

“Being on Both Sides”: The Ethnomusicologist between Official Institutions and Musicians

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Based on empirical research in the Seychelles islands (Indian Ocean), performed at the request of the Seychelles Ministry of culture, this article explores how the triangular relationship between the researcher, “interlocutors” (musicians and others), and government results in a particular form of knowledge production, one with restrictions, but also involving access otherwise unavailable to a foreign researcher. The author addresses the political economy of social science research in Seychelles and presents two case studies: (1) a course taught at the National Conservatoire of Performing Arts; and (2) the author’s involvement in an Intangible Cultural Heritage/UNESCO project. She discusses authorities and forces from the perspectives of values, and claims to an ethical stance taken in research, concluding that a comprehensive understanding of the actors, stakeholders and forces that influence the sustainability of music is imperative for (applied) ethnomusicologists working with the aim of assisting endangered music forms and traditions. A better grasp of the roles of ideas, beliefs and values inherent to musical practices and policy-making processes also contributes to a better understanding of music and culture, as well as the formulation of public policies.

During the fall of 2010, I started my PhD in ethnomusicology with a project born out of an explicit request, initially addressed to my co-supervisor in Montreal, Canada, from the Seychellois’ authorities via the Montreal Seychelles’ Consul. It is my understanding that Seychelles’ Ministry of culture¹ was expecting an “expert”² to document local traditional music and to stimulate the interest of the local population

1 Culture has never been the main object of a single Ministry in the Seychelles. Since independence in 1976, culture has been associated with a number of different ministries. I started to work with the Ministry of Social Development and Culture in 2011 until culture came under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture following a 2012 cabinet reshuffle. I refer to a “Ministry of culture” merely in order to simplify discussion.

2 Although the Ministry requested an “expert”, everything done in the Seychelles during my fieldwork was voluntary. I am very grateful to organizations and funds that supported my research and fieldwork in the Seychelles, especially a Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship.

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and musicians in its preservation. I spent a total of twelve months doing fieldwork between January 2011 and February 2014, mostly on Mahé, the main island of the archipelago, where 90% of the Seychellois live, but also on Praslin and La Digue islands. This project gave me the opportunity to fill gaps in academic knowledge through systemic research of Seychellois' musical practices, and also to respond to some local requests and needs, bringing together applied and academic research. However, the conditions and the values underpinned by this research in collaboration with the Ministry of culture also required consideration.

The Seychelles' Ministry of culture played an important role both in providing my research with official authorization³ and in "guiding" it, while Seychellois musicians and other individuals furnished a diversity of data on music, musical practices and their everyday life. As a result, I often assumed the role of mediator between musicians and officials at the Ministry. I consider this kind of ethnomusicology inherently applied research: it represents the music and the voice of ignored or oppressed people while it looks at the cultural policies and initiatives of the state and the reciprocal interferences and influences between these two contexts. This position contributes to a better understanding of local issues and social dynamics in a post-colonial society that impact musical expression and production. My stance towards the ambiguous, historically shifting representations and power relations was to "be on both sides," recognizing the aesthetic values and interests of musicians as well as formal institutions.

The different groups and individuals that I encountered had their own expectations regarding my presence, and their own interests, in both cultural and music development in the country. They had their own visions and stories of *the problem* of the "decline" of traditional local music, but admitted in all cases that musical life in Seychelles could and should be more dynamic and valued. It is important here to consider the meaning of "giving value" to music and musical life for the different parties at stake, including myself, as this enables a better understanding of the problem.⁴ To this end, being engaged with, and working alongside, different interlocutors and institutions opens the door to a different kind of understanding of local issues and values.

My partnership with the Ministry of culture came in the wake of a series of cultural policy interventions. I consider the concept of partnership an active association between different actors—individuals or institutions—who, while maintaining their autonomy, agree to pool their efforts to address a problem or a question in which they have an interest, a motivation, a responsibility or an obligation. This is a focused "epistemic community" as proposed by Harrison;

3 According to anthropologist Sandra J. T. M. Evers (2010), no foreign anthropologists were allowed to conduct independent research in the Seychelles for three decades, from the Seychellois' Revolution (1977) up until her arrival in 2004. The American ethnomusicologist Michael Naylor, although married to a Seychellois and visiting the Seychelles fairly often for holidays, conducted his PhD research between 1984 and 1994. He defended his PhD dissertation, focusing on the creolization in the musical genres of the Seychelles, at the University of Michigan in 1997.

4 Harrison 2015.

there may be a political and economic dimension to collaboration, and the partners share specific epistemic ideas, but do not need to share all of the same values and ethical systems.⁵ Consequently, when the partners agree on an end and work in that direction, supporting each other to attain their goal (at least officially), it does not mean they will use the same tools and methods. They work together because each party has something different to offer: knowledge, experience, contacts, a different role or position in the local music (eco)system and also in the global society, etc. In some cases, collaboration may also be a way to maintain control of the research and the diffusion of the results, as suggested in documents produced by the Ministry of culture governing research about culture.

The main common goal in this partnership was to document *moutya*—a local musical practice generally described as the musical legacy of slaves expressed by drumming, singing and dancing—to contribute to the project of getting it recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) by UNESCO. Another more global goal was to better understanding of issues regarding threatened traditional local music, including the lack of appreciation of the expertise of musicians, in order to solve “concrete problems affecting people and communities.”⁶ Beyond these research goals, the Minister wished to see me getting involved in other musical activities in order to ensure that more Seychellois benefited from my presence as a “music specialist.” I thought it was the least I could do in terms of reciprocity. In this context, my various skills were solicited in many ways and I experienced a “practical side of musical being”⁷ which resulted in teaching, playing, dancing, and taking on the role of consultant or even confidant, but all within the freedom and the constraints of Seychellois’ reality. Personal qualities such as diplomacy and empathy, along with a good sense of observation, self-criticism and ethics, are essential to conducting research and being active in different cultural spheres at the same time. My research was guided by the ethical principles of social responsibility, human rights, and cultural and musical equity—values advocated in applied ethnomusicology.⁸ My approach here analyzes the triangular relation I encountered between policy, empirical work and theory in order to explain the practical challenges of conducting applied and academic ethnomusicological research in Seychelles, and their theoretical implications.

To move in that direction, I will present two significant case studies from my fieldwork: a teaching experience at the National Conservatoire of Performing Arts, and my involvement and observations in the *moutya* nomination process for a UNESCO list of ICH. In doing so, I want to demonstrate: (1) how “being on both sides” and understanding the relations between, and with, different authorities and ethical systems is necessary in order to grasp the complexity of musical

5 Harrison 2012.

6 Harrison 2014, 18.

7 Titon 1992, 320.

8 Titon 2015b, 4.

practices and their environments when working as an applied ethnomusicologist with government; and (2) the importance of taking an ethical stance in research in which the different stakeholders' values and benefits interact. Before getting into that, some background on my research and the political economy in which it is embedded is required.

The Political Economy of Social Sciences Research in the Seychelles

Uninhabited until 1770, Seychelles society was born in the context of slavery as first a French, then a British colony. The country's independence, in 1976, was followed by the coup d'État of 5 June 1977 that led to the government currently in power. Led by France Albert René—a Grand Blanc⁹—the Seychelles Peoples' Progressive Front (SPPF) was clearly defending an anti-colonialist nationalism and opted for a socialist-Marxist one-party state government. The following years, described by Seychellois as the “Revolution,” brought many social, cultural, economical, and political changes to Seychellois' everyday life. Access to social and health programs was put in place ensuring a relatively high standard of living (compared to other African countries), although violations of freedom of expression and human rights were frequent and constraints imposed by the government were the norm.¹⁰ As my research has revealed, most cultural practices have been documented by researchers from the “Research Section” of the then Ministry of Education and Information, creating an official national (creole and/or Seychellois') culture that was institutionalized and folklorized. A musician explained that cultural troupes had been organized in each district¹¹ and that the creative content of their performances had to be approved by an official committee representing the government before they were permitted onstage. I noticed in communications with Seychellois, that, although there was a certain control, cultural expression did not take state-imposed cultural forms, but, as observed by Ana Hofman in socialist Yugoslavia, “offered an excellent opportunity for various people to be engaged in cultural activities.”¹² In 1981, the National Youth Service (NYS), at first mandatory and then optional, was created, which included a traditional education curriculum (in which “Seychellois creole culture” was taught), political education and paramilitary training. A highly criticized program, it ceased to exist in 1998. A whole generation of Seychellois is impacted by this experience, including several musicians, now aged between 40

9 The Grands Blancs constitute a category of European settlers and/or plantation owners in the Indian Ocean islands.

10 Evers 2010.

11 The Republic of Seychelles is composed of 25 administrative districts, each containing a community center. During the autocratic period, the centers were associated with political activities. Today, districts are responsible for the development of social and cultural activities.

12 Hofman 2010, 31.

and 55, who told me that they learned to play “Seychellois” music during their years in NYS. The study of this important period in Seychelles history is reminiscent of ethnomusicological research conducted in other state socialist countries, where folk music research was similarly connected to the promotion of a national culture;¹³ the aim of creating a new folk culture was to “implement the state’s agenda on education and to assist in the propagandisation of ‘positive norms and values’.”¹⁴ The 1970s also saw the development of luxury tourism, on which the Seychelles’ economy remains highly dependent. Tourism activities provide the main music venues and sources of income for musicians. What I term the “tourism context and argument” push all Seychellois—who know very well how necessary tourism is to their economical survival as a country and as individuals¹⁵—to preserve an image of paradise and political stability across their islands.

Despite the official return to democracy in 1993, not much has changed for Seychellois, who must still deal with the reality of their geographical isolation and the ambiguous policies of their government. It seemed to me—and many Seychellois have substantiated this¹⁶—that a general climate of fear, distrust, and oppression is still perceptible. Drastic economic changes after the economic crisis of 2008 led the IMF to step in with a two-year rescue package, with conditions. The post-colonial Seychelles’ dependence on tourism and concurrent spread of a neoliberal economy, globalization and, more recently, the influence of the “discourse of commodification” in the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions,¹⁷ combined with the population’s high cost of living, explain a tendency there to objectify culture and treat it like personal property. When culture or music is regarded as private property, social relations arising from exchanges are likely to be framed or defined and influenced by contracts or intellectual property law.

The conditions of my research were negotiated with a research supervision committee from the Ministry of culture and resulted in a “research protocol” that would give me official authorization to conduct research at locations in Seychellois’ territory. My research process can be described as *negotiation* because we—committee members from the Ministry and I—needed to determine the contributions from “each side” during my fieldtrips, so that exchanges appeared fair to both parties, and also because of the legal, economical and political elements embedded in local “folklore,” including music. As anthropologists Les Field and Richard G.

13 Hemetek 2006, 36; Hofman 2010, 30.

14 Hofman *ibid.*

15 This argument was used in the last presidential elections in December 2015 to frighten Seychellois with the specter that a change of government would threaten partnerships with Persian Gulf airlines, which now have a monopoly on flights to Seychelles, and resultantly, that Seychellois’ economics and quality of life would suffer.

16 A well-known local artist summarized comments that I heard more generally in my fieldwork: “Here in Seychelles, you can’t trust anyone. You and I have to be careful about everything we say and do, because everybody is watching us.”

17 Pyykkönen 2012, 554–557.

Fox note, “the term *negotiation* evokes the manner in which anthropological work [...] become[s] so embedded in complex relationships that the anthropologist can no longer impose [her] research priorities.”¹⁸ I had to defend my project before a committee comprising eight workers from the Ministry of culture. They particularly insisted on the necessity to “return” to the committee all eventual writings or material resulting from my research. I understood, from different comments that were made, that in being a foreign PhD researcher I was “taking” something from them for my own purposes. My research in itself did not seem to guarantee them sufficient benefit. In order to balance the situation and make it “more equitable” in the workers’ eyes, I agreed to get involved in specific training and consulting activities. One must understand that, in a small country like the Seychelles, there are very few cultural workers, and the existing ones do not have a strong educational background in culture or arts management.¹⁹ I think, as Hofman writes, that “there are contexts, places, time in which applied ethnomusicology, or at least research addressing local concerns, are needed or even mandatory to justify itself and the presence of the researcher.”²⁰

The conditions under which cultural researchers can conduct their projects in the Seychelles are in part set out in the document “Standards and Protocols for Managing Cultural Research in Seychelles.”²¹ We can read in this document that these “formal procedures” respond to “a necessity to develop and enforce mechanisms to ensure better management of [...] cultural resources so that the Cultural Institutions derive more benefits from them as well as to exercise greater control over their usage and management in general.”²² As some members of the committee told me, it is noted in the same document that “some past incidents [with foreign researchers] which occurred in some cultural institutions” provide “additional justifications for formally instituting standards and protocol to manage cultural research.”²³

My entry into the country, supported from the beginning by the Seychellois’ authorities as it was, oriented and influenced the process of my research. Many musicians knew who I was before I met them in the course of my research because they had seen me in the capital, Victoria, going on a regular basis to the National Library, where the main offices of the Ministry of culture situate. Their first question was generally: “Who do you work for?” I would explain the whole context of my research project. I first thought that some musicians would distrust me because of my position with the authorities but, instead, they considered that, with that

18 Field & Fox 2007, 10.

19 To date there are no existing education programs in these or a similar field in the country.

20 Hofman 2010, 31.

21 Ministry of Community Development, Youth, Sports and Culture, Culture Division 2008.

22 Ibid., 3.

23 Ibid., 32.

experience, I could better understand their reality and what they have to face in everyday life as Seychellois.

The following section presents two case studies based on my intervention within the Seychellois community, where fieldwork is “a way of knowing and doing.”²⁴

Sharing and Producing Knowledge: Teaching at the National Conservatoire of Performing Arts (NCPA)

My teaching activities at the NCPA in Mont-Fleuri, Mahé provided an opportunity to develop what one could call “participatory action research,”²⁵ leading to musical and social benefits for the local population. The NCPA includes a School of Music, School of Dance and School of Theater. I started to teach in the School of Music during my second week in the Seychelles. I had prepared classes and readings for the participants (about fifteen students from different backgrounds: music students, musicians, music teachers, and an anthropologist from the Ministry of culture); my plan was to introduce theory and methodology, and to foster projects “creating voice and knowledge opportunities for self-representation,”²⁶ thus exposing a diversity of experiences in relation to music. Each participant had to work on a semester-based project, documenting a musical practice or style (local or not) from the paradigms presented and discussed in class. At the end of the semester we shared and discussed our findings.

My first surprise when reading the papers was that most of the young participants knew very little about their traditional music because they do not have much opportunity to hear and practice it. Moreover, instead of asking for information from people around them, or talking about their own experience, many participants copied texts from the Internet, demonstrating that, in the Seychelles, authority seems to lie in writing or, at least, not in subaltern individuals. Some students faced challenges when trying to consult archives. Doing research on traditional music implies investigating the past for most Seychellois, who see their traditional music as folklore or, as a musician once told me, as “music for tourists.” A few young people said that they were too shy to discuss the topic with their parents or grandparents. In another context, an informant in his fifties told me that he never discussed musical life in the past with elderly persons in his family because it was impolite to question an older person about Seychellois’ culture. Talking about the past in general is not easy in the Seychelles, due to a long history of oppression. Evers notes that the Seychelles Copyright Act underpins many restrictions on freedom of speech and that folklore’s copyright “vests in the Republic.”²⁷

24 Titon 1992, 321.

25 Araújo 2009.

26 Hofman 2010, 26.

27 Evers 2010.

By the end of the semester, however, students were starting fully to appreciate our work and I could feel that “something was happening.”²⁸ A manager of the School of Music thanked me, but explained that some people were worried about students trying to access the archives and that the current infrastructure would not allow us to continue our work. I then realized that my approach—making participants more aware of their environment in order to start developing a critical point of view—bothered the authorities.

While at the NCPA, I questioned the quasi-absence of traditional and local music in the institution. On the one hand, the director of the NCPA was trying to convince professional musicians to come and share their musical heritage, knowledge and expertise inside the school, but without success. On the other, none of the professional musicians I met had studied music at the NCPA²⁹ and they all criticized the institution for different reasons. In the few interactions I saw between professional musicians and music students, the musicians even tried to discourage the students from a musical career, saying that nobody (referring mostly to the country’s authorities) cared about music. I could feel the bitterness in their talk. One day, I asked some musicians whether they felt they had a responsibility to transmit their musical heritage—being among the rare musicians and tradition-bearers still alive—and whether they would take part in some workshops we could organize, for instance in the NCPA. One of them answered:

The Ministry of culture wants to use us to show the good work they do for culture. But it is false. It has been like this for years... We go to meetings that the Ministry and the NAC [National Arts Council] organize, and it’s always the same. Nothing is changing. We musicians don’t get more recognition for our knowledge, talent and work, and our life and work conditions are not getting better. We’re tired of that.³⁰

I noticed this state of despondency in many interviews I made with musicians. Many of them were thinking they would give up their musical activities, “if it were not for the love of music...” some said. But is this “love of music” strong enough to perpetuate a musical heritage under adverse conditions? Very few young musicians are motivated to practice an instrument, and new trends, including computerized music, now dominate the national music scene. I see these decisions not to transmit, perpetuate or take part in a musical heritage, particularly in the framework of a revitalization program, as performative actions (or non-actions) and a way to define an identity in opposition to the dominant.³¹

28 In French, *quelque chose se passe* means both “something is happening” and “something is transmitted.”

29 The NCPA is currently the only school of music, theater, and dance in the country.

30 Anonymous musician, pers. comm., Dec. 2011. All translations from Creole or French into English are mine.

31 Butler 1990.

At one point, I was invited by the leader of NCPA jazz band to participate as a saxophone player, in order to “stimulate local players by bringing new competences to the band and also present a model for young woman musicians.” I also took part in the School of Dance’s end of year rehearsals and show as a dancer. An anthropologist from the Ministry of culture told me that he believes that if young Seychellois see a “foreign white woman” dancing moutya or *sega*, it would certainly contribute to enhancing interest in it. Although I did not choose to dance for this purpose, I could hardly avoid the situation. The comment reveals an inferiority complex—a common situation in post-colonial societies that experienced the slave trade. This interest in the foreign performer raises broader questions about the global politics of representation when it comes to the local display of cultural heritage.

Being involved in programs of the NCPA created situations that gave me access to alternative, otherwise inaccessible points of view, and that helped me to accumulate identities beyond that of researcher and develop other types of relationship with my interlocutors. This position allowed me access to another level of knowledge and experience in relation to my own research, although the moutya was virtually absent from the NCPA during my fieldwork period. At my request, a meeting called *Memwar lanmizik Sesel* (Memories of Seychellois Music) was organized in February 2012, in collaboration with the Director of the NCPA, with the purpose of discussing how moutya could become part of NCPA programs. Workers from the Ministry of culture, including the General Director for Culture, participated as well as experts from the broader community. The discussion was very informative, especially highlighting how Seychellois under forty years of age had typically never experienced “a real moutya” and that, even if it were taught at the NCPA, students would not have opportunity to participate in such an event because it does not happen anymore. “A real moutya” was a construction historically and currently being promoted by the Ministry of culture and some individuals.

In Search of Moutya: A Call for “Salvage Ethnomusicology”³²

I was interested in documenting moutya, which suited the political agenda of the Ministry of culture because one of the reasons the research committee wanted to ensure research results were returned was the intention to submit moutya as Intangible Culture Heritage (ICH) recognized by UNESCO.

32 This expression must be understood here as rhetoric of endangerment, loss, threat and eventual “death” of musical heritage used by some Seychellois concerned with the “almost certain disappearance” of some local traditional music and arguing that urgent solutions that aim to “protect, promote or safeguard” musical heritage need to be found and applied. This attitude corresponds to a specific vision of the problem, as explained by Catherine Grant (2014, 635).

In its musical and choreographed form, moutya is similar to *sega ravanne* from Mauritius and to *maloya* from La Réunion. The “authentic” moutya, to use the words of Seychellois repeating government rhetoric and expressing a desire for moutya revival, consists of drumming on 2 or 3 moutya drums—cylindrical skin drums—a man singing and women singing in response, and men and women dancing. In twelve months of fieldwork, I did not encounter “authentic” moutya. A diachronic approach to musical practices in Seychelles made me realize that it had been the object of a political revitalization and recovery, which resulted in a folklorization, during the Revolution. Moutya is rarely performed today, apart from touristic performances and at big cultural events generally organized by the Ministry of culture and/or the Seychelles Tourism Board, which are promoted abroad to attract tourists to the Seychelles. Some moutya nights are also set up in hotels or by tourists’ agencies, but it is basically impossible for the actors and organizers to meet the criteria of “authentic” moutya. My research revealed no evidence of “authentic” moutya being practiced in the communities. There was, however, evidence of elements of moutya in different Seychellois’ music and cultural expressions and manifestations. For example, some aspects of moutya’s musical expression, such as the characteristic rhythmic formula or sound of the moutya drum, are now included in different local musics. It is also clear to me, as noted by Naylor, that moutya “simultaneously reflects creole identity while serving as a primary influence to the current popular *sega*.”³³

As I started my interviews and began to meet different individuals (tradition bearers, musicians, dancers, policymakers, etc.), I understood that while a number of persons had something to say about moutya, only a very few had an extensive knowledge or in-depth expertise about it, some of whom did not want to participate actively in a “top-down” revitalization project led by the Ministry. Other musicians, however, conscious of the cultural and economic value and potential of the moutya as musical heritage, and as a tourist attraction,³⁴ want to take part in the movement. One problem is that some artists lack resources, and then there is the difficulty in accessing the material traces related to this heritage. In practice, only a few of the most popular moutya songs circulate.

Forming a larger sample, and because the Ministry had paper copies of typed moutya lyrics that were almost unreadable or not usable in other contexts, I transcribed into a Word document a collection of lyrics of moutya songs from documents archived mostly in the Creole Institute at Anse-aux-Pins and National Archives La Bastille (Mahé). The research committee members asked me not to divulge my compilation to anyone, though, due to intellectual property issues, even though I had carefully noted all relevant information in the document (context of collections, and names of researchers and informants). I found myself in a difficult situation when artists asked for access to the collection in order to get inspiration

33 Naylor 1997, 163.

34 Some musicians hope this scenario could lead to world music networks.

and create new musical arrangements using the lyrics. I discussed the dilemma with some committee members. The problem for them was not only the copyrights of music lyrics, but also the intellectual property of the researchers, the authors of the initial documents (non-published), and, finally, the persons who sang the songs for them. This shows how concepts of copyright and intellectual property can, in some cases, produce over-protection that casts heritage in stone and prevents its circulation. Nevertheless, I link this situation to folklore ownership issues contained in the Seychelles Copyright Act as pointed out by Evers (see above) in order to draw attention to a larger issue of institutional control over intellectual property, one which is distinctly at odds with individual human rights, for example, freedom of expression.

During conversations, many musicians and individuals alluded to laws that prohibit playing drums and public gatherings. In (mostly local) research documents, it is said that moutya was banned by British law until 1976 and, thereafter, tolerated only during public holidays from sunset until 9 pm.³⁵ The current Seychelles Penal Code, dated 1935, still includes such “Drums Regulations” section and prohibits playing drums at night and in residential areas.³⁶ According to the Public Order Act, holders of proposed public meetings or gatherings—meaning the concourse of ten or more persons in any public place—must present a written notice of intention, not less than six working days before the date of the public meeting, to request authorization by the Commissioner of Police.³⁷ The reality is that there is a greater chance of getting such authorization with good contacts, and many people still fear the authorities. Organizers of non-official and sporadic events dedicated to moutya also faced these restrictions around 2006-2007, when the police were discouraging these very popular events on the pretext that they undermined public order. In July 2013, the musicians’ association Seymas organized the first *Dimans moutya* (Sunday moutya).³⁸ One year later, Dimans moutya became an official festival supported by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture.

Apart from that, I observed very few concrete initiatives to promote moutya, despite different Ministry representatives’ expressing the will to see it declared an ICH by UNESCO. Although it was not clear to me whether the desire was directed at the Urgent Safeguarding List or the Representative List, my interlocutors at the Ministry of culture presented moutya to me as being still practiced by Seychellois, but also as an “endangered musical heritage” that might “die” if nothing is done because most of those who knew and had mastered the codes and know-how of the practice have disappeared.

35 Estralle 2007, 2; Koechlin 1981, 17.

36 On many occasions in 2015, the Minister of Tourism and Culture, St. Ange, confirmed that a process to remove this law will start soon. See, for instance, Nation 2015. References to online sources are accurate as of 16 February 2016.

37 According to a newspaper article (Uranie 2015), by 2015, the Constitutional Court of the Seychelles had declared Acts 22 and 23 of the Public Order Act 2013 “unconstitutional.”

38 For more information on the emergence of the festival Dimans moutya, see Parent in press.

The problem of “music endangerment” has been conceptualized by ethnomusicologists in terms of sustainability, “both from the perspective of creating viable futures for genres under pressure in the fast-changing contemporary world (e.g. Schippers 2010), and rather more expansively in reference too to the links between music and other sustainability concerns, such as economic and environmental ones (e.g. Titon 2008–2014, 2009).”³⁹ My position concurs with the view adopted by the majority of ethnomusicologists today, acknowledging that “the vitality and very existence of music genres naturally ebb and flow over time.”⁴⁰ Boundaries between musical genres in Seychelles are not clear. Moutya can be seen as constantly changing and adapting to new contexts. Nonetheless, although the creolization process can be observed in everyday life in Seychelles, the official representation of musical heritage is still based on distinctive (fixed) characteristics, inherited from specific cultural groups (mostly Africans or Europeans), and the whole heritage is considered and labeled “creole.” This shortcut background suggests that the local stakeholders and I had “different ‘stories’ about the problem.”⁴¹

Moutya’s “fluidity” makes it difficult to define and to present as an ICH according to UNESCO’s criteria. As the Mauritian anthropologist Rosabelle Boswell writes, “cultural heritage managers and researchers will find it difficult to identify pristine cultural practices and heritages or even a master narrative of heritage in the Indian Ocean,”⁴² and “the emphasis on preservation is at odds with the reality of super-diversity and ongoing creolisation.”⁴³ Seychellois’ cultural authorities must face considerable pressure to meet international dominant ideas about culture. My study revealed the strong influence of international policies and concepts of culture, like those of UNESCO, in the making of national heritage. The local formulations of cultural policies were based on international models, often to the detriment of local specificities.

The initial plan did not include my participation in the preparation of the nomination of moutya as an ICH to UNESCO, but my research was to establish a scientific basis for it. Some people in the Ministry were hoping that my presence and intervention could have an impact on the dynamism of local music. Documentation of musical practices, which comes under ethnological research and inventory work, can be an end in itself—namely preservation—but it does not comprise revitalization and rehabilitation of the practices, though it might coincidentally contribute to them, as has been the case during my study. When I met with the General Director for Culture in January 2012, he asked me to focus my documentation on the elderly bearers of the tradition in order to furnish information to “rehabilitate” the moutya. He also suggested that I visit persons in charge of district management in order to gather

39 Grant 2015, 630.

40 Ibid.

41 Grant 2015.

42 Boswell 2008, 22.

43 Ibid., 36.

information about individuals or groups practicing the moutya, and to encourage them to organize cultural activities with traditional music and dance. During my third stay in Seychelles, an employee of the Heritage section of the Ministry told me that, in his opinion, I was the best person to complete the nomination form because of my knowledge of the field and related issues, convincing me to have a discussion with the Principal Research Officer. I did not want to take charge of the project because I think Seychellois, the “community” to use UNESCO’s terms, must lead the project themselves according to their own values and choices. However, I agreed to lead meetings and writing. During the discussion with the Principal Research Officer, I learned that by contributing concretely to the UNESCO nomination, I would get access to other (the oldest) moutya recordings and material, but we would then need to complete another protocol for this specific action. As requested, I prepared a one-year plan for the preparation of the nomination. I knew the Ministry wanted to move quickly, arguing that maloya from La Réunion (France) and sega from Mauritius—both deriving from the regional and original sega,⁴⁴ like moutya—were declared ICH on the Representative List in 2009 and 2014 respectively.

This evokes the questions of who should represent the community and who “owns” the heritage management process.⁴⁵ It also indicates that, in the Seychelles, declaring ICH is primarily the pursuit of national authorities. Comparison with neighboring nation-states confirms the latter, and exhibits the competition between groups so often deplored vis-à-vis UNESCO heritage lists.⁴⁶

The involvement of ethnomusicologists upstream from official recognition is likely to become increasingly common in the current social and cultural environment of post-industrial societies. Some ethnomusicologists have published on their experiences and observations while involved in the recognition process and on the consequences of UNESCO recognition of musical practices.⁴⁷ As Guillaume Samson puts it, the role of the ethnomusicologist may be, in this context, to “put in perspective all the cultural, political and sociological contemporary issues in which music is part ... in order to consider the risk of drift, instrumentalization and misinterpretation.”⁴⁸ At the same time, applied ethnomusicology should avoid adopting a holistic view that misunderstands communities as homogeneous in order to achieve certain political goals. Samson reminds us of the importance of maintaining “a critical vigilance regarding the relationship we and ‘our expertise’ have with the institutional and political environment in which we conduct our research.”⁴⁹

44 Sega is a polysemic term apparently first used in colonial discourses in the nineteenth century to describe the music of the African and Malagasy slaves and workers in the Mascarene and the Seychelles (Samson 2013, 223).

45 Blake 2009.

46 Samson & Sandroni 2013; Titon 2015a.

47 See Samson 2011; Samson & Sandroni 2013; Sandroni 2010.

48 Samson 2011, 170.

49 Ibid.

Research, Ethics and Authorities

In this vein, it seems essential to me that the researcher takes responsibility for respecting moral and ethical principles. In an intercultural context with different interlocutors, ethics might vary from one person to another, since it refers to values rather than bonds.⁵⁰ The sociocultural dimensions of ethics are plural and complex; different ethical systems are at work in my research.

During the negotiation process with the supervision committee in Seychelles, I presented the consent form that I would introduce to all participants in my research. Such a form, mandatory for all research projects conducted with human participants at many universities globally (see Swijghuisen Reibersberg, this issue), aimed to inform participants of their rights during the research process and to authorize the researcher to use interviews and music recordings for educational purposes. The problem is that my consent form, derived from requirements of the Canadian university at which I was doing my PhD, was at odds with the ethical values of the Ministry and the desire of committee members that I leave with them a copy of all recordings made, including musical performances and interviews. During each stay in the Seychelles, I had to meet the committee members to inform them of issues and developments in my research. While I did not need a visa to enter the country as a Canadian, I systematically had to go to immigration before the end of the first month of each stay and gain a letter of approval from the Ministry of culture in order to have my authorization to stay in the territory renewed. In a meeting with the committee, I explained clearly that I would supply most interviews except for interviews or parts thereof that I was asked not to share for personal reasons. The committee then asked me to provide a list of all my interviewees, insisting that I should include the names of *all* individuals. At that point, my research methodology was moving increasingly towards non-formal discussions, a format in which everybody seemed much more comfortable discussing different issues related to my research and musical practices. Being aware of the need and desire to see musical practices documented and remaining available in the Seychelles after I had left the country, I tried to record as many musicians and musical events as I could, especially moutya. The absence of a clear archives policy and a contract between collectors and the National Archives remains a concern.

One might question the validity to another country of a risks assessment conducted by an occidental or North American university ethics committee.⁵¹ In the Seychelles, instead of building trust with my interlocutors, the consent form was generally perceived as a formality imposed by my university to obtain official permission to use the material collected from individuals and, by signing it, collaborators had freely agreed to participate in the research. Although the purpose of this form is to ensure that a “university must respect the dignity of participants

50 Desroches 2010, 81.

51 Léotar 2011, 32.

and ensure respect for their rights” in the research process, I do not think that participants understood it as protecting them, even though I insisted on available remedies. There were concerns as to how “my university” in Canada would protect “them” from my potential harmful actions or writings, and what did “my university” know about Seychellois’ reality. The forms mandated by ethics committees hardly consider some of the local conditions that can alter individual choices and interests. As ethnomusicologist Frédéric Léotar puts it, “in countries shaped by a vision of society where culture represents political issues inherited from a totalitarian regime, signing an agreement on which appear personal data may not be the best option to build confidence with an interlocutor.”⁵² In a hierarchical society, in which subaltern voices are too often silenced, it is generally not individual interests and desires that count, but those of the community. In this sense, prior approval of my research project by the Ministry of culture certainly reassured some research participants who, without the approval of their superiors in hierarchy—social or professional—would perhaps not dare to participate in such a project. On the other hand, while knowing that local authorities are part of the research project makes it easier for some individuals to agree to participate, some topics become more difficult to elaborate, especially in front of a camera.

As researchers looking for more equity in the research process, we should welcome such initiatives from our interlocutors to “proclaim their right to consultation”⁵³ because they counterbalance the authority often imposed by Western researchers and institutions, and contribute to establishing a dialogue with community authorities we work with. This dialogue eventually proved to be necessary for me to better understand the global issues inherent to local musical practices. Being an (outsider) translator or mediator between collaborators in the Seychelles and academia, I was hoping to “balance” the eventual power and knowledge relationship, inherited from a colonial legacy. As requested by the Ministry’s committee, I try to highlight the work of local researchers, but I normally do not have access to what they might have written. In a protocol, the committee insisted on “working in collaboration with local researchers,” but it was not clear—at least for me—what “working in collaboration” meant in this context.

Overall, I observed an institutionalization of my research that could have adversely affected the outcome of the research findings and complicated my researcher position. It also limited the exploration of some potential issues or revealing situations, restricting the spontaneous aspect of research in our discipline. Agreed-upon government protocol was a formal condition to conduct research in Seychelles. It is relevant to question power relationships implicated in the negotiation that eventually gave me the right to conduct research in the Seychellois’ territory. A researcher’s position of “scientific authority” often has to be negotiated with authorities when in the field.

52 Ibid., 31.

53 Aubert 2007, 12.

The research protocol can be seen as “a sign of the uneasiness felt by some of the ‘observed’ facing their observers.”⁵⁴ As ethnomusicologist Laurent Aubert writes, “it remains to be seen if such a protocol would be likely to cause a greater objectivity in the relation of facts, or if it would risk paralysing the relation dynamics of the exchange.”⁵⁵ In my experience, the protocol seems to have established a tension, more than collaboration, at least in the beginning. It reveals not only issues about heritage management and hegemony in Seychelles—reminding me I do not have authority there and that research results should be approved by the committee—but also a tendency towards “policy-oriented research.”⁵⁶ It finally evokes authority issues regarding the (applied) work of the ethnomusicologist, as pointed out by many researchers.⁵⁷ Music ownership issues can also affect relationships and research when musicians have the “perception that ‘someone is getting rich on [their] music.’”⁵⁸ In the Seychelles’ case, it is not even clear who that “someone” could be: it seems that the committee wanted to “protect” folklore and control research and production from improper appropriation by me—the researcher. Yet the musicians I consulted were worrying more the power of government institutions, and the global music industry, about which they often feel aggrieved. Their worries concerned relations between communities and states (between heritage and governmentality), and between communities and industries (of heritage and the market); questions that are essential in theorizing heritage and cultural policies. I ask, with Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, “[W]hen is protection not a means of dispossession?”⁵⁹ This raises issues of ownership and control over culture⁶⁰ and recorded material,⁶¹ which become increasingly important when money is to be made.⁶²

As with the research protocol, the consent form, and with issues related to intellectual property and copyright, the risk is that over-regulation will not only impede research, but also discourage researchers from collecting and publishing, for fear of not respecting the prerogatives of people they work with.

54 Aubert 2007, 12.

55 Ibid.

56 Weiss 1995.

57 See Seeger 1992; Titon 1992.

58 Seeger 1992, 356.

59 Hafstein 2014, 30.

60 Kapchan 2014, 5; Titon 2015b, 8.

61 Seeger 1992, 350.

62 Titon 2015b, 8.

Facing the Plurality of Stakeholders' Values

Ethnomusicologists may work with music and heritage that are now seen as “cultural assets”⁶³ protected by intellectual property and having an economic value that may be conflated with cultural values.⁶⁴ Many issues we face are “influenced by economic resources and ownership systems, often and currently within the pressures of neoliberalism, but also within pressures or graces of nationalisms, especially in historical terms,”⁶⁵ as is the case in Seychelles. The Seychelles socialist-progressive government recently adopted a Creative Industry Policy, “guided by the UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions adopted in 2005.”⁶⁶ This reflects somehow “its preference for culture that is profitable without public subsidy, is complicit in current modes of neo-liberal government and expansion of corporate capital.”⁶⁷ I am not going to present the paradoxes behind this policy here, but it clearly suggests a commercialization of heritage, as observed in the tourist industry. Discourses of commodification and governmentalization are interrelated and support one another,⁶⁸ but the humanitarian and democratic aspects of creative industry policy might be neglected. In considering governmentalization of cultural heritage in the Seychelles, one should be reminded that the community is the nation as a whole and not the individuals who are part of that community. Authorities’ representing cultural practices becomes depersonalized.

Seychellois artists want to be “professional,” that is to say, earn money, be publicly recognized for their art, and create in order to produce an aesthetic and commercial product. In most cases, the artists refuse to see musical heritage as “national.” They defend their singularity, meanwhile admitting the convening power of music like moutya.

As an (applied) ethnomusicologist, my values tend more towards democracy and social justice in arts, culture and also in the research process. My experience in this case was that my independence was compromised or threatened. I often had the impression my research was not meeting the committee’s expectations in terms of methodology, length and eventually results, or “useful knowledge.” This could be explained by the Ministry’s affinity with the trend towards “policy-based evidence-making,” where research “is created by institutions that have clear research as well as policy agendas.”⁶⁹ As cultural policy researchers Eleonore Belfiore & Oliver Bennett further note, “[i]t is, indeed, challenging (though not necessarily impossible)

63 Titon 2015a, 3.

64 Ibid.

65 Harrison & Pettan 2010, 10.

66 Government of Seychelles 2012, 6.

67 Brouillette 2009, 832.

68 Pyykkönen 2012, 559.

69 Belfiore & Bennett 2010, 136.

to guarantee the freedom required to ask the types of complex, exploratory and genuinely open questions required for knowledge production in the context of policy-oriented commissioned research.”⁷⁰ Academia is not immune to the forces and influences of politics and the market: research funders tend to privilege application of knowledge that has market value⁷¹ and/or concrete community impact.

Conclusions

“Being on both sides” was necessary to understand concerns and issues with musical life in Seychelles. It was also probably the only way to hope that my research would have a potential impact locally, even though I cannot be sure that my ideas will be applied in practice in the ways that I intend.⁷² My argument in this article is consistent with the idea that “[f]or an applied ethnomusicologist working with the aim of assisting endangered music, a comprehensive understanding of actors, stakeholders and forces that influence sustainability is imperative.”⁷³ The *temps long* is necessary in the process of observation and understanding of cultural practices, and also to build up confidence and successful communication. In some cases, our partners have expectations and we need to adjust our methods and goals to meet the criteria and agendas of local authorities,⁷⁴ which corresponds more to the consultative approach than humanities-based research. However, the latter is better at grasping the role of ideas, beliefs and values inherent in musical practices and the policy-making process in particular cases. This can contribute to a better understanding of music and culture, but also to the formulation of public policies at local, national and international levels.

Being an applied ethnomusicologist means being concerned, or “caring,” to use Jeff T. Titon’s words,⁷⁵ with people making music and this goes beyond of the musical act of playing or listening. The position implies substantial professional and ethical dedication to the production and use of knowledge in a way that can impact positively on individuals, communities and musical traditions.

70 Ibid.

71 Harrison 2012, 512.

72 Hofman 2010, 28.

73 Harrison & Pettan 2010, 6.

74 Field & Fox 2007, 9; Hofman 2010, 28–29.

75 Titon 2015a.

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