hawansa, *assize twa, assize twa, bizin alle dan grup*
S 1: hamni mandir ke **sadasya** ke **taraf** se

abhi Beharry **parivar** ke, ke **dhanyavaad** dewat haija
ke hamni ke aaj ego esan mauka delak ke

aake unke lage bhagwan ke **sewa** kareke awsar milal ta
suk ke din hamni ta kirtan *abitye* haisa shivala men aaj mamu ke **kripa** se
aaj hija hogal
itne tadad tolog ailaja
ek ghanta hamni ke sange bitailaja
isse liye hamni tolog ke **koti dhanyavad samarpan** karat haija
kyonki is samay, ih ghatawa
sakta kucho bhi kare, television dekhe
koi butik lage rahi,
koi ghumat hoi
koi parhat hoi, to kucho karat hoi,
ta ek ghanta nikalke baba, bhagwan ke kaam men tolog hamni ke saath delaja
isi liye hamni **hirday se dhanyavadsamarpan** karat haija

(Mother to her children in the background):
they are inside, *sit down, sit down you have to go in a group*
S 1: on **behalf** of the **members** of the temple
we now give **thanks** to the Beharry **family**

that today they gave us such an opportunity
to come to their place to **serve** god
we got the chance as
Friday we are *used to* kirtan at the shivala today through mamu's [a term of respect] **kindness**
today it has taken place here
so many of you have come
to spend one hour together with us
therefore our **distinguished thanks**
we **present** to you
because at this time,this hour
one could do whatever, watch television
hang around at a bar/store,
wandering around somewhere,
study something, do whatever
so you have taken an hour to join us in the work of god
therefore we **present heart-felt thanks**

ta ab mamu boli,
mamu?
Bolah tou ab ka bolbah

S2: Ham ihi bolat haj, accha jetna
upastitha sajan ba sab **parivar**
bahut dhanyavad aplog ke
dinon bahut **aasha** rakhle rahan
ke u din kirtan karyan
to aaj u din u kam pura hoi
aplog okra **ashirvaad** dah
aur **aplog** ke **dhanyavad** hoi apan apan ghar
se etna **samai** nikalke
aplog padharla aike kirtan karla
bhajan karla prabhu ke naam sunlija in ta
bahut **kritarth** hoi hamni
sabke dekha ketna hamar natin ba, beti ba, pato ba ailanja aake kasta uthake aaj elog ke ghar men

bahut bahut utsah milal
bahut bahut dhanyavad bhagvan ke
bhagvan **sahaita** ba
aur **parampita paramatma** ke **daya** se

tohlog ke **jiwan** men ham esne sukh santi
aur kushi aur har **parivar** men kushi
chaile rahi
bhagvan ke **ashirvaad** par **paripurna** rahi
tolog ke man **hamesha utsah** hoi

aur jaike bahut **aasha** rahi
ki ham kab mandir men jai jab puja karab

dekha ih ego ghar ba
La Nicolière men esan ego chota ghar ba
ki jane sab **parivar** milke
ego chota san mandir banayan
jaha koi **aasha** nai rahal **andhkar** rahal
aaj ego hawja par chota sun mandir ba
[. . . . . .]
ab bar bar **namaskar** karat hai tolog ke
jo koi hiya ailaja sabke **namaskar bahut dhanyavad** aaj hamra **aasra** milalke
aaj etna hamar **parivaar** chal aal
baki bhagwan **ki daya se**
sab kuch pura hoi. . .

S3: hamni tohar puja karilasa chacha

S2: ka karab beti
in ta tolog ke **sahas** ha
S3: tohro gor hath niman se rahi
to mandir men sabakan karba athi
S2: hamar barka maa **ashirvaad** devat
hawan han barka **ashirvaad** dewat hoi ki
tohar gor hath niman rahi aur. . . .
S3: nahi hamni bahut tohar tohar puja
path karlisa *parski* tu sab ka kam karela u
mandir ke-

so mamu, speak
mamu?
Speak, now what will you say

S2: I say this, well how many
gentlemen are **present**, all **families**
thanks a lot to you
for quite some time there has been **hope**
that one does kirtan that day
so today this work has become completed
give your **blessings**
and **thanks to you** for taking so much

time from your home
you have graced us by coming, do kirtan,
do bhajan, when we hear the name of god,
we are very much **indebted**
look at all, how many granddaughters
and daughters are there, how many
daughter-in-laws are there who have
taken the trouble to come today may there
be in the home of
these people **a lot, a lot of enthusiasm**
thanks a lot, a lot to god
god is **relief**
and through the **grace** of **supreme father and soul [i.e., god]**
may there be in your **lives** such joy and
peace and happiness and in every **family**
happiness
and may it be **replete** with the **blessings**
of god, may there be **always enthusiasm**
in your spirit
and when you go may there be much **hope**
that when I go to the temple when I
worship
I see there is such a home
in La Nicolière there is such a small home
that somehow when all **families** meet
becomes a small temple
where there is no **hope** there is **darkness**
today there is a small temple there
[. . . . . ..]
now many times I **greet** you people
who have come here, **greetings and many thanks**. Today we gain **reassurance**
today so many of our **families** have come
only through the **grace** of god
will **everything** be achieved. . .

S3: we pray for you, chacha [term of respect]
S2: what should I do daughter
this is you people's **greatness**
S3: may you remain healthy
you do so much for the temple
S2: our great mother gives **blessings**
yes she gives great **blessings** so that you
remain healthy and. . . .
S3: no, we respect you very much *because*
you do everything in that temple

This sequence, as an opening to the main activity of the evening—*kirtan*—is characterized by the mutual giving of thanks between participants in the context of moral discourse invoking the blessings of god. The main marker of performance is code choice, the switch to purist Bhojpuri, which is especially evident in the speech of Speaker 2, the older *sirdar*, who is also the host for the evening. Speaker 1, the younger *sirdar* and senior member of the temple committee, uses purist Bhojpuri as a marker of performance, signaling the beginning of the devotional event, with the devotees ending their individual conversations, which had continued while everyone gathered in the house and sat down on the floor. This variety is characterized by a maximal avoidance of Creole loans, which are otherwise very frequent in Mauritius Bhojpuri, but in the example above occur only once in the performance of Speaker 1, as in the use of *abitye* in Line 10. After thanking the older *sirdar* and his family on behalf of the temple committee for hosting the event and thanking the devotees present for coming, he then asks the host to give an opening address in turn (Lines 27–29). The host then continues to thank the devotees gathered, but much more than Speaker 1 he frames his opening address as a discourse of religious devotion. The use of Hindi lexical elements, which are in fact not well known to most Bhojpuri speakers in Mauritius, is frequent. This is especially evident in Lines 48–55, when the blessings of god are invoked repeatedly as a desired compensation for the devotees' presence and acts of worship.

The host's performance is met with approval by a middle-aged woman who is among the regular worshippers in the temple (Speaker 3), who expresses deep appreciation for the older *sirdar*'s engagement for the temple (Line 73 and following). She in turn asks for divine blessings to be bestowed on the host. Speaker 3 also seeks to inhabit the position of speaking for the present audience, as evident in her use of the first person plural pronoun *hamni* on Lines 73 and 82 in order to convey the feelings of thankfulness she assumes to be shared by the worshippers present.

One of the most salient effects such performances have on local participants is that they demonstrate a blurring of linguistic boundaries between Mauritian Bhojpuri and Hindi. That is, they add a purist register in which many of the common Creole lexical items used in Mauritian Bhojpuri are substituted by Hindi lexical elements in the local linguistic repertoire, all the while interpreted by local speakers as instances of Bhojpuri. This is possible because they consider a Bhojpuri with fewer words of Creole origin to be "pure" in the sense that it shows, in their view, less influence from non-Indian sources and is more clearly linked to the practice of Hindu traditions. In fact, several of the Hindi lexical elements in the transcript either refer to religious concepts or are otherwise used in an explicitly religious context such as *ashirvaad* ('blessing,' Lines 37, 55, 79, 80) *sahaita* ('relief,' Line 49) *parampita paramatma* ('supreme father and soul,' Line 50) *daya* ('grace, mercy,' Lines 50, 70) *aasra* ('reassurance,' Line 68).

The "hindiization" of Mauritian Bhojpuri effected here is not just confined to the level of the lexicon. There are also grammatical elements of Hindi which are characteristic of this purist register, such as demonstrative pronouns in the oblique case, which Mauritian Bhojpuri lacks (e.g., *is samay* 'at this time,' Line 18; *isi liye* or *isse liye* 'therefore,' Lines 16, 25). The use of gendered possessive postpositions, as in *bhagwan ki daya* ('the grace/mercy of god,' Line 70) is a feature of Standard Hindi, while in Mauritian Bhojpuri only a single form *ke* is used. Speaker 2 even uses a honorific pronoun of address, which is lacking in contemporary Mauritian Bhojpuri, referring to the audience gathered as *aplog* (Line 40). *Aplog* is derived from the Hindi second person pronoun of address *āp*, used in a manner parallel to the Mauritian Bhojpuri second pronoun of address *toulog*. Nevertheless, these grammatical features of Hindi are overtly represented by segmentable surface items, and lexical choice remains the focus of awareness for most people to classify the performances as "hindiized" (cf. Silverstein 2001).

The point here is not to arrive at a simplistic categorization of lexical items as either Hindi or Bhojpuri. Rather, the items highlighted in the example above represent choices that strike speakers as uncommon, because in other contexts Creole items would be preferred in their place. Also, certain items have phonological shapes that

make them sound Hindi, such as the substitution of [s] by [š] in *ashirvaad* (Lines 37, 55, 79, 80) as opposed to Mauritian Bhojpuri *asirvaad*, ('blessing'), [š] not being used in ordinary Mauritian Bhojpuri. That is, these choices have a certain in-between quality that make them intermediaries between Bhojpuri and Hindi, because local speakers identify them as Hindi, but they are not counted as clear codeswitches to Hindi and the overall discourse is understood to be Bhojpuri.[2] The intermediary characteristic of these purist items greatly contributes to the overall effect of blurring linguistic boundaries between Hindi and Mauritian Bhojpuri.

The use of purist, "hindiized" Bhojpuri at religious community gatherings provides a context in which Hindus appropriate and experience Hindi as "theirs," not just through explicit ideological discourses by Hindu nationalists, but also by making the language of the ancestors part of linguistic practices central to local processes of Hindu group identification. Hindi is the object of a discourse about ethnicized heritage in the diaspora. At the same time it also represents the pure and authentic end of a linguistic continuum in use alongside Creole among rural Hindu Mauritians, stretching from ordinary Bhojpuri with its often remarked frequency of use of Creole lexical items to purist Bhojpuri-Hindi and sanskritized Standard Hindi.

Hindi, the Ancestors, and the Pilgrimage

Generally, Hindu bodies involved in the organization of the pilgrimage and the running of temples at Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao see the propagation of Hindi as one of their goals, and Hindi classes are regularly offered in most temples across Mauritius. According to a former secretary of the Mauritius Sanatan Dharm Temples Federation, the single largest Hindu organization in Mauritius, whom I interviewed, the Federation considers itself the "main movement of the Hindi-speaking people" and also organizes and funds visits of prominent Hindi writers to Mauritius.

The religious significance of Hindi in Mauritius is affirmed at Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao by the fact that most sermons by *pandit*s visiting from India as well as local Hindu priests during the festival are in Hindi. A stage with rows of seats was built next to the Mauritiuseswarnath Temple in 1998, on which local Hindu *pandit*s and swamis from India delivered speeches in Hindi to an audience that included leading political figures, the Prime Minister and several ministers, and the Indian High Commissioner. Hindi *bhajan* were played in the temples and pandits and *pujari* ('worship assistants') instructed worshipping pilgrims in Hindi, which stood in salient contrast to the conversations in Creole among the pilgrims themselves. In addition, such emblematic use of Hindi in the midst of a Creole–speaking crowd was also evident in slogans often repeated in speeches and sermons such as *hindī ṛṣiõ kī bhāṣā hai* ('Hindi is the language of the ancient sages'). This claim that Hindi is both ancient and connected to religious authority was displayed in Devanagari script on the large tent of the *Seva śivr*/Human Service Trust, the Hindu nationalist body founded by the Indian missionary Swami Krishanand, maintaining links with the RSS and the VHP, at Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao in February 1998. The slogan exhorting Hindus to learn and cultivate Hindi was first coined in Mauritius by the Hindu missionary and political activist Basdeo Bissoondoyal, who used it in a song in his highly successful campaign of religious mobilization throughout the 1940s. A central part of this movement was also a Hindi basic literacy campaign in the context of the struggle for Hindu voting rights, when after a constitutional change in 1947 Indo-Mauritians were required to pass a simple literacy test in order to be eligible for the franchise. The second line of the song is the beginning of the Hindi alphabet:

sab hindū paṛo hindī	All Hindus study Hindi
a ā i ī	a, ā i, ī
yeh devtāõ kī bhāṣā hai	This is the language of the gods
yeh ṛṣiõ kī bhāṣā hai	This is the language of the ancient sages

[Verma 1984:91]

The last line of the song is recontextualized into the setting of the pilgrimage, where it serves to cast Hindi as a language of great antiquity, presumably already used by gods and ancient sages, and the study of it becomes a religious duty for Hindus. This also echoes the call of the writer Jay Narain Roy, a leading figure of the Hindi Pracarini Sabha (Society for the Propagation of Hindi) as well as a former member of the Legislative Council, that "learning and teaching our mother tongue is our first religious duty" ("*apni mātṛbhāṣā ko sīkhnā aur sīkhānā hamārā pratam dharmik kartavya hai*") (Roy 1970:139). Hindi then becomes a central part of a project of missionizing and religious purification, in which Hindu nationalists want to turn Indo-Mauritians into good Hindus in the diaspora.

The pilgrims also frequently and emblematically use Hindi in Devanagari script to indicate the name of their home village or town and the name of their community group or local religious association on the decorated *kanvar*, colorfully decorated structures of bamboo carried on the pilgrimage by members of local Hindu associations or temple committees to and from Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao. Brass vessels have traditionally been fixed to the ends of the bamboo poles of these structures in which sacred water from the lake is carried home to be offered in the shrines of the pilgrims' villages. *Kanvar* often resemble the shape of Hindu temples, displaying images of Hindu deities or a representation of the sacred sound *aum*, while the pilgrims carrying them chant Hindi *bhajan* as they head to the mountain lake. This provides another instance of a presupposed indexical link between Hindi and Hindu religion in Mauritius.

The discovery of remote Grand Bassin as a place for pilgrimage by a small group of devotees traveling on foot is remembered as an act of sacrifice and renunciation and therefore seen as based in Hindu traditions emphasizing these virtues. As one Hindu activist who was involved in the state-assisted development of Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao as an important site of Hindu pilgrimage put it in an interview with me: "they [the Hindu ancestors] could go without food, water, clothes, but not without their *dharma* ('religion, moral duty, conduct of life'), not without their rituals."

Further, the sacrifice and efforts of the original pilgrims were remembered as symptomatic of their general living conditions as indentured immigrant laborers in Mauritius, characterized by hardship, deprivation, and political repression. Hindu activists frequently pointed to the example of the ancestors in overcoming the hardships of both the pilgrimage and their overall political and social situation in Mauritius as an inspiration for Hindus in the present. They also emphasized the necessity to continue to honor them for the sacrifices they made. In this way, the pilgrimage to Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao undertaken by many devotees on foot from places across the entire island can be understood not only as a religious performance but simultaneously as a collective reenactment and commemoration of the past sufferings of the immigrant ancestors. Especially the pilgrimage in 1998 exhibited the perceived ancestral quality of this event, since it was celebrated as the 100th anniversary of the pilgrimage in Mauritius. It honored the achievements of the pioneer pilgrims who found this formerly remote lake in the upland forests of southwest Mauritius and who started turning it into a site of Hindu pilgrimage. The sacrifices made by the resilient ancestors in order to maintain Hindu traditions in an alien and oppressive environment are extolled in a conservative discourse focused on the perpetuation of purportedly ancestral Hindu culture.

Hindi in turn is depicted as the language of these ancestors in the school system, in discourses of Hindu activists, and in the context of the pilgrimage, despite the fact that few if any Indian immigrants had knowledge of Standard Hindi when they reached Mauritius. And Hindi is understood to be the link for Mauritian Hindus to the Hindu homeland in India, bestowed upon them by the immigrating ancestors leaving the Indian homeland in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The metaphor of the ancestor as the origin of tradition, understood as ancestral culture is one of the binding essential qualities between the pilgrimage to Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao, Hindi the ancestral language, and the faraway Hindu homeland.[3]

At the same time, the pilgrimage constitutes a propagation of Hindi as the language of the ancestors, whose heroic deeds in preserving Hindu traditions under the harsh circumstances of indenture on sugar plantations are remembered and celebrated in the Shivratri pilgrimage. The theme of ancestral qualities emerges as an overarching metaphor in the pilgrimage, connecting the Indian homeland of Mauritian Hindus as the place of origin of the ancestors, its local replication, and Hindi as the language of the ancestors, which continues to be cultivated and venerated by Hindus in Mauritius. Further, the pilgrimage and its celebration of Hindi take place in "ancestral time," a spatiotemporal framework in which the ancestors and their Hindu descendants are simultaneously present.[4] The presence of the ancestors is both evoked by the celebration of "their" language and the recreation of a sacred Indian geography. Moreover, the very structure and rhythmic temporality of the annual pilgrimage highlights the larger theme of the cyclical return of the ancestors' world, including "their" language, to the present. While Hindu forms of collective belonging in Mauritius thus become tied to a spatiotemporal order emphasizing the copresence of Hindus and the world of their ancestors, the propagation of Hindi is also linked to questions of historical consciousness and change. From the perspective of Hindu nationalists, a diasporic population in Mauritius needs to be transformed into authentic Hindus through Hindi in order for the assumed copresence with the ancestors to take place. That is, those who see a Hindu community in Mauritius as constituted through a regime of temporality evoking Benjamin's "messianic" time also implicitly recognize the importance of change and "progress" along the dimension of "empty, homogeneous" time in order to become one with their ancestors.

Calibrations of Displacement and Temporality

As I have outlined here, the cultivation of Hindi as the language of the ancestors in Mauritius is part of a larger process of establishing a diasporic relationship to a homeland in India. This relationship is then naturalized by the presupposed and performative use of shared metaphors, which establish iconic relations of likeness between Hindi, the pilgrimage, and the homeland. The semiotic mediations involved to establish the diasporic link to the homeland constitute a particular metapragmatic regimentation or indexical alignment. Here I draw on Michael Silverstein's (1993:48–53) analysis of the metapragmatic function in terms of different types of pragmatic calibration, that is different ways of establishing indexical relationships between sign events. In demonstrating how sign events become interpretable by relating them to other, antecedent sign events, thus providing a "context," Silverstein distinguishes between three ways of indexically uniting (laminating) layers of events, enabling their pragmatic contextualization. These are "reportive," "reflexive," and "nomic" calibration. While reportive calibration is characteristic of a more of less explicit marking that the ongoing sign event is presented to be a representation of a previous discursive sign event, such as in reported speech, reflexive calibration refers to the more implicit process of making sense of discursive interaction by relating the stream of indexicals to "event-frames" (socially recognizable types of events) and vice versa. Finally, nomic calibration stipulates that the relation between two sign events is defined by their location in ontically separate realms. The anterior sign event, for example, is presented as inhabiting a religious otherworld, a mythical realm, the world of the ancestors or of abstract generalization, while the presently unfolding sign event is understood to be the available and often privileged experience of that realm.

I expand Silverstein's concept of nomic calibration to better capture the relationships of spatial and temporal displacement and convergence between the different worlds brought into relation during the Mauritian Shivratri pilgrimage. My suggestion is that the performatively established link between Hindi, the pilgrimage, and the homeland bears some similarities to what Silverstein has termed *nomic calibration*. Understood as sign events, both the celebration of Hindi as the ancestral language and the reproduction of a sacred Hindu geography in Mauritius in the context of the

pilgrimage to Ganga Talao are interpreted as in a different realm from the homeland they strongly point to. However, the difference of realms is not of an ontic kind, but rather one imagined to be characterized by a spatial and temporal remove, which is then minimized in the context of the pilgrimage. This type of indexical calibration of displacement, which in the case discussed here might also be called *diasporic calibration*, involves the regimenting of indexicals as pointing toward a diasporic source conceived as a spatially removed homeland, which is furthermore invested with ancestral qualities.

Such processes of indexical calibration also constitute orders of temporality. The creation of relationships between sign events, as through reported speech or by performing a mythical narrative, also creates relationships in time, such as temporal sequence and temporal difference or convergence. In particular, a calibration of displacement bridges the temporal and spatial remove between events, therefore suggesting a relationship of temporal equivalence.

I have stressed how the regimenting of indexicals results in making the pilgrimage and the cultivation of Hindi interpretable as instances of invoking an ancestral Hindu homeland. The lamination of the sign events in the diaspora on the one hand and in the homeland on the other is crucially effected by iconicity, so that diasporic sign events become an available experience of the homeland. That is, the metaphors that are perceived as shared between Hindi, the pilgrimage in its setting, and the homeland create a dense set of indexical-iconic links between Hindi, the pilgrimage, and the Hindu homeland. This semiotically regimented diasporic connection appears as natural because of the effect of inherent likeness produced by the metaphors crucially underpinning the diasporic link.

This situation also has implications for constructing a temporal order of collective belonging. Ideologies of ancestral language meditate between the ancestral and linear temporal dimensions outlined in this article. Calibrations of displacement are ways of laminating sign events from different realms in a way that downplays the spatiotemporal difference between the events. That is, the world of the homeland and the ancestors is presented as inhabiting the world of diasporic Hindus in Mauritius, emphasizing the themes of sacred simultaneity and cyclical return central to the Shivratri pilgrimage. However, being one with the ancestors in Mauritius also rests on particular achievements on the dimension of linear time. Diasporic Hindus need to be made authentic through Hindi on several levels of activity, such as collective religious performance, explicit nationalist discourse and particular forms of linguistic practice. The purifying qualities of ancestral Hindi transforming Indo-Mauritians into diasporic Hindus are crucial for constituting community in this mode of temporality. In the case discussed here such a linear dimension of temporality comprises both the authenticating purification of diasporic subjects and a historical narrative of the heroic political and socioeconomic rise of a community of Hindus in Mauritius, who nevertheless managed to preserve their ancestral traditions under difficult circumstances. At the same time ideologies of Hindi as the ancestral language of Hindus contribute to the creation of concepts of community based on allegiance to an ancestral origin, which can be made present through religious performance and the voicing of an ancestral world in the cultivation of Hindi.

Conclusion

In this article I have sought to demonstrate how ideologies of ancestral language interact with the performance of Hindu pilgrimage in Mauritius in order to create a sense of diasporic belonging based on an experience of "ancestral time." In other words, the ideology of Hindi as an ancestral language also represents an indexical order of temporality in which the temporal and spatial disjuncture between Mauritian Hindus and the world of their Indian immigrant ancestors is negotiated and momentarily minimized.

What are the implications of the process of temporal regimenting I have called a calibration of displacement for the question of language and community? Benedict Anderson has underlined his case for the radical modernity of nationalism by arguing that a fundamentally new experience of time, referred to as empty and homogeneous and mediated by new literary genres, has crucially enabled the experience of national community. In so doing he has raised an important issue, the fact that the creation of language-mediated imagined communities often involves a reorganization of the experience of temporality. However, Anderson's narrowing down of the temporal dimension of the production of language-mediated imagined communities to linear, "empty, homogeneous" time fails to capture certain forms of time reckoning that are at the heart of modern ways of ethnonational identification. As Anderson and other scholars of nationalism have pointed out, the object of national devotion and identification, the nation and its people, are often represented as possessing considerable antiquity, despite their often manifest novelty. Conceiving a community of nationals on their linear march through history is not the only way to relate to the imagined antiquity of such communities; equally important are ritualized moments of communion with the ancestors, suspending the spatiotemporal remove of the present with their imagined national forebears. Instead of postulating the superseding of one dimension of temporality by another, an analysis of the complex interplay and coexistence of multiple dimensions of temporal regimentation represents a more promising approach to the problem of temporality, language, and community.

Notes

1. Hindi is also listed as ancestral language in the census. However, since the admission of Bhojpuri as a valid language for census purposes in 1983, its role has statistically been overshadowed by the latter. Nevertheless, in contrast to Hindi, little official support is extended to the propagation of Bhojpuri. Census responses are influenced by Hindu organizations, who give instructions to their members in public advertisements on which languages should be reported under the rubric "language of forefathers" (Hookoomsing 1986).

2. The intermediary quality of these purist items bears some resemblance to what Kathryn Woolard has termed *bivalency*, "the use by a bilingual of words or segments that could 'belong' equally, descriptively and even prescriptively, to both codes" (Woolard 1998:7), since these elements could be identified as either Hindi or Bhojpuri. What is different, however, is that in contrast to the Catalan/Castilian case described by Woolard, this use of bivalent words does not lead to discourse impossible to define as either Bhojpuri or Hindi. Also, in contrast to Woolard's case, where this bilingual phenomenon blurring linguistic boundaries is also associated with the voicing of dual identities, the use of intermediary Hindi-Bhojpuri elements becomes part of a purist perspective on Hindu identity in Mauritius.

3. For a more complete discussion of the deployment of shared metaphors, notably involving the Hindu Goddess in various forms, such as Ganga Mata and Sarasvati, in naturalizing the relationship between the Shivratri pilgrimage and the ancestral language Hindi see Eisenlohr (2001).

4. In some ways this situation recalls Keith Basso's analysis of ancestral place names among the Western Apache, which serve as vehicles of ancestral authority (1988:110–113) and evoke the mental presence of a spatially and temporally removed world in communicative encounters. Among the Western Apache, "speaking with names" not only affirms the value of ancestral traditions and knowledge but is also used to express charitable concern for other peoples' worries (1988:114–115).

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Department of Anthropology
Washington University in St. Louis
Campus Box 1114
One Brookings Drive
St. Louis, Missouri 63130-4899
peisenlo@wustl.edu