

## 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

There is constantly  
tinent – 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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