

**Special Section: The Seychelles in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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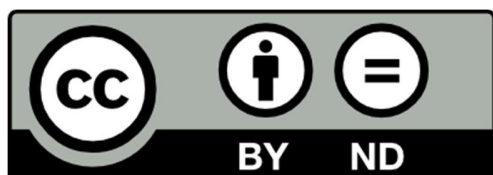
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## **Special Section: The Seychelles in the 21st century**

Guest Editorial Introduction

### **The Seychelles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

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**Abstract:** As an introduction to the themed special section on the Seychelles, this short editorial highlights the significance of small scale in a context of intensified and accelerating globalisation, which creates a new opportunity space as well as new vulnerabilities for small societies. The following articles cover a broad range of topics, from legal practice and linguistic processes to gender relations, politics and cultural identity. The authors, editors of this special section, emphasise that comparisons between small societies may generate interesting theoretical insights owing both to similarities and differences.

**Keywords:** comparison, globalisation, scale, Seychelles, transnationalism, vulnerability

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### **Introduction**

While small states have always been vulnerable and dependent on the outside world for their survival, the situation in the 21st century has some new elements. The scaling up of the world economy, owing to deregulation, intensified competition, technological developments and reduced costs of transport, produces challenges for industries and economic sectors bound to be small in scale, especially if they rely on exports. Moreover, fast and increasingly accessible internet integrates an increasing number of people in real time, regardless of location, leading to a danger of cultural homogenisation and domination by a few powerful actors.

This thematic section of *Small States and Territories* is about the Seychelles, focusing on the characteristics of small scale and its inherent challenges and potentials, with a special emphasis on the new world of fast global capitalism.

The papers in this section have been developed from presentations at a conference entitled ‘Blessing or curse? Small-scale societies in a globalised world: Lessons from the Seychelles’, organised by the Creole Language and Culture Institute at the University of

Seychelles (Unisey) from 6 to 8 March 2019. Many of the speakers at the conference were academics at Unisey, while some were foreign scholars working on Seychellois or Creole issues. The invited keynote speaker was Godfrey Baldacchino, the founding editor of this journal.

As is usually the case with these events, not all the presentations found their way into this publication. Some of the presenters were unable to submit polished papers in time owing to other commitments, while others had a focus which did not fit this special section, namely small scale and its implications for the Seychelles today.

### **Context review**

As a consequence of our strict criteria, the seven papers which are included here fit well together and cover important aspects of Seychellois society: globalisation (Eriksen, 2020), law (Bar, 2020), education (Persaud, 2020), cultural identity (Choppy, 2020), language (Klymenko, 2020), gender and politics (Ramtohul, 2020) and gender stereotypes (Deutschmann and Steinvall, 2020).

Although the Seychelles share many characteristics, dilemmas and challenges with other small societies, it also has some unique features. The main islands of Mahé, Praslin and La Digue, where nearly the entire population of 90,000 lives, are neither volcanic nor coral islands, but have granite as their foundation: a rare sight in the ocean. Concerns over rising seas, widespread in Pacific islands and neighbouring Maldives, are therefore not on the political agenda. The archipelago is also culturally homogeneous, the vast majority of the population being Creoles, denoting in this area a mix of European, African and Asian origin and cultural heritage. The Seychelles also has a distinctive identity on the international arena, as ‘paradise islands’ of unrivalled natural beauty (e.g. Franda, 2019; Gabbay and Ghosh, 2017). To several of these topics we shall return, in a comparative spirit, for smallness, though relative and relational, is in itself a relevant criterion for comparison in the social sciences.

In the opening paper by Thomas Hylland Eriksen, the main argument is that, contrary to expectations, small societies may in fact be well positioned to retain their autonomy and identity in an increasingly globalised world. They are flexible, often tightly integrated, and need only find niches that favour (or at least tolerate) small scale for their economic survival. This topic is followed up with a more specific focus in Penda Choppy's paper, where the author shows how the notion of the creole travels well and could be a template for understanding culture in many settings around the world. Notably, she shows how discourses about *créolité* in the Caribbean are relevant to the Seychelles, and suggests that recent developments in information technology and reduced costs of travel have facilitated a broader Creole identity than what was feasible before.

A legal scholar, Monika Bar shows in detail how small scale can be detrimental to impartiality in the legal system. The number of barristers in the islands is so low that practically everybody knows everybody else. Few wrongdoings, even blatant ones, are reported, largely – it seems – because of personal ties and mutual knowledge about one another's previous actions. Smallness is not conducive to anonymity, and the downside of strong interpersonal networks based on trust and reciprocity can be a lack of clarity and conformism. One of the participants at the conference casually remarked, during a break, that ‘it is possible that what we are best at in this small place, is gossiping’. Has a deep truth about the structure of Seychellois society – and, indeed, of other small societies – been identified? (e.g. O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994).

Another dimension of small scale is expressed through Olga Klymenko's linguistic analysis of graphic verbs in English and Seychellois Creole (*Kreol seselwa*). By comparing the use of various graphic verbs (to write, to draw, etc.) in the two languages, she concludes that Seychellois Creole reveals itself to be the smaller language by relying on French and English verbs to expand and grow more accurate. These words are nevertheless turned into Creole verbs seemingly effortlessly.

A third, no less important, aspect of smallness is discussed by Indra Persaud, a geographer, who analyses the educational system and especially the teaching of geography. She views this curricular subject critically, through the fundamental dilemma between strengthening one's sense of place and pride in one's own country, on the one hand; and participating confidently in a larger world on the other. Seychellois authorities have consistently used international standards in the educational system, which may have been necessary for students to qualify for higher education abroad. At the same time, the radical socialist ideology emphasising *créolité* dominant during the first decades of independence disdained the kind of cultural imperialism that was readily associated with metropolitan content in the educational system. The situation is such that a geography teacher tells Persaud that their students learn nothing about how Seychelles is connected to other countries. It may therefore not come as a surprise that the local Seychellois generally do not consider themselves Africans.

Ramola Ramtohol, a Mauritian sociologist who has studied women's political mobilisation in Mauritius, offers the only systematically comparative paper in this collection. She compares female political participation and activism in Seychelles and Mauritius. Although Mauritius is an ethnically plural society with a population which is more than ten times that of the Seychelles, Ramtohol finds many similarities and parallels concerning the role of women in politics. A certain conservatism in cultural values, which props up patriarchal practices, may partly be explained through the effects of small island living (e.g. Collins, 2011).

The gender perspective is pursued further in the paper by Mats Deutschmann and Anders Steinvall, Swedish academics working on a gender-based project about Seychellois society. Their paper focuses on what is perceived as a masculinity crisis in the country, of which early indicators have been noticed in education performance. Deutschmann and Steinvall relate this to Seychelles' past as a slave society, and suggest that this is symptomatic of other island creole societies in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. They hypothesise (and test) that this is a situation whereby the stereotypical Seychellois model of masculinity is set against the 'metropolitan' and comes out as 'inferior', with negative consequences for Seychellois society.

### **Conclusion: plus ça change ...**

The extent and depth of transnational cultural flows are not to be overestimated: certain things change fast, but others may remain stable, and kinship organisation and family values tend to be among the most resilient to change. Not least in islands, which after all remain enclaved in spite of increased global integration. In small (often island) societies, alternative ways of life may be negatively sanctioned and discouraged; and their practitioners shunned and ostracised, possibly to the point of being obliged to leave and seek exile/ ex-ile (Baldacchino, 2012). The kind of networks Bar describes in the legal system – which lead to the cultural cohesiveness emphasised by Choppy, the openness to influences shown by Klymenko, and the provincial dependence on metropolitan perspectives described by Persaud – may also entail the persistence of conservative family values. By way of example, in the

Faroës (a small island society located in a different ocean, the North Atlantic), Scandinavian culture and ways of life predominate, but with some exceptions, one being a widespread animosity to homosexual relations (Hansen, Nest, & Uljala, 2013). This confirms Ramtohl's main argument and may encapsulate some of the insights conveyed in this special section.

This should remind us that, in spite of shifting geopolitical configurations, an increasing acceleration of the global economy and transnational communication, climate change and so on, some features of small island societies are relatively constant, and this is the case no less for the Seychelles than for other societies in a comparable situation.

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## **Implications of runaway globalisation in the Seychelles**

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**Abstract:** At a time of rampant globalisation, large-scale operations are favoured over small-scale production in the main domains of the economy. This has political effects: domination by the big over the small is sought in both old and new ways; and cultural effects that influence from outside – such as Netflix, tourism and travel abroad – are intensified in the globally integrated information society. This in turn affects the media, language and self-identity, as well as being decisive for strategies in diplomacy, human security, planning and domestic politics. This article analyses the situation of the Seychelles in the 21st century: a small state, dependent on inputs from the outside world, and victim of a new form of colonialism. The country may still have potential to ‘punch above its weight’ and to hold its own, in spite of the disembedded, abstract economy of scale dominating this integrated, networked, accelerated, globalised world. For this to happen, a recognition and analysis of current changes are needed.

**Keywords:** colonialism, globalisation, resilience, Seychelles, small scale, small state

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### **Introduction**

The current high-speed, comprehensive and multifaceted globalisation that is shaping and re-shaping the human world raises particular challenges to small states. In this paper, I consider and analyse the implications of small scale in a world where boundaries are fluid, time and space are being compressed, and there seems to be a systemic preference for large-scale operations, not least in the production and distribution of goods, services and symbols. It is in some ways a new situation, epitomised by the rise of China as a global power, the fast growth in global trade and travel, the ubiquity of the Internet and the smartphone, and the loss of a shared narrative of progress and development (Eriksen, 2016).

A few clarifications at the outset seem appropriate. First, the kind of small societies I have in mind are not the quintessential and partly apocryphal isolated or at least self-sustaining societies typically studied in early- to mid-20th century anthropology (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2012). The remnants of these societies, be they in the Amazon or Melanesia, face their own set of problems and challenges in the 21st century, which are not under scrutiny here. Rather, we are talking about small societies which are integrated into the global system of exchange and communication, comprising production, distribution, mobility, consumption, technology and media. It is the world of the container ship and the smartphone into which these societies – from the Faroe Islands to the Seychelles, from Dominica to Samoa – have been swallowed.

Secondly, scale is not just about size, although that is a key aspect (Barth, 1978; Eriksen, 2016; Carr & Lempert, 2016). Scale also denotes complexity: it can be defined as the total number of roles or functions, necessary to reproduce a system. In a society with a limited division of labour, its scale is thus smaller than in a more differentiated society of equal size.

Like other SIDS (Small Island Developing States), the Seychelles has a complex division of labour. It is a small scale society (90,000 inhabitants) with a great number of tasks to be undertaken, from waste management and foreign language teaching, to land use planning and manning overseas diplomatic missions. The balance between the demands for specialised knowledge and the number of available people is precarious. Typically, efforts are made to mitigate some of the problems, such as via state support for the Seychellois language *Kreol Seselwa* (Choppy, 2020), importing both cheap and expensive labour (Thompson, Wissink & Siwisa, 2019; Bar, 2020; Bueger & Wivel, 2015), or ensuring options for higher education overseas, on the assumption that graduates will eventually return.

In general, large-scale phenomena are standardised and thrive on economies of scale, while small-scale phenomena are unique and crave specific niches to survive in a world dominated by mass production. A *clash of scales* occurs when the intersection of two or several scales leads to a contradiction, conflict or friction. For example, most policies are decided at local or national level, whereas climate change is a global problem, and all countries are interlinked through international trade, mobility and communication networks. At the same time, since political decisions are taken at a state or even transnational level, local resistance can result from a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement. Seen from the perspective of individual cognition, knowledge systems underpinning policy are based on abstract scientific methods, which may contradict local knowledge. It is a typical outcome of globalisation that the economies of scale favouring large operations make formerly viable, small-scale activities unprofitable. Many of today's conflicts can be understood through the lens of clashing scales.

### **The Seychelles in comparative perspective**

A small cog in an imperial world-system since it was first settled in the 18th century, the Seychelles has no pre-modern history and has socially evolved under the bright lights of modernity. Connectivity to metropolitan centres and integration into the world economy have thus always been taken for granted there, since the time of colonialism, when the islands supplied copra and vanilla and Victoria (the capital) served as a trading port for colonial vessels, until the present age, beginning in earnest with the opening of the international airport on the main island of Mahé in 1972. Today, the Seychellois economy relies heavily on tourism and tuna fishing, although the significance of offshore banking seems to be growing. A comparison with other small-scale island societies shows relevant similarities and differences.

First, the Seychelles as a human society was created by colonialism. This produces a different social dynamics from what is the case in Vanuatu, Malta, Kiribati, the Comoros and other small island states with a pre-colonial history and an indigenous population. It also differs from the Caribbean situation, where large indigenous populations went extinct owing to enslavement, massacres and diseases brought by the colonisers.

Second, Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica and Mauritius are also considered small-scale island states. But Seychelles is much smaller, qualifying as a micro-state, whether the limit is set at a million or 300,000 (both have been proposed). The former trio, with populations of a million or more, have a domestic market large enough to make many industries profitable; often established as import substitution enterprises during colonialism, factories producing consumer goods ranging from soap to biscuits have proved viable in these larger societies. This is generally not an option in the Seychelles (although, to be fair, it has a brewery and a domestic beer brand, Seybrew). There are thresholds in areas such as book publishing, production of consumer goods, international football (with decent results) and media, although there are



exceptions: Iceland (population: 330,000) has a lively publishing industry and a decent football team. Seychelles lies below the threshold in most of these areas. It is important to be clear about this. Gingrich & Hannerz (2018) deal with the “small countries” of Austria, Singapore and Norway; but each of these has several million citizens. The smallness in question here is qualitatively different. Seychellois must travel to South Africa, Kenya or Mauritius to shop in a fully-fledged mall; they have to tune in to the BBC to view a TV channel with mainly locally produced content; and ambitious young scholars must finish their education overseas.

Third, the landowner class in Seychelles was modest in size and prosperity, unlike in such places as Barbados; nor are there ranked clans, as is the case in most of Polynesia. There are inklings of a pigmentocracy (all four presidents of independent Seychelles have been relatively light-skinned), but the significance of inherited rank and property is less pronounced in Seychelles than in most other societies, even those of similar small scale. In spite of gender issues (which are also more complex than what meets the eye), Seychelles has a relatively egalitarian and relaxed, informal style of public communication. Its Gini coefficient nevertheless reveals considerable economic inequality: according to the World Bank, it is 46.8 and rising, while the world average is 38 (Trading Economics, 2020). This is largely due to contemporary developments rather than historical legacies.

Fourth, politics in the Seychelles is in some respects similar to that of other small-scale societies. Following 26 years of one-party rule, multi-party democracy was introduced in 1992. The outcome has nevertheless been something resembling traditional moiety systems described by anthropologists, where two blocs of roughly the same size compete for positions of power. As Veenendaal (2015) points out, there is no intrinsic reason to assume that small-scale societies should be more democratic than larger ones, although the social proximity of elites and commoners might suggest this (also Srebrnik, 2004; Baldacchino, 2012). Rather, factions and dichotomous political identities tend to arise, and patronage based on personal acquaintance can be rampant (Richards, 1982). Veenendaal (2015, p. 95) refers to research from small states in the Eastern Caribbean which describes “oppression, social exclusion, victimisation and highly antagonistic and polarised forms of competition as defining features of politics in this region,” adding that the civil service in São Tomé and Príncipe is filled with government supporters and that the politics of patronage riddles Pacific island politics. Even in tiny societies like the Pacific atoll of Tokelau (population: 1,500), a dependency of New Zealand, mutually exclusive group allegiances tend to arise, more often based on place, kinship or personal interests than on ideological differences, exacerbated by personal histories and informal networks (Hoëm, 2015). Mauritius is above the threshold in this respect (Eriksen & Ramtohul, 2018; Ramtohul, 2020), being able to host a plurality of political parties and movements representing more than two factions or interest groups.

Although resilience is sometimes posited as a contrast and alternative to vulnerability in the study of small island states (Philpot et al., 2015), vulnerability in the realms of livelihood and security remains endemic to small-scale societies, which lack the diversity and robustness of more differentiated societies. This concerns endogenous factors such as the likely overdependence on one or a few economic pursuits; but, in the contemporary world of transnational integration, events in the outside world have an even more pronounced influence,

The smaller the state or territory, the greater the likelihood that its domestic, internal affairs will be dominated, responsive to and driven by exogenous factors (including terms of trade, tourism trends and receipts, migration flows, remittances, aid flows and other rentier income) rather than endogenous ones (Baldacchino, 2019, p. 41).

Having set the stage, we now move to the main subject of this essay: the options available for small-scale societies like the Seychelles in the current situation of runaway globalisation.

Since the islands declared independence from the UK in 1976, the world of communication, production and consumption has changed dramatically. The rise of the East Asian and in particular Chinese economy is reconfiguring global economic power rapidly; seven of the ten busiest ports worldwide are now in China, and the phenomenal growth in tourism since the mid-1970s, from 200 million international tourist arrivals to 1.2 billion in 2017, is partly attributable to the growth of the East Asian middle classes. World trade has increased tenfold since Seychellois independence, from US\$ 2 trillion in 1980 to US\$ 20 trillion in 2018. Owing to the containerisation of shipping and more recently automation in certain ports, the cost of transport has decreased by more than 90 per cent since the 1970s. The logic of the comparative advantage, initially developed by David Ricardo (1817) on the eve of British world domination), dictates that any product should be grown or manufactured where it can be obtained and shipped at the lowest cost. With the decline in transportation costs, this logic, underpinning the ideology and practice of the current era of global deregulated markets, usually implies that cheap labour and large-scale operations outcompete the smaller and more expensive enterprises regardless of geographical location. In Seychellois groceries, accordingly, it is common to find imported fruit which could have been grown locally, but at a higher cost. The advantages of economies of scale are given free rein. It should be added that the growth in global trade has by far exceeded growth in global GDP (Eriksen, 2016).

The principle of economies of scale has, interestingly, been formulated in comparative physiology as well. Kleiber's law, discovered by biologist Max Kleiber in the 1930s, states that in a mammal, if mass increases by a factor of 100, metabolic rate increases by a factor of 32. This means that a cat which weighs 100 times more than a mouse needs only 32 times as much energy to sustain itself (West, 2018). Put differently: imagine two circles, one large, one small. The 'border-to-area' ratio is less in the larger circle than in the smaller one. The inevitable conclusion is that it is expensive to run a small state, which needs many of the same functions and institutions as larger states, but without reaping the benefits of economies of scale.

The accelerated integration of human activities worldwide produces prosperity, vulnerability and dependency, and closes the gap between places in the sense that local events may have transnational causes and global effects. For example, the logging and burning of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil that made world headline news in autumn 2019 (e.g. BBC, 2019), defended by President Bolsonaro as a domestic matter, are directly linked to the taste for hamburgers in Sweden. The forests are removed in order to create pastures for cattle or cleared land for soya plantations, and the soybeans are in turn transformed into animal fodder exported to cold countries where cattle have to be kept in the barn most of the year. The sense in which people in communities may feel overwhelmed and disempowered by their involuntary integration into large-scale economic, demographic, political or cultural configurations is a key factor for an understanding of the rise of the new populist and anti-elitist political movements in many places. Seychellois may, perhaps paradoxically, find itself in a better position than most to cope with the new situation, since they have always been entangled with larger systems in most respects; so isolationism has never been an option.

To sum up so far: at a time of runaway globalisation, large-scale operations are favoured over small-scale production in the main domains of the economy. This has political effects in that dominion by the big over the small is sought in both old and new ways; and cultural effects that influence from outside – Netflix, tourism, travel abroad ... – are intensified and magnified

in the globally integrated information society. This in turn affects the media, language and people's self-understanding, as well as being decisive for strategies in diplomacy, human security (including food security and protection from invasion), planning and domestic politics.

Now what, Seychelles? A speck in the ocean it is, but one which has the potential to shine a little more brightly than others. Perhaps.

### **Colonisation and decolonisation of the mind**

There is a mural in the capital Victoria depicting a few young people and the legend *Mofyer mo lidantite*: I am proud of my identity. What exactly does this mean, and why is it important for the authorities to make the point in such a public way?

Labouring under the illusion that one is something that one is not, or perhaps pretending to be someone else, is not unfamiliar in contemporary societies, where the impulses and influences from a seemingly more attractive setting can be irresistible. In the realm of cultural life, small countries may be particularly vulnerable to being overrun and transformed from outside influence, having little by way of domestic production of literature, film and music. It is therefore a matter of some interest that Kreol Seselwa continues to be used across many social settings, including parliamentary debates and television news, and that there are even signs of it being vitalised through its wide usage on Facebook and other social media.

During the first decade or so of independence, self-determination was high on the agenda. Although ties with other socialist countries were strong, bolstering the official narrative linking tiny Seychelles to the great forces of universal history, so was the emphasis on the local and the glorification of the common people. Unlike in the other French-lexicon creole speaking territories, Seychelles made Seychellois Creole, *Kreol Seselwa*, a national language, admittedly along with English and French. In the 1980s, agriculture was still thriving, and tourist developments were modest. By 2016, the position of Kreol has been weakened, American popular music has all but eclipsed the traditional *moutya* music, the blues of the Seychelles, and even Jamaican reggae in popularity; postcolonial *tiersmondisme*, influential in the 1980s, has faded from view, and there is a marked preference for imported commodities rather than locally produced goods such as fruit wine and traditional dishes like *kat kat banann*, based on salt fish and plantains. Many prefer to buy frozen fish from a supermarket, making life difficult for fishers selling their catch from the roadside. As one Seychellois puts it,

Young people around here no longer want to be Seychellois. They'd rather be Americans.

This is a setting where structural amnesia of a peculiar kind sets in. When your identity is defined through consumption rather than production, and ties to the production regimes of the previous generations have been severed, producing a credible historical narrative shedding light on and making the present day meaningful does not only become problematic – as in so many cases of creative appropriations of the past studied by anthropologists – but irrelevant. Presentism sets in. The past becomes a “foreign country” (Lowenthal, 2015): a scarce resource for some, worthless rubbish for others. This collective amnesia liberates people from the burdens of an African past of which they are ashamed and a history of oppression which they would rather prefer to forget; but, it also prevents them from understanding the causes of their present ailments, limiting the extent of self-knowledge (Choppy, 2020). As O'Brien famously says to Winston Smith in Orwell's *1984*, ‘he who controls the past controls the present’.

The post-slavery population of the Seychelles has experienced three distinct waves of attempted cultural standardisation from outside: the colonial, the socialist, and in this century, that of global neoliberalism and deterritorialised communication society. Contemporary Seychelles is subjected to multiple pressures and sometimes contradictory influences. In the last decades, its incorporation in systems of larger scale has intensified, creating forms of dependence different from those that the ‘revolutionary period’ of the late 1970s and 1980s sought to sever. Intensified contact with the outside world, through electronic networks and increased mobility – Internet and cable television are widespread, and half the Seychellois population make at least one trip abroad annually – has led to a growing pressure on local customs, mores and notions which in practice may be stronger and more difficult to resist than anything hitherto experienced, even during colonialism (Eriksen, 2019).

### **The imperialism of the 21st century**

Seychelles is the smallest country in the world, by population, with its own currency, the Seychellois Rupee. This does not detract from a heavy dependency on the outside world for sustenance.

Along with fishing, plantation agriculture on a modest scale was the main economic activity for most of the 20th century, copra, vanilla, sugar and cinnamon being the most important export crops. By the early 21st century, this is all but gone. In a neoliberal world of deregulated markets and decreased costs of transportation, the small scale of Seychellois agriculture could not compete with transnational economies of scale. Today, one of the old sugar estates on the main island of Mahé has been turned into a tourist-focused rum distillery with an upmarket restaurant and guided tours highlighting the charms of the colonial era, and the largest coconut plantation on nearby La Digue has been converted into an outdoor museum. Fish and some produce is sold in outdoor markets, but nearly everything in the shops has been imported, down to the apples and onions from South Africa.

In spite of former socialist president René's disdain for the most glaring forms of what he saw as neocolonial dependence, upmarket tourism has grown steadily since the 1980s, and along with processed fish, mainly tuna, revenue is mainly drawn from foreign-owned hotels and tour operators. After 40 years of independence, with the socialist *Parti Lepep* – People's Party – in power until 2016 (in spite of losing the election, it still holds the president, Danny Faure, in 2020), Seychelles present an intriguing mix of state socialism, global capitalism plus offshore banking, luxury resorts and bureaucratic red-tape, with a social and cultural substratum of creole informality.

There is considerable awareness of the vulnerability entailed by dependence on continuous interaction with the outside world. Food security is limited, and the freshwater supply, while usually adequate, is vulnerable to droughts. Construction of every kind of infrastructure, from roads to fibre optic cables, is expensive for the obvious reasons. In order to ensure some control of land and domestic wealth, restrictions on foreign ownership in the tourist industry dictate that establishments of 15 keys (or rooms) or fewer are reserved for Seychellois only; for establishments between 16 and 24 keys, a non-Seychellois may own up to 80 percent of the shareholding; and for establishments with 25 keys or more, non-Seychellois may own 100 percent, but they are encouraged to have Seychellois partners/shareholders. Although the rules encourage proxy ownership, they indicate that there is a real concern and anxiety that the most valuable chunks of land may end up being foreign owned. Since citizenship can be obtained at a premium, like in several other small island states, land grabbing

is becoming an issue in the Seychelles as elsewhere. Pressure from the outside world is growing as foreigners buy property and competition skews the Seychellois economy towards services and experiences which cannot easily be outsourced or provided elsewhere. This is a recipe for an economy dependent on tourism and offshore banking; although, as Baldacchino (2019) reminds us, small countries may find specialised niches and thrive by exploiting them.

As alluded to above, there is currently a discernible tendency towards a new form of cultural colonisation owing to overheated globalisation. A Seychellois intellectual said, during a conversation – aware that she was paraphrasing the Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) – that the socialists had been successful in nationalising much of the land, and had successfully decolonised central institutions, but that they had failed to decolonise the mind. In her view, they were like V. S. Naipaul's mimic men (and women, Naipaul 1967) who would rather be somewhere else, or – if at all possible – somebody else. Most Seychellois, she added, wanted to be global citizens, not descendants of Africans reproducing a mongrel, impure and imperfect culture developed in a miserable past that they would prefer to forget. The relative prosperity and high level of connectedness in the Seychelles makes this option feasible in practice. In other words, old inequalities are being superseded by new ones; although the old class structure was also transnational, the new one is transnational in new ways; and any quest for local uniqueness and rootedness is superseded by consumer dreams and the desire to partake fully in the kind of global modernity seen in the tourist areas and on television. This configuration differs from those debated among *créolistes* and others in the last century; although the 'double consciousness' is still evident, it is no longer the former colonial powers that serve as magnets and yardsticks, but the leisured and consumption-intensive worlds of tourism and cyberspace.

The physical boundaries of the Seychelles are not contested. Nearly all Seychellois live on three islands that are connected by ferry and light aircraft, and they have a shared collective identity as Seychellois, notwithstanding the persistence of hierarchies of race and class. Unlike the case of societies such as Trinidad and Mauritius (Eriksen, 1992), the Seychelles are relatively homogeneous in terms of collective identification, the vast majority being of African or mixed African–European origin. (Interestingly, the small Chinese minority are considered Creoles and intermarry with other Seychellois, which the slightly larger Indian minority do not, and they are so also not generally considered Creoles or even always as fully Seychellois.) This is complicated by a practice, common among Seychellois Indians, of importing labour from India. And so, a substantial proportion of the labour force in Seychelles does not speak Creole (Thompson et al., 2019) and does not fully participate in Seychellois society.

Territorial and ethnic boundaries thus do not present problems relating to social cohesion. At the same time, questions to do with identity are at the forefront of public discourse. The acceleration of communication, trade and mobility characteristic of the early 21st century (Eriksen, 2016), has simultaneously strengthened the transnational connectedness of Seychellois and their sense of isolation and marginality.

### **The fragility of small networks**

Smallness entails short social distances and encourages informality. In a small-scale society, you run into the same people throughout your life, and the extent of networks is limited. If you fall out with them, they can still be hard to avoid, and there may be few others to associate with. In larger countries, there would be many alternatives. Say, you work at a university and have a strained relationship with your dean; in a larger country, you could move to another university; while in the Seychelles, with its single university, this is not possible. So: if your

career plans are halted by personal conflict, you cannot just find other associates to work with. And you cannot escape your reputation unless you leave the country (Baldacchino, 1997).

Unlike in Mauritius, anonymity is in practice impossible in the Seychelles. In this respect, the archipelago is more directly comparable with the Faroe Islands, a North Atlantic dependency of Denmark with a population of less than 50,000. Yet the Faroese have their own language (which is, linguistically, intermediate between Icelandic and Norwegian) and a few local mass media. Some Faroese may proudly declare that they have no homosexuals, prostitutes or drug addicts. The explanation is simple; it is because they are all in Denmark, mainly Copenhagen, which is big enough for anonymity to be possible. You cannot be a burglar in the Faroes, since everybody knows who you are. Not least, they know your mother, so by becoming a deviant from the norm, you bring shame not only over yourself, but also over your family. It is also a fact that, if you are Faroese and suffer from a chronic disease, you have to move to Denmark. Here, the critical threshold has been surpassed in a country like Mauritius, but not in the Seychelles, which may send patients to Mauritius or elsewhere for treatment which requires specialist interventions.

The range of options for an individual living in a small society is narrower in some respects, but actually wider in other respects. A Norwegian friend of mine, a fellow academic who works in the USA, fears that he would become lazy were he to return to provincial, small Norway. This view is a version of Marx and Engels' rather debatable concept of rural idiocy: by living in a small, rural place, you acquire a limited horizon and a narrow range of experience (Marx & Engels, 2004 [1848], p. 17). This view may have been true when it was first formulated; but, modern education, media and cyberspace reshuffle the cards. Moreover, people who live in big countries can be shockingly naïve of the world outside, and those who live in small countries are often extremely interested in the outside world, often to the point of obsession. And so, many Seychellois may know more about Emmanuel Macron's politics than many French nationals, or more about English football than many English nationals. In this sense, runaway globalisation has made the Seychellois less provincial and better connected.

In the public sphere, smallness implies a lack of diversity, just as it leads to a lack of specialisation in the labour market. As a result, networks tend to come without an escape clause. There are obvious constraints resulting from the lack of anonymity, impeding the free exchange of ideas and the creation of civil society organisations or cross-cutting ties, since everybody knows who everybody else is: there are more multiplex (multi-pronged) than uniplex (single-pronged) relationships (Benedict, 1967). As suggested by legal scholar Bar (2020), intimate familiarity with other people's whereabouts inhibits the neutrality of the judiciary system, and this concerns the entire legal ecology, from clients to barristers and judges. On the other hand, smallness can be liberating in that it enables, indeed forces, people to wear several hats. Government ministers may have several portfolios, and a psychiatrist may double as a literature critic.

This lack of specialisation may yet prove advantageous: people are not constrained by a single role, but are allowed to flourish as generalists. Yet, they may also have "issue-specific capabilities that may be used as a tool for niche influence" (Bueger & Wivel, 2018, p. 175).

At a time when digital communication is deterritorialised and disembedded, the disjuncture between spatial and virtual communities may be difficult to relate to. In a small public sphere like that in the Seychelles, the gap is less wide and perhaps less problematic than in a larger country, where a message or image going viral can reach millions. In the case of

Seychellois society, most of the people active online know, or are aware of, each other IRL (in real life) as well. Spreading rumours online, accordingly, may be almost congruent with spreading the same rumours in the workplace or the schoolyard, unlike in the less orderly and more sprawling online communities in larger countries.

By the same token, the public sphere in the Seychelles suffers from small scale. There is little by way of diversity and pluralism of opinion in the media. This may also partly be a result of not quite having recovered from a time, officially ending in 1992, when the freedom of expression was very limited.

### **Seven advantages of small scale**

Seychelles is exempt from overheated globalisation when it comes to competing for market share in international trade, setting agendas in global politics or dominating world culture. But being a small fish in a sea of whales presents advantages. Seven are noted below.

First, the importance of a single individual in a small-scale society is disproportionate to the size of the society. There is no reason to assume that an Icelander is any less autonomous or influential than a Briton. On the contrary, in a globalised world, individuals in small countries tend to punch above their weight.

Second, this holds true for the countries themselves as well. Although the international influence of Seychelles is bound to be less than that of Brazil or the USA, it accounts for more than its 90,000 strong population might indicate. It is a full member of international organisations with its own strategic and territorial interests in the Indian Ocean, which it demands to be taken seriously even in the face of regional interest from major powers such as China and India. As noted about a 'great power' by Thorhallsson (2018, p. 26),

[it] will be able to achieve status and be noticed regardless of what it does. Small states, on the other hand, will not be noticed unless they purposely seek out to be noticed.

He adds that small polities may exploit niches left vacant by others and mediate between other actors, precisely by virtue of being non-threatening and without vested interests worldwide. As analysed by Bueger and Wivel (2018, p. 170), securing the Chair of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) – which includes major maritime powers such as Japan and Singapore – in 2015 is no small diplomatic achievement for a small state.

Third, smallness entails flexibility. A small-scale society can change course far more easily than a large one. While an oil tanker on its way to crash into a coral reef cannot possibly turn around in time to avoid disaster, a small sailboat can change direction in a matter of seconds. This quality is not to be scoffed at when the world is increasingly talking about the post-fossil fuel transition. The Seychelles can, for example, specialise in producing exclusive, unique niche goods based on craftsmanship rather than mass production (Baldacchino, 2019).

Fourth, small-scale societies may be more amenable to general trust in institutions than large-scale ones, owing to the short network distance between elites and masses. This precludes the need for expensive lawyers ahead of transactions, unlike in countries like the USA, where people spend a great amount of time and money (to use a favourite adjective of the current president) on not trusting each other. On the other hand, the idea that small societies are likely to be democratic, is a myth, and indeed, the opposite is often the case (Veenendaal, 2015).

Fifth, small scale can – again perhaps paradoxically – serve as an efficient bulwark against being overwhelmed by foreign cultural influence. Although English loanwords are entering Seychellois Creole, the language remains vital and vibrant. It is a community clearly delineated by its speakers and continues to be used. More pertinent to the present theme, typical ways of life are affected less by foreign influence than one might expect. The matrifocal family, a legacy from slavery, remains common, and lacking big cities, which are always attract external influence (and internal diversity), Seychelles remain relatively uninteresting and irrelevant to many large corporations. There is no Starbucks, no KFC, no IKEA. Seen from this perspective, small scale can in fact function as an inoculation against being overrun by large actors, just as insects are never attacked by lions.

Sixth, tasks can be accomplished more quickly and efficiently in a smaller than in a larger society. Consider walking into a large supermarket in search of a particular item, compared to going into a small corner shop with the same mission. Limited choice means not falling victim to the debilitating syndrome known as the tyranny of choice (Schwarz, 2004), and improves focus while increasing efficiency. A major work on the decline of empires (Tainter, 1988) argues that increasing costs of administration are a main cause for imperial fatigue and eventual collapse, and that this is largely caused by growth and increased distance between centres and peripheries. Although no large trucks are to be seen in Seychelles, transport is generally quick and flexible within the islands. Traffic exists, but nothing compared to the jams of major cities, and nobody spends hours commuting unless they live in one island and work in another.

Seventh and lastly, the flexibility entailed by small scale can be utilised to mobilise individual creativity and collective vision more easily than in larger societies, which are by default more conflict-ridden and fragmented. While redefining its niches in a world where its comparative advantages lie in services and location rather than the production of goods, Seychelles may also, at the same time, take the opportunity to negotiate its future in a carbon-neutral world. A society of this scale may be better placed to change focus and direction than a larger one bogged down by heavy conventions and powerful corporate interests. Precisely by virtue of its scale and location, Seychelles may lead, dependent on collective decisions taken.

## **Conclusion**

Always vulnerable, precarious and dependent on the outside world for sustenance and impulses, the Seychelles are, like other small island-states, currently subjected to a new form of dependence, owing to the acceleration of trade and transnational communication, the deregulation and subsequent upscaling of the global economy, and growing scalar gaps between the centres of power and the less powerful. I have argued that paradoxically, The Seychelles may be in a better position than many larger countries in counteracting some of the disempowering effects of 21st century globalisation.

The Seychelles are used to negotiating their autonomy and destiny in a sea of dependencies and relationships. The creole character of Seychellois society bears witness to centuries of mixing, flexibility and adaptation to new impulses and changing circumstances. The country can develop and refine niches that cannot be scaled up because they are inherently local, notably in the realm of tourism; and the islands can also be branded through other products aimed at niche markets overseas, such as vanilla and handicrafts. The small scale of the country and the cultural homogeneity of its population make it feasible for it to change direction in its economic and environmental policies, should circumstances so demand. Moreover, the linguistic and cultural identity of the population remains resilient in spite of



pressure from global media and tourism. Young Seychellois who try to behave like African-Americans do so in a distinctly local way, communicating their rap, ghetto or Rasta identity in *kreol seselwa*, which is also the most widely used language locally on the social media.

This is not to say that there are no problems or challenges ahead. In future research, a critical topic will be the growing influence of China economically, culturally and politically. Another subject will be migratory patterns to and from the islands: The fear of losing talent is about as strong as that of migrant labour upsetting the demographic balance and social cohesion, but foreign purchase of property and citizenship is no less a concern. A third burning issue for Seychelles will be the balance between sustainability and dependence on tourism. Finally, an issue of continued but increasing importance concerns international alliances and cooperation, in the light of geopolitical and economic interests not so much in the islands as such, but the vast oceanic area surrounding them.

The conclusion is nevertheless that, counterintuitively and paradoxically, a small state, or a micro-state, like the Seychelles, is in a better position to retain autonomy and self-determination in a seamlessly globalised, accelerated world than many larger states.

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## **Two Tribunals and an Appeal in Seychelles: Monitoring and enforcement of legal ethics in a small jurisdiction.**

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**Abstract:** On paper, the legal profession in Seychelles does appear to be governed by ethical rules of conduct backed up by appropriate mechanisms for enforcement. However, on closer inspection, it appears that in practice these mechanisms function erratically, if at all. This paper examines the regulatory gap between theory and practice, focusing on recent examples of enforcement actions against lawyers and judges in the jurisdiction. It goes on to discuss possible reasons for this gap, including a lack of ethical education, lack of peer pressure or other incentive to maintain ethical standards, and deficiencies in independence and impartiality of disciplinary tribunals. These reasons are discussed in the context of the small scale of the legal profession in a micro-jurisdiction.

**Keywords:** legal ethics, ethical compliance, small states, judiciary, legal profession,

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### **Introduction**

For a two-year period starting 1 October 2017, I was engaged as a Senior Lecturer in Law at the University of Seychelles (UniSey). My time in Seychelles coincided with UniSey's participation in the Scale in Seychelles research project, which investigated various aspects of living in a small-scale society, and in which I took part. As a lawyer, I was particularly interested in how the legal profession operates in such a small jurisdiction. To that end, I attended to observe legal proceedings at the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal, and interacted with a number of judges and attorneys. I also conducted ten semi-structured interviews with legal practitioners in the Seychelles to get a better understanding of various aspects of legal work in the jurisdiction.

This paper relies primarily on legal and critical analysis of relevant case law and legislation together with an analysis of notes of my observations of court proceedings and interviews with members of the legal profession in Seychelles. Supporting material includes official governmental websites and websites of the Bar Association of Seychelles, as well as select comparative material from the jurisdiction of England and Wales. The English jurisdiction was chosen for comparative purposes because of its familiarity – both for myself and for the judges and attorneys of Seychelles.

While I initially cast my net wide to get an overall picture of legal practise, legal ethics – and in particular, the question of enforcement – quickly emerged as a major issue of my investigation. I had been a practising lawyer at one point in my career, and ethics are something that I am trained to pay attention to in the legal context – maintaining ethical standards is strongly emphasized in legal education and work culture of the English legal profession, with legal ethics seen as crucial in preserving the rule of law. While infractions of ethical rules by individual legal practitioners are far from rare, the English legal profession – represented by its

professional bodies – strives to maintain compliance with relatively robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. I was therefore quite shocked by what I perceived as a rather relaxed attitude towards ethical enforcement in the legal profession of the Seychelles, particularly given that the jurisdiction is so closely related to my own. This paper is my attempt to take a closer look at the issue of legal ethics in Seychelles, to discuss some of the reasons for the divergence I have found between the theory and practice of enforcement of legal ethics in the jurisdiction, and to address the question of smallness and role it plays in the operation of ethical enforcement.

### **Pirates (alleged) and a fair(ish) trial**

On 17 September 2018, the case of *Republic of Seychelles v Ahmed and others* [2018] SCSC 866 came on for trial at the Supreme Court of Seychelles. Six Somali nationals were alleged by the prosecution – led by the Deputy Attorney General of Seychelles, Mr. David Esparon - to have engaged in piracy, having been captured in November 2017 by the Italian navy operating as part of the joint EU anti-piracy task force. The case against them was circumstantial: they were discovered shortly after an attempted pirate attack against a merchant vessel, with a skiff that fit the general description of the attacking ship. They had no weapons on board at the time of capture and claimed to be fishermen, carried away from shore when their engine broke – on the face of it, not entirely an unreasonable claim, though aside from fairly dilapidated fishing nets, they did not appear to have much in the way of usual fishing equipment.

As the alleged pirates had not been caught red-handed (and being incompetent fishermen is not yet a crime), it was quite important for the prosecution's case that the evidence – including the descriptions of the appearance of the suspects and their boat – be consistent across witnesses. In an affidavit reproduced at paragraph 10 of the subsequent judgment in *Ahmed and others* (dated 28 September 2018 and available at <https://seylii.org/sc/judgment/supreme-court/2018/866-0>), a British legal officer with the EU Naval Force described how the prosecution worked to achieve this consistency. The officer, Lt. Commander Fane-Bailey, had been part of the operation that originally captured the six suspects and was now in Seychelles to observe the proceedings against them, as well as to support the members of the operation summoned as witnesses. It is in this last capacity that she attended at the National House offices of the Deputy AG in the morning of Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2018, where a scenario straight out of a legal ethics exam unfolded before her very eyes.

According to her affidavit, Mr. Esparon asked one of witnesses to testify to viewing footage that he did not see (thus encouraging the witness to lie to the court under Oath); gave the witnesses the exact form of words he wanted their testimony to take when describing the suspects' skiff ("white with a light blue band"); showed them photographs of the skiff taken by other witnesses; and emphasized the importance of one of the suspects wearing a red shirt. Lt. Commander Fane-Bailey attempted to stop him several times in the course of the meeting. However, as Mr. Esparon persisted, she could do nothing else but promptly report the whole matter to the Chief Justice of Seychelles, potentially throwing away a year's worth of her own and her team's hard work in bringing the suspects to trial. To her credit, she did not hesitate to do exactly that.

Coaching witnesses is a very serious infraction of legal ethics in most, if not all, developed legal systems. In Seychelles, it is specifically prohibited by Rule 17(4) of the Legal Practitioners (Professional Conduct) Rules 2013 ("the 2013 Rules"). The reason for the prohibition should be fairly obvious: giving witnesses the opportunity to compare stories, tailor

their accounts to fit with other evidence and iron out any inconsistencies puts the fairness of subsequent proceedings in serious jeopardy, thus clearly contravening the rule of law. Given the affidavit evidence – unchallenged by the prosecution – that witness coaching took place, it is not surprising that the judge presiding over the case dismissed the charges against the six suspects with the damning verdict that the evidence against them was “so manifestly unreliable that no reasonable tribunal could safely convict on it” (*Ahmed and others*, para. 20).

What was baffling about this whole affair was that – as apparent from the affidavit – Mr. Esparon made no attempt to conceal his unethical behaviour from a fellow lawyer, and persisted despite her repeated efforts to get him to stop. Was he not concerned that she would report him, despite their shared obligation – as lawyers – to report exactly such misconduct? Further, when her affidavit was produced to him, he did not reply to the allegations of his misconduct at all – not even to deny that he did anything wrong (*Ahmed and others*, para. 14). In many jurisdictions – including England and Wales, where most Seychellois lawyers have been trained – being caught in such a serious ethical violation would likely result in disbarment and loss of any future prospect of legal employment. Was the Deputy AG not concerned at all about the damage that these revelations could cause to his career prospects and professional repute?

As it turns out, Mr. Esparon had nothing to worry about, and probably knew it. However, to understand why this is the case, we must take a short tour of the Seychellois legal profession and explore the divergence between theory and practice in enforcement of legal ethics in the jurisdiction. Much of that gap, I will argue, is due to the smallness of its legal profession.

## **Legal ethics in the Seychelles: the rules**

### *The legal system*

The legal system in Seychelles is a blend of the English common law tradition with the French civil law and local customary law (Twomey, 2017). The procedure is adversarial and based on the English model, with many Seychellois lawyers and judges having studied for their law degree in England or Wales. Proceedings are conducted in English, although translation into Seychellois Creole is available and frequently used by litigants and witnesses. Overall, the whole process looks very much like what one would expect to see in the courts of England and Wales – down to lawyers dressed in wigs and gowns, and the ethical rules that the system purports to uphold.

### *The lawyers*

According to the website of the Bar Association of Seychelles, there are 56 attorneys and/or notaries eligible to practise in the jurisdiction, as well as 16 State Counsel and Assistant State Counsel together with one public prosecutor in the Attorney General’s Office. Practising attorneys are those who are licensed to offer legal services to the general public and represent their clients in court. The licensing process is administered by the Registrar of the Supreme Court, who keeps a Roll on which the names of currently authorised attorneys appear. Not all eligible attorneys are in active practice: the judges and lawyers I interviewed in February and March 2019 estimated the number of active practitioners to be around 30, serving a population of 100,000 people. By comparison, Jersey – a small island off the coast of England with a population of a similar size to Seychelles – has just under 300 practising lawyers listed on The Law Society of Jersey website; though perhaps the island’s popularity as an off-shore

jurisdiction has something to do with increased numbers. The members of the AG's Office – State Counsel, Assistant SC, and the prosecutor – act only on behalf of the government and do not offer their services to the general public.

All lawyers in Seychelles – whether attorneys, State Counsel, notaries, or even pupils – are bound by the ethical obligations set out in the 2013 Rules, made pursuant to the Legal Practitioners Act (Consolidated to 1 December 2014). The Rules include both the usual general duties – such as upholding the rule of law (4(1)), acting honestly in providing legal services (4(2)), and maintaining the integrity and reputation of the legal profession (6(1)) – as well as more specific rules usually found in legal codes, such as the prohibition on entering into intimate personal relationships with clients (11(4)), the duty not to mislead or deceive the court (14(3)) or the duty to report misconduct of another legal practitioner (22(1)).

Monitoring and enforcement falls to the Office of the Chief Justice, in accordance with sections 10 and 11 of the Legal Practitioners Act and the Legal Practitioners (Disciplinary Measures and Reinstatement) Rules 1995 (“the Disciplinary Rules”). The Disciplinary Rules set out the procedural steps of any disciplinary proceedings for suspension or removal from the Roll of attorneys-at-law, or taking any other disciplinary measures against members of the legal profession. Under Rule 2(1), the Chief Justice may initiate such proceedings upon “a complaint in writing made by any person or information received otherwise” – the latter being perhaps a reference to the duty of lawyers to report each other's misconduct under Rule 22 of the 2013 Rules. In theory, non-compliant lawyers are therefore in danger of having their misconduct brought to the attention of the Chief Justice both through the complaints of those they have offended, and through the reports of any fellow legal professional who becomes aware of it.

### *The judges*

According to the most recent annual report on the judiciary of Seychelles available on [seylli.org](http://seylli.org) (2016/17, p. 6), there are five magistrates, eight judges of the Supreme Court (including a Master), and four judges of the Court of Appeal. In addition, the Chief Justice – currently Mathilda Twomey, appointed in 2015 and the first woman to hold the position – presides over the judiciary and sits on both the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal. While there have been some arrivals and departures since the 2016/7 report, my informal head count – arrived at by attending court at the Palais de Justice in Victoria (the capital city) and talking to legal professionals at various times between July 2018 and March 2019 – confirmed that the overall number of judges hovers at around 20. The judges of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal sit at the Palais de Justice. The four magistrate courts are situated around the three main islands – two on Mahe (Victoria and Anse Royale), and one each on Praslin and La Digue.

All judges are subject to the Seychelles Code of Judicial Conduct 2010 (<https://seylli.org/seychelles-code-of-judicial-conduct>). The Code includes an array of usual judicial obligations needed to foster effective administration of justice: from independence and impartiality of decision-making to competence and diligence in carrying out judicial duties. Judges are required by the code to also accord equal treatment to all those who appear before them, and hold to high standards of integrity and propriety in both their professional and personal lives. There are no specific provisions concerning any procedures for enforcement or sanctions for non-compliance within the Code, and nothing to indicate a monitoring mechanism. However, its provisions appear to be taken into account in proceedings concerned with removal of a judge from office pursuant to article 134 of the Constitution of the Republic of Seychelles (“the Constitution”).



Pursuant to article 134(1) of the Constitution, a judge (a Justice of Appeal or Judge) can be removed from office if they are unable to perform the functions of their office. This inability can arise “from infirmity of body or mind or from any other cause, or for misbehaviour.” While it is only the President of Seychelles who can appoint or remove a judge under the Constitution, recommending suitable candidates for a judicial post as well as initiating removal proceedings are in the hands of the Constitutional Appointments Authority (CAA), a five-member body established via a political compromise process set out in articles 139 and 140 of the Constitution. While the CAA does not appear to monitor or police judicial behaviour specifically, it does receive and consider complaints about any constitutional appointees, including judges. Any person may lodge such a complaint, supported by an affidavit setting out the nature of complaint and substantiating facts. The procedure is set out on the CAA website at <http://www.caaseychelles.com/index.php/lodge-a-complaint>.

When a complaint is made about misbehaviour serious enough to warrant removal from a post, the CAA is required under article 134(2) to appoint a Tribunal “to inquire into the matter, report on the facts thereof ... and recommend to the President whether or not the Justice of Appeal or Judge ought to be removed from office.” If such a recommendation is made, the President is obliged under article 134(3) of the Constitution to remove the judge in question from office.

### **Monitoring and enforcement in practice**

From July through September 2018 as well as during February/March 2019, I attended a number of hearings at the Palais de Justice, observing a variety of cases in the Supreme Court (including the pirate trial). I also conducted ten (10) semi-structured interviews with legal professionals knowledgeable about the jurisdiction’s legal system: my interviewees were current judges, practising attorneys or lawyers working in an adjunct capacity. The interviewees were selected based primarily on their availability: they were mostly the people who had time to talk to me, responded positively to my attempts to arrange an interview, and actually showed up to be interviewed. The information they provided was helpful in explaining and supplementing the publically available case law on enforcement of legal ethics in the jurisdiction; much of the information and discussion below derives from both my interview and court observation notes.

Other than the constitutional mechanism for removal by the President following a Tribunal under article 134(2), there appear to be no disciplinary procedures or penalties available for judicial violations of ethics. I have been unable to find any publicly accessible information concerning the number of complaints the CAA receives about judges, or how those complaints are handled. I could find no indication that the CAA is investigating the complaints made and exercising any disciplinary measures for infractions that might not be sufficiently grave for the constitutional article 134 procedure. That procedure has thus far been used twice to convene tribunals to consider allegations of judicial misbehaviour. One resulted in suspension of Judge Karunakaran and the recommendation that he be removed from post; the other was based on “revenge” complaints made by Judge Karunakaran against the Chief Justice, which were rightly dismissed for lacking merit. Both cases are more fully discussed below.

Of the two avenues for reporting misconduct of lawyers – public complaints and peer reporting under Rule 22 – only the first is actually working. Between 20 and 40 complaints a month are submitted to the Office of the Chief Justice from former or current clients unhappy with a lawyer’s work. These are many and varied, ranging from completely trivial or misguided

through serious complaints alleging unethical or even criminal conduct. However, as of February 2019, not a single report has ever been made under Rule 22 by a member of the legal profession. According to my informants – both lawyers and judges – it is highly unlikely that one will be made in the near future. When asked, the majority confirmed that they have witnessed a variety of unethical behaviour, some of it very serious and possibly criminal, such as fraud or money laundering. However, all of those to whom Rule 22 applies asserted that they would never report the misconduct witnessed. Some apparently misunderstood what it requires: they believed that reporting would be the same as making a complaint, which they would then have to pursue and litigate (which is incorrect). Others thought that they would have to have some direct evidence of misconduct before reporting (also incorrect). One person quite openly said that they would never make such a report, and they did not know of anyone else who would: it simply would not happen, as “the Bar is too small.”

Once a complaint is received, the Chief Justice will consider it, and decide whether it is serious enough to ask the lawyer in question to respond to the allegations. She will then consider both sides, and either close the matter, ask for more information, or inform the persons concerned of any action she intends to take. If ultimately she decides that there is some merit in the complaint, she will refer it to the Legal Practitioners’ Discipline Committee, composed of three senior judges other than the Chief Justice. The tribunal thus formed will then investigate the matter, make findings of fact, and recommend a penalty. Under s10 of the Legal Practitioners Act, the available penalties include suspension or even removal from the Roll of attorneys: a sanction that should constitute a significant incentive for obeying the rules, given that it deprives the lawyer in question of the right to practise the profession that is their livelihood.

Unfortunately, as of 2018, this sanction has been somewhat neutered by the case – and more specifically, the result of the Appeal – of a Mr. William Herminie.

## The appeal

In 2016, Mr. Herminie made history as the first member of the Seychellois legal profession to be subject to disciplinary proceedings under s10 of the Legal Practitioners Act. It appears that he had a number of complaints against him, which were not resolved due to his reluctance to translate into action his undertakings to the court promising to remedy the conduct complained of. His intransigence led to a Tribunal finally being appointed, which found a number of complaints against Mr. Herminie factual. The Supreme Court judgment concerning Mr. Herminie’s punishment for his various transgressions, *In the matter of William Herminie (Attorney-at-Law Disciplinary Measures)* [2016] SCSC 621, records the Tribunal findings at paragraph 14.

According to those findings, Mr. Herminie:

- Breached undertakings to the Court (repeatedly);
- Repeatedly helped himself to his clients’ money: he kept the money awarded to some of his clients, sometimes for years. In one particularly horrible case, the client he appropriated money from was a disabled woman; the funds she had won would have made her last years bearable. Instead, she died not having benefited at all “from the settlement money paid on her behalf during her lifetime due to the professional misconduct of counsel.” Mr. Herminie was finally coerced into paying back her estate after she was already dead;



- Did not do work he was paid for (didn't show up to court, failed to file documents, etc.);
- Charged clients fees to which he was not legally entitled;
- Pursued an intimate relationship with one of his clients;
- Practised without a license for some time;
- Had eight cases pending against him for non-payment for goods and services, dishonouring a cheque, and professional misconduct, at the time of the disciplinary tribunal
- Assisted a client in committing tax evasion.

It was clear what penalty had to be imposed for this litany of misdeeds and dishonesty, and the Supreme Court – in the person of the Chief Justice – did not shy away from imposing it: Mr. Herminie was struck from the Roll, and thus barred from practising law. Chief Justice Twomey allowed in her judgment for a possibility of his reinstatement, provided that prior to making an application he completed two years of pupillage – a type of apprenticeship that all new lawyers normally go through to be qualified. However, the judgment made it clear that completion of pupillage was merely a prerequisite for making the application for reinstatement, rather than a condition for reinstatement itself. For that, Mr. Herminie would still have to persuasively argue and give reasons for why, despite his many past transgressions, he should be restored back to the Roll. In light of the gravity of his misconduct, it is difficult to imagine what possible grounds could be found sufficient.

Whatever his other faults, Mr. Herminie is clearly not a quitter. He appealed his ejection from the legal profession to the Court of Appeal on two grounds, only one of which was relevant to his reinstatement. In it, he argued essentially that the Chief Justice was a little too harsh on him:

*The Honourable Chief Justice erred in principle in ordering the Appellant to serve a further term of two years pupillage with an approved Chambers as part of the stated rehabilitation programme. Appellant humbly submits that the supervision in an approved Chambers for a shortened period would be lawful as Appellant has undergone pupillage as granted, lawfully by the former Chief Justice V. Alleear. para. 4, William Herminie v Registrar, Supreme Court [2018] SCCA 11.*

Those readers who are also lawyers should at this point be scratching their heads – how is this a real ground of appeal? That is a very good question: a higher court is not normally allowed to interfere with an exercise of a lower court's judicial discretion – such as an imposition of a penalty or condition – if the discretion is properly exercised. It does not matter if a judge is harsh and a less onerous condition could have also been “lawful,” so long as the judge did not exceed their discretion in imposing what they did. In his appeal, Mr. Herminie does not allege that the Supreme Court exceeded its discretion or that it did not exercise it properly – on the contrary, in asking for a shorter period of pupillage before he is able to apply for reinstatement, he is acknowledging that the court had the right to impose such a requirement on him in the first place. He is just saying that it could also have been shorter. Legally speaking, as a ground of appeal, this is nonsense – it should have been tossed straight out of court.

And yet, the Court of Appeal not only seriously entertained but actually allowed this ground of appeal; not only tossing out the requirement of pupillage imposed by the SC, but also taking the extra step of restoring the victorious Mr. Herminie to the Roll (subject to some minor conditions). The judgment in the case gives no real clue as to why this happened, and

the reasoning leading up to Mr. Herminie's restoration is practically incoherent. The relevant passage is found at paragraph 11:

11. *The broad question for the Committee and the learned Chief Justice was whether the Appellant was a fit and proper person to practise law and whether all professional conduct complaints against the Appellant have been resolved to the satisfaction of the individual clients involved and pursuant to the Legal Practitioner's Act. The learned Chief Justice found that he was unfit to practice as an attorney-at-law or a notary. Under section 10 of the LPA, the Supreme Court may suspend or remove from the roll an attorney-at-law in such circumstances. Therefore, in our considered judgment, the issue of serving a new 2 year period of pupillage in terms of section 10 of the LPA strictly does not arise. However, semantics aside, we are of the considered view that the seriousness of the actions and/or omissions of the Appellant are such that this court will not condone. The term "pupillage" used by the learned Chief Justice connotes a requirement that the Appellant must go through a "process of rehabilitation" to ensure that he appreciates the necessity of properly conducting himself as an attorney. The Appellant himself recognized that necessity when he stated in ground 1 of his appeal inter alia that – "Appellant humbly submits that the supervision in an approved Chambers for a shortened period would be lawful ...." We hold similar views albeit not necessarily serving pupillage as such.*

In the next paragraph, they simply allowed his appeal and restored him to the Roll "for reasons stated above." What are the reasons they might be referring to is anyone's guess, given that para. 11 does not come even close to stating or supporting grounds for restoration. In the first few lines of the above passage, it appears as though the CA considered the imposition of the pupillage requirement as being outside the Supreme Court's powers; but then the paragraph goes on to equate it with a requirement to undergo a "process of rehabilitation," which was squarely within what an application for reinstatement demanded. They therefore appear to have conceded that the Supreme Court did have the discretion to impose this requirement, and then gave no reason for why they decided to interfere with it – they just did.

Even if that is incorrect and the CA decided that imposing the pupillage requirement was outside the powers of the Supreme Court, that in itself is not a ground for restoring Mr. Herminie to the Roll. CA specifically acknowledged that Mr. Herminie was found not fit to practice, and they did not question that finding. They further acknowledged that he was removed from the Roll pursuant to a properly exercised power of the Supreme Court – so the discretion exercised in Mr. Herminie's removal was not impugned at all. It was therefore up to Mr. Herminie to apply to be restored, giving reasons for why he should be; and for the CA (if such an application came before them) to consider whether those reasons were adequate. No such application was made, and no reasons for reinstatement given. Removing the pupillage requirement only meant that they could substitute something else to serve as a "process of rehabilitation" prior to applying for reinstatement – it could not be a reason for reinstatement. And yet, as if by magic, it was.

I have asked those I interviewed for their explanation of the Herminie case. On the whole, most people thought that he was restored because the original penalty – striking him from the Roll – was too harsh. One person suggested that he had served his time, as it were, in that he was barred from his profession for two years between the Supreme Court decision and the Appeal judgment. Another suggestion was that the CA worried that, if they came down too hard on Mr. Herminie, quite a few other lawyers – whose conduct was also not quite up to

scratch – might then have been vulnerable. Or that it was unfair to single out Mr. Herminie for punishment and there was something else that motivated the institution of the Tribunal against him. These last two explanations seem rather alarming: it would be a truly sad state of affairs for the Seychellois legal profession if a significant proportion of their members turned out to be as badly behaved as Mr. Herminie. But perhaps the first explanation – that the Court of Appeal considered the penalty imposed to be too harsh – has some chance of making sense of their seemingly bizarre decision, if we interpret it to mean that the penalty imposed was well outside the limits of the range of penalties normally imposed for the sort of transgressions that Mr. Herminie was found to have committed.

*Was the penalty “too harsh?”*

This could be a legally sound explanation if some standards against which the penalty imposed could be evaluated existed at the time – such as official guidance or past case law giving examples of types of misbehaviour and the range of penalties applicable. Unfortunately, Mr. Herminie was the first lawyer in modern Seychelles to face disciplinary action, so no form of such guidance was available. However, it is perfectly acceptable to look to other jurisdictions when there is a gap in the local law – for instance, consulting English jurisprudence is common practice in Seychelles. The English (and other foreign) decisions are not binding on the Seychellois courts, but they provide persuasive guidance for how to tackle a particular issue by looking at how similar jurisdictions deal with the same problem.

When it comes to guidance on penalties for misconduct by the English legal profession, finding it is relatively straightforward. The Bar Tribunals and Adjudication Service website (<https://www.tbta.org.uk>) helpfully provides a searchable database of findings and sanctions against misbehaving lawyers (barristers, in this case) in England and Wales. With very little effort, one can discover the range of behaviours considered worthy of disbarment (the barrister version of striking off the Roll), and compare it to that of Mr. Herminie to ascertain whether the penalty imposed on him really was outside acceptable limits.

Consulting the database in March 2019, these recent examples of disbarment were found:

- Stealing £400 from petty cash (Mahnoor Choudhury, 19 April 2017);
- Misappropriation of monies from a conveyancing transaction (Rajesh Babajee, 20 April 2016);
- Posting 7 racist/anti-semitic tweets (Ian Millard, 27 October 2016);
- Tax evasion (Mohammed Shaikh, 10 October 2016);
- Repeated or persisted fare evasion on the London Underground (Peter Barnett, 26 September 2016)
- Lying on a job application (Merilyn Brown, 20 June 2014)
- Breach of undertaking to pay a listing fee; failing to pay £50 by the time ordered by a judge (John O’Callaghan, 12 November 2013);
- Failing to release money due to a client (Ann Ng, 11 September 2013).

A common theme in most of these examples is that the misconduct in question involved some form of dishonesty, which is, according to the Sanctions Guidance 2019 of the Bar Tribunal and Adjudication Service, “not compatible with practice in a profession which requires exceptional levels of integrity” (BTAS, 2019, p.42). Dishonesty is punished harshly, because without honest conduct on the part of the officers of the court – lawyers included – the rule of law becomes a joke. The administration of justice, to be effective, relies on the legal

profession to be, by and large, prepared to honestly carry out their duties. So if a barrister is caught doing anything dishonest, the starting point is disbarment. Unless there are strongly mitigating circumstances, they are banned from practising law.

It seems clear that, by these standards, Mr. Herminie's penalty was fully justified; his misconduct was more than sufficient to warrant barring him from the legal profession for life. Whatever the real reason for the Court of Appeal's decision to set this penalty aside, the judgment therefore set a truly unfortunate precedent. Instead of taking this opportunity to signal ethical conduct as important, the Appeal judges instead signalled that even very serious misconduct will be tolerated rather than appropriately penalised. If even Mr. Herminie cannot be barred from practice, who can? Removal from the Roll has thus possibly been reduced to a purely theoretical sanction.

The judgment leaves an unpleasant impression that dishonesty is just not that big a deal, and even egregiously unethical conduct can be forgiven. Several of the people I spoke to also did not seem to be particularly troubled by Mr. Herminie's behaviour, at least not to the extent that I would expect fellow lawyers to be. This is, I believe, where the smallness of the profession becomes important. While several reasons for this apparent ethical apathy will be discussed in the next section, the small number of practitioners will be pointed out as a root cause of why unethical behaviour continues to be tolerated.

### **Why size matters**

The reasons that my informants advanced for why enforcement of ethics remains problematic in practice boil down to three main areas: (1) lack of ethical education in the legal profession; (2) lack of incentive to behave ethically; and (3) interdependence and lack of impartiality, both in the profession and in Seychellois society generally. While on the face of it, all three have little to do with smallness – lack of ethical education, for example, could also be a problem in a much more populous legal profession – in the particularly Seychellois context, all three can at least partially be traced to smallness.

### *Education*

The first ethics module in the preparatory course for students taking the Seychellois Bar Exam was implemented around two years ago. It consists of ten hours of instruction (one hour per week for ten weeks), concentrating on ethical theory for four weeks, and six weeks of having students work out practical application of ethical rules to various scenarios. Technically, the course is still not compulsory for future lawyers – students can take the Bar Exam without taking the preparatory course - but in practice, the exam is hard enough that most people who pass it have taken the course. Therefore, future lawyers should be able to start their careers with at least a basic grounding in legal ethics.

Prior to the ethics module being implemented, there was no ethical education available for Seychellois lawyers, compulsory or otherwise. Therefore, unless they had studied ethics elsewhere, the current crop of lawyers and judges would have had no ethical education that they could use to guide their professional conduct. Indeed, all of the practising attorneys and judges I interviewed confirmed that they have had no ethical education as preparation for practice or judicial office. There was therefore no stage of their legal education at which ethics were emphasized as important.

While both lawyers and judges were aware of their respective general rules of professional conduct, real-life ethical dilemmas tend to be complicated and involve conflicting loyalties or conflicts between personal interests and professional duties. Even in as straightforward a scenario as that which arose in the pirates case – witness coaching – it can be difficult to know what to do when, for example, one’s commitment to ensuring a fair trial clashes with a year’s worth of one’s own work and the desire to see perpetrators behind bars. Without appropriate training and support, it is not easy to resolve it merely from general principles, and the temptation to let standards slide can become irresistible.

This is why the main institutions of the English legal profession invest so much in both the ethical education of young lawyers and in on-going ethical support for the profession. Ethics are a key component of the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC), the vocational stage of training for every aspiring barrister. Students must not only pass an exam in professional ethics, but under the “Red Light Rule” can also be failed in other modules (such as advocacy or conference skills) if they fail to spot and successfully resolve any ethics issue that comes up: even if, otherwise, they would have passed the exam (BPTC Handbook 2018-19, pp. 36, 61-65; BPTC Syllabus). Passing the ethics exam requires knowledge of the continuously revised and updated BSB Handbook (the Bar’s code of conduct rules) and the associated Code Guidance, on issues ranging from confidentiality through contacts with the media to the duty to report the serious misconduct of others (as well as one’s own). Following completion of the BPTC, ethical education continues during the aspiring barrister’s pupillage year (e.g.: <https://www.innertemple.org.uk/education/>), in the practice management course delivered by the four Inns of Court (one of which every barrister must be a member of). Newly qualified barristers are then required to complete an additional three hours of ethical education in their first three years of practice (as part of their 45-hour continuing professional development [CPD] requirement). While more experienced barristers are not required to include ethics in their 15 hour a year CPD requirement, they may do so; and should an ethical problem arise at any stage of their practice, they may avail themselves of a confidential Bar Council ethics helpline to help them resolve the difficulty.

The above effort to instil ethical values in new lawyers requires considerable manpower, consisting not only of employed personnel – who design courses, teach ethics to students, work out details of ethical rules and continuously update the Handbook, write additional Code Guidance, etc. – but also of a number of volunteers, lawyers and judges both practising and retired, who attend to assist with activities organized by the Inns of Court and the Bar Council, as well as help out with the ethics hotline. There is arguably insufficient qualified personnel in Seychelles available to staff such an extensive system of ethical education and support. Given the small number of legal practitioners, all of whom appear to be very busy, the Seychellois Bar might simply not have the resources – in terms of finances or time – to set up and operate a comparable ethical education model.

On the other hand, there are also only one or two new attorneys who pass the Bar Exam in Seychelles per year. Surely, it should be possible to deliver some kind of ethical induction training to such a small pool, with the goal of at least improving over the current situation? At minimum, the bar ethics module could be made compulsory; a specific ethics test could be instituted as part of the Bar Exam; and a more practical ethical education could be delivered during the new lawyer’s pupillage year when they are apprenticed to a more experienced practitioner, perhaps by way of weekend workshops. While the limited number of qualified personnel available to deliver an ethical education could therefore be part of the problem, it

certainly seems that the profession could do more than it currently does to instil ethical values in its next generation.

*Lack of incentive*

As discussed above, following the *Herminie* judgment, fear of formal enforcement is unlikely to form much of an incentive to act ethically. But even aside from this unfortunate decision, it seems that fear of penalty is insufficient to motivate good behaviour, to the point where certain types of misconduct have become normalised in practice. Most notably, failing to show up for scheduled court appearances, showing up late, and showing up unprepared are shockingly common and readily apparent – despite a clear obligation to appear and act competently on behalf of clients contained in Rule 8 of the 2013 Rules. The only penalty for failure to appear is SCR500 – around €35 – and even that is not regularly imposed, despite the disruption and delay such misconduct causes in case management and the potentially severe consequences it may have for clients. The overall impression is that legal professionals in general have little to fear from the law, even when openly breaching their professional duties.

Another problem is a lack of any perceptible peer pressure to comply with ethical standards: peer pressure that would otherwise provide a strong incentive for members of the legal profession to abide by their ethical obligations (or at least appear to do so), particularly given the small size of the community in question. That no such pressure operates on the Seychellois Bar seems evident not only from the nonchalance with which the Court of Appeal judges have treated Mr. Herminie’s misconduct or the failure by lawyers to report unethical conduct under Rule 22 (discussed above), but also by the seemingly complete absence of any formal or informal censure from the legal profession when fellow lawyers are caught committing serious ethical breaches. The local Bar Association has no formal regulatory function and seems completely uninterested in policing its members’ ethical standards – to date, it still does not even have a code of conduct, let alone a disciplinary procedure (its website directs anyone unhappy with a lawyer to complain to the Supreme Court). Judging from both its website and its Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/barassociationse/>) it is not a particularly active organization. Even so, it has been known to issue press releases – most recently on 17 May 2018, concerning the appointment of a Tribunal to investigate the Chief Justice (see below) – as well as lobby the CAA to recommend more local attorneys for judicial office (about which they posted on 1 March 2017). One would expect it to show some interest when one of its members is found to have committed serious ethical misconduct; but there is no reaction to either Mr. Herminie’s striking off or subsequent restoration on the BA’s websites.

Absent leadership on the issue of ethics from their professional body, or any other source of peer pressure, the local Bar remains remarkably tolerant of even very serious ethical infractions. For example, after his restoration, Mr. Herminie was quickly able to find chambers to practise from, meaning that at least one other lawyer apparently had no fear of their own reputations becoming tainted by association with his many ethical failures. Mr. Esparon – of the pirate trial fame – was apparently so relaxed about his reputation that he did not even bother to respond to the allegations of witness coaching raised against him. He also faced no visible consequences at work – he retains his position and continues to appear in court.

While a lack of ethical education (discussed above) surely plays a role in this tolerant attitude, the small size of the legal profession is partly responsible for it as well. There are so few practising lawyers available, that everyone is needed to handle the volume of casework before the courts. That awareness of limited numbers might also motivate a greater reluctance

to pursue misbehaving lawyers and impose strict penalties: if you start out with 30 practitioners and start suspending or striking off the Roll for unethical behaviour too readily, you might quickly run out of people needed to run the legal system.

*Interdependence and lack of impartiality*

In the context of evaluating the functioning of democracy in micro-jurisdictions, Veenendaal (2013, p. 9) noted that the small size of a population appears to have a toxic effect on impartiality of democratic institutions, due to the much closer personal connections between politicians and citizens. As a result, such institutions “are commonly ignored or circumvented” by citizens going around the proper channels and exerting personal influence through a network of patron-client linkages. In the context of disciplinary procedures for breaches of legal ethics, this intimate societal interdependence leads not only to perceived lack of impartiality amongst the decision-makers ostensibly entrusted with monitoring and enforcement, but also seemingly to a tendency for the public to view allegations of misconduct as mere extensions of the personal or political disputes of the persons involved.

Independence and impartiality are essential for any system of adjudication, including one concerned with monitoring and enforcement of ethics. A disciplinary tribunal, for example, needs legally qualified personnel to investigate allegations, as well as to prosecute, defend and adjudicate the matter. It is usually important that all those involved not be connected with any of the parties to the dispute, and that they all are and appear to be impartial. Otherwise, the process could be undermined by bias; and the resulting decision would be open to accusations that it was reached less on merits and more on the basis of personal likes or dislikes that have little to do with the case at hand.

Unfortunately, in a population as small as that of the Seychelles, finding sufficient staff for a tribunal that both is, and appears to be, independent and impartial is all but impossible. All of the members of the legal profession know each other quite well: they all have personal, business or political connections with each other, either friendly or rival, going back years or even decades. Even looking outside the law, the pool of professionals in Seychelles is very small, and many of them hold multiple offices. For example, as of February 2019, three practising attorneys were also members of the Assembly (the local parliament). Most of the people I interviewed described the difficulties that operating in such a small society creates: finding yourself having to cross-examine friends or people they know; running into litigants outside of work; having their personal life restricted by not being able to go to certain places connected with the litigation they are involved in (in a country with a strictly limited number of restaurant dining options and only two supermarket chains, this could be quite a problem). It seems that virtually everyone is connected with everyone else in Seychelles: through their extended families, their political alliances, their business dealings or their friends. Finding someone who is both independent and impartial would therefore be a struggle; finding someone who both is and appears to be completely independent and impartial probably cannot be done.

Because of these interconnections – between lawyers, between lawyers and judges, between lawyers, judges and other members of society – the legal profession embedded within them seems to look not so much at the conduct of a particular lawyer accused of misconduct, but rather more broadly at the dispute that the conduct forms part of. Their evaluation of the problem seems to be directed at ameliorating the dispute – trying to resolve it so that everyone goes away more or less satisfied – rather than objectively evaluating the disputed conduct from an ethical perspective and taking appropriate action. This means that the question of whether a

particular lawyer acted ethically, regardless of any complaint against him or her, seems to be rarely answered; instead, the focus is taken away from the impugned conduct and shifted onto the people involved. This might partially explain why lawyers are so determined not to report on each other: if the focus is on the dispute, making a report would make them seem to be one of the parties to it, leaving them open to “revenge” allegations.

This dearth of independence and impartiality, and the problems it causes, was demonstrated in two recent tribunals convened to investigate alleged judicial misconduct under article 134(2) of the Constitution.

## Two Tribunals

On 30 September 2016, a complaint alleging a number of breaches of rules of judicial conduct on the part of Judge Durai Karunakaran was lodged with the CAA by the Chief Justice. Given the serious nature of the breaches complained of, on 7 October 2016 the CAA appointed a panel of three judges to form a Tribunal to inquire into Judge Karunakaran’s fitness for office. The President of Seychelles – James Michel at the time – suspended Judge Karunakaran from office, pending the determination of the complaints against him, as of 10 October 2016.

It appears from the procedural history summarised on pp. 5-8 of the subsequently issued 2017 Report of the Tribunal’s proceedings that, from the outset, Judge Karunakaran had done nothing to refute the substance of the allegations against him. He was granted an extension of time to 7 February 2017 to file his reply on the merits of said allegations, and does not appear to have done so. Aside from a bare denial of allegations (contained in his letter to the Tribunal dated 28 November 2016), the Judge in fact appears not to have troubled himself to address the substance of the complaint at all.

He concentrated instead on attacking the process itself, seeking to delay Tribunal proceedings, applying for recusal of its judges and alleging lack of impartiality and constitutional impropriety. When that did not work, on 24 May 2017, he delivered a “two-minute statement” via his Counsel, and simply walked out – he “failed to participate and attend any further proceedings” of the Tribunal (2017 Report, p. 7). It should be noted that he went on to appeal the constitutional validity of the decision to institute a Tribunal against him all the way to the Court of Appeal. That appeal was recently dismissed by the CA in *Duraikannu Karunakaran v The Constitutional Appointments Authority & Ors (Constitutional Appeal SCA CP 04/2018)* [2019] SCCA 17, delivered on 21 June 2019. The decision is worth reading both because it provides a fascinating insight into judicial decision-making (the five Appeal judges wrote four separate judgments in support of their respective positions), and because it illuminates some of the background of the CAA’s decisions in respect of the two Tribunals.

In the Judge’s absence, the Tribunal proceeded to hear oral evidence from 17 witnesses and to review a large volume of documentation in support of the allegations, including court records of proceedings before Judge Karunakaran (2017 Report, pp. 7-8). Having walked out of the Tribunal, Judge Karunakaran declined to take the opportunity given to him to present any evidence in his defence, so the record is by necessity somewhat one sided. Even so, given the sheer volume and reliability of the evidence against him – some of which was taken from his own judgments and official court records - it is difficult to see how he could have refuted the charges against him. The Tribunal found the allegations against Judge Karunakaran substantiated, and decided that several of them were grave enough to warrant recommending removal under s134(2)(b) of the Constitution. They made the recommendation to the President accordingly (2017 Report, pp. 72-75).



Both the sheer number and variety of misbehaviour exhibited by Judge Karunakaran is impressive. It includes pervasive sexism, exemplified by his expressed dissatisfaction that a woman had been made the Chief Justice (an appointment to which he clearly felt entitled), followed by blatant disrespect towards the Chief Justice and repeated attempts to undermine her authority; as well as his remarks in his written judgments in at least two cases, in one of which he referred to the alleged “frailty of modern women, who is [sp.] observably, more susceptible to emotional disturbances than her counterpart, I mean the other sex” (2017 Report, p. 70). His misconduct further included inordinate delays, of up to fourteen years, in case management and delivering judgments (pp. 58-64), to the point where some litigants simply gave up (and in one case, died waiting); forcing litigants to settle cases (pp. 67-69); and substantively altering the content of transcripts of court proceedings, including the content of orders made in court – conduct which, as the Tribunal pointed out, amounts to forgery contrary to ss.331 and 333 of the Penal Code (pp. 50-56).

One particular account of Judge Karunakaran’s misbehaviour is important for our discussion: his conduct, described at pp. 33-36 of the 2017 Report, in the case of *Linyon Demokratik Seselwa v Electoral Commission* MC 86/2016 (thereafter “the LDS case”), concerning the 2016 national elections. LDS is one of the parties that competed in said elections, and currently holds the majority in the Assembly. Prior to the elections, LDS sought to challenge the decision of the Electoral Commission that allowed registration of a party that LDS alleged had a name too similar to their own – the fortuitously named “LSD,” Lafors Sosyal Demokratik.

It appears that, rather than file for a review of the Commission’s decision in accordance with proper procedure and have it assigned to Judge Renaud (who was to hear all election cases in accordance with the instructions of the Chief Justice), the lawyer for LDS, a Mr. Anthony Derjacques, first went to speak to Judge Karunakaran, who proceeded to allocate the case to himself, taking advantage of the fact that he was the duty judge during court vacation time. When later confronted with this irregular behaviour, Judge Karunakaran at first reportedly denied that he saw Mr. Derjacques in chambers prior to the case being filed; however, upon being reminded of the existence of cameras in the courthouse, he admitted receiving Mr. Derjacques (2017 Report, p. 33).

He heard the matter the same afternoon it was filed (17 August 2016), and granted an interim injunction prohibiting, among other things, the Electoral Commission from registering LSD as a party to the election. He also ordered the parties to be served with the order he had just made, and set the case down for a “mention” on 21 September 2016 – the first opportunity the EC as well as the party affected were to have to have their say on the matter (*Linyon Demokratik Seselwa v Electoral Commission* (MA 258/2016 arising in MC 87/2016) [2016] SCSC 597). Conveniently, the date he set was after the election was scheduled to take place on 8-10 September 2016 – thereby effectively excluding LSD from participating.

Once notified of what has been happening behind its back, LSD issued its own petition, to intervene in the proceedings and asking for the order striking them off the electoral register to be set aside. That petition was heard on 25 August 2016, with the judgment delivered the same day (*Linyon Demokratik Seselwa v Electoral Commission* (MC 87/2016) [2016] SCSC 617). Mr. Derjacques once again appeared for the LDS, with Mr. Rajasundaram appearing for LSD. The Electoral Commission, represented by Ms. Aglae, also appeared to argue that the injunction issued against it without notice was both procedurally and legally unsound. The

Judge, having indulged himself in ridiculing Ms. Aglae and Mr. Rajasundaram, apparently for the entertainment of the rowdy LDS supporters present in court to cheer him on (2017 Report, pp. 34-36), affirmed his decision to remove LSD from the electoral register, without giving either one of them much of a hearing. While Mr. Rajasundaram successfully appealed to the Court of Appeal, the appeal did not come in time for LSD to participate in the 2016 election – they were barred from participating. LDS took the majority of seats in the Assembly.

For the purposes of this paper, this incident serves not only to illustrate the gravity of Judge Karunakaran’s misconduct, but also to provide a background for the events that followed. Before the Tribunal even issued the decision recommending his removal, Judge Karunakaran started flooding the CAA with a flurry of complaints against the Chief Justice, by letters dated 26 June 2017, 26 July 2017, 15 September 2017, 24 October 2017 and 9 March 2018. The CAA met to consider these complaints (together with the Chief Justice’s replies) on 13 April 2018, and resolved to appoint a new Tribunal to investigate the Chief Justice’s fitness for office pursuant to article 134(2) of the Constitution. Three experienced legal professionals from abroad were appointed to the panel: a retired judge of the New South Wales Supreme Court who was at the time the Chief Commissioner of a body charged with investigating allegations of law enforcement misconduct; a Judge of the High Court of South Africa, who also sat on the Labour Appeal Court and the UN Appeal Tribunal; and a retired Chief Judge of the High Court of Lagos State, Nigeria. Assisting the Tribunal was a Mr. Redding SC, a South African lawyer (see paras 4-9, 17 of the 2018 Report). A long list of issues arising from Judge Karunakaran’s complaints was presented for their consideration (2018 Report, para. 15).

Having heard evidence in June 2018, and carefully considered the issues presented to it, the panel issued a 130-paragraph decision dismissing all of the complaints – not only did the Tribunal find no impropriety on the part of the Chief Justice, it concluded (at para. 130) that “the only conclusion reasonably open on [the] evidence is that she acted with complete propriety on all the occasions called into question.” Their analysis of the complaints submitted by Judge Karunakaran shows them to be so clearly without merit, that it is clear that on any objective assessment they could never have led to the institution of the Tribunal against the Chief Justice.

So: why was the Tribunal appointed to investigate the Chief Justice? The explanations of some of my interviewees, combined with the matters discussed in the 2019 judgment of the President of the Court of Appeal, Judge MacGregor (*Duraikannu Karunakaran v The Constitutional Appointments Authority & Ors*) paint the following picture. It seems that following the electoral victory of the LDS (to whom Judge Karunakaran was so accommodating in the LDS case, described above), the President - at this point Danny Faure - found himself in need of their political cooperation as the majority party in the Assembly. Not long after the election, the CAA membership was increased to five, and by April 2017, new members – more sympathetic to the LDS – were being appointed. Thereafter, the newly constituted CAA dramatically altered course, now supporting Judge Karunakaran’s efforts to have proceedings against him dismissed and declared null and void. They went so far as asking the President, by letter dated 12 May 2017, to revoke the Judge’s suspension and to consider appointing him to the Court of Appeal (paragraph 38 of MacGregor J’s judgment) – a truly shocking suggestion, in light of cogent allegations (of which they were fully aware) of gross and persistent misconduct on the part of the Judge in question. They followed this up by issuing a press release on 21 May 2017, in terms “similar to the press release published in the newspaper affiliated to the LDS” (paragraph 39 of MacGregor J), alleging essentially that their predecessors failed to consider the Chief Justice’s complaints properly before appointing the

Tribunal against Judge Karunakaran. Given that the said Tribunal proceeded regardless, this manoeuvring appears to have been thwarted.

By the time the newly constituted CAA was considering the complaints against the Chief Justice (in April 2018), they had a lawyer on retainer to advise them on the legal merits of the complaint, and whether they warranted the institution of a Tribunal. Unfortunately, that lawyer was Mr. Anthony Derjacques: the same Mr. Derjacques who also works for the LDS, and whose friendly private chat with Judge Karunakaran in chambers led to the Judge's highly improper intervention in the electoral process, described above. In the circumstances, it is difficult to imagine a more biased individual than Mr. Derjacques to evaluate the merits of Judge Karunakaran's complaints. It has been suggested to me that he was the only lawyer in Seychelles willing to take the job; however, it seems clear to me that given the choice between (1) this particular lawyer; and (2) no lawyer at all, the only proper course of action before the CAA would have been to opt for (2).

Against this background, the institution of proceedings against the Chief Justice appears to be nothing more than a politically motivated witch-hunt, enabled by the newly appointed LDS-sympathetic members of the CAA. A more generous interpretation, suggested by one of my interviewees, takes into account the difficult position the CAA found itself in, given the optics of the situation. Most non-lawyers would be unable to reliably distinguish a meritorious complaint of judicial misconduct from one that is not, and there was literally no one in Seychelles at the time with sufficient appearance of both independence and impartiality and whose assessment of the matter this small society would reliably trust; especially given the identity of the main protagonists. As the complainant was Judge Karunakaran, to simply reject his complaints might have appeared unfairly one sided in light of the complaints against him having been properly investigated. The CAA might therefore have decided to try to appear impartial by treating the problem before them as a sort of dispute, in which they felt obliged to ensure that both parties were equally treated: as Judge Karunakaran was put before the Tribunal on the basis of the Chief Justice's complaints, so should Judge Karunakaran's complaints about the Chief Justice be evaluated by a Tribunal as well. They further signalled their virtuous intentions by – to their credit – going to some trouble to appoint a panel of eminent foreign lawyers, whose independence and impartiality could not be seriously put in question.

Of course, this apparent attempt at “equal treatment” does not take into account the fact that the merits of the respective complaints against each Judge were far from equal; nor does it detract from the fact that the CAA appears to have failed to attempt any objective assessment of the substance of Judge Karunakaran's complaints, as is their constitutional duty. After all, if they felt themselves unequal to the task of making such an assessment without legal help and were thus prepared to hire an independent lawyer to aid them, why not turn to the English, Australian or South African Bar if no one suitable could be found in Seychelles? Instead of having to import lawyers for the Tribunal, it surely would have been much cheaper and more sensible to hire an experienced and fully independent foreign legal expert (or even a panel of them) to examine Judge Karunakaran's complaints and issue a reasoned opinion on whether they merit the institution of a Tribunal in the first place.

Perhaps the lesson here is that, instead of attempting real enforcement of ethical standards, all that the relevant decision-makers strive for achieving is a veneer of impartiality in managing “disputes” between complainants, aiming to resolve or tone down conflict with the least amount of disruption to established social and political networks. Judging from the conduct of the CAA, especially their absurd attempt to “resolve the dispute” between Judge Karunakaran

and the Chief Justice by having the former appointed to the Court of Appeal, they appear to prefer matters of ethical misconduct to be swept under the carpet instead of having such breaches openly and objectively investigated and punished. That this attitude might be shared by at least a section of the legal profession is suggested by the comments of one of my interviewees, who implied that the Chief Justice did something improper in bringing the misconduct of Judge Karunakaran into public view. They suggested that the situation could have been handled “more discreetly,” and that the public airing out of dirty judicial laundry - by a Tribunal whose impartiality Judge Karunakaran and his supporters loudly questioned – polarised the local Bar. If this is true, and even lawyers cannot be relied upon to put aside their political and personal loyalties to examine the evidence and make an honest and public distinction between serious and spurious allegations, then it would be difficult to demand the same from a body as apparently politically compromised as the CAA.

## **Conclusion**

I met quite a few hard working lawyers and judges in Seychelles who diligently try to do their best despite heavy caseloads, a lack of ethical education and the apparent absence of leadership and support from their professional body. Many of the people I spoke to had a positive view of legal work: two called it a “noble profession;” and several others spoke warmly about the rewarding nature of their legal or judicial practices, in spite of the difficulties encountered. Some were clearly interested in bettering themselves professionally, attending legal conferences and trainings organised by the judiciary. It would seem that, outside of a core of five to eight practitioners who are consistently unprofessional and unethical (as several of my interviewees have indicated), many legal professionals do care about the law and their own conduct and reputation in relation to their practices, at least sufficiently to try to maintain standards even in the absence of a properly functioning regulatory framework.

Unfortunately, in the absence of robust and visible enforcement, it is far too easy to let ethical standards slip. Even those lawyers who strive to abide by their ethical obligations would find it difficult to maintain standards in a situation where guidance on ethical behaviour is lacking, the temptation to get away with a small (or not-so-small) breach or two is not tempered by any contrary incentives, and the ability to effectively pick and choose which ethical rules one complies with is combined with absence of any official or social censure. This is the situation that the legal profession in Seychelles appears to find itself in, and the result is a normalisation of certain misconduct: such as the pervasive problem with lawyers failing to turn up to court hearings on time or at all, as well as a complete failure to report misconduct witnessed, in breach of Rule 22. An aura of tolerance for even gross ethical breaches appears to have developed; even those who have been caught in serious ethical violations face few, if any, consequences, legal or social. Mr. Herminie has been embraced back into the profession; Mr. Esparon appears to have gotten away with alleged witness coaching without much trouble; and Judge Karunakaran was allowed to resign two years after his Tribunal, instead of being removed from office in accordance with the Tribunal’s recommendations (arguably leaving the President in breach of his constitutional duty under article 134(3)).

It seems evident that the small size of the profession – only about 30 practising attorneys and around 20 judges – plays a fundamental role in maintaining this unsatisfactory state of affairs. The smallness of the pool of available professionals makes the establishment of an ethical regulatory framework an uphill struggle: everything from developing and updating ethical rules, guidance and education, through staffing enforcement tribunals, requires both manpower and financial resources, both of which may be in short supply in a micro-jurisdiction.

Moreover, the smallness of the profession means greater interpersonal entanglements and more reluctance to engage in effective enforcement due to fear of retaliation – everyone knows everyone else, and where their skeletons are buried. It might also appear that objectivity in assessment of misconduct and imposition of appropriate penalties is a pipe dream, given the difficulties of finding independence and impartiality in both the small legal profession and the small society in which it is embedded.

Still, effective administration of justice requires a legal profession regulated by an ethical code of conduct that is actually enforced – not merely subject to individual compliance on a voluntary basis. The apparent difficulties faced by the legal profession of Seychelles in building an effective monitoring and enforcement mechanism must be acknowledged – but they should not serve as an excuse to do nothing. There is more that the profession can do to raise ethical compliance, starting with adjusting their own tolerant attitudes towards misconduct. This would involve a commitment to stricter observance of the rules that are currently being openly flouted (such as the rule mandating showing up for hearings on time), as well as a willingness to objectively evaluate the conduct of others, criticise one's peers for their misbehaviour, and report the ethical breaches witnessed. I am certain that creating a robust enforcement framework will require creative solutions given the smallness of the jurisdiction: this may involve reaching out for assistance to the legal professions of other common law jurisdictions. However, a willingness to shake off the culture of tolerance and apathy towards misconduct must be seen as a first step towards creating a legal profession that can be confident in its ethical reputation, and in whose integrity the Seychellois public can fully trust.

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## Teaching geographies of small and large, near and far: Multi-scalar identities in the Seychelles geography classroom

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**Abstract:** Seychelles is a small and relatively remote nation, with a hybrid legacy of European colonialism and Cuban-inspired socialism that is now fused with present-day convolutions of global capitalism. This Indian Ocean archipelago provides a unique site for the study of multi-scalarity. Extending from the individual to the global, this paper uses a multi-scalar lens to critically examine the forces that have shaped (and continue to shape) Seychelles' education, making particular reference to the geography curriculum. By linking local stories to national and international narratives, the intricacies of geography curriculum-making help to unpack the forces that shape education in small states. The multi-scalar politics of language, culture and power are shown to disrupt the geography classroom, challenging Seychellois teachers' and students' sense of place and *Kreol* identity. Generally, the paper provides an important example of the way small-scale education systems can be both resilient and vulnerable to the powers of the global economy.

**Keywords:** Cambridge curricula, geography curriculum, knowledge society, Seychelles, small scale

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### Introduction

A multi-scalar lens provides a multi-focal view of the way bounded spaces interact and exert influence. A bounded or 'definable' space, conceptualised by geographers as 'place', can range from the place (mind and body) of the individual, to the global arena, and beyond. Exploring how personal, local, national and international spaces are interlocked enables us to understand phenomena in more complex ways.

Previously uninhabited, the Seychelles archipelagic space of 115 islands, scattered across the western Indian Ocean, was claimed by France in 1756, and remained predominantly under French governance until 1903 when the islands were declared a Crown Colony of the British Empire (Fauvel, 1909). During such a time, the remote and tiny islands formed part of Europe's political, social and economic supranational space, linking Seychelles to a global slave-based system of trade and exchange. During this era, education of the islands' predominantly slave population relied on the French Catholic and, later, the Anglican churches (Johnstone, 2009). Following the passing of the 1944 Education Act in Britain, a more formal education system was established, under the Education Ordinance in Seychelles. The Ordinance spelt out the British Government's responsibility for education and made English the medium of instruction (Domingue, 2001). A target was set for 80% of Seychellois children, aged 6-11, to receive free schooling (Shillington, 2009, p. 53). The Catholic boys' and girls' schools were transformed into grammar schools, geared towards British-based Cambridge 'O' levels. In 1963, Cambridge 'A' level exams were also introduced.

The British based grammar school system and Cambridge curricula played a formative role in shaping Seychelles' current education system (Campling et al., 2011, p. 105). Domingue (2001, p. A4) described the system as "elitist and problematic", while Purvis (2004, p. 49) reiterates that,

disparities were especially apparent at secondary level where the curriculum had a strong tendency towards traditional academic subjects, with a clear focus on the requirements of international examinations ... taken by a minority of students.

Heavy reliance on the Cambridge 'O' level curriculum led to significant backwash effects at lower levels of the education system, and, consequently, denied many Seychellois teachers a sense of curriculum ownership (Lowe, 1999; Crossley et al., 2001; Bray & Adam, 2001, p. 233).

Western examination boards continue to play a key role in shaping the education systems of ex-colonial states (Bray & Steward, 1998; Bray & Adam, 2001, p. 233). While some countries worked hard to develop national or regional examination bodies – for example the Caribbean Examinations Council and the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment – a significant number of ex-colonial small states have continued to rely on international providers, such as the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) (Crossley et al., 2011, p. 31). This has proved the case in Seychelles, despite a socialist *coup d'état* in 1977, just one year after independence. In spite of the imposition of a one-party socialist system of government, leading to radical changes in the education system, the Cambridge exams regime survived and remain standard for those seeking access to higher education opportunities overseas.

Education lies at the heart of local struggles for democracy and plays a key role in shaping post-colonial narratives (Hobsbawm, 1977; Green, 1997, p. 35). Through the production of geographical imaginaries (territorial affinities, frameworks of 'who we are' etc.), schools help to channel the ideals of national and community-based identity and citizenry (Thiem, 2009, p. 160). Wilson & Tan (2004, p. 209) corroborate this by explaining that Singapore used their education system to ensure young Singaporeans would acquire the 'right' instincts to "bond as one nation; to have a strong sense of national identity and social responsibility; and to have confidence in the nation's future". For the Seychelles, there seemed to be a similar enthusiasm, not only for celebrating citizenship and statehood but also in fashioning a national *Kreol* identity, using the education system. The goal was to strengthen political and economic independence, ensure national security and promote social equity and unity.

For Seychelles and similar colonies, such as Mauritius, the end of colonial rule gave birth to new states where no single community or group of people could lay claim to 'first' nation status, as no indigenous population pre-dated the islands' colonial era. The creation of a new identity required a "new narrative" (Anderson, 2006, p. 205). So, for Seychelles, a new narrative had to be built around a unifying idea. The notion of *créolité*, referring to multiple or hybrid identities (Hall et al., 1996, p. 623; Sharp, 2009, pp. 98-99), was used as part of the socialist government's unity project and centred on *Kreol* language and culture. Prior to independence, the language of most Seychellois had not been formally recognised as either an official language or a medium of instruction, despite being spoken on the islands for over 200 years (Shillington, 2009, p. 170). The vision was that *Kreol* would no longer be regarded as the language of the poor and, instead, the language would be part of the forging of a single Seychellois national identity (Shillington, 2009, p. 173). *Kreol* was the language of emancipatory songs, poems and plays; and, after independence, the language of the new



national anthem. Among the most influential *Kreol* songs used during the early days of post-colonial identity making were those by Patrick Victor;

*Prezan zot in vwar ki nou en nasyon ki annan son langaz ek son sanson.*

(Now they see that we are a nation with our own language and our own song.)

Patrick Victor (*Zwe Sa Lanmizik*).

*Dan nou lalang nou a ekrir pour nou zanfan lir.*

(In our language we can write for our children to read.)

Patrick Victor (*Liberte Total*).

As part of the unity project for education, a new ‘Creolisation Policy’ stipulated *Kreol* as the medium of instruction in the first two years of primary school and that the primary curriculum be re-orientated to the local context (Purvis, 2004). The socialist government, with UNESCO support, commissioned a group of Seychellois to develop a *Kreol* orthography (a standardised system of spelling) so that it could be officially integrated into the education system. Apart from this vision of unity, the socialist equity project saw the introduction of compulsory, free schooling for all children aged 5-14 and the universal provision of free school meals for crèche and primary children. Private schools were also abolished during the period of one-party rule (1977-1992) (Domingue, 2001; Shillington, 2009).

The government’s educational nation-building project has led to many tensions. While the Creolisation policy has been widely embraced, frictions persist. The constant, deep-rooted desire for external legitimacy has meant that the education system still bears many similarities to the inherited, British model linked to Cambridge International Examinations (CIE). To illustrate, more specifically, how these multi-scalar tensions are manifest, this paper brings the school subject of geography to the fore.

Geography education plays an important role in helping people form their personal, local, national and global identities. While all subjects may claim to be “intrinsically worthwhile”, geography’s claim is,

particularly strong because it is an integral part of our everyday lives ... What we experience directly in local places interconnects with people and places in a much wider global world ... [and] ... from the earliest age we use all [our] experiences to try to make sense of the world (Roberts, 2011, pp. 246-7).

To help young people make sense of their world, the geography curriculum wrestles with a diverse set of social, economic and political views and agendas, not only from local and national communities, but also from a global perspective (Blum, 2008). By examining the multi-scalar forces that shape the geography curriculum in Seychelles, this article asks whether there is room for multi-scalar identities in the Seychelles geography classroom. First, the underlying tensions between an international, cosmopolitan and a local, *Kreol* philosophy of the geography curriculum are discussed, followed by a look at the diseconomies of scale affecting geography curriculum governance in Seychelles. Third, the spotlight turns to geography curriculum-makers who face the challenge of teaching about geographical issues from a local, as well as a regional and an international perspective. Fourth, the article looks at the way the curriculum has shifted to the scale of the individual, by appealing to a sense of personal aspiration and entitlement, within a supposed ‘knowledge society’. Balancing these multi-scalar identities in the Seychelles geography classroom presents curriculum-makers with a complex task.

## Curriculum Philosophy: cosmopolitan and *Kreol*

Like many small ex-colonial states, Seychelles did not have a national education system prior to colonial rule and as such, its educational space has always been “inherently international” (Crossley, Bray & Packer, 2011, p. 48). The English-based Cambridge IGCSE and ‘A’ level curriculum continues to dominate Seychelles secondary education system, 40 years after independence from Britain. Yet, despite the dominance of the Cambridge curriculum, only a minority of state school students are entered for five Cambridge IGCSE subjects (Purvis, 2004, p. 49; Campling et al., 2011, p. 105). The alternative ‘National Exams’, sat by those who fail to meet locally-established entry criteria for Cambridge IGCSEs, are fashioned in the image of Cambridge curricula. This replication further strengthens the legitimacy and authority of Cambridge-based education in Seychelles.

Cambridge Geography has undergone significant changes from the days when the ‘O’ level curriculum served the English-speaking Indian Ocean region. At the time of independence, the Cambridge Geography ‘O’ level included a section on the ‘home region’ which, for those in the Indian Ocean, meant Seychelles and Mauritius. Despite lingering colonial insinuations, the Cambridge Geography ‘O’ level ‘home region’ allowed room for the superimposition of a post-colonial sovereign identity (Persaud, 2017). This focus on the ‘home region’ was short lived, however, as a switch to Cambridge IGCSE Geography, in 2005, meant the removal of the ‘home region’ from the curriculum. While supposedly more “user-friendly”, the introduction of the Cambridge IGCSE Geography curriculum has not only been criticised for being “overloaded” and feeling “more like a watered-down A-Level” (Howell, 2014) but also for continuing to represent a more traditional, imperialistic view of the world (Marsden, 1997, p. 248) by prioritising a British-based, metropolitan worldview.

By choosing to adhere to the Cambridge IGCSE vision of geography at secondary level, the IGCSE is allowed to dictate the content of the lower secondary curriculum. Apart from the ‘physical geography’ and ‘human geography’ of Seychelles units, which still rely on local textbooks written during the 1980’s, the cultural literacy contained in the lower secondary curriculum reiterates the knowledge of a Global North and limits the exploration of alternative views, be they from a small island, *Kreol*, African, regional (Western Indian Ocean, Indian Ocean Rim) or broader Global South perspective. In addition to these cultural and political omissions, the current secondary geography curriculum does not incorporate any meaningful discussion of climate change or sustainable development, two global issues that lie at the heart of so much that the nation, the region and the world as whole, are trying to tackle.

The enduring legacy of English-based, imperialist education is sustained by a small educational system reliant on international integration and recognition. Small states like Seychelles tend to prioritise international legitimacy and global mobility as two of the main driving forces of their education systems (Bray & Steward, 1998). The portability of credentials is a key factor for small states with only a limited range of local higher education opportunities. This prioritisation of international mobility means educational emphasis is placed on international curricula and high-stakes international exams (Bray & Adam, 2001; Crossley et al., 2011). In Seychelles, results of Cambridge IGCSE and A levels are discussed publicly each year by both government and private educational institutions, and the Ministry of Education’s Medium-Term Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2014) sets specific targets for improving Cambridge IGCSE results.

While the advantages of continuing to offer Cambridge IGCSE and A levels are obvious, the risks in doing so also evident. Small states are especially vulnerable to loss of indigenous, local educational culture, rooted in local languages and customs (Rohlehr, 2011). This loss threatens a sense of local and national cultural identity (UNESCO, 2011). After gaining independence, many liberated societies moved quickly to revise colonial curricula to be more inclusive of the histories and geographies of indigenous and First Nation peoples. For Seychelles, without a pre-colonial indigenous population, the main driving force for nation-building was the carving of a *Kreol*-based identity.

From 1977, the newly independent government actively encouraged people to ‘re-imagine’ Seychelles society through a *Kreol* cultural lens. In education, the primary and lower secondary curricula were reconstructed to serve the aspirations of the new *Kreol* nation. The new primary curriculum not only introduced the learning and use of the *Kreol* language but also new ‘social studies’ subjects, including Seychelles politics and citizenship (Persaud, 2017). Today’s primary social studies curriculum (combined history and geography) is overwhelmingly Seychelles-focused (see [Table 1](#)). Only in P6 (10-11 year-olds) are children introduced to the Indian Ocean Region and one brief unit on World Geography. In comparison, England’s primary national curriculum for Geography and History (Department for Education, 2014), includes the geography of Europe and the Americas, the history of the Roman Empire, Ancient Greece and the ancient history of a non-European country/region, as well as the geography and history of their own country.

One of the consequences of the Seychelles-based primary social studies curriculum is that students enter secondary school with a very limited knowledge of the world. As one secondary geography teacher recently explained<sup>1</sup>, students “were poorly equipped with geographical knowledge and skills”, which “was particularly problematic for those doing IGCSE geography” (Persaud, 2017, p. 127). Another secondary geography teacher added,

[Seychellois students] don’t ... study how Seychelles is connected to other countries because these connections are not really integrated into the education system (in Persaud, 2017, p. 145).

This teacher was referencing the “place-based” (Gruenewald and Smith, 2008, p. xiii) nature of the primary curriculum, which, she felt, affected students’ worldview. Secondary geography teachers agreed that ‘World’ geography should be introduced earlier because “Cambridge is about the world” (Persaud, 2017, p. 144). Their call for more ‘world geography’ to be included in the primary curriculum exposes the difficult issue of multi-scalar curriculum governance in Seychelles.

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews with geography teachers were conducted as part of the author’s doctoral research (Persaud, 2017). An article (Persaud, 2019) summarises the methodology used to gather geography teachers’ stories.

**Table 1: Primary (P3-P6) Social Studies Curriculum.**

		P3	P4	P5	P6
		Concepts: Time, Place, Scale, Interdependence, Cultural Diversity, Sustainable Development			
		Home/School	District	Country	Region/World
Theme	Place (Location)	What is a Community?	Mapping your Neighbourhood	Victoria	Indian Ocean Region
		My Home			
		My Neighbourhood	Important Places in your District	Seychelles (Mahe, Praslin, Silhouette, La Digue)	World (Continents and 'some countries')
		My School	Emblems and Mottos		
	People, Services, Activities and Attitudes	Home	People and Activities in your District	History of Victoria and Seychelles	Indian Ocean Neighbours; Cultures, Languages etc.
		School-who is who? Sense of Belonging	Services in the District	Activities in Victoria	Trade and Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region
		Neighbourhood	Identify Problems in District; Suggest Solutions	Government of Seychelles	Human Features of Mauritius, Reunion, Madagascar and Maldives
	Natural Environment	Your Home Environment	The District Environment	Land Use in Victoria	Weather and Climate of Seychelles
			Caring for our Environment	Physical Geography of Seychelles	Oceans and Continents: Indian Ocean Environment
		Weather at your School	Weather in the District		
			District Land Use	Land Use in Seychelles	Land Use in the Indian Ocean Region

Source: Ministry of Education (2007).

### **Curriculum governance: economies and diseconomies of scale**

Governance and ownership of the curriculum is closely tied to questions of national self-determination and cultural identity (Robertson & Dale, 2006; Thiem, 2009). The post-colonial struggle for political, economic and cultural sovereignty is highly emotive for small states burdened by inherent physical and human vulnerabilities. The heightened sense of vulnerability experienced by most small states deepens their desire for a stronger sense of cultural and political identity. However, nation-based educational policies, curricula, assessment and certification are more difficult to develop and administer in small countries (Bray & Steward, 1998). The limited pool of specialist expertise, diseconomies of scale, insufficient human and financial resources for curriculum development, and highly personalised, bureaucratic structures, represent serious constraints for small developing states (Bray & Steward, 1998; Bray & Adam, 2001). Education systems in small countries, therefore, when weighing their limited capacity for self-determination with the understandable desire for international educational credibility and portability of qualifications, are often left with no choice but to import policies, curricula and certification systems which then tend to remain unmediated or unreconstructed for small state contexts (Crossley et al., 2011, p. 5). In the case of Seychelles, Purvis (2004, p. 50) adds that diseconomies of scale present tremendous challenges to the system, with recurrent staff shortages at teaching, curriculum development, managerial and policy-making levels.

Maintaining a level of curriculum coherence and cohesion is one of the main problems for an education system under pressure. With a view to addressing the shortcomings of the generic Cambridge IGCSE, the Seychelles Ministry of Education revisited the idea of localising all S5 exams. A full set of “local Seychelles Examinations, compatible in standard with the IGCSE and GCE”, was flagged (Nolan, 2008, p. 85) and it was recommended that the Ministry conduct only local examinations for 16-year-olds (S5) and 18-year-olds (*ibid.*). Ministry officials confirmed<sup>2</sup> that the increasing cost of Cambridge exam entry and the significant proportion of students failing to earn even a subsidiary pass at IGCSE level, led to calls to localise exams. Officials also conceded that, due to the on-going issue of teacher shortages, there were often not enough specialist teachers available to consistently deliver quality teaching at IGCSE level.

The complete localisation of S5 and ‘A’ level exams would have been a significant milestone for Seychelles education, but the idea proved too controversial. Reassuring parents and other stakeholders, that the local exam would be equivalent to IGCSE, was deemed too challenging. If parents were unconvinced, or preferred their children to sit for international exams, many would move their kids to the private sector, undermining the state education system. Similarly, experienced teachers may have left state schools to teach in the private sector. Private schools would never have embraced local exams; so, in effect, by maintaining the Cambridge examination system, the Seychelles Ministry of Education cedes much control over its secondary school curriculum, meaning national governance of the content and structure of secondary education is compromised (Bray & Steward, 1998).

The secondary geography curriculum is due for a much-needed review. In the past, the National Institute of Education (NIE) had the mandate to review curricula, publishing, in 2004, the Geography National Curriculum (GNC) (MoE, 2004). The GNC was, essentially, a watered-down version of the Cambridge ‘O’ level syllabus, except for a 10-week topic called

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communications, May 5, 2011 and February 13, 2014; see Persaud (2017).

‘Our home in the Universe’ and a 4-week topic on the ‘Physical Geography of Seychelles’, both taught in S1. Despite the 2005 switch to IGCSE Geography, the GNC remained virtually unchanged. The publication of the 2013 National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 2013) meant that review teams were assembled to look at each subject area. Led by the coordinator for social science subjects at the Ministry, the geography review team acknowledged that the secondary geography curriculum lacked sufficient reference to concepts such as globalisation, sustainability and climate change. While keen to include more detailed references to climate change across S1-S3, the difficult question was; which topics to remove from an already overloaded curriculum? The review team were unable to answer this question, so the geography national curriculum remains unreformed.

The curriculum, as Whalley et al. (2011, p. 381) argue,

[is a] creature of circumstance ... influenced by national needs, histories and political investment as well as institutional inertia. ... Consequently, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to determine what geography curricula ‘should be’, for they are products of time and place.

In the process of understanding the present geography curriculum in Seychelles, it is prescient to examine its “structured absences” (Morgan, 2001, p. 290). With no significant reference to climate change, or even globalisation in the secondary S1-S3 curriculum, the primary social science curriculum also lacks important historical references to slavery and colonialism, which, as a Ministry official conceded “makes geography harder”.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, primary students’ “limited global awareness”<sup>4</sup> restricts their ability to engage properly with the secondary geography curriculum, especially in terms of understanding global relations, the rise of new superpowers and their effect on Seychelles and the region. How such ‘absences’ are rationalised or justified is unclear, but to address them will require significant curriculum restructuring.

At secondary level, the dependence on Cambridge curricula is likely to last for many years. For geography, this means the disciplinary gap between primary and secondary will continue, with primary school students denied the essential global-scale geographical knowledge they need to access the secondary curriculum. Simultaneously, secondary students need to be given the space to challenge the status quo (Jackson, 1996). In order to understand the world objectively and move beyond their everyday experience (Young & Muller, 2010) geography students need access to powerful geographical knowledge (Young & Lambert, 2014). For this to happen, geography teachers not only need to possess powerful geographical knowledge but powerful pedagogies too (Roberts, 2013).

### **Curriculum making: connections and disconnections**

Teachers enact the geography curriculum by harnessing the energies of geography education’s “power-knowledge dialectic” (Foucault, 1980; Scott, 2008, p. 55). This means that teachers not only tap into the discursive powers of their discipline and their profession but also their students, parents, employers, policy makers, as well as local, national and international communities, each with a vested interest in education. Channelling these divergent forces is part of the complex task teachers execute every day. As a way of capturing this sense of

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<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation, May 20, 2015; Persaud (2017).

<sup>4</sup> Ministry official, personal conversation, May 20, 2015; Persaud (2017).

teachers' agentic power, the term "curriculum maker" was coined by Clandinin & Connelly (1992). To successfully make and re-make the curriculum, curriculum-makers need to: negotiate curriculum content; enhance pedagogy; converse with students; juggle national educational demands (assessment structures, education policies, professional expectations); manage societal expectations (from parents, employers, government, community groups, the media); while also attempting to collaborate with other subject specialists through professional communities of practice.

Being able to draw on the expertise of a large community of geography educators is an essential part of curriculum-making. In small states like Seychelles, however, the number of local subject specialists is limited, restricting professional development opportunities (Bray & Steward, 1998). Geography teachers in Seychelles rarely engage in formal curriculum discussions and without engaging with contemporary geographical ideas, many teachers struggle to develop their subject knowledge and pedagogy. Exacerbating this sense of disconnectedness, for many secondary teachers, is the importation of the Cambridge curriculum and examinations. The inability to access those who control the curriculum overseas, means teachers feel marginalised (Crossley et al., 2011, pp. 5-6). In recent story-telling sessions, geography teachers described how the IGCSE, and even the national curriculum, often felt inaccessible, confusing and repetitive (Persaud, 2017, p. 187).

With little influence over the curriculum, and reliant on the Ministry of Education to centrally purchase student textbooks, geography teachers tend to rely on a combination of out-dated locally produced textbooks and imported resources. A number of locally produced geography textbooks, such as '*The physical geography of Seychelles*' (Ministry of Education, 1983; 1990) and '*The human geography of Seychelles*' (Ministry of Education, 1984) are still being used at lower secondary level despite being over 25 years old. Produced during the early days of independence, as part of the islands' concerted attempt at nation-building, the textbooks not only represent a reaffirmation of post-colonial "place-based education" (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008, p. xiii), but also the conscious affirmation of small island identity (Bray & Steward, 1998, p. 14). By focusing on Seychelles, the geography curriculum tried to "reclaim the significance of the local", endorsing the "situatedness and particularity" of life lived at a small-scale, so both teachers and students could celebrate their unique, small island "sense of place" (Morgan, A. 2011, pp. 99-100).

Common for all geography curriculum-makers is the challenge to balance the need for students to understand local issues with their need to understand changes taking place elsewhere in the world (Allen & Massey, 1995 in Marsden, 1997, p. 249). Rather than being limited by the small-scale nature of a place-based curriculum, an understanding of events taking place on a larger scale helps students to understand events happening locally. As Allen & Massey (1995) reiterate, "we live local versions of the world" (in Marsden, 1997, p. 249). Unfortunately, for Seychelles geography curriculum-makers, many students are reluctant to learn much about the world beyond their islands. As one expatriate geography teacher lamented; Seychelles students' lack of a "world outlook and, at times, (their) xenophobia, is frustrating" (Persaud, 2017, p. 172). Another teacher echoed this sentiment by saying that "anything that stretches beyond Seychelles just seems so weird (to the students)" (Persaud, 2017, p. 144).

The unmediated use of out-dated English-based geography textbooks, written from Western perspectives and meant for Western audiences, presents further challenges for curriculum makers in Seychelles. One such text, '*New wider world*' by David Waugh published

in 2009, was purchased for all Seychelles government secondary schools. Its ubiquity means it continues to be used across a range of age groups and in both IGCSE and non-IGCSE classrooms. The heavy reliance on this one imported textbook, combined with very-outdated local textbooks and limited opportunities to draw on the expertise of geography specialists, means teachers struggle to re-interpret the curriculum for their students. Thus, attempts to 'glocalise' the curriculum, by using everyday experiences and local knowledge as a starting point for a broader analysis of the way Seychellois lives are linked to economic, social and political events operating at national and international levels, prove very difficult.

One example of such difficulties relates to students' sense of identity. Despite strong geographical and historical ties to Africa, young Seychellois do not feel part of the continent. *Kreol* students will refuse to identify as African, when asked about their identity, replying; "don't call us African, don't call us Indians, don't call us whites, call us Seychellois" (Persaud, 2017, p. 148). One teacher explained that "telling a Seychellois that Seychelles is part of Africa is an insult" (Persaud, 2017, p. 148). To rationalise this sense of denial and offense, the teacher used the notion of the 'Seychellois psyche'. She explained that Seychellois were an enigma and Seychelles was a place that was hard to 'place' as it was so difficult to find definitive statistics that could easily define the country and its people (Persaud, 2017, p. 148). Her struggle to 'position' Seychelles, and the Seychellois, indicates the complexity of trying to define people who refuse to be easily categorised, especially if the categorisation is regarded, in some way, as 'inferior'. Pride in all things *Kreol* is, obviously, symptomatic of the small island post-colonial condition. However, the essentialising of a *Kreol* identity, coupled with little interest in learning about other cultures and places, means Seychellois are at risk of parochialism.

While a strong sense of *Kreol* identity exists, the irony for geography curriculum-makers is that discussions about local social issues are not part of the official curriculum and are not encouraged by the Ministry of Education. Teachers will use case studies from other countries when exploring 'contentious' geographical issues such as migration, trade, politics and economics, and will not directly connect ideas and events to Seychelles (Persaud, 2017). For example, the issue of increased immigration, in the context of Seychelles being an aging society with a stagnant birth rate, is not a recognised case study. With many conversations about local controversial issues foreclosed, teachers and students tend to prefer physical geography topics (Persaud, 2017), where the potential for controversy is seemingly reduced, given such topics are regarded as more 'objective' and scientific. Paradoxically, again, geography teachers in Seychelles tend not occupy a 'neutral' position (Winter and Firth, 2007, p. 351) when teaching about the physical geography of Seychelles. The conservative view is that Seychellois should be the 'protectors' of their small island 'paradise', and it is almost regarded as a patriotic duty to be custodians of the natural environment (Persaud, 2017).

An impassioned approach to environmental education is not unwarranted (Winter and Firth, 2007, p. 354); however, there is the risk that Seychellois students are lulled into a romantic notion that, because their home is believed to be a tropical island 'paradise', they need not learn much about the 'world beyond'. There is also the danger that students are encouraged to uncritically accept policies that 'reserve' and 'protect' their natural spaces, without being allowed to challenge these policies, especially when certain spaces are being protected from Seychellois themselves. Enquiries into how, why and for whom 'natural areas' are being managed should be part of a contemporary geography curriculum. Unfortunately, these important questions about how 'protected' areas and certain 'imaginings of space' serve particular interests (Lefebvre, 1991; Smith, 1999; Sharp, 2009) are not encouraged. This is



despite common complaints from students that they are often denied access to certain beaches in Seychelles, due to restrictive hotel rules (Persaud, 2017, pp. 148, 208).

By “sticking to the syllabus” (Persaud, 2017, p. 122), geography teachers reinforce a seemingly oppressive status quo, commonly found in many small-scale societies. An inherent conservatism and insularity can threaten open and progressive education, giving rise to cultures of control and repression. This authoritarian backdrop sits uncomfortably alongside the more celebratory vibe of a young, independent *Kreol* nation.

Encouragingly, the recent expansion of voices on social media, due to widening access to affordable and reliable internet access, has transformed debate in Seychelles. The impact this may have in the geography classroom is still unknown. However, the spread of online activism and engagement does need to be viewed with some caution. Through the internet, the powerful forces of globalisation and neo-liberalism can combine to undermine a nation’s sovereignty and ability to provide localised solutions for its people (Hobsbawm, 2000; Hviding, 2003).

### **Curriculum entitlement: individualism and the global ‘knowledge economy’**

Individualised access to the global ‘knowledge economy’, made possible by improvements in fibre-optic connectivity to the world wide web, feeds Seychellois’ personal sense of aspiration and entitlement. Seychellois now expect more personalised solutions, in return for assuming more responsibility for their own affairs. In terms of education, parents are more likely to look to private providers to satisfy their individualistic sense of competition and social mobility for their children. The desire to gain entry to local and global elites, means many Seychellois parents now place even greater value on internationally accredited, portable educational qualifications. This has translated into a growing demand for private schooling based on European (English and French) curricula. Such shifts mean state provision of education is under increasing pressure to compete within a ‘globalised’ system tailored to the individual. Confronted by a conflicted set of national and global educational agendas<sup>5</sup>, the Seychelles’ state education system faces numerous difficulties. For example, besides the growing competition from private educational institutions, a recent IMF education programme for Seychelles effectively ‘rescaled’ local governance structures (Dale & Robertson, 2006), replacing local decision-making with more complex “pluri-scalar” systems (Thiem, 2009).

Under the forces of global convergence, educational spaces have ceded to the dominant neoliberal notion of the ‘knowledge economy’ and surrendered to supranational standardisation and benchmarking (Dale & Robertson, 2006; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). Yet, despite yielding to some of these global capital production pressures, national education systems still need to ensure social reproduction and cohesion at national levels. Dale and Robertson (2006) describe this dichotomy as the conflicted rescaling of education. The process of rescaling can expose the limits of national educational institutions as they come under increasing pressure to maintain coherence in the face of conflicting agendas. As national education institutions give way to “pluri-institutional” and “pluri-scalar” governance, curriculum debates get caught up

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<sup>5</sup> The World Bank promotes the ‘knowledge economy’ and educational standardisation in order to expand the market economy through individualised access to knowledge (Lingard, 2000; Spring, 2009; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012) while institutions like the UN and the Commonwealth call for more social inclusion and equity through programmes such as ‘Education for All’, ‘Education for Sustainable Development’, and the education targets of the ‘Millennium Development Goals’ (MDGs) (Lingard, 2000, p. 91).

with the contested issues of citizenship and employment in a globalised, “knowledge-based” world (Thiem, 2009).

For Seychelles, while the post-colonial place-based primary social studies curriculum focuses primarily on community-based citizenship and nation-building, the more cosmopolitan ‘knowledge-based’ Cambridge curriculum is pitched at the individual (Mitchell, 2003). The Cambridge IGCSE is skills-based, standardised, portable and places the individual, supposedly, at the centre of ‘decision-making’. It promises individuals the means to respond to the changing demands of global capitalism, to shift from place to place in order to be part of the global ‘knowledge economy’ and to be ‘at home’ anywhere. The Seychellois who are able to afford and/or gain entry to the global knowledge economy enjoy its benefits, leaving those without such credentials “locked in place”, immobile and seemingly “uncompetitive” (Elliott & Urry, 2010). This leads to huge income and opportunity gaps, and a growing tension between an affluent, mobile, globalised and “kinetic elite” and a poor immobile local underclass (Sheller, 2013).

### **Multi-scalar identities in the Seychelles geography classroom**

Educational space is characterised by a constant struggle between integration and differentiation (Gregory, 2009, p. 388). Seychelles society is also characterised by a permanent state of flux, where space and identity are under constant negotiation (Appadurai, 1996, p. 189). While naturally exposed to externalities and heavily dependent on imports, Seychelles’ smallness, islandness and physical remoteness means its people can assume a parochial, inward gaze (Baldacchino, 2008, p. 49). This mutability defines the *Kreol* condition, with Seychellois continually obliged to adjust or defend their space and identities in order to maintain a sense of *Kreol* community and locality. Local curricula can form part of this defence strategy as well as a reassertion of local educational governance structures.

For those making and re-making the geography curriculum, large-scale threats to Seychellois livelihoods, from globalisation and climate change, should form a key part of their work. Space to explore the “super-complexities” (Whalley et al., 2011, p. 379) of the world is also what is required in the geography classroom (Hicks, 2007; Morgan, 2012; Roberts, 2011). Seychelles belongs to a world organised by, and working for, global capitalism. To understand how local, national and regional relations are continually redefined by market economics requires knowledge of global development and trade.

The geography classroom also needs to make space for the locale, to help young people understand local cultural, political and economic processes (Thiem, 2009, pp. 157-8). This means the “structured absences” embedded in the curriculum (Morgan, 2001, p. 290) need to be confronted. By neglecting, say, essential aspects of Seychelles colonial history, the curriculum downplays the dehumanising and far-reaching effects of slavery and racism that continue to shape society today. The realities of being part of a globally contested, hybrid space (Appadurai, 1996, p. 189) require knowledge and analysis of all practices, and not just *kreolised* ones. Similarly, the ways in which Seychellois identity and citizenship are created and re-created, requires the use of many lenses, and not just a *Kreol* one.

A globalised curriculum that employs multiple perspectives and more contemporary geographical ideas can meet the needs of a multi-scalar, multicultural society (Thiem, 2009, p. 162). Such a curriculum would encourage students to explore, question and problematise the notion of *kreolité*. Based on powerful geographical knowledge, a new curriculum could help

Seychellois teachers and students challenge the powerful (Young, 2012). To do this, a rigorous review of the primary and secondary geography curricula needs to be undertaken, with curriculum makers at the heart of this process. Curriculum makers need to play a central role in curriculum innovation, in order to engage with powerful geographical ideas and build a sense of curriculum ownership (Lowe, 1999; Crossley et al., 2001; Bray & Adam, 2001, p. 233).

## **Conclusion**

Using a multi-scalar lens, this article has explored how the Seychelles geography curriculum operates in personal, local, national and international spaces. At secondary level, by retaining the English-medium, Cambridge IGCSE geography curriculum, Seychelles tries to meet the needs of those who aspire to be part of the global ‘knowledge society’. This could be seen as re-creating an elite group of those who, in effect, are educated ‘elsewhere’, reminiscent of the education system under colonial rule. Being part of UK’s supra-national educational space serves the needs of a new local elite seeking global mobility. These aspirations sit uncomfortably with those who struggle to identify with a cosmopolitan identity. Most Seychellois students are not able to fully engage with the Cambridge curriculum, so are denied, through a series of ‘structured absences’, access to powerful geographical knowledge about their locality and beyond.

While the secondary geography curriculum could be viewed as more cosmopolitan, the primary social science curriculum represents a form of *Kreol* cultural preservation, adopting a more nationalistic philosophy and practice. This could be interpreted, however, as being too parochial, more typical of “small island insularity” (Royle, 2002). By using a multi-scalar framework to understand the conflicted nature of the Seychelles geography curriculum, it has been possible to illustrate how small-scale education systems can be both resilient and vulnerable to the powers of the global economy.

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## From local Creoles to global Creoles: Insights from the Seychelles

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**Abstract:** In this paper, Seychellois society is discussed from the perspective of a small island society whose smallness and insulation in its early formation contributed to the emergence of a very distinctive type of creole culture and identity. This is symptomatic of other island creole societies in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean, which have been described as culturally hybrid populations, as a result of 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Century colonialism and slavery. Political connections between these societies have led to the construction of a wider creole identity, based on their shared history. More recently, these plantation types of creole societies have come to realise that they must share their creole identity more widely since, as a result of globalisation and the acceleration of migration, the metropolises of the world are becoming centres of creolisation in the sense of mixing and hybridity. Is this the same process that occurred in places like Seychelles and Martinique, and is this what is happening in Europe, with the advent of immigration from the Global South? Or, should the term ‘creolisation’ be reserved for a particular historical and sociocultural situation resulting from plantation slavery? In other words, is creolisation a global or localised phenomenon? Furthermore, can these new metropolitan centres of creolisation learn anything from the way small creole island states and territories have adapted to their social environment, or should they continue to be seen as the core from which modernity and progress flow to the periphery?

**Keywords:** creolisation, culture, globalisation, identity, language, metropole, Seychelles

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### Introduction

As a child, I remember reading a story about a frog who lived under a coconut shell, and believed the roof of the shell to be the roof of the sky. Growing up in Seychelles, I have also lived in an insulated world, which ironically, was the whole world “diffracted” (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant, 1990, p. 892). I was used to multi-coloured families and dancing to a range of music, from the African *moutya* to the European influenced *contre-danse*. The word ‘creole’ had come to represent everything that describes my identity; language, culture, even ethnicity. Up to now in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Seychelles is the only country to have made creole a national language, inscribed in its Constitution. Seychellois culture is constantly referred to as a “blending” of different cultures and ethnicities from three continents – Africa, Europe and Asia (Seychelles Cultural Policy, 2004). This melting pot is represented in the physiognomy and cultural practices of the Seychellois people. There is no such thing as a typical Seychellois in terms of appearance since the appellation can be attributed to a spectrum from black to white, and Asian, with most people being a mixture of two or all three continents (Sparks, 2015).

This definition can, to varying degrees, be extended to other island nations in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. The Seychelles Creole Festival, through which Victoria, the capital, has come to be known as “the capital of the creole world” (Hoad, 2017), has attempted to loosely seal this inter-regional creole solidarity since the 1980s. This “rassemblement” is

representative of a particular group of creole societies: French-based creoles. The Seychelles' Creole Festival is replicated on a wider scale, in academia, via the *Comité International Etudes Créoles* (CIEC) which includes creolists of mainly French-based communities. Other French-based creole societies in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean also have their own versions of the creole festival, and they are almost all members of CIEC. This large 'creole family' also acknowledges other creole groups with the same historical and socio-cultural patterns – for example, English-based creoles – though they do not have as many interactions with them as their own group. In this respect, we have thus tended to regionalise our identity concerns.

Through CIEC's regular colloquiums where academic research is presented, ranging from linguistics to anthropology, new interpretations of creoleness and creolisation are changing group-based perceptions of the creole language and identity. There is a wide range of scholarship, beyond that originating from CIEC, which is also contributing to these changing perceptions. These studies have the added dimension of not focusing only on small-scale creole societies that are mainly island-based, but also on metropolitan creolisations that are being sourced by the globalisation phenomenon, and augmented by mass migrations of late. Should these new interpretations represent an identity conflict for plantation type creole societies or do they present new opportunities for better self-knowledge and appreciation?

### **17<sup>th</sup> Century Slave Trade as the Progenitor of New World Creolisation**

The word 'creole', as it is known in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, describes peoples and cultures of mixed ethnicity and cultural practices from contact zones such as the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean, created by 17<sup>th</sup> century colonialism and slavery (Stewart, 2007, pp.1-3). This concept of the word 'creole', from an ethno-cultural viewpoint, has a strong component of African influence, contributed by the slaves, manifested in hybridised religions, food, music, dance and language, amongst others. This existed alongside the dominant European influence of the plantation masters or colonial powers: at which the oppressed culture of the slaves chipped away, infiltrated and eventually changed through mixing, to create the new creole cultures in the New World (Trouillot, 2006).

In this process, that is, creating, or recreating culture by mixing previously distinct elements and adapting them to new environments, the word 'create' is very significant. The end result – that is, the creole (both as noun and adjective) – is a product of the verb 'create'. Cohen (2007, p. 371) points out the linguistic root of the word, from the verb 'to create': *creare* in Latin (Cashmore, 2004, p. 94). The Slave Trade created the conditions for the emergence of the diversely hybridised forms known as creole and the term eventually came to represent, not only the colonisers who transplanted themselves from the Old World of Europe to settle in the New World of the Americas, but also the slaves who were transplanted from Africa, and who adapted to the New World environment. Most importantly, it refers to both black and white progenies of the transplanted people, and the resulting genetic and cultural mix (DECA, 2017, p. 205). This also applies to the parallel New World created in the Indian Ocean, albeit on a smaller scale than the Americas.

Perhaps this is why Eriksen (2007, p. 155) argues that "Creoles are uprooted ... and are contrasted with that which is old, deep and rooted". His argument suggests that creole societies are constantly creating new forms by assimilating new customs and new ways of doing things, through the process of adapting to a new environment and changes in this environment. Cohen (2007, p. 372) qualifies this as "to create anew" in the 'New World'. In the context of the New World plantation and slavery system, it means that people had to find creative ways of surviving in very harsh conditions. This is why creole culture and identity is a triumph of



creativity and sustainability. This is especially so in tiny islands like Seychelles which have, in their history, experienced both connection and disconnection to the outside world. History and geography have worked together in this creole equation. Cohen and Sheringham (2016, p. 41) have elaborated on this concept,

There is something salient about both the spatiality of islands and the brutality of the plantation that made them particularly fecund spaces for the emergence of creolized identities born from different diasporic origins.

This statement seems particularly apt for the Seychelles archipelago. In an area of only 455 km<sup>2</sup> (Wheeler, 2015), it has accommodated many different diasporas and exiles. They all came from outside; yet once inside, contributed to the creation of a new identity: from the original French settlers, who brought in waves and waves of African and Malagasy slaves from all over Eastern and Central Africa, to the Indian and Chinese traders who came to seek new opportunities (Scarr, 2000). One might be so bold as to say that the resulting homogenous creole identity (Bueger and Wivel, 2018) is due to the smallness of the space which has forced people together, in spite of differences in status, beliefs and ethnicity. It has allowed “continuous and intense forms of encounter between the inhabitants” (Cohen and Sheringham, 2016, p. 41). These intense encounters include boundary crossings: ethnic, social, political. However, another dimension of forming new identities in the spatial dimension of these tiny islands involves the creation of boundaries as a form of resistance to outside interference (Cohen and Sheringham, 2016, p. 43). This is illustrated by the white colonists’ attempt in 1790 to declare Seychelles a Colonial Assembly, separate from Ile de France (Mauritius) from whence they were being governed, and the continued resistance to British rule after the latter annexed the islands (Shillington, 2009, pp.15-18). Notably, even if Seychelles was ruled longer by the British than by the French (the French period lasted from 1770 to 1814; and the British, from 1814 to 1976), the language and culture has remained recognizably French Creole. It is important also to note that, even if the white colonists tried to reserve the appellation “Seychellois” for themselves, in exclusion of the slave descendants, mixed population (whom they called “Creoles”), and more importantly, of the British administration (Shillington, 2009, pp. 24-25), time, nature and the spatial limitation has eroded their intention.

### **Seychellois identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

In Mauritius, creole identity is ascribed to people of Malagasy and African descent: thus, descendants of the slaves and a marginalised segment of the population (Boswell, 2006, pp.1-2). In contrast, in Seychelles, Kreol means a total mixture of races, a true melting pot, where slave descendants have mixed with the white plantation families or with the Indian and Chinese merchant class (Sparks, 2015). In the colonial past, this type of racial and social mixing occurred through the oppression of the slaves and their descendants, and thus carried with it the social stigma of illegitimacy. However, in contemporary Seychelles, emphasis has been placed on equality and fraternity through the Second Republic’s social reforms after it came to power in 1977 (Choppy, 2018). Today, the Constitution of the Republic of Seychelles stipulates that everyone, irrespective of colour, race or social station, has the right to life, dignity and the right to freedom from slavery. Furthermore, the preamble declares the pride and awareness of the people that they are one single nation, though of multiracial origins, and can serve as an example of multiracial harmony (Constitution of the Republic of Seychelles). This is a hard won freedom, as is testified by the vestiges of racism and social disadvantage that linger in Seychellois society (Choppy, P. 2018). For example, in his account of Seychelles’ history as a slave society, Scarr (2000, pp. 4-5) points out that, since 1766, Paris had decreed that ‘all blacks were slaves, and their progeny indelibly tainted and barred from entering the ruling white class’. Referring to the general assumption that race and colour have never been a problem in

Seychelles, Scarr argues that “proponents of the view that Seychelles uniquely differed would have had to explain how the white people of the Mascareigne Islands came to identify themselves as ‘*Seychellois*’ and call blacks ‘*Creoles*’” (2000, pp. 4-5).

However, Scarr will have to contend with the fact that in Seychelles, the natural law of mixing (stimulated by a small island community in which the majority are slave descendants), has resulted in the noun ‘Creole’ becoming synonymous with the noun “Seychellois”, irrespective of race (Bueger and Wivel, 2017). The people have triumphed over the social and racial barriers imposed by history: they have overcome difference through creolisation. By appropriating everything that had been brought in by the various ethnic strands, and mixing and adapting them to their new situation and environment, they (re)created a new world, a new people and a new culture and language. For example, regarding interbreeding between whites and blacks, expressly forbidden by the *Code Noir*’s Article 5, Pierre Hangard (often referred to as “the first Seychellois”) set an early example by starting a family with a Malagasy woman (Scarr, 2000, pp. 7-8). He might have been motivated by love or desire, or he might have simply been pragmatic in the face of the limited presence of white women in Seychelles at the time. Whatever his motivation, his household was a precursor of the creolisation process in Seychelles which produced the current ‘melting pot’ scenario.

This racial creolisation extends to other domains of social life, for example, food, which ranges from the local version of the French bouillabaisse, the *bouyon blan* (local sea-food being adapted to pre-existing recipes), to curries and lentils originating from India, and regional *rougails* and chutneys, as well as local concoctions making use of coconut milk, the latter ingredient of which was Seychelles’ main plantation produce. Music-wise, the Seychellois’ most favoured are the *moutya*, said to have originated from Mozambique, and the *kanmtole* which though is said to be an African word (DECA, 2017) but covers the whole range of European music and dance which have been adopted to the Seychellois rhythm. The Seychellois’ first language, creole, and main religion, Roman Catholicism, are both examples of French colonial domination, but which have been coloured by vocabulary, practices and beliefs from mainly Africa and Madagascar, but also India and China.

This mixture of heritages is the reality of the everyday world of the Seychellois. Indeed, as the creolists put it, it is “the world diffracted and recomposed” – albeit a very tiny drop of the world – mainly contained within its 459 km<sup>2</sup> of land area (FOSA Country Report, online).<sup>1</sup> I reiterate that it is this containment that has made it possible for such a total mixture to occur. The socialist regime of the 1980s certainly encouraged the adoption of this mixed heritage in its entirety as the common heritage of every Seychellois, irrespective of racial origins (Torch of Freedom, 1981). In fact, the Seychelles creole brand as we know it today, has been recreated by the local population, so that there is generally no ethnic distinction in heritage appropriation. The *moutya* is considered as belonging to every Seychellois, and not just people of African origin, and the *kanmtole* as well, rather than just people of European descent. This is mainly because, in reality, everybody has more or less, multiple origins; additionally, much of this ‘heritage’ has been created locally or adapted to suit local needs.

This is not to say, however, that there is no racial tension in Seychelles. As mentioned earlier, vestiges of the slavery period persist, also expressed in such words as “mazanbik”, a derogatory word for a person of African origins (D’Offay & Lionnet, 1982, p. 262). More recently, there have been expressions of disgruntlement with the lot of ordinary Seychellois by certain groups and individuals who consider that the creole identity and wellbeing is being threatened by the recent influx of migrants. For example, in March 2019, a “Mouvman Kreol

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<sup>1</sup> The original area was 455 km<sup>2</sup>, but has been extended through land reclamation to 459 km<sup>2</sup>.

Seselwa” was registered as a non-political group, declaring its aims as “seeking to promote the welfare and socio-economic wellbeing of the Seychellois Creoles by uplifting them in all spheres of life” (SBC Blog, 2019). The contention is that: (i) Indians and Chinese are considered as controlling the economy, especially the retail sector, thus putting Creoles (i.e. Seychellois) at a disadvantage; and (ii) the new migrants (from India) are not integrating with the local population, unlike their predecessors. This brings to the forefront, the Seychellois’s concept of creoleness, which is essentially, mixing in all aspects: genetically, socially, geographically... unlike in Mauritius where the creole concept is expressed by the motto “unity in diversity”, and represents separate (more or less) ethnic communities within one nation (Eriksen, 1994). More significantly, the “Mouvman Kreol Seselwa” declares its agenda as “ways to ensure that Seychellois – who are born and bred on the island nation – are put and remain at the forefront of the country” (SBC Blog, May 13, 2019). Though it declares itself as “not racist” but rather as “seeking to promote racial harmony”, its “born and bred on the island” criteria leave no room for new assimilations; they could fan xenophobic tendencies in the current local political climate.

In contrast, at government level, Seychelles has been praised for its “openness to and appreciation of difference”, by not seeing race, heritage, traditions and religions as hindrance to cooperation. In their paper on Seychelles’ foreign policy as a small island state, Bueger and Wivel (2018, pp. 181-182) refer to the Seychelles Creole language as representative of the Seychellois cultural pragmatism “which does not start from foundational principles and beliefs, but from ideas of what works and what can be achieved”. This “Creole attitude”, they say, is behind Seychelles’ success as a leader in such global issues as maritime affairs and climate change. In the same work, these authors refer to a poem by Seychelles’ first President, Sir James R. Mancham, in which he declares the Seychellois nation to be “The melting pot of ethnical prejudices” and “...a sample of the world to come...” (Bueger and Wivel, 2018, p. 181). Again, it is important to note that this overcoming of difference is not utopic, but rather reflects a desire and determination to erase it through policies. In reality, there are still some elements of the postcolonial syndrome at work, both overt and subtle. For example, even Mancham himself, author of “The melting pot of ethnical prejudices” and celebrated for his politics of reconciliation, provoked a debate in the local media about the validity of the creole language, and the argument that Seychelles should aim to be a Monaco and not a Bamako (Mancham, 2014; Volcère, 2016). Nevertheless, the Seychellois are generally willing (or unwitting) participants of the “creole attitude”. The question is, can this “creole attitude” be further interpreted as a possible model for the metropolises of the Northern Hemisphere, which are currently facing integration issues through the advent of mass migrations, primarily from the Southern Hemisphere? Secondly, with the cultural mixing that is the inevitable outcome of this South to North migration, are the post-slavery, postcolonial islands and communities – currently identified as creole societies – the only ones that can claim a creole identity?

### **Who is creole? Sharing an identity with the whole world**

The continued evolution of new cultural forms in “New World” creole societies has established a definite creole “genre” in popular culture that has come to be recognized worldwide. For example, creole food, music and styles are recognisable brands associated with creole societies like Louisiana, the Seychelles, Réunion and Martinique. Over the last two decades or so, the creole zone of the Indian Ocean has based much of its tourism offer and publicity on what can be termed ‘the creole brand’. The ‘Vanilla Islands’ concept, for example, exploits the idea of creole culture as a marketing tool to entice tourists to the Indian Ocean for an ‘authentic’ experience. This venture is a concerted effort between Réunion, Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros and Mayotte, using the vanilla concept as “a natural product

and cooking ingredient that creates great interest among tourists...” which is also a common asset of the Indian Ocean Islands (Vanilla Islands, 2010). The venture was based on the creation or exploitation of certain cultural activities such as the creole festival and other local-based events linked to historical or socio-cultural practices (Seychelles even borrowed the carnival idea from the Caribbean: troupes from such places as Brazil, Notting Hill in London, South Africa, India, China and Thailand paraded through the streets of Victoria, but the idea did not take root). In creating the ‘vanilla’ concept, the Indian Ocean stakeholders are laying claim to the particularity of a common creole identity, whether intentional or otherwise.

On an ideological level, this is the same kind of particularity that the Caribbean creolists proclaim in their creole manifesto, when they say that “Creoleness is the interactional or transactional aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history” (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, 1999, p. 891). “The yoke of history” is a reference to the Slave Trade and the subsequent plantation societies, regimes which created present-day creole societies and the creole identity that is exploited in tourism and political discourse. It thus requires a definition of the creole concept that has historical and physical boundaries. For example, the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean are physical enclaves of this type of creole culture. Both emerged from 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century exploitation of slavery and underwent a localisation mixing process that was necessary under prevailing conditions. The localisation process meant that each geographical region had its own particularities: for example, in Seychelles, the use of coconut milk is particular to its creole cuisine because of the islands’ past function as a coconut plantation. In Martinique, where the banana plantation is still culturally significant, it is the plantain that has pride of place in creole cuisine (Martinica Online, 2019). However, both creole societies have close similarities. For example, both cuisines rely heavily on seafood because they are islands. Both have a mixture of European and African dances: for example, variants of the French quadrille and African drum dances. This has led to identity affiliations, as expressed in the creole manifesto, where a double sense of identity is claimed when the Martinican authors affiliate themselves first with other Caribbean peoples from a geopolitical standpoint, and then with other creole peoples in the Indian Ocean, from an anthropological standpoint (Bernabé et al., 1990, p. 894).

Essentially, creolists speak of an “interior attitude” or a “mental envelope” that binds their creole identity to a limited physical and historical space (Bernabé et al., 1990, pp. 886-891). It is also a call to fellow Martinicans to appreciate their particular brand of creole identity, freeing it of its painful past and what they perceive as “an uncomfortable muddle”, which has caused them to “anchor” illusions of purer forms of identity “in mythical shores”: Africa, Europe, India ... (Bernabé et al., 1990, p. 892). The only homeland they can lay claim to, is “right here” within the geographical boundaries of Martinique. This insistence on drawing a circle around the physical boundary of their creole identity emerged from the creolists’ dissatisfaction with the tendency in post-slavery creole societies to affiliate their identity with the Old World, which essentially fragments them as a people or nation, since this identity is scattered over three continents. It is only when their “interior vision is applied” and their creoleness is “placed at the centre of their creativity that they will be able to appreciate the beauty of their creole identity” (Bernabé et al., 1990, p. 897). This is, essentially, the creole identity that embraces “the human grandeur of the *djobeurs*, the depth of life in Morne Pichevin, the vegetable markets ...” (*ibid.*). It is the creole identity from which the creole brand used in tourism today should be sourced. It is the essence of “the world diffracted and recomposed”, but on a small scale (Bernabé et al., 1990, p. 892). It is also the essence of historical violence and displacement being overcome, and difference being embraced. When creole societies boast about their “melting pot culture”, this, ostensibly, is where they are coming from.

However, more and more, creoles who have no other identity than this one, have come to realise that they must share it with practically the whole world, since as a result of globalisation and the recent acceleration of migration, the metropolises of the world are becoming centres of creolisation in the sense of mixing, hybridity, and more. Though peoples have been mixing and hybridising long before the Transatlantic Slave Trade, it is this historical phenomenon that nurtured the social and linguistic transformation that brought about the creole concept. The world's dictionaries, linguists and anthropologists still acknowledge this historically and geographically bound concept as the first interpretation of "Creole" (Cohen, 2007; Cashmore, 2004; Jolivet, 1982). A Google search with "creole" as the only input will support this claim. Nevertheless, this concept of creole is now changing. Cohen (2007) offers a second interpretation of creolisation, describing it as the selection of particular elements by communities or individuals, from incoming or inherited cultures, which are then endowed with new meanings that are different from those they possessed in the original cultures. These are then creatively merged to create new varieties that supersede the prior forms. In this context, creolisation can occur anywhere and anytime that contact zones are created.

### **Locating creolisation**

With the advent of mass migration from the Global South in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, does Cohen's description of creolisation adequately describe what is happening, or is likely to happen, in Europe? Or, should the term creolisation be reserved for a particular historical and sociocultural situation resulting from plantation slavery? In other words, is creolisation a global or localised phenomenon? Braithwaite (1971) argues that Jamaica developed its own distinctive "Creole" character, whereby institutions, customs and attitudes were shaped by African and European influences. However, he goes on to point out that this initial merge also occurred as part of a wider regional complex, and was just as much influenced by regional economics as by political and revolutionary ideologies. It is from this backdrop, that one of the world's most influential creole heritage springs from: creole music such as the reggae and the calypso.

*Reggae, calypso, gumbo and jambalaya* are elements of a creole culture that may be acknowledged as specific to the Caribbean. They emerged from the particular dynamics of their physical and social environment in a particular historical context: that of plantation slavery. The *sega, moutya, maloya* and *rougail* are similarly specific to the Indian Ocean creole zone, based on similar dynamics. However, both creole zones share variants of the same mentalities, attitudes, beliefs, language systems and cuisines, etc. For example, when I went to Guadeloupe to attend the 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the International Creole Studies Forum in 2016, I noticed that the All Saints Day event was given a mystical importance that has probably superseded its ritual observation in Catholic Europe. Seychellois families also take the observation of this annual event very seriously. In the first two days of November, Mont Fleuri cemetery is overwhelmed by family members with loads of flowers and cans of white paint. It is considered a shame for one's dead to have an unpainted tomb during this period. However, only a fraction of the people who perform this ritualistic face-lift attend the actual mass officiated by the Catholic Church. A more important example is that French creoles of the Americas and the Indian and Pacific Oceans are considered as a language group within the wider set of creoles and pidgins that emerged from plantation slavery (Chaudenson, 1992; Michaelis et al., 2013). There are varied levels of inter-comprehension between the creoles of the two zones, depending on how linked their historical sources are. Take, for example, the following riddle ([Table 1](#)):

**Table 1: Similarities in meaning and orthography of the riddle on sugarcane in Caribbean and Indian Ocean creoles.**

Language	Riddle	Answer
English	Standing water?	Sugarcane
French	L'eau debout?	La cane à sucre
Seychelles Creole	Delo debout?	Kann
Mauritian Creole	Dilo dibout?	Kann
Reunionese Creole	Dolo dobout?	Kann
Martinican Creole	Dlo doubout?	Kann
St. Lucian Creole	Glo doubout?	Kann a sik

Note that both the vocabulary and the orthography are practically the same, with very minor differences (Choppy, 2018). The vocabulary is obviously affected by the fact that all of these creoles have French as their lexifier. The orthography also shows some traits that appear specific to French creoles: for example, agglutination, as in “de l'eau” in French transforming to “delo”, “dilo”, “dlo”, etc. Baker (1984) suggests that this feature is Bantu-based. Thus, Braithwaite's argument about the distinctive quality of Jamaican creole society due to its European, African and regional influences, might be said to apply to each of these examples, thus binding all these creoles together from a historical and regional standpoint, whether they have French, English or Portuguese as their lexifier. They have a common historical origin and a common genetic and cultural formula: European + African + localisation = Creole. Another Caribbean writer, C.L.R. James, narrows down the peculiarity of this creole identity and quality when he posits a particular Caribbean West Indianness from Haiti to Cuba that has been forged over history from a “peculiar” origin, that is, island-bound slavery (Shapiro, 2016, p. 4). This is a great case for the argument that creoles of the postcolonial zones do have a claim to this particular brand of island creoleness, particularly in view of the fact that any pride they take in this identity has had to contend with the painful past of slavery and subalternity. Creolists from both the Indian Ocean and Caribbean zones have made explicit this claim by coming together under the banner of an anti-imperialist academic federation, created in 1983 in St. Lucia during a Creole Studies conference, and formalised in 1987 in Seychelles (Statutes of Bannzil Kreol, 1987; Gens de la Caraïbe, online). It is this same creole brand that creole societies of this type try to exploit in marketing their particular attributes to the tourism markets: what is sold as “the best of everything!” Creole music, and creole cuisine are two such symbols of this melting pot alchemy that extracts “the best” of the ingredients put in it to come up with a unique brand (Remy, 2015, pp. 143-148). Whether such symbols are free of the stereotypes and identity conflicts from which they emerged is another discussion.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, creolisation is understood not only in the post-slavery, post-plantation society context, but can apply to any society that is subject to multicultural mixing. Eriksen (1999, p. 2) points out that “In an era of global mass communication and capitalism, creolisation can be identified anywhere in the world...”, though he stresses the importance of the degree of mixing in each case. Hannerz's concept of “cultural creolisation” is often referred to in this context: for example, his observation of how television was shaping everyday life in the 1980s (Hannerz, 1987). Hannerz (1997) also talks about “flows” and how things do not stay in their places, and how globalisation takes place in many dimensions. Apart from systems that merge (commercial, cultural, etc...), the most important aspect of creolising societies is of

course, people. Referring to the Mauritian case, Eriksen (1999, p. 11) states that, to some extent, it is possible to become a creole within one's lifetime, while it is not possible to become an ethnic Hindu or Muslim. This can happen mainly by intermarriage. This means that the possibility for creolisation to occur and expand is always there, needing only for groups of different cultures and origins to coexist in the same physical environment. Istanbul, which has long been a metropolis for the convergence of peoples with vastly different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, is such a centre of creolisation. On a much smaller scale, Malta, which has been populated and occupied by Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Greeks, Normans, the Knights Hospitaller, French and British... and which is now seen as a land of opportunity by professionals and unskilled minorities of different ethnic groups, is another such centre of creolisation (Facts, History and News, online, 2019). The most recent wave of creolisation to occur was triggered by the "Arab Spring" beginning 2010, causing millions of refugees to flee north to Europe. Simultaneously, refugees from Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, etc..., were fleeing war and poverty, still going north. The resulting encounters with local populations were bound to create new creolisations. For example, in her study on notions of masculinity and sexuality among transmigrant Arab Muslims in contemporary Stockholm, Gerholm (2003) discusses how this city might be seen as a centre by Arab families, whose private lives remain on the periphery of this centre; but contribute nevertheless to the multicultural quality of the city. A more direct creolisation process occurs when Arab Muslim men and Swedish women marry or cohabit and raise their children in a Swedish environment. This, says Gerholm (2003), inevitably creates new cultural forms; creolisation is an unintended outcome.

Creoles from the ex-colonies, and who might have so far understood the term only in this context, have themselves greatly contributed to the creolisation of metropolitan centres like London, Paris and New York, by moving to these centres and starting new flows. The Notting Hill carnival in London is an example of New World creolisations flowing back to the Old World, where the conditions for their emergence were created (Taylor & Kneafsey, 2016). Encounters between New World Creoles and the different ethnic groups that inhabit the metropolises of Western Europe, produce children who are raised with both metropolitan values and their parents' original cultural values. This is a new generation who may (or may not) consider themselves creoles, but who are nevertheless products of multiple hybridisations. Combined with all the other mixes caused by the different diasporas of different eras, New World Creoles must realise that 'Tu dimun pu vini kreol' (Everybody will become creole) (Eriksen, 1999). Even the creolists admitted this, welcomed it even, when they said, "...we were the anticipation of the relations of cultures, of the future world whose signs are already showing (Bernabé et al., 1990, p. 892). This is not only an expression of pride in their particular brand of creoleness, but also a declaration of the positivity and creativity of the creolising process, which the world should learn from and embrace.

### **Maintaining authenticity**

If the world is creolising, it is not doing so without resistance. Communities and governments, more often than not, understand the concepts of "nation" and "culture" as representing borders: both physical and cultural. There is much preoccupation with identifying cultural authenticity and maintaining it (Hannerz, 1997). In this sense, the globalisation and creolisation phenomenon is often considered a threat because it is seen as homogenising and standardising cultures, thus depriving nations of authentic uniqueness (Cohen, 2007). Even New World Creoles, as we have seen, are preoccupied with their own particular brand of uniqueness, in spite of the fact that creolisation is a process of assimilation and adaptation. Hannerz (1997) points out that the tendency to focus on culture only as a group marker could turn it into a tool of social exclusion. Preoccupations with cultural autonomy and the defence

of a cultural heritage for its own sake, he says, is often a rhetoric that is closely linked to power and material resources. This is illustrated in the current rise of xenophobic tendencies and the subtle (as well as overt) practice of racism worldwide, from ‘islamophobia’, the mistreatment of the Romany people in Europe, the xenophobic violence in South Africa, to the distrust of African migrants in Sweden and the neglect of Bushmen in Botswana (Harcourt, 2009).

Ironically, the world has been creolising long before the word was coined and defined. Most metropolises who might today consider the new wave of migrants as a threat to their ‘cultural authenticity’, need to critically and soberly consider the degree of this authenticity. Take, for example, Hannerz’s reference to Ralph Linton’s classic “100 % American” description (Linton, 1937),

A “solid American citizen” goes through his morning routines, and as Linton follows him around, it turns out that hardly an object he uses is actually of American origin as a cultural invention; it is from India, Germany, China, the near East, and so forth. Yet as he considers the accounts of foreign troubles in his morning newspaper, the man thanks “a Hebrew deity in an Indo-European language that he is 100 percent American” (Hannerz, 1997, p. 5).

The diversity of sources that contributes to this person’s life is a strong case for cultural mixing, and thus, creolisation. In today’s world, creolisation also walks hand in hand with the concept of globalisation. Looking at Linton’s “100% American”, it can be argued from an economic standpoint that globalisation is increasing cultural diversity through improved consumer access to markets (e.g. tourism, art & décor, food...). In fact, Cohen (2007) argues that, by accepting the idea and reality that cultural boundaries are fuzzy and indeterminate and by embracing the notion of ‘travelling cultures’, hybridisation and creolisation have become potential subversive concepts. They are subversive of race and ethnicity because they point to the existence and growing numbers of people of mixed heritage everywhere. The same goes for territorial and language-based notions of nationalism, as well as religious fundamentalism. In the latter case, Cohen (2007) says that, in spite of fundamentalists emphasizing purity and adherence to strict doctrine, hybridised and creolised practices constantly present anomalies in social behaviour and belief systems. People all over the world are creolising either through direct contact with other cultures, or through the effects of globalisation. It is an inevitable outcome of modern times. Cohen (2007, p. 382) calls it “the soft sounds of fugitive power”.

This also applies to small scale societies like Seychelles. While they might be right to take pride in their particular forms of creolisation, they should be careful of prescribing a static creole culture. For example, older Seychellois musicians often complain that the younger generation of musicians are ‘corrupting’ traditional Seychellois music with their ‘copying’ of black youth popular music (Arts Conference, Seychelles, 2018). However, this popular form of new creole music is an important evolutionary aspect of the Seychellois creole language that the youth can relate to more easily, at a time when they are bombarded with global music forms (Choppy, 2018). On the same note, concerns over the increasing influence of English on Seychellois creole surfaces from time to time, with members of the public calling up the Creole Institute of Seychelles to complain about such things as code-switching on the media. However, the stance of the Creole Language Committee is that, while efforts should be made to avoid code-switching (if possible) in formal media activities, the Seychellois reality is a trilingual one, with new terminologies entering creole all the time. The solution they have proposed with regards to orthography is that new words that are admitted to the standard form of Seychelles Creole should be in the version that creolises more easily, unless one version is already more widespread amongst users (Choppy, M.T. 2013). This is a more realist approach to change than the nationalist leanings as illustrated by the ‘born and bred’ prescription of the *Mouvman Kreol*



*Seselwa*. Those who express fear about cultural loss, with reference to what are considered traditional aspects of culture such as music and language, should understand the “protean nature of creole forms ... that it is an assimilating culture that changes and adapts as per its people’s needs and environment” (Baron and Cara, 2003, p. 4).

To come back to the story of the frog under the coconut shell, whilst the closeness of the roof provides us with a sense of protection from the outside world, and permits us to describe what is often expressed in Kreol as “sa ki pour nou” (what belongs to us), our ability to grow and evolve depends on our ability to assimilate new forms and refashion them. In view of the great reverence held for the English language in Seychelles (Choppy, M.T., 2018), many might be shocked to hear it described as a giant creole, and that its strength lies in its ability to assimilate and transform new concepts from other languages. Change is as inevitable as it is necessary: a culture that does not evolve becomes irrelevant, and thus stands a greater chance of disappearing.

## **Conclusion**

Globalisation may be seen as having started with travel and voyages of discovery, of which Marco Polo’s introduction of Asian goods to European markets and all across the routes he travelled, is a good example. The European so-called ‘voyages of discovery’ which led to the Triangular Trade and the creation of the New World, unleashed a historical wave of creolisation through globalisation which then ricocheted back to the Old World in the mass migration of creoles from the colonies. The current wave of migrations across Europe, though socially induced, might be described as ‘force majeure’. This is leading to what Cohen ((2007, p. 382) describes as,

... mobile, transnational groups, themselves undergoing ‘everyday cosmopolitanism’, while dominant, formerly monochromatic, cultures are becoming criss-crossed and sometimes deeply subverted by hybridisation and creolisation.

These are two major types of creolisation that have and are changing what Cohen (2007, p. 381) calls “the basic building blocks of organised cultures and societies”, and he uses Rushdie’s comments about the much debated *The satanic verses*, to illustrate his point. Rushdie’s comment to the violent reaction towards his book (which he describes as rejoicing in “mongrelisation”) is that its most vociferous critics believe that intermingling with different cultures will weaken their own, whereas he is of the opposite opinion,

*Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it (Rushdie, 1991, p. 394).

This is the same lesson that creolisations *à la Seychelles* can offer the world: that, in extreme situations, such as slavery and the domination of one group by another, it is still possible, even inevitable, to “renegotiate culture” and emerge with something positive and beautiful (Haring, 2003, p. 19). It is a lesson that applies to New World creole societies as well. Edouard Glissant, an acknowledged forefather of the creole movement, asked whether we should favour “[a]n identity that would not be the projection of a unique and sectarian root, but of what we call a rhizome, a root with a multiplicity of extensions in all directions” (in Stoddard and Cornwell, 1999, p. 349). Glissant highlighted communication and establishing relations with others. This makes cultural diversity possible and thus for the world to keep on renewing itself. This does not mean that earlier forms of culture, what have been established as ‘traditional’, should be discarded or allowed to die. By all means, they should be documented, conserved and kept alive through practice *if and as long as* their practice remains relevant to

their particular societies. Most vitally, ‘traditional’ forms should be the sources of new evolved forms, whilst allowing space for new assimilations. In nurturing their positive ‘creole attitude’, the Seychellois should bear this in mind and make of the Creole Festival motto, a reality of Seychellois society now and in the future,

En lizye lo lepase, en lizye lo lavenir  
(An eye on the past, an eye on the future).

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## **Scaling language competition in a small island state: Graphic verbs in Seychellois Creole and English**

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**Abstract:** One of the sensitive aspects of a small country is the predicament of its language. Seychellois Creole, one of that country's three official languages and the native language of its Creole population, is asserting its linguistic identity against the globally-established English and French, the other two official languages of the country. How resilient is Seychellois Creole in this language triangle? Are the challenges it faces related to the small number of speakers, citizens of the small country? To what extent, and in what particular way, does Seychellois Creole vulnerable position, as a small language neighboured by two international languages, affect its development? These questions are approached in this paper by means of the comparative analysis of some linguistic parameters of Seychellois Creole and English. Research has been carried out with a group of English and Seychellois Creole verbs conceptualizing the process of graphic representation. The paper focuses on the capacity of the two contrasted languages for concept lexicalisation, patterns of semantic development and syntactic shifting.

**Keywords:** creole, figurative meaning, graphic verbs, language coexistence, language resilience, lexicalisation, semantic extension, Seychelles, small state, syntactic shifting.

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### **Introduction**

The language situation is a significant aspect of any country's socio-cultural identity. In the case of Seychelles, a small archipelago state with three national languages, the current language balance is a sensitive and controversial topic, characterised by (Fleischmann 2008, p. 50) as a kind of paradox,

Here, Creole is the mother tongue of the vast majority of the population although trade, administration, and education are preliminary conducted in English.

Though equally supported by the Constitution of Seychelles, the national languages are not equal in their linguistic weight: Seychellois Creole (SC), a young language which came to existence relatively recently [according to (Fleischmann 2008, p. 38) around the time of colonization of the Seychelles in 1770, as a continuation of either Mauritian or Rodriguez Creoles, having taken shape earlier in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century], co-exists with English and French, long established global languages. Conditions and effects of this small and global languages adjacency can be better understood through Eriksen's (2016, p.132) "clashing scales" concept, whereby it is not so much the cultural but scale related differences which more accurately describe the contemporary "overheated" world (p. 132). Such disparity becomes even more obvious when embedded in the context of 'islandness', with its associated boundedness, smallness, isolation and fragmentation (Baldacchino, 2018). In this vein, due to

the above factors, language and other types of influences in small island units are “amplified through compression” (ibid, p. xxx), that is, are more enhanced than similar processes in larger, mainland, locations. As Baldacchino (2018) points out, islands and small states are not just “scaled down versions of larger continental places” (ibid). To continue, “islandness is far more nuanced than its strictly materialist renditions may suggest” (ibid). In terms of languages in Seychelles, language interrelations are too intricate and complicated to be captured by usual scales of bigness and smallness, because a number of factors – intrinsic linguistic, as well as extrinsic socio-cultural and geographic – come into play. So, how resilient is SC in asserting its language identity over and against neighbouring English and French?

This paper sets out to explore some of the effects of SC and English adjacency as national languages of Seychelles, focusing on the semantic dimension of their coexistence. The first section contextualises the problem addressed, providing some information on the current status of SC and English in Seychelles as well as a brief linguistic fact file on SC. It also defines the research material, methodology and underpinning theoretical concepts of the study. Next, it presents the results of the comparative analysis of some linguistic parameters of SC and English: their capacity for concept lexicalisation, semantic and syntactic development of meaning expressed by a group of verbs. The main observations of the undertaken analysis are summarised in the concluding section of the paper.

## Context

### *Current status of Seychellois Creole and English in Seychelles*

There are three official languages in the Republic of Seychelles, a small state of around 90,000 citizens, located in the Indian Ocean, and which secured its independence from the United Kingdom in 1976: Seychellois Creole (Kreol Seselwa), English and French (Constitution of Seychelles, Chapter 1(4), Clauses 1 & 2). Since the Seychelles islands were first colonised by France in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, French has served as the basis for the development of SC. Genetic relatedness of SC to French survived the British period of colonization of almost 170 years and can be traced in the majority of SC vocabulary nowadays. This fact could be explained by the strong connection during British rule with Mauritius, run by the French. However, though taught in schools as a separate subject, French is used less frequently than English and SC (Fleischmann 2008, p. 31).

SC, spoken by 99% of the population at home and in informal settings, is considered to be the common language or the mother tongue in Seychelles (Purvis, 2004). Alongside English and French, SC is used for the media, official speeches, and in education. It is the only language used at early childcare centres and at primary schools. It is taught as a separate subject at higher levels and is usually used as a medium of instruction for physical education, craft and religion. The Christian Bible was translated into SC in 2016 (Orsander, 2016).

English in Seychelles is used as language of official administration, commercial correspondence and as a medium of instruction at school for the majority of subjects from year three onwards (Fleischmann, p.30). English is also the language of instruction in post-secondary and higher education sectors. To illustrate, all programmes at Seychelles National University (2019), both local and licensed ones, are offered in English. Major national newspapers publish predominantly in English (<http://www.nation.sc/>); and there is an extensive presence of English on local radio and TV broadcasting (<https://sbc.sc/>).

SC developed in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries during European colonisation of the Seychelles (Fleischmann 2008, p. 23). Typologically, it is a French based Creole, with 90% of words derived from French (Choppy, 2013, p. 32). Among other mentioned lexifiers are English, Malagasy, Hindi, and Swahili (ibid.). For the most of its history, SC was unwritten and transmitted orally. The process of its graphisation and standardisation took place progressively in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is associated with the appearance of the first Creole Grammars (Bollée, 1977; Corne, 1969).

Currently, SC has a phonemic orthography, which represents the sounds that are actually used in the language (Fleischmann, 2008, p. 62). The grammatical system of SC is outlined in a number of sources (Bollée, 1977; Corne, 1969), including the SC version: *Gramer Kreol Seselwa* ‘Grammar of Seychellois Creole’ (Choppy, 2013), providing information on SC phonology, morphology, lexicology, semantics, syntax and punctuation. SC lexical corpus is represented in a trilingual (Creole, English, French) dictionary (Gillieaux, 2017) and a monolingual dictionary of SC is under compilation (Lexical corpus for Diksyoner Monoleng Kreol Seselwa 2019). The development of SC is monitored and regulated by the Creole Institute of Seychelles (<https://www.seychelles.fr/lenstiti-kreol%20.php>); and its advancement and promotion is on the agenda of the Creole Language and Culture Research Institute at the University of Seychelles (<https://www.unisey.ac.sc/>). There is a growing amount of fiction and poetry written in SC (Dick, 2016; Dogley, 1994; Esparon, 2006; Gabriel, 1996; Grandcourt, 2001; Melanie, 2018; Lespoir, 2003; Savy, 2007 among others), as well as a number of associations, forums and events to promote creative approaches to this language (<http://www.pfsr.org/national-highlights/bling-bling-poetry-association-officially-launched/>; <http://www.nacseychelles.sc/3rd-annual-poetry-festival-seychelles/>). Based on the above, using Haugen’s (1996) key steps in the process of language standardisation, SC has passed the stage of selection and codification in dictionaries and grammars, and has gone through some important stages of elaboration and acceptance: this includes its inauguration as a national language in 1981 and its introduction as the medium of instruction at schools in 1982. Overall, thanks to its current social status, standard grammar and writing system, and its evolution in fiction, poetry and other creative forms of verbal expression, SC can be considered as a language in its own right, serving the needs of a variety of socio-cultural contexts in Seychelles.

Further elaboration of SC, its prestige and functional variation greatly depend on its relationship with other languages in the country, in particular with such a global language as English. The successful analysis of this relationship is not based on simply the matters of scale; it involves the juxtaposition of a number of intrinsic linguistic and extrinsic socio-cultural factors. From the perspective of scale studies, “... *to scale* is not simply to assume or assert ‘bigness’ or ‘smallness’ by way of a ready-made calculus” (Summerson Carr & Lempert, 2016, p. 3). The process involves an analysis of social circumstances, dynamics and consequences of scale-making, as scales applied in different social domains to categorise or interpret the world are not given, but are discursively constructed. Mediated socially and linguistically, scales may channel perceptions prompting attitudes and camouflaging certain factors capable of triggering alternative categorisation. A more useful approach seems to be based on operating with “relative degrees of elevation or centrality” derived from comparison of potentially scalable entities and qualities (ibid.). Obviously, SC’s relatively short period of existence, small number of speakers, limited vocabulary, and so on, place it within the category of ‘smallness’, with a number of implications arising out of its competition with a ‘major’ global language with an extended history of function, global distribution, wide prestige and a firmly established geopolitical status. However, to what extent and in what way is the ‘smallness’ of SC an issue for its development? Is the influence of an adjacent global language pervasive or can some resistance be traced? These questions are approached in this paper with a comparative analysis



of syntactic semantics. With a group of SC and English verbs, three semantic processes are examined: how the verbs lexicalise a certain concept; how the meaning is further unfolded in the syntactic structures; and how such meaning develops.

### *Graphic Verbs*

The verbs under study in the present paper belong to the thematic group of graphic representation. As defined by the Oxford Dictionary, the term ‘graphic’ originates from Greek *graphē* meaning ‘writing, drawing’ (<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/graphic>) and is used relating to various ways of creating visual images, including writing, drawing, engraving and carving. Graphic Verbs (GVs) in this paper are verbs denoting controlled physical actions resulting in a graphic image. E.g.: (English (Eng.)) *to write, to draw, to paint, to carve, to engrave, to ink, to illustrate, to autograph, to touch-type, to scrawl, to sign; to doodle, etc.*; (SC) *antour-e* ‘to encircle’, *delinyen* ‘to mark out’, *desin-en* ‘to draw’, *drafte* ‘to draft’, *ekrir* ‘to write’, *grifonn-en* ‘to scrawl’, *kaligrafye* ‘to calligraph’, *list-e* ‘to list’, *kos-e* ‘to tick off’, *korize-e* ‘to correct’, *minit-e* ‘to write minutes’, *ponktye* ‘to punctuate’, *siny-en* ‘to sign’, *stenografye* ‘to take down in short hand’, and so on.

The choice of the above verb group for comparative analysis is motivated by the fact that the lexemes in question denote a cross-cultural concept: in all cultures writing and drawing have been the powerful instruments to capture and store knowledge and experiences, to communicate through time and across space. Goody and Watt (1963) describe writing as a “technology of intellect”: while oral societies are organised around speaking and listening, writing societies promote literacy, a pre-condition of critical understanding of the nation’s authenticity (Goody and Watt, 1963, p. 344). The telling example is the case of Seychelles, where graphisation of SC and the adoption of a phonemic orthography is closely associated with the country’s distancing from its colonial past and the sense of independence and national identity (Fleischmann, 2008, p. 63).

### *Research techniques*

The present research has been carried out with the two sets of data: lexicographic samples of SC and English were used to provide GV definitions and to analyse how the concept of graphic representation is lexicalised in both languages; while textual samples were used to study how the particular meaning instantiations unfold syntactically and develop further through their use.

Lexicographic samples of GV in contrasted languages comprise, respectively, 147 English lexemes sourced from two monolingual English dictionaries (Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners; Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary) and 65 SC lexemes sampled from a trilingual dictionary (Gillieaux, 2017) and a lexical corpus for monolingual SC dictionary (Lexical corpus for Diksyoner Monoleng Kreol Seselwa, 2019). Textual examples for SC were derived from the above lexicographic resources, fiction sources (Dick, 2016; Dogley, 1994; Gabriel, 1996; Grandcourt, 2001) as well as from the input of SC-speaking respondents. Textual examples for English were derived from the above-mentioned English dictionaries and the British National Corpus.

The analysis has been undertaken in the framework of argument semantics: a branch of linguistics approaching the meaning of a verb with reference to its argument-taking nature (Dowty, 1986, 1991; Fillmore, 1968; Levin, 1993; Tesnière, 1959). In this line of linguistic research, verbs have central position in the lexicon due to their semantic and syntactic properties. Semantically, a verbal lexeme not only names a certain action, but encodes a number of action participants and circumstances, indicating who and what is engaged in the



event and what characteristics or principles apply for the action to be carried out. Hence, the same concept can be lexicalised from a number of perspectives: compare, e.g., the verbs *to write* and *to scribble*, both referring to the process of graphic representation, but presenting this process differently, the latter lexeme foregrounding the manner in which the action is carried out. Information about the event denoted by the verb is summarised in its definition as provided in the dictionary entry. Different action participants are classified into semantic sets known as roles, reflecting the function of the entity in the event. Thus, the semantic role of Agent refers to the entity which produces action; while that of Object refers to the entity which undergoes action, and so on. When used in a sentence, the verb becomes the syntactic centre as it opens slots for semantic arguments – the above mentioned event participants incorporated in the meaning of the verb – which are filled in by the noun phrases. You can say, e.g., that *a letter* or *an essay* (instantiating the Object) was written by *a student* or by *your friend* (instantiating the Agent). The meaning of the verb transforms in context, acquiring new shades and nuances, and transferring to new semantic dimensions of metaphoric use, when you can say, e.g., that *your destiny* (something abstract and impalpable and, therefore, beyond writing) has been written in the stars.

### Lexicalisation of the concept of graphic representation in English and Seychellois Creole

Real events of graphic representation can be schematically outlined as a situation in which a Doer (someone who writes, draws, engraves, etc.) creates a Graphic Image (something written, drawn engraved, etc.) on a Surface (a canvas, a sheet of paper, a wall, etc.) with an Instrument (pen, brush, knife, etc.). The above prototypical scenario of the graphic action, as part of our knowledge about the world, is differently captured and incorporated in a number of words that we use to denote it. To be more precise, the nominative focus can shift from the instrument of image creation (a typing device in *to type*) to the manner of such action ('hasty' and 'careless' in *to scribble*). However, regardless of the foregrounded component, the graphic event is perceived in its wholeness, the speaker's general knowledge allowing for the other implicit components being inferred in course of interpretation.

The data analysis has revealed some similarities and distinctions in how the process of graphic representation is conceptualised in English and SC. In both languages graphic actions are encoded in a variety of ways by GVs foregrounding different aspects of the denoted event. According to the foregrounded semantic component, the following subgroups of GVs can be identified in the contrasted languages.

#### *Foregrounding the nature of the graphic product*

In both languages, graphic actions are conceptualised as the two types of representation: symbolic and iconic, based on the nature of their product. Accordingly, there are GVs of writing (the resulting product being a symbolic sign - a letter, a word, a sign of punctuation, a diacritic sign, etc.), e.g.: (Eng.) *to autograph*, *to touch-type*, *to scrawl*, *to sign*, *to doodle*, *to hyphen*, etc.; (SC) *ekrir* 'to write', *grifonn-en* 'to scrawl', *kaligrafye* 'to calligraph', *list-e* 'to list', *kos-e* 'to tick off'; and GVs of painting or drawing (the graphic product being of iconic nature, imitating or resembling the image represented), e.g.: (Eng.) *to draw*, *to paint*, *to illustrate*; (SC) *desin-en* 'to draw, to illustrate', *barbouye* 'to daub, to scribble, to scrawl', *penn* 'to paint', *pentir-e* 'to scrawl, to scribble'.

### *Foregrounding the manner of graphic act realisation*

Contrasted languages have GVs which connote specific characteristics of the way in which the graphic act is carried out. This includes:

careless, hasty way of writing or drawing resulting in illegible, messy text or picture as a product, e.g.: (Eng.) *to scrawl - to write or draw awkwardly, hastily, or carelessly*; (SC) *grifonn-en - reye, ekrir anpaye* ‘to scrawl, to write in an entangled way’, *barbouy-e - mal penn en sirfas oubyen en desen* ‘to paint a picture or drawing in a messy way’; stylised (elaborate or standardised) way of writing, e.g.: (Eng.) *to calligraph - to produce or reproduce in a calligraphic (artistic, stylised, or elegant handwriting) style*; (SC) *kaligrafye - fer kaligrafî (lar fer zoli lekritir avek bann let ki'n formen dan en fason dekoratif oubyen elegan)* ‘to do calligraphy (the art of writing beautiful letters produced in a decorative or elegant way)’, *ortografye - ekri dapre lareg lortograf* ‘to write according to the rules of orthography’.

### *Foregrounding the instrument of the graphic act*

A number of GVs in English and SC encode information regarding the tool or means with which the graphic object is produced, e.g.: (Eng.) *to chalk - to write or draw with chalk*; (SC) *tip-e - ekrir an servan en konpiter oubyen masin tipe* ‘to write with the help of the computer or typing machine’.

### *Foregrounding the surface on which the graphic image is produced*

Both languages have GVs which denote cutting or carving signs on a hard surface, e.g.: (Eng.) *to engrave – to form by incision (as on wood or metal)*; (SC) *grav-e - foyu bann tras pour fer desen, let lo en sirfas dir tel ki dibwa, metal* – ‘to cut the lines for the drawing or letters on the hard surfaces such as wood, metal, etc.’.

### *Foregrounding the stage of action*

GVs in both languages encode the particular phase of the graphic act, including:

initial, preliminary phase, e.g.: (Eng.) *to sketch - to make a sketch, rough draft, or outline of*; (SC) *drafte - fer, ekrir en draft* ‘to do, to write a draft’;

repetition of the action, e.g.: (Eng.) *to redraft – to draft something again*; (SC) *reekrir - ekrir ankor enn fwa* ‘to write once again’.

### *Foregrounding a graphic act as a sub-event*

Both English and SC GVs denote actions in which writing is included as an associated action, e.g.: (Eng.) *to subscribe - to pledge (a gift or contribution) by writing one's name with the amount*; (SC) *anrezistre - enskri, met non lo lalis ouswa rezis* ‘to register, to put the name in the list or register’.

Though sharing some patterns of graphic act nomination, English and SC also demonstrate a number of differences in this area. This can be illustrated with the subgroup of technology linked GVs, that is GVs which encode graphic acts produced with the help of some recently devised means (e.g. photocopier, computer, mobile phone, etc.) or those graphic acts which involve sophisticated technological processes (e.g. *to etch - to produce (something, such as a pattern or design) on a hard material by eating into the material's surface (as by acid or laser beam)*). To begin with, though in SC there are a number of technology linked GVs, e.g.: *tip-e* ‘to type’, *skàn* ‘to scan’, *teks* ‘to text’, *imel* ‘to e-mail’, *fotokopye* ‘to photocopy’,

*fotografye* ‘to photograph’, there are substantial lexical gaps in naming certain graphic processes, reflected in such English GVs as, e.g., *to lithograph*, *to etch*, *to stencil*, *to photoengrave*.

Another point of difference is that nomination of technology linked graphic acts in English is more fine-grained, meaning that the same event can be represented by a number of GVs, each focusing on different aspects of the denoted action. To illustrate, there are a number of English GVs which denote writing with a keyboard or touchscreen: e.g. *to type*, *to key*, *to rekey*, *to touch-type*, *to text*, *to keyboard*, etc. The SC corpus reveals only two verbs with the similar meaning: *tip-e* ‘to type’ - *ekrir an servan en konpiter oubyen masin tipe* ‘to write with the help of computer or typing machine’ and *teks* ‘to text’ - *anvoy mesaz par telefonn mobil* ‘to send a message via mobile phone’. It is worth mentioning that some SC technology linked GVs are not included in the dictionary or lexicographic corpus, though they are currently used by SC speakers. In particular, though the noun *imel* ‘e-mail’ - *korespondans elektronik par enternet* ‘electronic correspondence via the internet’ is registered in the SC lexicographic corpus, there is no entry in this resource for the related verb. However, the respondents’ input includes examples of this lexeme being used as a verb: (1) *Imel mwan bann detay* ‘E-mail me the details’.

To sum up, though SC has a verbal resource to present graphic acts from a number of perspectives or with a different degree of descriptivity (see 2.1-2.6), it proves to be limited in some domains, in particular, in nominating processes in constantly evolving area of technological development. Linguistically, the advantage of English lies in its more expansive vocabulary and higher degree of synonymy. However, viewed through the lens of scale studies, the above discrepancies between SC and English can be accounted for not only by the factors contributing to the smallness of the former and the global nature of the latter. With the relatively short period of SC’s existence and with its lexicographic exercises still in progress on the one hand, and English being pervasively present in the majority of contexts as a global language of technology, economy and the Internet on the other hand, there is a higher probability of borrowing and assimilating from a bigger language than developing the vocabulary from the internal resources of the smaller one.

### Semantic dynamics of English and Seychellois Creole graphic verbs

The meaning of the words is never fixed; it develops under the influence of a number of factors, including contextual modulation, socio-based variation or knowledge development in general. As a result, the meaning of words can be extended at the expense of additionally attached meaning components or through figurative use which transcend their initial area of application. Observing the use of GVs in everyday speech makes it possible to trace some patterns of their semantic development; that is, to see new components of meaning, different from those defined by the dictionary, or to see them used to denote actions from other domains, distinct from the domain of graphic representation.

Analysis of textual examples of SC and English GVs has revealed both features of semantic parallelism and those of semantic distinction for their secondary derived meanings. Interestingly, in a number of cases, the derived meanings observed in the SC GVs are not registered in their dictionary entries. Thus, the verb *ponktye* ‘punctuate’ is defined in the SC corpus as *met siny ponktyasyon* ‘to put punctuation marks’. However, research data includes examples where this verb is used in a different meaning: (2) *I fer sir pou pran en moman silans avan I delivre son pwen pou ponktye lenportans son mesaz* ‘He has made sure to take a moment of silence before making his point, to punctuate the importance of his message’. The meaning

of SC GV *ponktye* observed in example (2) is similar to the meaning registered for its English counterpart *to punctuate*: ‘to give emphasis or force to; emphasize’: (3) *The meeting on Monday punctuates Mr. Khalilzad’s latest diplomatic whirlwind in the region to line up support for substantive talks*. Another example is SC GV *reekri* ‘to rewrite’ which is defined as *ekrir ankor enn fwa* ‘to write one more time’. This direct meaning can be traced in the following example: (4) *Fodre reekrir sa teks, akoz I annan tro bokou fot dan premye draft* ‘You have to re-write this text as there are too many mistakes in the first draft’. Nevertheless, the meaning this GV manifests in use is not limited to the meaning outlined in its definition. Another example illustrates the above verb in its transferred meaning: (5) *Listwar pe ganny reekrir an se monman dan lemonn* ‘History is being rewritten at this moment in the world’. In sentence (5), the word *reekri* parallels one of the meanings of its English counterpart *to re-write* - *to try to change the way that people think about an event in the past, often in a way that is not honest or correct*, revealed in the example to follow: (6) *She accused the Secretary of State of trying to rewrite history*.

Thus, similarity of derived meaning for SC and English GVs points to the influence of the latter. On the other hand, alongside patterns of influence, examples of semantic derivation of SC GVs include cases illustrating a way of development distinct from English, e.g.: (7) *La i pe al tip son lemosyon*. – (literally) ‘There she/he goes typing her/his emotions’, meaning that someone cannot communicate their emotions verbally. Though sharing with its English counterpart *to type* the direct meaning of writing with the help of the keyboard, SC GV *tip-e* is distinct from it in its figurative meaning illustrated by example (7). Another example demonstrates a similar characteristic for the SC GV *mark-e - fer en mark, les en tras ekri lo en keksoz* ‘to make a mark, something written in an object’: (8) *Sa fiy in fini mark ou non dan son liv, la bliye la, in fini pou ou*. ‘This girl has already marked your name in her book, you can forget it, you’re done’. According to the informant’s commentary, the meaning of (8) is that the girl has trapped the boy in a relationship for life.

Another difference concerns the extension of meaning of GV in SC, e.g.: (9) *Sa artis i fer grifonnaz avan I konmans so desen*. ‘This artist makes sketches before he begins the drawing.’ In example (9) the noun *grifonnaz* ‘scribble, doodle’ related to the verb *grifonnen* ‘to scribble, to doodle’ - *reye, ekrir anpaye* ‘to scribble, to write in an entangled way’ - reveals the component ‘preliminary, as part of preparation’, the negative connotation ‘aimlessly’ typical for the English counterparts being cancelled.

Overall, the examples (2-5) above illustrate how the semantic development of SC GVs is influenced to some extent by their English counterparts, whose extended and transferred meanings, registered in the dictionary, are projected onto SC lexemes in everyday parlance, even though such meanings are not assigned to them in their dictionary entries. With English being pervasively available in film, mass media and the Internet, English patterns of use for certain lexemes are borrowed for SC lexemes, blocking the alternative development of their meaning. However, in a number of more culturally specific domains, such as those related to person’s feelings or emotions (examples (6-9)), semantic development of SC GVs follows its own authentic path, distinct from that of English.

### Syntactic development of SC and English graphic verbs

The semantic formula of GVs described in their lexicographic entry is differently instantiated in the course of a verb’s syntactic development: when the verb is used in the sentence, its semantic arguments are expressed by particular words, thus turning an abstract action into a concrete act of doing, referring to a concrete situation in reality. Interestingly, not

all participants of the graphic act find their manifestation in the sentence: implicit components have to be inferred from those presented explicitly. For example, in (9) above, there is no mentioning of the tool with which the sketches are done (a pen or a brush, etc.). However, as such a tool is an inherent participant of the graphic act, its absence in the sentence does not hinder its interpretation.

When some of the semantic arguments do not surface, their positions are taken by other action participants. Comparative analysis of such syntactic shifting in SC and English has revealed a number of distinctions. In particular, a certain semantic argument is differently replaced on the syntactic level in English and SC equivalents, e.g.: (10) (Eng.) *The editor corrected the author's manuscript.* (11) (Eng.) *Please correct your essay for punctuation errors.* (12) (SC) *Sa ansennyen, i annan kaye pou koriz-e avek leson pour prepare.* 'This teacher has exercise books to correct and lessons to prepare'. In sentences (10-12), the syntactic position for the implicitly presented Affected Object (something which is corrected - a letter or a word) is taken by nouns related to other action participants. In case of English GV *to correct* in (10-11), Affected Object is substituted for by the name of the document (manuscript, essay), that is something referring to information product which contains elements for correction. Differently, in case of the SC GV *koriz-e* 'to correct' in (12), the same semantic argument is replaced by the noun *kaye* 'copybook' referring to the place, the physical container for the written document to be corrected.

Another distinct feature is the omission in SC of the syntactic element representing the Created Object, which is not typical of English e.g.: (13) (SC) *Plizyer fwa monn ganny demande pou reekrir aköz dimoun pa konpran mon lekritir* 'Several times I was asked to rewrite because people do not understand my handwriting'. (14) (SC) *Zot in desin partou lo miray.* 'They have drawn all over the wall'. In the examples (13-14) above, SC GVs *reekrir* 'to rewrite' and *desin-en* 'to draw' are used intransitively, that is, without any noun phrase corresponding to the object of the action. English GVs 'to rewrite' and 'to draw' are defined as transitive verbs and are used as such in similar contexts, e.g.: (15) (Eng.) *The teacher asked him to rewrite the essay.* (16) (Eng.) *I had to rewrite the letter.* (17) (Eng.) *Students drew maps of the states and labelled them.* What is peculiar is that, in providing an English translation for their SC sentences, informants exhibited some influences of SC on their use of English: in particular, the intransitive use of the English verbs *to rewrite* and *to draw* in the contexts above.

To sum up, alongside sharing the capacity for implicit presentation of semantic arguments in a sentence, SC and English GVs demonstrate different patterns of their syntactic substitution. The difference concerns the nature of the semantic argument which takes over the direct object position (Created Object in English, e.g. to correct the manuscript or the essay, vs Place in SC, e.g. to correct the copybook), or availability of the above syntactic function (transitive use in English vs intransitive use in SC, e.g. the possibility to say 'to rewrite several times' instead of grammatically required 'to rewrite smth several times'). In the multilingual context of Seychelles, SC GVs' syntactic patterns are projected onto their English counterparts, contributing to the specificity of English in Seychelles, modifying the global in a small scale context. The observed influence of SC on English may be seen as a prerequisite evidence for a particular variety of English in Seychelles.

## **Conclusion**

Comparative analysis of some linguistic parameters of two adjacent languages of Seychelles – Seychellois Creole and English – has provided a number of observations which contribute to a better understanding of language coexistence from the perspective of scale.

Though a language in its own right, with an established orthography, vocabulary and grammar, SC, as a small and young language, is challenged by English, its global neighbour, in its further development. The nature and mechanisms of this challenge, analyzed through juxtaposition of some linguistic characteristics, such as nominating capacity, patterns of semantic derivation and those of syntactic shifting, are defined by both the language related parameters and the external socio-cultural factors. The results of the analysis suggest that, internally, SC has a verbal resourcefulness to represent certain concepts from a number of angles, lexicalising various action participants and characteristics. In particular, with reference to the concept of graphic act, GVs in SC explicitly or implicitly present the nature of the graphic product, the manner in which the action is carried out, its stage, instrument, surface and attending circumstances. The meaning of SC verbal lexemes dynamically transforms in use, transgressing its primary domain, e.g. graphic act representation, to other thematic areas, e.g. figuratively presenting the person's emotions and relationships. On the syntactic level, when unfolding into a sentence, SC GVs follow distinct patterns of surface substitution for implicit semantic participants. The above mentioned arguments support the claim for the linguistic maturity and authenticity of SC, and its resilience in the context of scale based, that is, small vs big, island-bound language competition.

There are nevertheless some manifestations of its vulnerability in the above mentioned coexistence with a big language, such as lexical gaps and low level of synonymy in some areas, in particular, technology related nomination, projected semantic derivation of SC lexemes, prompted by patterns of use lexicographically fixed for their English counterparts, and a parallelism of the syntactic alignment of semantic arguments for English and SC sentences. The above mentioned fragilities of SC can be accounted for by a number of external factors. On the one hand, these are facts related to SC, such as a relatively short period of its functioning as a national language, a small number of speakers, and a relatively restricted lexicographic resource. On the other hand, these are facts characterising English, such as its global reach, its dominance in the majority of socio-cultural domains, including such influential areas as education, mass media and the Internet. The above mentioned factors either stimulate borrowing and assimilation to compensate the lexical shortage in SC, or bring about semantic and syntactic projection. The factors mentioned above are reinforced by the general vulnerability of SC due to the small scale, manifested mainly in the limited variety of language related opportunities available locally and, as a result, dependence on the bigger international context, as is the case with English as the language of instruction in Seychellois schools, motivated by the prioritized educational paths through overseas higher educational institutions.

Given the widely recognized way of globalisation, manifested among other areas in language diversity reduction, special efforts should be made to support the sustainable use of local (albeit non-dominant) languages, such as SC. Steps and choices made today have important implications for this language further development and preservation. As with any language, SC is a unique resource to transmit endemic knowledge and culture, and it presents a particular way of knowing and interpreting the world. For this precious resource not to be diminished or damaged, language maintenance should be part of a collective agenda, involving legislators, educators, researchers and users.

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## **Women's political representation in Small Island Developing States: A comparative analysis of Mauritius and Seychelles**

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**Abstract:** A notable feature of the island studies literature is the gap at the level of research and data on gender issues. This paper look at the gender dimensions of political representation in two Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Indian Ocean: Mauritius and Seychelles. The paper discusses the gendered aspects of scale, boundedness, isolation and fragmentation that are characteristic of island states in the contexts of Mauritius and Seychelles. Mauritius and Seychelles both inherited British colonial structures and became independent in 1968 and 1976. Smallness is a salient feature of both islands, but women's political trajectories and success differ substantially. Drawing from published sources, this paper attempts to explain the different trends in gendered political presence in Mauritius and Seychelles. The paper also discusses the implications for women's political empowerment in SIDS.

**Keywords:** Mauritius, Seychelles, scale, women's political representation, patriarchy

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### **Introduction**

The field of island studies is a relatively recent area of scholarship that gained impetus with the increased global concern about climate change and vulnerabilities of small island states. Following decolonisation of the developing world, many islands became sovereign states, left to fend for themselves in order to ensure economic and social survival. Island countries constitute most of all small sovereign states (Srebrnik, 2004, p. 331). Small islands face a distinct set of challenges due to their small size and often, remote location. While they have many things in common, small island states are certainly not homogenous. They vary in size, demographics, culture and religion. Standards of living also tend to differ rather widely, with GDP per capita (in US\$) ranging from \$57,714 in Singapore, \$15,629 in Seychelles, \$10,490 in Mauritius, to \$1,312 in Comoros in 2017 (World Bank, 2019). There has so far been little scholarly research undertaken on women and politics and women's political mobilisation in Seychelles, whereas more academic work has been done in this domain in the Mauritian context. Nonetheless, available sources provide relevant information for a comparative analysis. Scholarly work on gendered specificities of island states is also sparse at present.

Small territories are generally characterised by small-scale societies because of their relatively small populations (Benedict, 1966, p. 33). As such, it may be possible that nearly everyone has some knowledge about everyone else in a small-scale society or even of the activities others are engaged in. As argued by Benedict, "anonymity is impossible in a small-scale society", which limits the likelihood of developing impersonal role relationships (Benedict, 1966, p. 27). Small size leads to social compression, stronger personal contacts and wider role enlargement, role diffusion and role multiplicity (Baldacchino, 2000, p. 73). These features facilitate the aggregation of individual into group interests and enable more effective supervision of group discipline and compliance with any agreements made (*ibid.*). Given the physical remoteness and isolation of many islands, the features of a small-scale society become

even more pertinent in small island states. Therefore, appropriateness or otherwise of scale, wide-ranging personal knowledge and skills, resonance with local culture, extent of embeddedness in extended family networks, and easy access to politically powerful people become key issues that influence the day-to-day lives and activities of citizens of island states. Kinship connections, for example, may assume a stronger influence than one's occupational roles and credentials. Small state societies are "highly personalised", and therefore need to foster "managed intimacy" (Bray, 1991, p. 21).

Moreover, small island states spawn a distinct sense of identity, nurtured by small population size and a common physical isolation from the impacts and influences of other societies (Campling, 2006, p. 251). Baldacchino (2005, p. 32) contends that 'social capital', defined as "the resourcefulness of a people to respond positively, collectively and responsibly to an identified challenge", plays a major role in maintaining social order and ensuring economic growth in small island states. Richards (1972, p. 170) further argues that the physical constraints of island jurisdictions tend to foster strong communities with a shared language and history and the identity of these communities may be forged through collective resistance to outside forces. Such a state of affairs may nonetheless render small island societies more resistant to change, including progressive change. This can be problematic where existing social relations have traditionally been exploitative towards or have disadvantaged certain segments of society: for example, women and minority groups. Indeed, pressures to avoid disagreements in small island societies may imply that individuals who overtly express opposition or dissent risk social exclusion and ostracism (Baldacchino & Veenendaal, 2018, p. 343). Furthermore, rigid control exercised by elites in island states may lead to nepotism and patronage in spite of positive trends on indices of political and civil rights (Srebrnik, 2004, p. 329).

The island studies literature is so far largely deficient at the level of research and knowledge on gender issues. Gender equity or inequity as well as gender equality or inequality form part of the culture of any given society. Gender based inequalities, whether overt or subtle, structure hierarchical and power relations in society, impacting on entitlements, livelihoods and citizenship of individuals. Karides (2017a, p. 30; 2017b, p. 78) highlights the need for 'island feminism' which would examine how gender and sexuality intersect with other social forces to structure the lives of island populations. She defines island feminism as "the intellectual sensibilities of island place and constructs of gender and sexuality, positing them as intertwining forces that shape the particular conditions of economic, social, and ecological life, and the cultural and political machinations particular to islands" (Karides, 2017b, p. 78). There is certainly a need to understand how and to what extent the specificity of islands, including the spatial dimension, guide and structure gender relations in island states. Moreover, the application of island feminism would help explain the resistance of islanders to external influences as a measure for sustaining local culture and determine the gendered implications of such resistance. In fact, adhering to embedded beliefs and practices on islands would imply clinging to hierarchies around race, class and gender and sustaining patterns of discrimination and thus, resisting progressive change while perpetuating inequities (Karides, 2017a, p. 35).

This paper attempts to partially address this gap by focussing on the gender dimensions of political representation in two Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Indian Ocean: Mauritius and Seychelles. Drawing from published sources, the paper discusses the gender dimensions of scale, boundedness, isolation and fragmentation that are characteristic of island states in the contexts of Mauritius and Seychelles. Both islands inherited British colonial structures, were populated by migrants, have tourism as a key industry and are currently classified as middle-income countries in the African region with high human development. Mauritius became independent in 1968 whereas Seychelles did so in 1976. Mauritius and Seychelles are both experiencing demographic dynamics that are closer to the developed than

developing world, with declining fertility and an ageing population. The two small island states nonetheless differ markedly at the level of political trajectory and women's representation in parliament. While smallness is a salient feature of both islands yet, women's political trajectories and success differ substantially in the two small jurisdictions.

### **Women's political presence in SIDS**

In his seminal article on 'islands and despots', Baldacchino (2012, p. 109) argues that, ... small island societies may be wonderful places to live in, *but only as long as one conforms to the dominant culture*. Should one deviate from expected and established practices, the threat of ostracism is immense (my emphasis).

This is a strong statement that carries gendered implications, especially for women who attempt to defy or challenge entrenched patriarchal culture, norms and values. In SIDS, religion, culture, tradition as well as the vestiges of colonialism, have historically restricted women to their nurturing and care-giving role in the family, creating barriers to women accessing the formal sphere, including politics (Borlato, 2014). Additionally, scale, ecological complexity and remoteness tend to magnify existing inequalities and/or discrimination faced by women, girls and their communities in SIDS. The contribution of the Women's Major Group (WMG) for the Sixth Session of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals, held in New York, 9-13 December 2013, stressed that women in SIDS face overall high levels of economic, social and environmental injustice (WMG, 2013). The WMG includes over 400 organisations, social networks and indigenous women's groups from all global regions, including SIDS, working towards gender equality, social justice and human rights.

Scholarly writings on women's political presence in SIDS have so far been mainly nationally or regionally based. The existing body of theory on gender and politics has not yet given due focus to scale and the particularities of small island states. Nonetheless, the relatively smaller size of parliaments of SIDS has a more pronounced impact on women's share of seats in parliament (IPU, 2017, p. 1). For the year 2016, the highest gains and the biggest setbacks with regard to women's representation in parliament were recorded in SIDS (IPU, 2017). The adoption of legally binding electoral gender quotas has been a major contributing factor to inroads made by women into political life. In Cabo Verde, for instance, quotas have ensured women's place in parliament, and political parties are required to propose lists that allot at least 25 per cent of the slots to men or women if they wish to receive any public funding. The ruling African Party for the Independence of Cabo Verde nominated 59 women candidates (34 per cent), leading to women making up almost 24 per cent of the national parliament (IPU, 2017, p. 8). In the Comoros, the legal system is more complex because of the application of customary rules, Islamic and modern law. The measures enshrined in modern law are not enough to reduce the gender disparity present in customary rules and Islamic law; little progress has been made towards achieving a greater presence of women in parliament (Borlato, 2014).

Table 1 provides data about women's representation in parliament in SIDS. There are significant variations, with Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu not having any woman in parliament and Cuba having a 53.2 per cent presence of women in parliament.

**Table 1: Women's representation in parliaments of SIDS.**

Small Island Developing State	Lower or Single House (%)	Upper House or Senate (%)
<b>Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean and South China Sea</b>		
Bahrain	15	22.5
Cabo Verde	23.6	-
Comoros	6.1	-
Maldives	4.7	-
Mauritius (Nov 2019)	20	-
Sao Tomé and Príncipe	14.5	-
Seychelles	21.2	-
Singapore	23	-
<b>Caribbean</b>		
Antigua and Barbuda	11.1	52.9
Bahamas	12.8	43.8
Barbados	20	38.1
Belize	9.4	15.4
Cuba	53.2	-
Dominica	25	-
Dominican Republic	26.8	9.4
Grenada	46.7	30.8
Jamaica	17.5	23.8
Haiti	2.5	3.6
St Kitts and Nevis	13.3	-
St Vincent & the Grenadines	13	-
Trinidad and Tobago	31	35.5
<b>Pacific</b>		
Fiji Islands	19.6	-
Kiribati	6.5	-
Marshall Islands	9.1	-
Timor Leste	40	-
Federated States of Micronesia	0	-
Nauru	10.5	-
Palau	12.5	15.4
Papua New Guinea	0	-

Samoa	10	-
Solomon Islands	2	-
Timor-Leste	40	-
Tonga	7.4	-
Tuvalu	6.7	-
Vanuatu	0	-

*Source:* Inter-Parliamentary Union (2019).

Patriarchal culture, religion and tradition tend to maintain gender inequalities in SIDS, thereby limiting women's political presence. In the Caribbean island states, there is resistance to the advancement of women in politics whereas in the Pacific island states, women are traditionally believed not to have any leadership skills (Borlato, 2014). In the Pacific, Baker (2017, p. 1) notes that women who participate in politics are often caught in a gendered quandary. On the one hand, when women candidates are not elected, women voters are blamed for allegedly voting against their own interests. On the other hand, when women candidates are elected, they are expected to represent all women and not only their constituencies in parliament (Baker, 2017, p. 1). The statement of the Speaker of the Cook Islands Parliament Niki Rattle that culturally, women do not vote for women because they support the men in their families confirms this situation (Maoate-Cox, 2017). Such expectations, however, contribute to resentment towards women voters from unsuccessful women candidates. Furthermore, there is also the possibility that women voters may have wanted to vote for women candidates, but intimidation from a male spouse or relative was an impediment (Baker, 2017).

In the Solomon Islands, mainstream politics and decision-making are considered to be male arenas, leading to low participation of women in politics (Gay, 2009, p. 183). Traditional gender norms combined with the effects of a patriarchal colonisation process that brought in the Christian doctrine with its ideal moral expressions of respective femininity, further disempower women (Dyer, 2017, p. 198). Intersectionality and multiple identities problematise women's political participation in Fiji: historical, cultural and special specificities complicate an understanding of women's agencies there (Leckie, 2002, p. 175). Political divisions of ethnicity, culture and class remain pertinent and impact on women's agencies and political presence. Small states are more likely to have a more conservative political culture, which hinders social change and progress requiring significant political capital. For women politicians in the Pacific Islands, even for those who are committed to gender equality goals, it becomes difficult to balance representing gender with representing their electoral district (Baker, 2017, p. 18). Although women politicians may be committed to gender equality, yet working in their constituencies is essential for them to win a seat in an election. Thus, expectations placed on women in the political sphere, whether as voters, candidates or representatives, to prioritise gender over other politically salient factors, become problematic in small island states.

Factors affecting women's political representation are fairly similar in SIDS and the rest of the world. However, given the small-scale factor in SIDS, there tends to be greater resistance to change in cultural norms and values. This slows down or hinders progressive change, particularly in the area of gender equity and political representation. Moreover, the limited anonymity and closer monitoring of the activities and movement of citizens in small-scale societies puts women activists and politicians under more intense scrutiny from family and

society in general. This keen social surveillance adds pressure on those women who choose to defy tradition and culture and to venture into the male-dominated political sphere.

### **Women and politics in Seychelles**

The Republic of Seychelles is an archipelago of 115 islands scattered in the Western Indian Ocean. Mahé is the main island where 90 per cent of Seychellois live. Seychelles has a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual society, with a French-lexicon Creole as the main language, and English and French as the administrative languages. Seychelles was populated by migrants who came from Africa, Europe and Asia. In current times, Seychellois society is described as “relatively harmonious in terms of race” with the prevalence of intermarriages and the population is predominantly Creole, mainly of East African and Malagasy heritage (CEDAW, 2018, p. 2; CIA, 2019). The main religions are Christian, with 76.2 per cent of the population affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church, 10.5 per cent Protestant, 2.4 per cent other Christian denominations and 5.1 per cent belong to other faiths such as the Bahai Community, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism (CIA, 2019). The estimated population is 93,400, with 46,300 male and 47,100 female (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016 – cited in CEDAW, 2018, p. 2). Seychelles falls in the high human development category, which industrialised countries tend to fall into, with a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.797. It was ranked 62<sup>nd</sup> out of 189 countries in 2017 (UNDP, 2018a). The HDI measures the long-term progress made by a country along three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to formal education and a decent standard of living (UNDP, 2018a).

Seychelles gained independence from the UK in 1976 and remains a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Seychelles was under autocratic rule soon after independence when the Seychelles People’s Progressive Front (SPPF), led by President France Albert René, took power in a coup in 1977. A new constitution, promulgated in March 1979, officially turned Seychelles into a single party state. Multiparty democracy was eventually restored in 1992 and a new Constitution was adopted in 1993. Seychelles has a unicameral parliament known as the National Assembly, composed of up to 35 members serving five-year terms. 25 members of parliament are directly elected by popular vote on the first-past-the-post basis, whereas the other ten are appointed on the basis of proportional representation. For the seats of appointed members, political parties that obtain at least 10 per cent of the total votes nominate one member for every 10 per cent of the votes polled.

In Seychelles, women tend to play the lead role in the family, whereas men generally hold little accountability towards family responsibilities (Yoon, 2011; Campling et al., 2011; Allard & Bauer, 2018; OECD, 2019). Seychellois society, in this sense, carries strong resemblance to a matrifocal society where women have a key decision-making role in the family. The 2002 census showed that 47% of all households were headed by women. Mothers shoulder the bulk of household responsibility, raising children and controlling household expenditure; but they have to balance these duties with paid work, often leading to a double burden (Yoon, 2011). In fact, most Seychellois women work outside the home, in government white-collar jobs as well as in manual occupations that were traditionally monopolised by men (Yoon, 2011). In female-headed households, male partners are often transient, rendering women and their dependents more vulnerable to poverty. Moreover, many men chose to remain unemployed and depend on state unemployment benefits, on their wives’ income, or on their parents’ pensions until they find non-menial well-paying jobs (Yoon, 2011, p. 106). Although the Family Tribunal Maintenance Act mandates fathers to support their children, many fathers refuse to pay child support (Yoon, 2011). There are twice as many women who are recipients of benefit payments and social assistance than men (Campling et al., 2011, p. 94; CEDAW, 2018, p. 22). Although a greater sharing of domestic duties is starting to be observed in Seychellois society, especially

among the younger generation, women's role in household management remains significant (Allard & Bauer, 2018, p. 39). The persistence of domestic violence in Seychellois society is a further indication of unequal power relations between men and women within households (Ministry of Social Development and Culture, 2011; CEDAW, 2018).

Women's rights are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Seychelles, including the right to political participation, and there are no legal barriers for their participation in the electoral process. Women also have equal access to education, employment, ownership of property, inheritance as well as credit and there is no gender gap in salaries. Yet, when it comes to instances of higher decision making, Seychellois women are often marginalised as men monopolise these positions. At this level, Seychellois society becomes patriarchal and women are given little space (Allard & Bauer, 2018, p. 38). There are no legal provisions to ensure gender parity including special measures, for example, quotas in elective office positions, such as the National Assembly. On this issue, the 2011 CEDAW report for Seychelles states that,

... myths about the relative superiority/inferiority of women and men abound. Public acceptance for special measures is low. There is a common perception that Government policies and services are currently very pro-women. The introduction of special measures without appropriate advocacy and sensitization programmes may produce a harmful backlash (Ministry of Social Development and Culture, 2011, p. 41).

This statement indicates resistance to temporary special measures that could boost women's political presence. It also shows that cultural beliefs and myths constitute barriers to women's political participation and parliamentary presence. Political parties have not adopted voluntary quotas to increase the representation of women in parliament nor advocated in favour of the quota system. Yoon (2011, p. 112) nevertheless argues that women have achieved a "respectable" level of political representation without quotas in Seychelles.

In 1980 and 1985, prior to the introduction of multi-party democracy, women made up 41 per cent of the elected national assembly members (Ministry of Social Development and Culture, 2011, p. 60). Since the re-introduction of multi-party politics in Seychelles in 1993, women's representation in the National Assembly has stayed below 30 per cent, with the notable exception of the 2011 National Assembly (AU, 2016, p. 6). After the 2011 elections, women's share of seats in parliament peaked to 43.8 per cent without recourse to any form of temporary special measures and Seychelles was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the world from 2011 to 2016 for women's representation in parliament. Nonetheless, the African Union election observer mission to the Seychelles noted that this was the inadvertent result of an election in which Parti Lepep, the only party that regularly fields high numbers of women candidates, contested the election largely unopposed (AU, 2016, p. 6). Women's representation in parliament dropped to 21.2 per cent following the 2016 elections even when women made up the majority of registered voters and were well represented at campaign rallies, at polling stations as polling officials, as polling agents, and as citizen observers during the elections (AU, 2016). The Parti Lepep was the only party with high numbers of women candidates at 44%, followed by the Seychelles Patriotic Movement (SPM) at 21.7% and the Linyon Demokratik Seselwa (LDS) at 16% (AU, 2016, p. 6). Out of 20 women candidates, seven were elected to the current 33-seat parliament. Three of these hailed from the party that formed the new government (Seychelles Democratic Alliance), and four were from the People's Party (IPU, 2017, p. 8). The fall in the number of women parliamentarians reflects the flaws of increasing women's political participation without any special mechanism to sustain the gains that had been achieved in this domain (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2018, p. 52).

Yoon (2011) examined the factors accounting for women's lower representation in the National Assembly of Seychelles. The findings of her research reveal that the dual burden of work Seychellois women face, longstanding beliefs about women's appropriate role, the authoritarian nature of politics practised in the country, expected financial commitments to constituents and low commitment of political parties to nominate more women hinder women's political participation and subsequent representation in parliament (Yoon, 2011, p. 111). Currently, relatively few women are included on party lists and only one independent woman candidate has stood in presidential elections since 1993. Political parties give preference to male candidates over women on the assumption that men make better candidates (CEDAW, 2018, p. 8). In April 2018, following a cabinet reshuffle that reduced the size of cabinet to ten ministers in addition to the President and Vice-President, Seychelles attained gender parity, with an equal number of men and women ministers in cabinet. Women ministers were also given non-traditional ministerial portfolios, including the Ministry of Habitat and Lands (Nation, 2018).

Despite a perceived egalitarian culture in Seychellois society and an absence of direct discrimination against women candidates, traditional beliefs about women's appropriate roles persist. Many Seychellois women prioritise motherhood and family over a political career, which is perceived to be a man's domain (Yoon, 2011). The dominant matrifocal family system in Seychelles leads women to shoulder the bulk of family responsibilities and expenses. As such, women are left with little time to participate in politics and financial contributions expected from members of parliament by constituents are an additional deterrence for women to join the political field. Yoon's findings further reveal that a greater number of women are reluctant to join the opposition parties because of fear of reprisal from the dominant ruling party (Yoon, 2011, pp. 109-110). In spite of the return to democratic politics, an authoritarian political culture prevails; and, in a small society, where anonymity is uncommon, and there is a lingering fear of reprisal from family and opposing political parties, the effects are magnified. The women's lobby for increased space in parliament is also relatively weak. Yoon (2011, p. 109) notes that women's organisations have done little to lobby the government to take actions to enhance women's political representation, beyond meeting with the president and political parties to request that they address the gender gap in local politics. An Action Group of Women Parliamentarians was set up in 2000 to provide support and mentor potential young women politicians, but it has been relatively inactive (CEDAW, 2018, p. 8). Thus, the smallness of Seychellois society restricts women's space for political action. The patriarchal culture is also slow to change, despite the matrifocal family system and women's leading duties in society.

### **Women and politics in Mauritius**

Mauritius is a small archipelago state, located in the south-western Indian Ocean with a population of some 1.22 million inhabitants: 604,900 male and 617,300 female as at July 2018 (Statistics Mauritius, 2018). Mauritius gained political independence in 1968 and became a Republic within the Commonwealth in 1992. The population of Mauritius is almost entirely composed of descendants of migrants from France, Africa, India and China. The population is composed of four ethnic groups and four major religious groups, namely, the Franco-Mauritians and Creoles who are Catholic; the Indian community, Muslim and Hindu; and the small Chinese community, either Buddhist or Catholic. Hindus make up 52 per cent of the population, Muslims 16 per cent, Creoles 28 per cent, Sino-Mauritians (Chinese) three per cent and Franco-Mauritians are less than one per cent of the population (Eriksen, 1998, p. 15). Creoles include the descendants of African slaves and 'gens de couleur' or Coloureds who are a mixed race group, often the offspring of African women slaves and their Franco-Mauritian masters. The Hindus are divided by caste and language (Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Marathi), whereas the Muslims are differentiated in terms of sectarian affiliation (i.e., Memons, Surtees, Sunnis, Shiia and Ahmadiyya), with the Sunnis being in majority (Hollup, 1996, p. 288). The Creole group



is also not homogenous and is divided by class and phenotype, especially skin colour. The 'ti Creole' group are mainly dark-skinned and in manual occupations such as labourers, dock workers, domestics and fishers. Many upper and middle class Creoles are light-skinned and in professional posts: teachers, nurses, administrators and in tourism (Boswell, 2014, p. 150).

The persistence of ethnic boundaries has been described as "the most striking insular feature of Mauritian society", especially "the concern to reproduce ethnic boundaries at home" and "the urge to remain pure and untouched" (Eriksen, 1993, pp. 142, 143). According to Benedict (1962, p. 77), it is the lack of congruence between the different groups that holds Mauritian society together. Diversity and difference remain entrenched in Mauritian society: politicians frequently refer to the slogan 'unity in diversity' or the 'rainbow nation' in their speeches aimed at promoting national unity. Although Mauritius is constitutionally a secular country, religion pervades nearly all aspects of life (Richards, 2007). Mauritian society is also patriarchal in nature and women's rights and entitlements were gradually enhanced in the post-independence period. The 2005 CEDAW report for Mauritius stated,

Mauritius being a multicultural society with many religious customs, favours a male dominated social system thereby reducing the impact of measures taken to eliminate discrimination (CEDAW, 2015, p. 33).

Women in Mauritius are a heterogeneous group, divided by class, religion, caste and ethnicity. As such, their life situations are relatively varied, although patriarchy cuts across all groups. Research has yet to be undertaken to document the specific experiences of patriarchy of the different groups of women. Nonetheless, certain concerns resulting from male domination and patriarchy affect the majority of women in the country. Women are still expected to shoulder the bulk of domestic and child care responsibilities in spite of their qualifications and career, although those from the higher income strata are able to hire domestic help. Moreover, domestic violence is a persistent problem that affects women across the different groups in Mauritian society. Women are also underrepresented in positions of power. However, some societal concerns appear to be more common among women in specific groups. There have been cases of marriages of minor girls in some conservative sections of the Muslim community. The most recent case resulted in the death of a 13 year-old girl who was pregnant and had been religiously married to a 19 year-old young man (Daloo & Kamanah-Murday, 2018). Female headed households with single mothers are fairly common among some sections of the low-income Creole population, indicating greater autonomy but also precarity.

Mauritius has had sustained multiparty democratic rule since independence from Britain in 1968. Eleven general elections have been held since independence, each characterised by a series of political alliances between political parties. As a SIDS, Mauritius has made laudable progress and is known to be a highly consolidated democratic and development model within the SADC region (Breytenbach, 2002). Mauritius also falls in the high human development category, with an HDI value of 0.790 and ranked 69<sup>th</sup> out of 189 countries in 2017 (UNDP, 2018b). Moreover, Mauritius has been praised as an 'African success story' and a 'miracle' due to its skilful management of diversity, political stability, sustained democracy and economic growth (Brautigam, 1999; Frankel, 2010; Eriksen & Ramtohul, 2018). The political system of Mauritius consists of a unicameral multiparty parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster model. It has a legislature made up of 62 elected members and a maximum of eight members appointed from a list of 'Best Losers'. The Best Loser System caters for the representation of ethnic minorities in parliament with the provision of eight additional seats over and above the 62 elected seats, but it is not a gender sensitive system. Mauritius did not face the type of political and social unrest experienced by many newly independent developing nations. The different political institutions in the island have ensured representation of the

different ethnic groups, which fostered a feeling of justice and equity at the level of representation of diverse interests. This is a key factor that has enabled the country to maintain peace and political stability despite the prevalence of ethnic fragmentation. In fact, the practice of multiculturalism in Mauritius advocates the co-existence of ethnic, religious and cultural groups and mutual tolerance by maintaining a balance in the distribution of power between the different groups (Ramtohol, 2015).

Mauritius has a multitude of political parties, some of which are dominant in size, power, appeal and popularity. These include the Mauritius Labour Party (MLP), Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM), Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien (MSM) and Parti Mauricien Social Democrite (PMSD). A smaller party, the Muvman Liberator (ML), which is in the current government coalition, was formed in 2014 as a splinter from the MMM. The main political parties are multi-ethnic, even if the MLP and MSM tend to draw support from the Hindu community and the MMM and PMSD have a greater following among the Creoles. The MMM was a left-oriented party that rejected communalism and promoted nationalism during the early years of its operation in the 1970s. However, following their electoral defeat in 1976, the party shifted its orientation to communal politics as practised by the other political parties. There is now little ideological difference between the main political parties and all claim to promote a socialist ideology which would lead to social justice and redistribution of wealth. They also claim to support women's political participation and presence; and the MMM and MLP even have notional constitutional provisions for a 30 per cent representation of women in decision making instances of the party. However, these provisions are rarely respected and fulfilled.

The Constitution of Mauritius guarantees the equality of all citizens as well as the respect of fundamental rights and freedoms. In 1995, the Constitution was amended to render sex discrimination illegal in the country. Moreover, reforms have ensured that women have the same legal rights as men. Mauritian women and men are also entitled to equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms, including opportunities and responsibilities in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres (Patten, 2001). However, cultural and societal barriers still prevent women from fully exercising their legal rights. Women's political representation has, remained marginal despite Mauritius being a consolidated democracy and there being a distinct improvement in the status of Mauritian women since independence. Indeed, women's representation in the Mauritian parliament has remained consistently low: 5.7% (1983, 1987), 17.1% (2005); 11.6% (2014). The figure rose to 20% following the latest (November 2019) election. The lobby of a group of women's organisations (the Majority Party, FederAction, Media Watch Organisation-Gemsa) for a more sizeable representation of women in parliament on the eve of the 2005 election led to a greater number of electoral tickets offered to women. In the last election, three key political blocs – MSM-ML and LP-PMSD alliances and the MMM – were in competition. Each of these fielded 12 women candidates out of 60, leading to a greater representation of women. Ten women were directly elected whereas four were appointed as Best Losers on the basis of their ethnic and religious identities.

At the level of local government, Mauritius adopted the 'New Local Government Act' in 2012 which provides for a gender-neutral quota of at least 33% (one-third) representation of either sex in municipalities and village councils. The adoption of this quota led to a significant increase in the presence of women in local government in 2012. At national level, authorities have now acknowledged the need for electoral reform to correct the longstanding gender imbalance in the Mauritian parliament and to ensure a more adequate representation of the opposition in parliament (MGECDFW, 2017). However, progress is slow and consultations on electoral reform are ongoing. Due to the sensitivity of representation on ethnic and religious grounds, electoral reform remains a highly contested matter in Mauritius and political leaders

are very cautious to act for fear of losing electoral support. Concerns about ethno-religious representation in parliament are prioritised over women's representation.

The failure of Mauritius to set up and implement mechanisms that enhance the increased participation of women in politics has been described as the only democratic deficit of the country (Chiroro, 2005, p. 1). Patriarchal norms and culture which filter into political structures, remain a major impediment to women's political emancipation in Mauritius (Ramtohul, 2015; 2018; 2019). In fact, there is very little *de iure* discrimination operating against women in Mauritius: but economic, social and cultural barriers continue to hinder women from realising their full potential (Patten, 2001). Conservative norms and values that govern notions of respectable femininity are major impediments to Mauritian women joining active politics, which is deemed to tarnish the family reputation and thus inappropriate for women (Ramtohul, 2019). Mauritian society is also highly family orientated, where women are expected to shoulder the bulk of domestic responsibilities, leaving them with less time than men for political activities unless they have strong family support and financial security. Patriarchy is therefore reinforced by stereotypes, culture and tradition that disadvantage women, especially the full enjoyment of their rights and entitlements as citizens. Although Mauritius has experienced commendable modernisation and development since independence, there has been little change in cultural norms and values, which have yet to genuinely support gender egalitarianism.

The prevailing patriarchal culture hinders women's autonomy and freedom to engage in active politics and also leads to covert and overt discrimination against women politicians. The most recent example are the derogatory comments on the pregnancy of Joanna Bérenger, a young Franco-Mauritian woman and daughter of senior politician and former prime minister Paul Bérenger in an article in *L'Express*, one of the most read and known newspapers in the island. Joanna Bérenger was elected ahead of her male competitors in constituency number 16 in the latest election. However, despite her commendable performance as a young politician who was elected on her first attempt at national elections, she was described as coming to parliament with "ek zak dan tant" (Nancoo, 2019). This Kreole expression literally means 'jackfruit in the basket', depicting her unborn child as the fruit in the basket. Many Mauritians, especially women, felt the expression and description to be offensive, leading to a wave of protest and critique of *L'Express* on social media for misogyny and women bashing. The newspaper issued a statement of apology on the same day and apologised to Joanna Bérenger (*L'Express*, 2019). This example highlights the salience of patriarchy in Mauritian society which still prioritises women's reproductive roles over a career. This becomes more pertinent when women work in traditionally male dominated areas.

The Mauritian political system and institutions have been primarily designed to ensure communal representation. But this has, at the same time, led to the exclusion of women from political positions. Communalism highlights the preponderance of ethnic and religious communities in the public sphere and society at large (Eisenlohr, 2006, p. 274). However, communalism carries a gendered dimension since it promotes the patriarchal value system and all that is rightly or wrongly associated with religion (Ramtohul, 2015, p. 31). Communal tendencies that defend and safeguard religious practices, along with religious malpractices and entitlements, and rights of communities against any threats from the 'rival' communities, also tend to make the communities rather resistant to any change in the status quo (*ibid.*). This state of affairs has a magnified impact on women as they have often been exploited and oppressed by the decrees and practices in most religions. The existing communal culture in Mauritius remains largely resistant to change and becomes more visible during elections, leaving the country with little hope that it would dissipate one day.

The leadership of political parties in Mauritius has so far been a male preserve: most women assume secondary roles largely because of a culture which does not challenge men's dominance of leadership positions (Ramtohul, 2015; 2017; 2019). Much of women's political participation therefore remains invisible because they are active in the 'background', at grassroots level. Leaders of political parties also prioritise the nomination of representatives of social, religious and ethnic groups over gender; and these are mainly male candidates who benefit from strong lobbies and wide support of socio-religious organisations and have a higher probability of being elected (Ramtohul, 2015, p. 39). Hindu and Muslim women are disadvantaged by the lobbies of socio-religious organisations which tend to nominate and sponsor male candidates. Religion also influences the nomination of female candidates in certain constituencies: for example, Constituency No. 3 in Port Louis is mainly populated by Muslims; all political candidates are men. For political parties and their leaders, fielding a woman candidate in this constituency carries the risk non-election because of the cultural and religious specificities of the area (Ramtohul, 2009). Constituency No. 1 is mainly populated by Creoles and there is no lobby from socio-religious bodies. Here, the main political alliances each nominated a woman candidate in the last election. One woman – Dorine Chukowry – was elected. Hindu and Muslim women therefore face greater odds in the political field than women from other sections of the population because of the lobbies of religious and cultural bodies that exert significant influence on the political playing field and in the nomination of candidates.

Moreover, political participation, especially at national elections, is costly: women often struggle to finance their political campaigns. A strong women's lobby for women's representation in parliament and the need for electoral reform towards this end has been absent. Women's associations have failed to forge a national consensus on the importance of parliamentary representation for women's rights in the country. On this issue, cooperation between women politicians and women's organisations is weak (Ramtohul, 2015, p. 42).

## **Conclusion**

As SIDS, Mauritius and Seychelles have both reached the status of middle-income countries and high Human Development. They have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the constitutions and laws of both countries give women the same rights and entitlements as men. However, when it comes to political representation, change has been slow. In Seychelles, women were better represented under the authoritarian regime and efforts made by the Parti Lepep, which was the dominant party at one time, to nominate a higher number of women candidates made a difference to Seychellois women's presence in parliament. However, the more recently formed parties made little effort to nominate more women candidates. In the case of Mauritius, women have historically been a minority in parliament since independence; there has been no change to the political system and structures since then. Electoral reform is on the agenda and is the primary mechanism which could institute change, but there is resistance to alter the existing structure, especially because of its implications for representation on ethnic and communal grounds. Political parties in both countries also tend to show little concern for gendered representation.

Both Mauritius and Seychelles can be described as 'small-scale societies', given their societal dynamics and demographics. The lack of anonymity in such societies renders going against convention, established norms, values and traditions rather difficult: it is an exercise that requires courage and leadership. In the domain of political participation and representation in parliament, it seems that women in these two small states experience similar constraints impacted by scale. Often, it means that these women have to go against their own family and extended network for a career in politics. Indeed, the relatively closed political structures and circles in both small states preclude women's full participation. In Mauritius, Eriksen (2018, p.

125) argues that “people with talents, but without the right networks, may easily be excluded from the possibility of social mobility”. Even though Seychellois society is matrifocal, women are still excluded from positions of power. Mauritius has a patriarchal society with the same scenario; it is characterised by diversity and division, complicating women’s political emancipation. Women struggle to break the glass ceiling to attain parliamentary positions in these small states because of resistance to cultural change. The indicative cases of Mauritius and Seychelles suggest how small state societies can resist progressive change. The gender dimensions of such resistance in relation to women’s political empowerment are manifest.

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## **Gender stereotypes and the apology in a small state: Uncovering Creole male stereotypes in the Seychelles using digital matched-guise methodology**

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**Abstract:** Recent research in the Seychelles speaks of a “growing crisis of masculinity”, manifested in statistics such as a ten-year life expectancy difference in favour of women, alarmingly high levels of substance abuse amongst younger men, and underachievement of boys in schools. According to the authors, males are generally disempowered by stereotypical views of males as “irresponsible”, “unreliable” and “secondary to women”. Similar gender patterns have been observed in other ex-slavery Creole cultures such as the small states in the Caribbean, and some scholars argue that these structures have historical origins dating back to slavery. In this study, we seek to explore aspects of Seychellois stereotypes of masculinity through so-called matched-guise experiments. Through digital manipulations of voice quality, we produce identity-warped male and female versions of the same monologue recording – a short apology. We then asked respondents to listen to the recordings and respond to the same in a short online questionnaire, where we ask questions relating to their impressions of the apology and the speaker. Dimensions here include honesty-dishonesty; politeness-impoliteness; weakness-strength; and reliability-unreliability. Differences in results of responses to male and female versions of the apology give strong indications that Seychellois stereotypically view males as dishonest, unreliable, lazy and careless. We discuss potential origins and consequences of such constructions, and propose awareness-raising measures for how these destructive historically produced scripts of gender can be rewritten.

**Keywords:** digital matched guise methodology, inferiority, masculinity, Seychelles, small states

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### **Introduction**

In his analysis of how researchers have grappled with the concept of the small state, Maass (2009) observes that, although no consensus has been reached regarding a concise definition, *vulnerability*, and its counterpart and cure, *resilience* (-building), have been identified as important attributes of small states. The development has seen these attributes being broken down into operationalised and indexed features and frameworks being developed to help resilience building (Briguglio et al., 2009; Lewis-Bynone, 2014). While the early focus was primarily on quantifiable aspects of economic vulnerability and resilience (e.g. Briguglio et al., 2010), factors such as social and environmental sustainability have attracted more attention recently, and a search for, and discussion of, suitable variables as indicators and

components of ‘vulnerability versus resilience’ are underway (Lewis-Bynone, 2014; St Bernard, 2014).

Focussing on the social side of resilience building on a more generic level, Eriksen (2011, p. 95), summarises crucial challenges of small states as:

promoting social equality without demanding cultural similarity; developing a pride in the local as something unique, not as an inferior copy of the metropolitan; and finally, developing a local politics which grows out of domestic concerns proper, not of political projects developed overseas.

The size of such challenges is quite substantial from the outset, and their chances of success closely depend on prevalent international political trends, donations and discourses, which can lead to “ontological traps”, drawing attention and resources away from the exact local initiatives and domestic concerns that Eriksen points to (Baldacchino, 2018). One such example is how concerns regarding climate change could put important social projects, such as gender issues, on the back burner. However, there need not be a conflict here. For example, although superficially very different domains, environmental issues and social cohesion can be linked, and their gendered dimension has been underlined by Dunn (2013) and Chambers, Northover & Taylor (2013), both in the same issue of *Small States Digest*.

Gender equality is the focus of the present article, a factor by many seen as a central element in the development of social sustainability and resilience building. However, the aim here is to address an aspect of gender that is often seen as intangible and difficult to capture as a simple statistic, but nevertheless, we would argue, in crucial need of address for sustainability to be achieved. To be more precise, the subject of this study is that of gender stereotypes. Here, we will explore some aspects of the gendered stereotypes that exist in the context of the island state of the Seychelles using a modernized and digitized methodology inspired by the so-called matched-guise experimental set-up (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner & Fillenbaum, 1960). The purpose of the experiment is to empirically uncover some of the aspects of Seychellois local and metropolitan gender stereotypes that may affect expectations and behaviours of men and women alike in the Seychelles. The overall aim is to discuss our findings in the light of Seychelles’ historical past, current societal challenges, and further relate to how these findings may be of possible relevance to small states of similar background.

Why then is the Seychelles a suitable object for a study with the present focus? With a population of 95,000 inhabitants (World Bank 2017), it is obviously a small state. Moreover, the country belongs to a subgroup of Small States, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (Crossley & Sprague, 2012). In this context (i.e. SIDS) the Seychelles makes a good prototypical candidate; Seychelles, as many of these states, has developed its identity and social structure in a postcolonial context mixed with the particular circumstance of being an island state, and as such, its history and geography affect aspects of sustainability in its many different shapes (societal, environmental, and so on). In short, the Seychelles shares many attributes with small states with similar background in the Caribbean and the Pacific. For this reason, perhaps, Seychelles served as an example (together with Vanuatu and St Lucia) in Briguglio et al.’s (2010) manual for profiling small states’ vulnerability and resilience, and in this sense it could be viewed as a benchmark for comparison.

## **Background**

### *Gender structures in the Seychelles*

The question of masculinity and femininity in the Seychelles is complex. Seychelles is popularly, and somewhat misleadingly, occasionally referred to as a ‘matriarchal’ or ‘matrifocal’ society, where women tend to be “dominant in the household, be in control of economic expenditures” and where “unwed mothers are the social norm” (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2017). Much statistics from the Seychelles supports this image. In 2010, 51% of households were headed by women (National Statistics Bureau, 2018), and women are also highly visible in public life. For example, the 2011 parliament boasted the fifth highest proportion of women in the world with 43.8%, and although this figure was radically reduced in the 2016 elections, women still occupy 41 % of the Ministerial posts. Women also make up a clear majority of the civil service (62%, according to Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010), and are massively overrepresented in all government-funded areas such as education and health, as well as in sectors such as finance and insurance (National Statistics Bureau, 2018).

On many levels there is, what most people would call, “gender equality” in the Seychelles. Girls and boys all attend school for at least 9-10 years, and there are no legal, social or religious pressures that disfavour women or force them into unwanted gender roles. It is, for example, quite acceptable for women to have children outside wedlock, and many do. Nevertheless, in many other areas, the Seychelles has quite clear gender divisions that mirror global hegemonic masculinity patterns. For example, many occupational sectors such as fisheries, transportation, engineering and construction are dominated by men, and gender roles in the home are overall fairly ‘traditional’, with women tending to have the main, or sole, responsibility for the upbringing of children and household duties. Note, however, it is in no way taboo for men to care for children and the household, and you often see fathers with infants and young children on busses, and so on. However, women are also often the main breadwinners, and in many cases men’s role in family life, both as breadwinners and/or in upbringing, is marginal. This places unreasonable burdens on many women in the Seychelles, especially as multigenerational family structures are gradually disappearing, and it is less likely that grandmothers, aunties and sisters can be relied upon for support and to share child care.

Men’s disengagement from the family can be seen as a backlash against the public portrayal of men as inadequate and irresponsible (Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010, p. 80). Male respondents in their study claimed that women were taking over as providers and that men had given up. The following reported statements from interviews with respondents in their study are quite telling: “*they don’t need men anymore*” and “*they want to be in the driver’s seat; let them be, we stay out.*” In their study, men further reported that they felt incapacitated and disorientated because both government and society only emphasized the rights of women and children. In sum, Geisler & Pardiwalla (2010) argue that males are generally disempowered by stereotypical views of males as “irresponsible”, “unreliable” and “secondary to women ... in life generally”.

### *Creole gender stereotypes from a political and historical perspective*

The stereotype of the ‘irresponsible’ male is mirrored in many SIDS with a history of colonialism and slavery. There may be reasons for this. In his study of gender roles and nationalism, Eriksen (2017, p. 1448) maintains that “although it is commonly assumed that

gender identity is primarily personal while national identity is primarily political, these two dimensions – the instrumental and the symbolic – merge in practice.” Beckles (2004), for example, argues that the Caribbean Black/Creole male construction as ‘lazy’ and ‘irresponsible’ was politically and ideologically motivated as a way of reducing the potential threat that male slaves constituted in the colonial project, and to retain patriarchal (white) power. As an illustration of such constructions, Beckles (2004, p. 233) discusses the term *Quashee* that was used in the Caribbean in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to describe the typical male slave. In this construction, the African and Creole male was described as “docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing”. Beckles argues that such constructions, in combination with violent terror, were psychological weapons designed to suppress the male slave, and thereby reduce the threat of the slave male community, which greatly outnumbered the slave owners.

Female slaves, on the other hand, posed less of a physical threat, and were a valuable resource in that their children also were born into slavery. Under these structures, white slave masters had rights (including sexual rights) over all women and children (many of whom they had fathered), and while maternal lineage was formally recognised, paternal was not. In this way, male slaves had their roles as husbands and fathers forcibly taken away from them (Beckles, 2004). Moreover, female slaves were often let into the homes of the slave masters, and in the colonial mission it was particularly important that they remained loyal to the slave owners and their ideals. In summary, slave masculinity was dishonoured by the condition of being “kept” and “kept down” and also rendered “socially dead” by the denial of such aspects as fatherhood (Beckles, 2004, p. 230). In this way, the brutal system of slavery seems to have resulted in an emasculated male and “a strong independent female who single-handedly was deemed to be responsible for the well-being of the family” (Mohammed, 2004, p. 61).

We would argue that very similar structures existed in the Seychelles (Bwana & Bwana, 1996; Chang-Him, 2002; Maiche, 2003), and that current gender stereotypes are closely linked to the Seychelles’ historical past. According to this logic, male stereotypical constructions in the Seychelles are partly the result of a slave past, and restricted to the Creole male in the national psyche. This idea has, in turn, probably been reinforced in post-slavery, and even neo-colonial times, in order to support power structures which may benefit from discrediting Creole men. In other words, we hypothesise, stereotypes which refer to males as ‘irresponsible’ and ‘unreliable’ apply only to Seychellois creole men, while the white ‘European/Western male’ is regarded in higher esteem, yet another example of a construction where the local is described as an “inferior copy of the metropolitan” (Eriksen, 2011, p. 95). Further, such stereotypes may serve to disrupt social cohesion and sustainability, and finding ways to raise awareness about these issues becomes an important aspect of resilience building.

## **Methodological Background**

### *Matched-guise studies*

The current study explores some of the male/female stereotypes using a so-called matched-guise experimental set-up (Lambert et al., 1960). A key feature of the method is that it allows researchers to measure how judgements and evaluations of the same output (linguistic or otherwise) may be affected by judges’ perceived identity of the speaker (producer). The matched-guise technique is a powerful tool in exposing stereotyping since it generates objective measurable data about a phenomenon which otherwise tends to be illustrated using highly subjective and anecdotal evidence. In Lambert et al.’s original study, an actor produced

the same text in two or more variants, and the study showed how a brief recording in French versus English (in Canada) triggered different responses regarding speaker's personality, social status and character, depending on the language/accents of the speaker (Bradac, Cargile, & Hallett, 2001). The matched-guise test is still used today to test how judgement of speakers is affected by stereotyping in various disciplines, ranging from sociolinguistics, social psychology, business research and medicine (Cargile, 1997; Cargile & Giles, 1998; Lawson & Sachdev, 2000; Dixon, Mahoney, & Cocks, 2002; Bilaniuk, 2003; Carson, Drummond, & Newton, 2004; Buchstaller, 2006). A good example is how the same CV is judged differently depending on the perceived nationality of the applicant (indicated by typical Arab or European names, for example).

A major critique of traditional matched-guise set-ups based on spoken language has been that it is almost impossible to control for unwanted background variables, even when the same actor/actress is used. Speed, intonation, or pitch can all have a significant impact on how something is perceived, and it is very difficult to control for these when making multiple recordings of the same text (Tsalikis, DeShields & LaTour, 1991). Also, when exploring the gender variable in matched-guise set-ups, one has to use two actors, making it even more difficult to control for unwanted background variables such as accent (Bilaniuk, 2003). Such challenges have restricted gender research using matched-guise set-ups with voice recordings to date, and most studies are limited to very short utterances, evaluations based on a simple 'hello' (McAleer, Todorov & Belin, 2014), or a short reading of a passage (Ko, Judd & Blair, 2006).

In the current study, we use 'voice-morphing' techniques to digitally manipulate the *same recording* in order to create a seemingly 'male' and female versions of the same conversation. We thus believe that we are able to eliminate many unwanted background variables previously pointed out as problematic in matched-guise set-ups (Tsalikis et al., 1991).

*The speech act under investigation: the Apology.*

In this study, we ask our respondents to judge a speaker on the basis of an apology, produced either in either Kreol Seselwa (the first language in the Seychelles) or English. Dimensions explored, such as sincerity, honesty and politeness, are closely associated with male and female stereotypes in the Seychelles, but also occur frequently within apology research in general. Apologies can tell us a lot about power relations. According to Olshtain (1989, p. 156), an apology is intended to provide support for the hearer who was "malaffected by a violation". By apologising, the speaker is thus willing to "humiliate himself or herself", and to admit to fault and responsibility for the offence in order to restore social equilibrium. There is thus a 'power dimension' to apologising, and it is more likely that we see apologies directed from the powerless to the more powerful than vice versa (Brown & Lewinson, 1987).

The social function of an apology is, however, not only directed at the receiver. Meier (1996, p. 152) compares apologising to 'repair work', meant "to remedy damage incurred to the offender's image when the latter behaves in some way below the standard expected relative to a particular reference group." In this model, the main emphasis of the function of apologising is restoring the offender's public image. For this to succeed, an apology must be viewed as sincere, genuine and honest: the apologiser must truly feel remorse for what she/he has done, is honest about the circumstances surrounding the offence and means what they say. Without these ingredients, an apology can easily be seen as an 'excuse': a way to get off the hook.

Whether an apology is perceived as truly genuine or not is partly determined by aspects such as politeness conventions, its linguistic shape and how it is delivered. This complexity is also reflected in its form. The exact details may differ from culture to culture (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Meier, 1996; Kasanga & Lwanga-Lumu, 2007; Hahn & Hatfield, 2011). However, a genuine apology in most cultural contexts will consist of up to five strategies: a linguistic expression of apology (*I am sorry*, for example); an acknowledgement of responsibility for what has occurred; an explanation; an offer of repair; and a promise that it will not recur (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981). Ultimately, however, the success or failure of an apology is determined by its receiver. If the offended does not believe the offender, i.e. that she/he is genuinely remorseful and accepts responsibility for the mistake, that the explanations provided are truthful, and that the promises of repair and non-re-occurrence can be relied upon, an apology can quickly turn into “a poor excuse”. In other words, a prerequisite for a successful apology is trust. This trust can of course be based on previous experience (it is for example hard to trust someone who has lied to you in the past), but also on collective beliefs and stereotypes about certain social groupings (men, for example). In our experiment, we expose respondents to the same apologies, where the only difference is the apparent gender (as manifested by voice quality) and ethnicity (as manifested by language) of the person apologising. It is thus reasonable to assume that differences in interpretations will be based on aspects of trust, which in turn, we theorise, will be affected by stereotypical preconceptions of the social group in question (Seychellois men or women and expatriate men and women).

## Method

### *Overview*

Through digital manipulations of voice quality, we produced identity-warped male/female and Creole/expatriate versions of the same/similar language output, in this case, two short humble apologies delivered in either Kreol Seselwa or English. We then asked respondents to listen to the recordings and respond to the same in a short online questionnaire, where respondents had to respond to statements relating to their impressions of the apology and the speaker. Dimensions explored include many of the aspects discussed in association with male and female stereotypes in the Seychelles such as in/sincerity, dis/honesty, un/reliability, lazy vs. hardworking, im/politeness, and un/reliability. The overall aim has been to empirically explore aspects of Seychellois gender stereotypes, and also to see how these compare with Seychellois constructions of expatriate male/female stereotypes. In a separate questionnaire, delivered after the respondents had listened and responded to the apologies, we also tried to map the group’s stereotypical preconceptions of the traits explored by explicitly asking respondents to state whether they believed trait characteristics such as ‘being honest’ was typically male, female or neutral. We did not include aspects related to ethnicity here, as we deemed such questions to be potentially offensive.

### *The apologies*

The apologies were first produced in Kreol Seselwa in consultation with other native speakers (one of the authors of this article speaks fluent Kreol Seselwa). They are contextualised as subordinate workers apologising to a superior over the phone for mistakes resulting from misunderstandings. The apologies are ‘complex’ (Deutschmann, 2003) in that they contain all five strategies listed by Cohen & Olshtain (1981): (1) an explicit expression of apology; (2) an admission of fault; (3) an explanation; (4) promise of repair; and (5) assurance that it will not happen again: see Apology 1 and 2 below (English transcripts).

### Apology 1

Sorry Madam [1]. I'll start marking those exam papers straight away [4]. You know, I thought the deadline was next week [3]. But I'll start working on them straight away [4]. Sorry again [1], it is my fault [2]. I misunderstood the directives [2]. The next time I'll make sure I read your e-mails more carefully [3,5].

### Apology 2

Of course Madam. I'll look at all the details that you have asked me to check straight away [4]. And I really apologize [1] for not contacting you until today. Sorry! [1] I am really sorry [1]. My fault [2]. In the future, I will make sure I check my e-mails earlier [3, 5].

(Numbers in brackets refer to Cohen and Olshtain's different strategies, as listed above.)

The apologies follow Seychellois cultural politeness conventions with clear signalling of respect (the use of honorifics, such as *Madam*), and with a tone of voice in both recordings that is 'humble' and unquestioning. In summary, there is nothing in the wording or delivery that suggests that this is anything but a genuine apology.

### *The recordings*

When making the recordings, we used four actors: two native Kreol Seselwa speakers (one male and one female), and two native English speakers (one male and one female, both with American accents). In choosing actors for the recording, we first had to make sure that their voices would respond well to voice-morphing. From prior pilot tests, we knew that some voices sounded more believable than others after digital manipulation. For this reason, we systematically pre-tested a number of different voices to see how they responded to digital morphing before choosing actors. Two short sound files from each potential actor (one original and one which had been voice manipulated) were sent to 25 peers asking them whether a) the recordings sounded natural, and b) sounded convincing as male/female voices, or not. Based on these responses, we chose the four voices, two male and two female, that were evaluated most positively. Since one of the actors was female and one male in each language, we could also counterbalance any potential effects resulting from the voice manipulation.

The initial recordings were made using Avid Pro Tools HD 12.0.0, and then edited in the same software. Pitch shifting was processed manually with X-Form (Rendered Only) using Elastic Audio properties in Pro Tools. Two different versions of each apology were thereby produced. For example, in one of the versions, the female native English speaking actor's voice playing "expatriate" was altered, or 'morphed', so that the pitch and timbre matched what was conceived as a male speaker (based on the pre-tests described above). In the other version, her voice was largely left unmanipulated. The same procedure was carried out with all the recordings in Kreol Seselwa and English. Moreover, in the final product, all versions had the sound quality reduced to match that of a typical telephone conversation. This left us with eight guises: two in which the Creole speakers' voices sounded 'male' (one original and one manipulated), two in which Creole recording sounded 'female' (one original and one manipulated), as well as equivalent versions produced by the male and female English native speakers. The recordings were then 'packaged' as Youtube videos with images that signalled the ethnicity and gender of the apologisers (see [Figure 1](#)).

**Figure 1:** Images used for the Youtube videos which were then arranged in a counterbalanced design (gender and ethnicity reordered) in the electronically distributed Survey Monkey response questionnaire.



*Data collection*

All recordings and questionnaires were packaged in a Survey Monkey electronic questionnaire for easy distribution. The questionnaire included an introductory page explaining that this was a study on language and politeness (without giving the exact details of the design). Respondents were here asked to provide basic details of themselves (age, gender, nationality, and education). After this, an automated ‘randomiser’ directed them to either Group A or B. Respondents were not aware of the design of the experiment or that some recordings had been manipulated. Each respondent then listened and responded to four apologies (two in English and two in Kreol Seselwa) according to the counterbalanced order indicated in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1:** Group A and B response orders.

Group A (31 respondents)	Group B (35 respondents)
Apology 1, Creole, female, original	Apology 1, Creole, male, manipulated
Apology 2, Creole, male, original	Apology 2, Creole, female, manipulated
Apology 1, Expatriate, female, manipulated	Apology 1, Expatriate, male, original
Apology 2, Expatriate, male, manipulated	Apology 2, Expatriate, female, original

After the response phase, respondents were directed to another page where they were asked to respond to statements about various traits and whether they considered these to be typically male, female or neutral.



*Response statements*

After each apology, the respondents had to respond to statements on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from: disagree strongly (1) to agree strongly (6) regarding their impressions of the person apologising. These included:

The person apologising is being completely sincere  
The person apologising is being honest - this was a mistake  
The person apologising genuinely regrets the mistake  
The person apologising takes full responsibility for the fault  
The person apologising is insincere  
The person apologising is being dishonest - this was no 'mistake'  
The person apologising does not really regret anything  
The person apologising is just making up excuses to get off the hook  
The person apologising is very polite

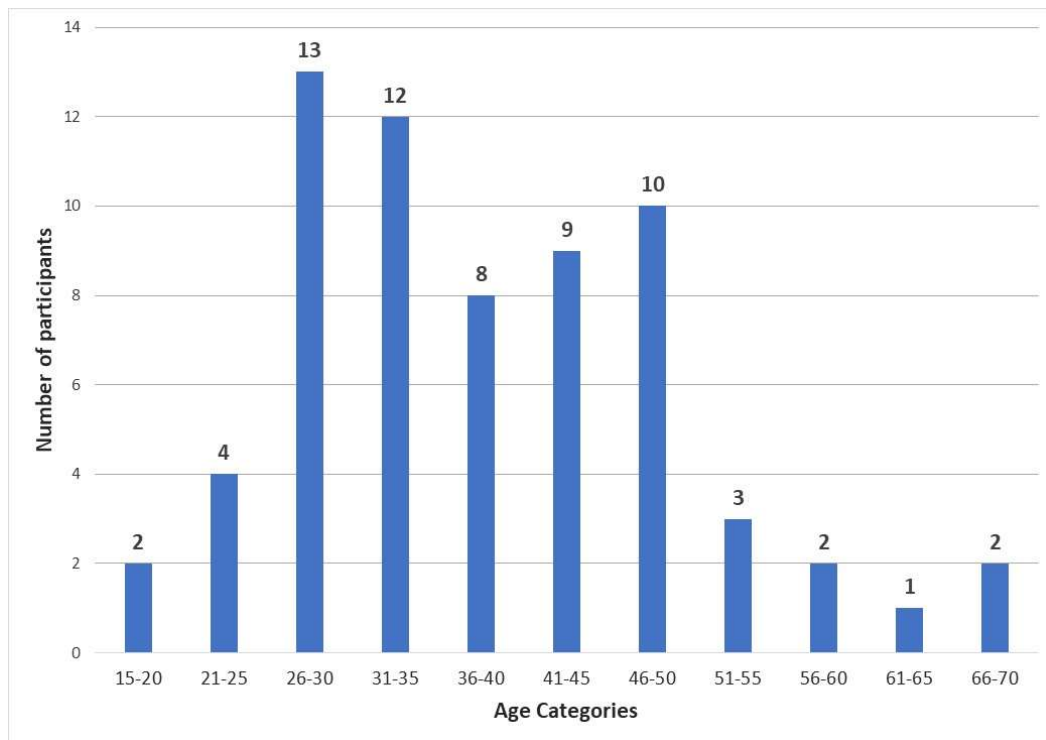
In the final part of the questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought various traits were male or female, on a scale where -2 indicated typically male, -1 somewhat male, 0 neutral, +1 somewhat female, and +2 typically female. Traits included were:

Being honest  
Being polite  
Being reliable  
Being organised  
Being hardworking  
Being dishonest  
Being rude  
Being unreliable  
Being lazy  
Being messy

*Respondents*

We distributed the questionnaires via Seychelles social media (Facebook) in various popular groups, and also used our contacts at the University of Seychelles to secure respondents. In all, 66 respondents completed the survey. All were Seychellois, 23 were male and 43 were female. After randomisation, 31 of these ended up in Group A and 35 in Group B. Other aspects of their demographics are summarised in [Figure 2](#) and [Table 2](#).

**Figure 2: Age distribution of respondents.**



**Table 2: Educational background of respondents.**

Level of education	No. of respondents
Secondary school	0
A-levels or other post-secondary training	27
Graduate university education (Bachelor)	23
Post-graduate university education (Master's, PhD)	16

It is clear from the above that the sample of respondents was by no means representative. Firstly, women were highly overrepresented. Moreover, it is clear that our contacts at the university were probably the main source of informants given the fact that the respondent population were highly educated.

### *Data Analysis*

In our analysis, we wanted to answer two main questions:

- Firstly, and most importantly, we wanted to analyse whether there were any significant differences in how the apologies in the four guise categories (Seychellois male, Seychellois female, Expatriate male and Expatriate Female) were evaluated.
- Secondly, we wanted to see whether any background variables related to respondent identity may have affected the results. Here, the gender of the participant was of particular interest.

For the analysis, we used multivariate analysis designs in SPSS (GLM-repeated measure design) to analyse the data. No significant effects could be deduced on the basis of respondent identity (probably because there were not enough respondents for this to be relevant) and respondent identity was thus dismissed as an explanatory factor. We were thus left with a ‘clean’ analysis of how respondents had reacted to the different guises.

**Results**

*Responses to the apologies*

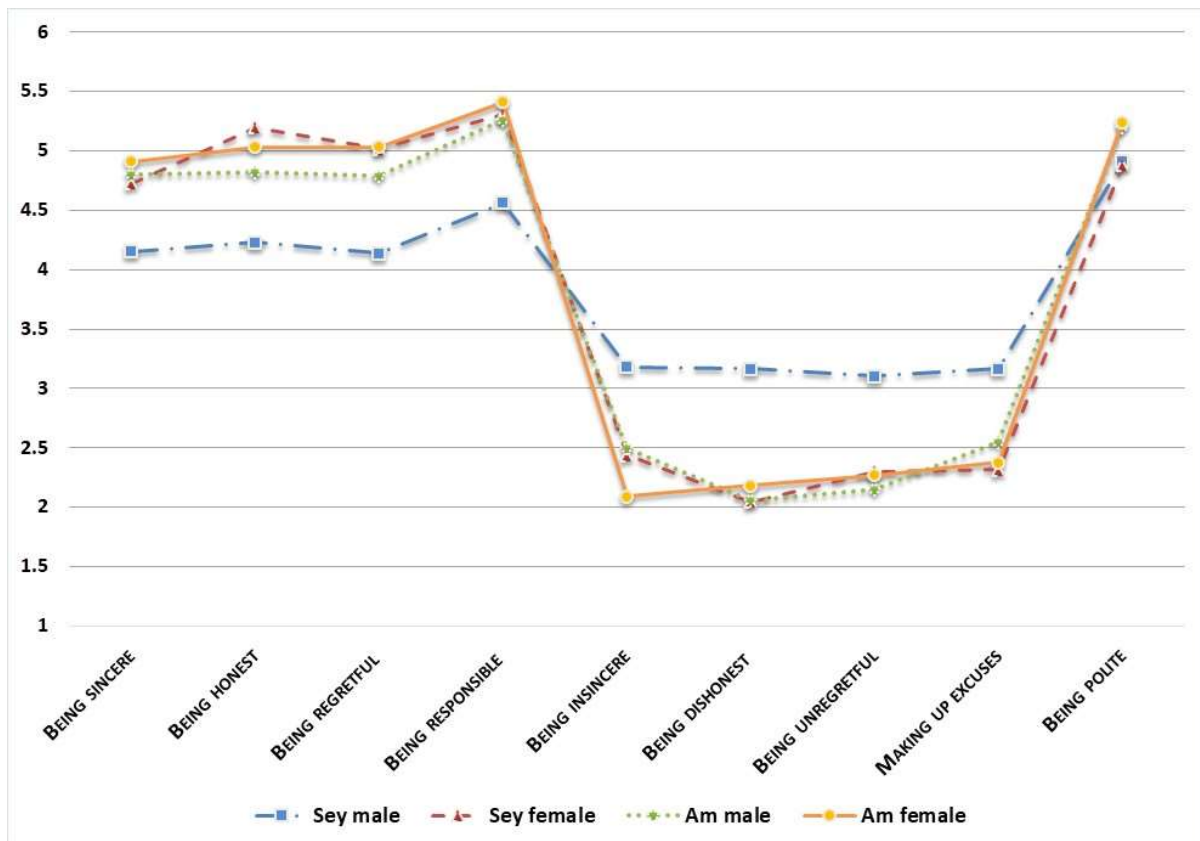
The response patterns to the guises were quite clear. There were no significant differences in how respondents judged the apology guises labelled as ‘produced’ by expatriate male and female speakers or the Seychellois female speakers. The Seychellois male speaker guises, however, stood out, and received significantly lower scores on all aspects such as sincerity, honesty, being regretful and taking responsibility for the fault compared to the other groupings (with one exception: honesty and the expatriate male guise). There were no significant differences in how polite any of the speakers were deemed to be. See [Figure 3](#) and [Table 3](#) below for the specific results.

**Table 3: Results from data analysis. Seychellois male apologies compared to other groups.**

	Compared to	Mean difference	Std error	Significance
<b>Sey. Male (Being sincere)</b>	Sey. Female	<b>-0.576*</b>	0.292	0.05
	Expt. Male	<b>-0.652*</b>	0.256	0.013
	Expt. Female	<b>-0.758*</b>	0.248	0.003
<b>Sey. Male (Being honest)</b>	Sey. Female	<b>-0.970*</b>	0.24	0.001
	Expt. Male	-0.591	0.252	0.132
	Expt. Female	<b>-0.803*</b>	0.249	0.012
<b>Sey. Male (Being regretful)</b>	Sey Female	<b>-0.879*</b>	0.278	0.002
	Expt. Male	<b>-0.652*</b>	0.256	0.013
	Expt. Female	<b>-0.894*</b>	0.263	0.001
<b>Sey. Male (Being responsible)</b>	Sey Female	<b>-0.742*</b>	0.268	0.007
	Expt. Male	<b>-0.697*</b>	0.234	0.004
	Expt. Female	<b>-0.848*</b>	0.246	0.001
<b>Sey. Male (Being insincere)</b>	Sey Female	<b>0.742*</b>	0.261	0.006
	Expt. Male	<b>0.682*</b>	0.278	0.017
	Expt. Female	<b>1.091*</b>	0.241	0.000
<b>Sey. Male (Being dishonest)</b>	Sey Female	<b>1.121*</b>	0.251	0.000
	Expt. Male	<b>1.106*</b>	0.221	0.000
	Expt. Female	<b>0.985*</b>	0.234	0.000
	Sey Female	<b>0.803*</b>	0.258	0.003

<b>Sey. Male (Being unregretful)</b>	Expt. Male	<b>0.955*</b>	0.229	0.000
	Expt. Female	<b>0.833*</b>	0.242	0.001
<b>Sey. Male (Making up excuses)</b>	Sey Female	<b>0.848*</b>	0.256	0.001
	Expt. Male	<b>0.621*</b>	0.262	0.021
	Expt. Female	<b>0.788*</b>	0.268	0.005
<b>Sey. Male (Being polite)</b>	Sey Female	0.03	0.203	1.000
	Expt. Male	-0.288	0.154	0.395
	Expt. Female	-0.333	0.182	0.433

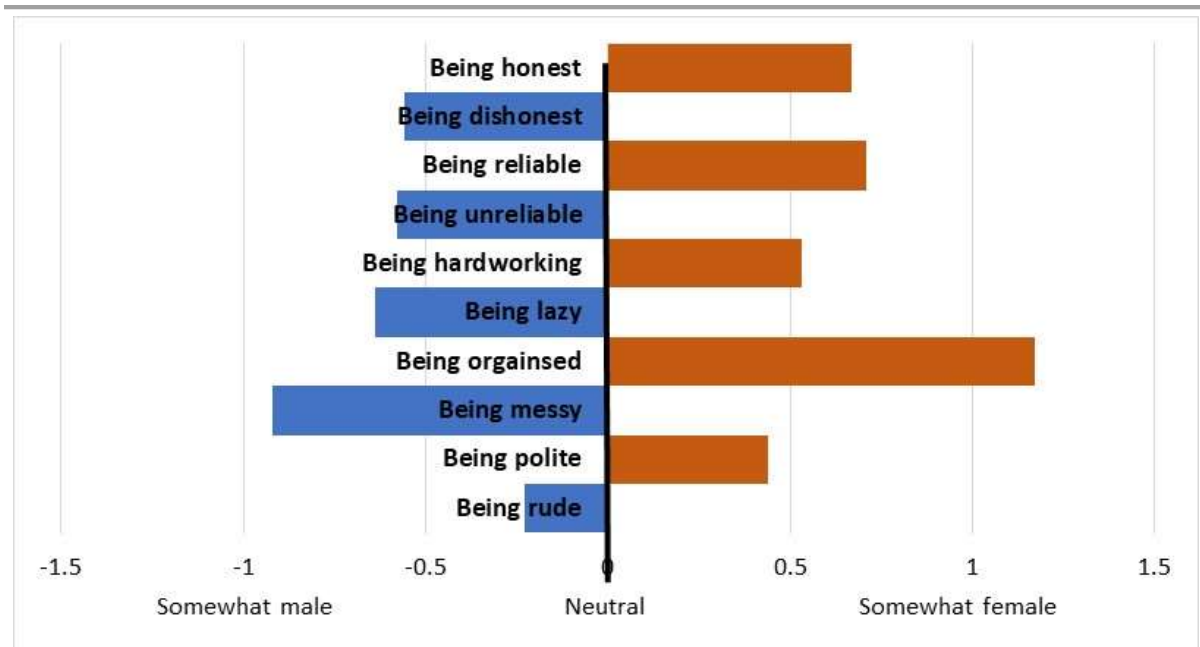
**Figure 3: Apology responses. (High figures indicate that respondents agree with the statements (1 = Disagree strongly; 6 = Agree strongly). Figures for each category are the mean value of responses to two apologies: one manipulated and one original.)**



### *Stereotypical preconceptions of traits*

Note that the statements posed to the respondents in this part did not distinguish between Seychellois and expatriate male and female stereotypes. We did not want to include this variable for ethical reasons, but it is reasonable to assume that when responding to typical female and male traits, respondents referred to those stereotypes that were closest to them, i.e. Seychellois male and female stereotypes. The results are summarised as [Figure 4](#).

**Figure 4: Respondents' gender stereotypical views of various traits relevant to the study. (Negative values indicate 'somewhat male' (-1) and 'typically male' (-2), while positive values indicate 'somewhat female' (1) and 'typically female' (2) traits.)**



From our results, it is clear that the respondents had generally quite negative stereotypes about males as being messy, lazy, unreliable and dishonest. In contrast, females were deemed to be organised, hardworking, reliable and honest. The differences for the trait politeness were less marked, 'being rude' coming out as only a marginally male feature (i.e. almost gender neutral).

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Although our results can be questioned on a number of methodological issues (a small unrepresentative sample of respondents, for example), we would argue that they provide empirical evidence for a tendency that is generally observable in the Seychelles, namely that stereotypes surrounding Seychellois men are, on the whole, quite negative when it comes to traits such as honesty, work ethic and reliability. These claims are supported by other researchers (Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010). Such stereotypes, when deeply rooted, obviously pose a real danger for any development of social sustainability and resilience. Stereotyping, based on various social categories such as gender and ethnicity, serves to simplify how people perceive and process information about individuals (Talbot, 2003: 468), and it also builds up expectations on how they are supposed to behave. People can choose to ignore such expectations, but they still have to relate to them. In this way, negative stereotypes of men in general, unfairly risks impacting negatively on various aspects of an individual's life, including upbringing, how he is treated in school, employability, and the ability to receive and manage credits and loans. Additionally, since social interplay is a key factor in identity construction, a self-fulfilling prophecy kicks in: it can, and does, transform 'as if truths' into real truths.

There is plenty of evidence that suggests that many men (and of course women too) in the Seychelles are seriously disempowered. The Seychelles has one of the highest prison population rates in the world, out of which the majority (95.5%) are men, more specifically 799 per 100,000 in 2015 (Walmsley, 2015). A major contributory factor to these depressing statistics is likely to be the alarming rate of opiate abuse among the male population: Seychelles tops the world ranking, together with Afghanistan and Iran. Meanwhile, girls massively outperform boys in school (Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010); Seychelles has the largest gender differences in reading rates among 14 African nations investigated (Hungu & Thuki, 2010, p. 83).

These figures may well be the consequences of unequal gender structures in schools where, according to a Ministry of Education study (2002), the expectations for girls on the part of teachers were higher than those for boys. The study also revealed consistent differential treatment of boys and girls with regard to streaming, attention time and punishment. These gender patterns are incidentally mirrored in the Caribbean, where according to De Lisle (2018, p. 447) males tend to end up in the lower stream (low ability) classes and are treated accordingly. Upbringing too, has an important part to play. Through surveys and interviews, Geisler & Pardiwalla 2010 (p. 77) reveal a family structure where many boys are “pushed out into the street”, thrusting them “outside the place where emotions and sensitivity are learned and attachments are formed”. According to the authors “Seychellois boys appear to be confined within the parameters of a narrow stereotypical image of toughness, roughness, irresponsibility, independence, and laziness” (ibid.). In summary, these negative observations, facts and figures seem to be the result of a vicious negative feedback loop, where negative expectations lead to negative consequences, which in turn feed into negative expectations, and so on.

As illustrated by our results, negative male stereotypes do not seem to apply to all males, but more specifically to Seychellois males. Based on anecdotal evidence as well as our own experiences and observations (and partly supported by Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010), we would also argue that negative male stereotypes are class specific, and do not apply fully to the well-educated middle-classes, and/or the so-called *Gran Blan* population, descendants of the original French settlers. Such claims of course need to be confirmed empirically: but, seen from a structural and historical perspective, they ‘make sense’. The original construction of the lazy and irresponsible *Quashee* male (see Beckles, 2004, above) was applied by the suppressors (slave owners) to the suppressed (slaves) in order to motivate injustices, and to maintain hegemonic structures. There is no reason that such stereotypical constructions should not have persisted if they benefited the powerful. As has been noted, colonised people have consistently been depicted negatively as weak, barbaric, childlike, dumb, and so on. (Nandy, 2004; Thong, 2012). Given the Seychelles’ long colonial history, it was after all important to retain ethnocentric beliefs that the morals and values of the coloniser were superior to those of the colonised, and here Creole men in particular, were important targets.

In the Seychelles of today, there are still many interests that arguably benefit from the stereotypical idea of the unreliable, dishonest and lazy, working class, male Seychellois. For example, it justifies the import of cheap manual labour in the construction and hotel industries. This has led to a development whereby almost one third of the Seychelles labour force (over 17,000) is made up of foreign labour, this while more than 25% of the Seychellois male population only have informal jobs, 4.2 % are unemployed and almost 3% are stuck in prison (National Statistics Bureau, 2018). It also justifies primarily foreign men to remain in ultimate charge of prestige institutions such as investment companies, big multinational hotels and

international banks. So while the idea of the ‘glass ceiling’ is applicable to Creole women in spite of their relatively strong societal position in the Seychelles, it is also relevant to many Creole men. The ceiling is thus primarily made up of *white* expatriate men (and a small minority of privileged Seychellois men). Finally, the ‘masculinity crisis’ provides a steady revenue to the drug and alcohol industries. In summary, it appears that a neo-colonial status quo which mirrors historical patterns is being maintained.

Efforts to redress social problems in the Seychelles seem generally to be more focussed on dealing with the consequences rather than the causes of current problems. According to Geisler & Pardiwalla (2010, p. 80), male respondents accused social service agencies and NGOs of discrimination against men, and there was no point in raising cases since “decision makers [held] a preconceived idea of men as losers”. According to their report “NGOs were seen to provide support to women only and the one existing fathers’ association remained largely invisible” (ibid.). Men were also reported to claim that “mothers did not allow them to take care of their children, and that instead they threw men out of the house, humiliating and ridiculing them in the process” (ibid.). Though limited, this provides evidence for one of the big challenges facing small island nations according to Eriksen (2011, p. 95), namely “political projects developed overseas,” which have little understanding of local contexts and concerns.

## **Conclusion**

Current gender structures in the Seychelles are detrimental to all Seychellois. On the one hand, many women are overburdened by the responsibilities of bringing up a family and being the sole economic providers, while at the same time having to pursue careers and shoulder professional responsibilities. Many Seychellois working class men, on the other hand, are marginalised, both in the home and on the labour market, leading to various negative consequences such as violence, social isolation, unemployment and drug abuse. We would argue that this state of affairs is at least partly a consequence of gender stereotypes stemming from an historical past, when it was in the interest of the powerful to disrepute Creole masculinity while at the same time gaining the loyalty of Creole women. In so-doing, they contributed to a split between the sexes, and a current situation where the discourse between Seychellois men and women is “charged with accusation, disappointment and prejudice” (Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010, p. 81).

In order to remedy current trends, and the so-called masculinity crisis, the reconstruction of national gender stereotypes is arguably a central factor. Educational institutions should play a vital role in this process, proposing new alternatives, and providing a historical understanding of how the national psyche has been shaped by plantation culture and slavery. Today’s curricula pay little attention to these matters, and we would argue that an increased understanding of the nation’s history is a key step to break the shackles of the past, to create new and better informed identity constructions, and to foster what Eriksen (2011, p. 95) calls “a pride in the local as something unique [and] not as an inferior copy of the metropolitan”. Here, we also see that methods based on the models used in this study could help to illustrate the effects of stereotyping on conception and to stimulate discussions – particularly in schools and other learning spaces. In this work, it is also crucial to portray “the dynamism and complexity of the masculinity construct” (De Lisle, 2018, p. 459) and to propose alternatives to the hegemonic stereotypical variants. Such models would be applicable to many SIDS contexts.

The social problems current facing the Seychelles illustrate the vulnerability of small postcolonial states. This ‘smallness’ can, however, be turned into a blessing. The nation has enormous potential. It has less than a 100,000 inhabitants, and while things quickly can turn for the worse, positive changes are also attainable. The population is, on the whole, well-educated and informed, and the time is ripe for Seychellois to take greater charge of their own destiny and seize their own history (Baldacchino, 2018). In this work, educational institutions are given, key players. We are convinced that the Seychelles, and other SIDS like it, are able to meet current challenges; and, while outside help and expertise by all means can be sought, the problems and solutions should be defined and owned by the local population.

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