

Présence Orientale: The Indian Ocean World in Seychelles' cultural heritage

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Introduction

Seychellois identity is almost always discussed in terms of creolization, that is, its 'melting-pot' culture and people, issuing from three continents (Seychelles Cultural Policy, 2004). This description revolves around Seychelles' history of European colonization and slavery, thus obscuring other regional, geographical and historical influences. It overshadows the fact that Seychelles, though isolated until the French settled it in 1770, exists in what authors and researchers of the region call 'the Indian Ocean World' (Ottino, 1974; Koechlin, 1984, 2000; McPherson, 1984; Haring, 2003, 2005; Vergès, 2007; Blench, 2014; Schottenhammer, 2019). Drawing on Stuart Hall's (2010) description of the creolization process in the Americas as the *Présence Européenne*, *Présence Africaine* and *Présence Américaine*, I call the 'Indian Ocean World' concept, the *Présence Orientale* in the Indian Ocean region. This is the third element of the creolization phenomenon in this region, giving it its particularity as a creole region. The other two, *Présence Européenne* and *Présence Africaine* are common denominators in the creolization process, in both the Caribbean (Americas) and the Indian Ocean region. Both the Indian Ocean World concept and the '*Présences*' concept will be elaborated on, a little further in this article.

In discussing what she calls Indian-Oceanic creolizations, Françoise Vergès echoes the Martinican Creolists '*Eloge de la Créolité*' (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, 1990), when she says of Reunion Island, that 'It is not an African island, nor a French island, nor an Asian island; it is an island of creolization' (2007, p.135). So too one might say of Seychelles in this 'Indian-Oceanic' configuration, except that one might arguably add 'English' to the equation. From a political viewpoint, one might argue that, in fact, Reunion is a French island, because it flies the French flag and there is a strong element of French culture there; that by virtue of its predominant Asian population and strong ties with India, Mauritius is an Asian island; and that by virtue of its predominant African origins, Seychelles is an African island. However, all three have a common denominator; that of being creole islands, which is manifested in their creole lingua franca, their genetic mixtures and their multiculturalism. Though this creolized existence is seen as stemming from European colonization and slavery, as Vergès points out (and Ottino before her), 'the Indian-Oceanic world served as the subterranean terrain of creolization'. Pre-colonial encounters between the groups that were

brought to these islands, merged with the encounters between slaves and European settlers resulting in the interaction of ‘layer upon layer of significations’ (Vergès, 2007, pp.135-137). However, the Indian Ocean World concept, and the *Présence Orientale* in the creole equation of the Indian Ocean region are barely known or understood in academia and other spheres of understanding. This is true even of this region itself. The reasons for this are mainly the dominance of Eurocentric forms and methods of education and the globalization of what is perceived as Western forms of culture.

Marginalization of the Indian Ocean World in regional creolization discourse

In postcolonial theory, these Indian-Oceanic creolizations are marginalized on different levels. On the level of creolizations stemming from colonization and slavery, Caribbean creolizations are much more popular and written about than Indian Ocean creolizations (Vergès, 2007, p.134). Possibly, this might be due to the later settlement of the Indian Ocean islands by Europeans establishing slavery plantation systems, compared to the Caribbean. It might also be due to the lesser amount of literature from the Creole societies which resulted from these plantation systems, compared to the Caribbean and the Americas. On a second level, this marginalization is extended to the European supremacy in the equation. In the case of Indian Ocean creolizations, Seychelles, Reunion and Mauritius are the three island plantation societies that are usually lumped together as ‘creole’ islands. Because they are islands that were uninhabited before European colonization, and as all three have strong, though varying degrees of French influence, their creolized forms are more often than not seen as being primarily French (Chaudenson, 1992; Michealis et al., Michaelis et al., 2013; Bertile, 2013). For example, all three have a creole lingua-franca (with varying degrees of written forms) which is classified as a ‘French-based Creole’ (Michaelis et al., 2013). Food, music and dance have obvious multiple sources, but are frequently described in French terms. Moreover, for people classified as ‘creoles’ in all three islands, beliefs and spiritual practices are dominated by the Roman Catholic Church in the French language. Notably, there are varying efforts and measures to valorize the creole language in this and other respects – but then again, as has already been pointed out, the language is a *French-based* creole. Thus, the African and Asian components are somewhat overshadowed by the dominant power during the early creolization period.

This brings us to the third level of marginalization of the *Présence Orientale* in the composition of Indian Ocean creolizations. This is the marginalization of the contribution of the Indian Ocean World to the final mix of this region, compared to the primary element of European masters interacting with African slaves. In the case of Seychelles and the Mascarenes, as has already been mentioned, their lack of a ‘native’ population prior to colonization makes it

difficult to pin down the third '*présence*'. However, in talking about the spread of a common stock of folktales in the Western Indian Ocean region, Lee Haring does point out that these folktales, and other cultural elements, were inherited from an already established 'culture franca' (citing Ottino, 1974) in the Indian Ocean region and were spread to Seychelles and the Mascarenes by the slaves and indentured labourers that were brought there by Europeans (2005, p.292). This is the 'subterranean terrain of creolization' that Vergès discusses and which, in Hall's theory, might be called the '*présence orientale*'. The '*présence orientale*' is not a subject of widespread study in the context of Indian Ocean creolizations. In the case of Seychelles at least, pre-colonial happenings in the region are hardly included in the local concepts of origins and identity. The history books and school curriculums are dominated by European figures, with the large mass of African slaves remaining unknown and un-named on the periphery of history, as it is, except for a few exceptional cases such as 'Castor' and 'Pompée' who managed to get into the official records as notorious rebels (Nicholls, 2018; O'Gorman, 2019).

This situation might be described as the postcolonial or neo-colonial condition of Indian Ocean creole societies, as seen from both the Metropolitan centre and within the periphery. As a concrete example, most Seychellois believe that their society is a Eurocentric one (Choppy, 2018). To a large extent this is true – at least, there is a general tendency to aspire to European, or Western standards (Choppy, 2018). This is not surprising, given that Seychelles' education system has always been European in content and orientation, beginning with the introduction of a French Catholic education in 1851 (Ministry of Education, 1999) and the change to English as a medium of instruction for the core academic subjects in 1904 (Fleischmann, 2008), culminating in Cambridge international 'O' Levels and 'A' Levels. For those with the ability, this usually leads to a tertiary level of education in a university that uses English as medium of instruction, except for a few cases, for example, where French is the target subject, or students are sent to universities in the ex-communist bloc such as Cuba or China, where they have to learn and study in the local language. Currently, there seems to be a language shift towards English, with an increasing number of young parents preferring their children to acquire English as their first language (M.T. Choppy, 2018). Though the Seychellois people are aware of their creole identity and its melting-pot equation, to most people, Seychelles' history revolves around French and British colonization, and their awareness of Seychellois creolizations is, in most cases, limited. By dwelling on the Indian Ocean World, and its contribution to Seychelles' cultural heritage, it is hoped that this article will arouse more curiosity about the '*présence orientale*' in the Seychellois creolization equation, its shared history with the Mascarenes, and the role of other Western Indian Ocean islands in the configuration of that history.

Présence orientale

As has been mentioned already, the concept of '*présence orientale*' in the plantation societies of the Western Indian Ocean can be paralleled to Hall's concept of the '*présence américaine*' in the Caribbean region. Secondly, it is necessary to link this theory to the concept of 'reinterpretation' in the creolization process in the juxtaposition of these two regions. 'Reinterpretation in creolization occurred because enslaved Africans (as well as colonial settlers) needed to make their old values and customs work in a new, and totally different, environment. They were obliged to adopt and adapt to new values that were imposed upon them, by fitting them into the molds of their old values and patterns. This harks back to Herskovits' 'reading of old meaning into new forms, or the retention of old forms with new meanings' (1948, p.557). These 'old meanings' and 'old forms' include previous cultural interchange amongst the various tribes that were mixed and lumped together in the New World, and which would play an important role in forming these new creole societies.

This process is called 'cultural translation', and the societies involved, 'translated societies' (Hall, 2010, p.29). These translated societies always bear the traces of the original, but the original can never be restored (2010, p.29). This is illustrated through Hall's '*présences*' theory in describing Caribbean creole society. He proposes that the first element, the *présence africaine*, is the subterranean voice of Africa which could only express itself by indirect means, thus by 'signifying' (through detour, evasion, mimicry, subversion, appropriation, translation and expropriation) (2010, p.30). This, one can surmise, is why creole culture is at its most creative in language and folklore. The second element, the *présence européenne*, is, on the other hand, 'the voice that speaks all the time', the colonizing voice. Nevertheless, it too has been translated through tropicalization and indigenization. It has also absorbed other European strains from the constant contact with them, just like the *présence africaine* has been shaped by the myriads of African ethnicities thrust together in a common space. The third element is the *présence américaine* which is 'the primal scene' of the violent encounters 'between different worlds for which the Caribbean has historically provided the crucible' (Hall, 2010, p.30). The *présence américaine*, is also 'the disruptive force of 'the local' – the vernacular, the indigenous, the 'native ground'' (Hall, 2010, p.31). In the Indian Ocean, the third presence would be the *présence orientale*. However, the 'native ground' in the Caribbean context becomes ambiguous in the case of Seychelles and the Mascarenes, since they were unpopulated prior to colonization, unless considered in the context of the Indian Ocean World. The complexity of the Caribbean (and Indian Ocean) creole society is created by the merging of all three *présences*, and the need to reinterpret the different sets of values in this new context, at different levels of interaction, but within one single society.

The Indian Ocean World: Ancient Indian Ocean interchange

In order to better understand the Indian Ocean World concept, it is important to describe it in historical and geographical terms. The geographical reaches of the Indian Ocean World stretch 'along a curve from the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa to Cape Leeuwin in south-western Australia' (McPherson, 1984, p.78). This is essentially what is now known as the Indian Ocean Rim and included the coastal areas of Eastern and Southern Africa, the horn of Africa, the tail of the Arab peninsula, Southern India and Indonesia (Blench, 2014). This also included the islands within the Indian Ocean, which were either populated in pre-colonial times through maritime and commercial expansion within the region, or during colonial times, when the forced emigration of peoples on the eastern side of the rim to the plantation islands expanded this world inwards (Vernet, 2013; Haring, 2005). Vergès makes a case for a network of cosmopolitan civilizations which seems very far removed from the Third World status of the region in the postcolonial era:

The Indian Ocean was a site of encounters and exchange long before the arrival of Europeans in 1498. Cosmopolitan ports cities in the Indian Ocean, e.g. Mombasa, Calicut, were frequented by Jews, Armenians, Gujaratis, Bengalis, Hindus, Malagasy and Muslims mingled, forging a lingua franca ...

(2007, p.137).

This world, Vergès argues, was the result of the patronization of Arab navigators and poets, Chinese travellers and merchants, and was even influenced by European mythology in the Middle Ages. In fact, research on this area has shown that the Middle East, Southeast Asia and the Far East were linked together in a system of long distance maritime exchanges by 1000 CE at least, and that these exchanges were sophisticated and regular enough to be described as more or less the first 'global' economy (Schottenhammer, 2019). McPherson's work further consolidates this theory, with emphasis placed on a series of cultural interchanges amongst the peoples of this region for at least 50,000 years (1984, p.78). This was strengthened by the development of trade and commerce, overland and across the sea. For example, he proposes that over 5000 years ago, there were commercial links between Egypt and East Africa via the Red Sea and supposedly along the East African coast, with parallel interactions between the Mesopotamian civilizations, Southern Arabia, East Africa and even the Indus Valley (McPherson, 1984, p. 80). In a time when they were still free from the commercial slavery imposed by colonialism, African sailors and traders also patronized these waters and made their contributions to the region's cultural and economic evolution (Vergès, 2007, p. 139). Haring also puts forward a theory of 'cultural negotiation' involving the mixing of Malagasy civilizations originating from Indonesia, with Swahili civilizations of East Africa between the 6th and 9th centuries, C.E. The result of this was a language and customs used by more than 12 million people (2003, p.19).

When the French began a systematic transportation of African and Malagasy slaves to the Indian Ocean islands in the 16th century, the seeds of creolization had already been sown through the earlier convergence of these two societies. One distinct sub-region that was influenced by commercial and cultural interactions in the Indian Ocean World was the Swahili region, stretching from the Mozambican/Tanzanian border to the Bajun islands in southern Somalia, and offshore islands like Zanzibar, the Comoros and even Madagascar (Perkins, 2015). For Seychelles and the Mascarenes, this is the region that represents the ‘subterranean terrain’ of creolization as it is from there that the slaves that made up a majority of their population during the early creolization period, came from (Seychelles National Archives, 2011).

Arab navigators in the Indian Ocean and the Portuguese take-over

Vasco da Gama looms large in the written history of the Western Indian Ocean islands, and consequently, in the memories and consciousness of their peoples. In fact, the Portuguese navigator is not only famous for being one of the most prominent ‘discoverers’ during the European ‘Voyages of discovery’, but is credited with having paved the way for maritime contact and commerce between the Orient and the Occident, and in so doing, turning the Indian Ocean into a cross-cultural contact zone (Jayasuriya, 2008, p.1). In fact, the Portuguese wrestled power over the waters of the Indian Ocean from the Arab navigators who had dominated the area for centuries (*Le Mauricien*, 2018). In so doing, they opened the way to the general exploitation and domination of the Indian Ocean region by other European powers, such as the Dutch, the French and the British (Jayasuriya, 2008, p. 178). The French, especially, brought about permanent settlement on the Mascarenes and Seychelles, as well as colonized the key islands of Madagascar and the Comoros (Haring, 2002, pp.5-10). These are essential parts of the Indian Ocean World Swahili region which influenced the cultures and populations of the Indian Ocean Creole zone, thus representing the *présence orientale*. However, the perpetuation of a European education system and the domination of Western culture in the postcolonial era means that the *présence orientale* in these islands continues to be obscured.

If you ask around in the streets of Victoria, most Seychellois will tell you that Seychelles was discovered by Vasco da Gama. In fact, a brief informal survey amongst friends and family across several generations confirms this belief. A further investigation at the Ministry of Education (June, 2020) confirms that whilst students are now being made aware that there is a possibility that Arab navigators might have sighted our islands before the Portuguese (and might even have landed, since some ancient structures on Silhouette Island are suspected to be Arab tombs [A.W.T. Webb, 1966, p.11]), Vasco da Gama is traditionally given the honour in the official syllabuses since his sighting is more or less the first and best known recorded

sighting. As for the first landing, it is attributed to Alexander Sharpeigh, a British commander of an East India Company squadron, who dropped anchor near the Mahé group in 1609 (A.W.T. Webb, 1966, p.11). The curriculum developers have done a good job in more recent times, to situate Seychelles within the context of an ex-slave society; however, the general orientation is the traditional Eurocentric viewpoint of History (Ministry of Education, 1999).

The Arab navigators who preceded the Europeans in the region tend to be referred to in a general way and are not named specifically.¹ Scarr's historical account supports this approach as he mentions that others may have sighted parts of the archipelago before the Portuguese, but that specificities come with da Gama's 1502 sighting of the Amirantes group, and the subsequent appearance of this group as the Seven Sisters on a Portuguese map of 1517 (2000, pp.2-3). He does however, acknowledge that the masters of navigation in the Indian Ocean prior to the Portuguese take-over were Arab pilots, specifically naming the pilot Sulaiman bin Ahmad bin Sulaiman Al-Mahri, in whose early 16th century text, Seychelles appears as the Zarin islands (2000, p.3). In fact, in the Arab World (which played an important role in the Indian Ocean World), the acknowledged Master Mariner of the Indian Ocean who exploited the trade winds and the monsoons to advantage, is Ahmad Ibn Majid (Lunde, 2005). Ibn Majid is even credited with having improved several early Chinese navigation tools, and written a book of navigation in the Indian Ocean, from which the Portuguese and Europeans generally, benefitted when they reached the region and colonized it from the 16th century onwards (Lunde, 2005). The meeting of these two worlds has resulted in the current creole societies of the region.

As such, European colonization in the Indian Ocean redefined its racial and economic dynamics which has had a lasting impact until the current era. Some of the current elements of encounters mentioned by Vergès (cultural exchange, regional cooperation, migratory flows and capital) might be argued to be the results of not only the colonial bonds which linked the Indian Ocean World in general, but also the pre-colonial links which made it easier for the particular brand of creolization which exists in this region to occur. As Vergès puts it, 'The arrival of Europeans deeply affected but did not destroy the Indian Ocean World... this world lives on through informal roads of exchange' (2007, p.138). Cultural heritage is one area where these 'informal roads of exchange' are apparent, for example in the domains of music, food, religion, folklore, etc.

¹ G. Boniface, retired Curriculum developer, Ministry of Education, Seychelles, 24th June 2020.

Case-study 1: Evidence of Indian Ocean World musical heritage in Seychelles

Music, or more specifically, musical instruments, is one domain in which researchers have unearthed the Indian Ocean World contribution to the Seychelles cultural heritage (Koechlin, 1984; Koechlin, 2000...; Blench, 2014). For example, Roger Blench's fairly recent research on the reconstruction of the past history of musical exchange in the Indian Ocean (2014) illustrates perfectly the Indian Ocean World theory as discussed by Vergès (2007), Haring (2003, 2005), McPherson (1984), Schottenhammer (2019). It traces the transference of musical instruments along the Indian Ocean rim from Southeastern Africa, to the Arabian Peninsula, South and Southeast Asia, inclusive of Indonesia and the surrounding islands, across the ages. Of particular interest is the transference of instruments from around the 9th century starting from Indonesia and what Blench calls the Island South East Asia (ISEA) to the East coast of Africa. This refers to the maritime migration of Indonesian peoples, first to what is now known as Tanzania, then down to Mozambique, and later on to Madagascar. Much later, around the 17th century, there was another transfer towards the South West Indian Ocean islands (Blench, 2014, pp. 688-689). This tallies with Haring's theory of an Eastward diaspora, which during the slavery period in the 17th and 18th century, accounts for the transfer of cultural traits from the Swahili world of East Africa, Madagascar and the Comoros to Seychelles and the Mascarenes (2003, pp.20-23). As Blench puts it, islands are easier to 'unpick' than a mainland, when analyzing cultural traits, because their cultural practices and artifacts act as a palimpsest of previous influences (2014, p.679). In the case of Seychelles, its repertoire of traditional musical instruments is one aspect of the Indian Ocean World palimpsest.

The island's most popular form of traditional music is probably the *moutya*, which, apart from the singing, relies entirely on a series of three drums for producing the music (Mahoune, 2007; Parent, 2018; Choppy, 2018). Bollée's etymological dictionary of Indian Ocean creoles traces the *moutya* no further than the Macua region of Mozambique (Bollée, 1993, p.333). This accounts for the transference of slaves from this region to Seychelles and other Western Indian Ocean islands during the colonial era. The musical instrument, that is, the *moutya* drum, has in fact, earlier connections with the Swahili world, where it is described as a frame drum that can be played either with the bare hands or with sticks, depending on the specific community; in Arabic it is called the *tar*, in Bahraini, the *ma tari*, and in Swahili, the *ma twari* (Eisenberg, 2009). In Seychelles, the frame is described as a wooden hoop made out of pliable mangrove wood (Seychelles ICH Inventory, UNESCO, 2014, p.218). The equivalent of the *moutya* drum in Mauritius is the *ravanne*, which is described as a wooden frame with goatskin stretched over it. As in Seychelles, the drum has to be heated so that the skin can regain its resilience, and thus ring out better. The origins of the word *ravanne* is thought to be from the Tamil word for tambourine, '*Iravanaum*' (Eisenberg, 2009). A similar drum is found in Madagascar, called

the *amponga tapaba*. Apparently, the Malagasy believe it to be one of the world's oldest drums because of its similarity to drums found in South East Africa (Eisenberg, 2009). Thus, the *moutya* drum of Seychelles represents a link between Central and Southeastern Africa, the Swahili world, the Arab world, India and Madagascar.

Another percussion instrument that is found in all three creole islands of the Indian Ocean is made up of hollow gourds or tubes with dry seeds inside, which are then shaken to produce a rustling sound. In Mauritius it is called the *maravanne* and in Reunion, the *caiamb* or *kayanm* (Eisenberg, 2009). In Seychelles, it is (or was) known as the *kaskavel* (Parent, 2018; Seychelles ICH Inventory, UNESCO, 2014). The origins of the appellation *kaskavel* may be due to the plant from which the seeds used to fill the hollow gourds of the instrument come.² Though a similar instrument exists in Madagascar, it is called the *rabola*. However, a Malagasy cylindrical harp called the *morovan* may be the originator of the name *maravanne* (Eisenberg, 2009). Though both the *maravanne* and the *kayanm* are still popular in Mauritian and Reunionese music (especially the *sega* or *maloya*), the *kaskavel* has lost ground in Seychelles, and is only now being reintroduced through regional exchanges of traditional music (Athanasé and Uranie, 2016). This is an illustration of what Vergès calls 'the informal roads of exchange' that still lives on in the Indian Ocean, thus perpetuating ancient links (2007, p.138).

The zither is also a widespread instrument in the Indian Ocean World, whose origin is attributed to the South East Asian islands of Sulawesi, and which probably travelled westwards to East Africa and Madagascar through the maritime migrations of around the 9th century (Blench, 2014, pp.688-689). This instrument is among those brought to the islands by Malagasy and East African slaves, and this can be traced not only through the forms and types of instruments but also through their names. For example, the tube zither, known in Madagascar as the *valiha*, of which the name is from the Sanskrit *vāḍya* (Sachs, 1938), is known in Seychelles as the *mulumba*, which is a Bantu name (Blench, 2014). Drawing upon the studies made by Koechlin (2002), Blench proposes that the *valiha* or *mulumba* must have been part of the instrumentarium of the enslaved peoples of the East African mainland (though it did not survive there) and was transferred first to Madagascar, and then to the Comoros and Seychelles (Ottenheimer 1970; Koechlin 2002). It was eventually reinterpreted by the Seychellois through lack of contact with the Malagasy performance tradition (Blench, 2014, p. 681).

Following a similar journey, the stick zither also originated from the islands of South East Asia and was adopted by a mixed Austronesian/Bantu population on the East African coast as early as the 7th century, onwards (Blench, 2010). According to Blench, the stick zither is

² Sources: M.T. Choppy, Maconstance, 2020; J.C Mahoune, North East Point, 2020.

only found along the rim of the Indian Ocean (2014, pp. 681-682). It was also carried to Seychelles and other Western Indian Ocean islands by the same slave populations, where it was again transformed in Seychelles, becoming hybridized with the chest bow (Koechlin, 2002; Blench, 2014, pp.685-687). The Seychellois name for the stick zither is the *zez*, which is of Eastern and Central African origin, *sese*, with a couple of variants like *zeze*, *djedje* and *zeze*. The Swahili appellation is *lokángo voatávo*, which turns up in the Malagasy version, combining both the Swahili and the Central/Eastern African versions, *jejy voatávo* (Eisenberg, 2009). There is even a proposal that there might be an Indian input in the evolution and spread of this instrument (Blench, 1984).

These are a few examples of musical instruments which reflect pre-colonial encounters in the Indian Ocean. These encounters have marked the cultural heritage of the Indian Ocean rim and islands, and its heritage is the Indian Ocean World. Along with these instruments are the cultural practices, the songs, dances and ceremonies which must have accompanied them. However, these are more likely to have undergone a more pronounced creolization process or hybridization than the more tangible musical instruments.

Case-study 2: The folktale

The folktale is the second case-study which can be used as a good illustration of the Indian Ocean World theory in the creole islands of the Indian Ocean. Like the musical instruments, they were brought in by slaves, indentured labourers and settlers during the colonial period. Haring says of Madagascar, the Comoros, Mauritius, Reunion and Seychelles, that they share a common stock of traditional folktales (2007). Since all of these islands have had a significant relationship with France, in the first two cases, having been colonized by them, in the last three cases, having founded the earliest settlements there (the earliest settlement of Mauritius by Europeans was started by the Dutch in 1599 [Vaughan, 2005], but it did not last), a number of these tales originated from France. However, most of the tales originate from East Africa and have been further enriched through interchanges between Austronesians and Bantus in Madagascar (Haring, 2003, p.20). This stock of folktales has undergone a deeper creolization process in the plantation islands (Mauritius, Reunion and Seychelles) due to the wide variety of ethnicities that were thrown together through slavery and the colonial system (Baker and Corne, 1982; Teelock and Alpers, 2001; Michaelis et al., 2013). The folktales have evolved differently in their different environments, but they nevertheless represent a continuum of the Indian Ocean World.

The most obvious East African contribution to the Indian Ocean folktale genre is the trickster tale. In Haring's 2003 study of this region, the following are listed: (1) The deceptive tug of war which features two big animals who are tricked by a smaller animal into a strength

contest. In Mauritius, the whale and the elephant are tricked by a cat (Haring, 2007, pp.83-85). In Seychelles, the trickster is Brer Sounougoula, and the two contestants are the whale and the elephant. Haring also gives an account of a version from what is now Zambia, which was collected during British colonial rule. In this version, the trickster is Hare, but the big animals are Hippopotamus, whose territory is the water, and Rhinoceros, whose territory is the land (2007, p.84). (2) The second example is the tarbaby and the rabbit, which in Seychelles, as in other Indian Ocean islands, merges with the story of the hare at the animals' well (Haring, 2007, pp.85-94). Instead of a tarbaby, it is Tortoise who has his shell tarred to catch Sounougoula (Choppy and Salomon, 2004, pp. 25-31). A third example is the deceptive agreement to sell or kill mothers (Haring, 2003, p. 20). Two friends agree to kill or sell their mothers (the reasons vary), but one deceives the other and does not keep his end of the bargain. In the Malagasy version, the one who does not kill his mother ends up having her killed accidentally on another occasion, thus restoring the balance (Haring, 2007, pp.124-125). In one Seychelles version, the hare (*Compère Lièvre*) gets away with preserving his mother whilst getting Brer Monkey to sell his own to the king and sharing the proceeds with him. The trickster is very rarely allowed to be killed, and the storyteller almost always finds a way to rescue him in the event that he is caught by an adversary. In this case, when Monkey and his relatives catch *Compère Lièvre* and make a plan to burn him to death, he convinces them that setting him free in a grassy field at dawn is a surer way of killing him, and of course, he escapes (Choppy and Salomon, 2004, pp.48-49).

Another popular story that is found throughout East Africa and the South West Indian Ocean islands is the defiant girl who marries a wolf or monster in disguise (Haring, 2003, p. 20). In most versions, from Central Africa to Madagascar, Mayotte, Mauritius and Seychelles, the girl's brother (in the Creole islands, they are *Pti Zan* and *Zann* [Petit Jean and Jeanne]) is very clever and manages to plan their escape via a magic flying basket, which reacts to a song (Haring, 2007, pp.147-167). The creolization phenomenon becomes very apparent in one Seychellois version when the story is framed in an old French fairy tale by Charles Perrault in 1889, which features abandoned children in the woods and an ogre with magic boots.³ Both stories, that is, the Seychellois one and the French one, englobes the Hansel and Gretel story. Most versions of the Defiant girl story, start with the girl being very choosy over her prospective husband and getting deceived by the wolf, but in this version, the children are abandoned in the forest by their parents, who are too poor to keep them. They come across a family of wolves deep in the forest, who fatten them for eating. The story resumes its original plot when *Pti Zan* plans and effects their escape in the flying basket. In some African versions, the wolf is a magician (Haring, 2007), but in this version, the magic is effected by some special boots, which the storyteller calls *bot atelye*, in French, *bottes de sept lieues* (or seven league boots

³ Told by Charles Perrault, and translated by Andrew Lang in his *Blue Fairy Book*, Dover Publications, Inc., Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 65-25707, pp.231-241, published 1965 from the original edition circa 1889.

in English). Though these boots allow the wolf to get to *Pti Zan* and *Zann*'s parents' home fast, it doesn't stop *Pti Zan* from burning him to death, and after his magic resuscitation as a pumpkin, to have him defeated by a tortoise who eats him.⁴ Thus, though the story has many aspects of Perrault's fairy tale plot, it is essentially the African story of the Defiant Girl which has been inherited by all the Western Indian Ocean islands. Notably, all other known versions of the story so far in Seychelles stick to the African plot, for example, as per Antoine Abel's comic book version (1981) and as told by an informant from Praslin, Mr. René Bastienne.⁵

Haring links the kind of structural mixing illustrated in the Seychellois version of the Defiant Girl in the above paragraph, to the creolization process. Stuart would call it reinterpretation. Interestingly, Haring also says that framing one story into another was a favourite device of Indian and Arab storytellers, long before writing (2003, p.25). As he rightly points out, in Mauritius, Indian and Islamic traditions merge with African and European influences, and this, in varying degrees of similarities, would apply to both Seychelles and Reunion. Inevitably, this would also include cultural acquisitions derived from pre-colonial encounters, before the populating of these islands. For example, Haring identifies the Seychellois tale of a guy who learns to understand the language of animals (as is the case usually, this role is given to *Pti Zan* who always plays the clever boy/man) as originating from India (2007, p.352). Another such tale, that of the forty thieves, is reminiscent of the Arabian Tales. Though Scheherazade's tales are now popular in Seychelles through the printed book and through the Disney renditions of the most popular tales (Alibaba and Aladdin), the tale of the forty thieves has been known amongst the Seychellois elders long before this. One elderly informant says that his grandmother told him the story as a child.⁶ A tale which Haring says is specific to the Western Indian Ocean region is that of an African swallowing monster which is combined with a seven headed Indonesian monster (2003, p.20). Indeed, the seven-headed monster is well-known in Seychellois folklore, which either guards a forbidden treasure or comes from its lair to ravage the countryside periodically, until it is killed by a hero. However, one informant who got these stories from her grandmother, is of the opinion that they are a European inheritance from Greek and Roman mythology as her grandmother was of European descent.⁷ This might well be true, but the existence of a seven-headed snake in Malagasy mythology inherited from Indonesia has been documented and might just as well be the source of the Seychellois seven-headed monster (Peek and Yankah, 2004, p.570). From another angle, the Malagasy monster is described as a seven-headed snake and is comparable

⁴ Source: Elina François Brioché, Grand Anse Praslin, 70 years old. Collected on 27th June, 2020.

⁵ Source: Mr. René Bastienne, Baie St. Anne Praslin, 73 years old. Collected on 27th June, 2020.

⁶ Source: Norbert Salomon, Perseverance, Mahé, 66 years old.

⁷ Source: Marie-Thérèse Hossen, Maconstance, 82 years old. Her Grandmother was named Alice Loizeau, née Paton.

to the Greek Hydra. This could be a coincidence of universalism as is often the case in world folklore. At any rate, the conditions in Seychelles for the story to have several sources are in place, for, like its neighbours, it is both a historical and geographical crossroads where many cultures meet and interact.

Conclusion

As has been discussed throughout this paper, in the consciousness of the Indian Ocean plantation islands, the *présence orientale* has remained pretty much subterranean (Ottino, 1974; Vergès 2007). In Seychelles, at least, the word *orientale* is more likely to be interpreted as 'Asian', and thus somewhat 'alien', as the Indian and Chinese elements of the population and culture are considered as 'Seychellois' and 'creole' (Choppy, 2020). What has to be taken into consideration, though, is that since the advent of western capitalism, which is currently still the dominant global power bloc, anything east of Europe is oriental, in the context of Said's *Orientalism* (1978). It is an acute irony that the power of western capitalism came from the exploitation of slavery in the plantation societies in both the Americas and (to a lesser extent) in the Indian Ocean (National Geographic, 2003). It is precisely in the postcolonial context that countries such as Seychelles, which have been governed by colonial powers, far longer than they have governed themselves, should model themselves after these so-called, First World powers. They probably fear that if they don't, their education systems, financial institutions, cultural institutions and so on, will be seen as backwards (expressed as Third World) by western controlling institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (Lazarus, 2012, pp.9-10).

As a result, the cultural domains of art, myth and ritual may not 'become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people' in 'Third World' or 'Developing' societies, unless they are allowed into modern narratives (Appadurai, 1996, pp.5-10). This is especially so in micro-states like Seychelles where more ancient art forms are increasingly overshadowed by more recent assimilations. This is what is happening to the two forms of Seychellois cultural heritage discussed in this paper. The western orientated education system does not sufficiently provide for a cultural education that takes into consideration the role of the Indian Ocean World in Seychellois culture and social systems. Whilst it is understandable that the conditions for traditional story-telling are no longer in place for it to flourish in the communities (story-telling grandmothers have been replaced by Netflix, Kindle, and so on), everything should be done to at least document this genre for research, for inserting into the school curriculum, for publication and other means of conservation. Similarly, traditional musical instruments in Seychelles are hardly known by the current generation of Seychellois, let alone, their diverse origins from the Indian Ocean World. Globalization, though it is seen as development and progress by many, can also mean a faster spiral of decreolization through

the loss of the different strands of our creole culture. The final irony is that the celebrated unique brand of creole culture that Seychelles is so proud of in its tourism marketing, depends on all these little strands that are slowly fading away. Our unawareness of the Indian Ocean World is just one aspect of our postcolonial unconscious, as Neil Lazarus (2012) would have put it.

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