"MUSIC OF THE SLAVES" IN THE INDIAN OCEAN CREOLE ISLANDS: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE SEYCHELLES

by

MARIE-CHRISTINE PARENT

Abstract: This article examines the development and expression of the *moutya* from Seychelles, in relation to the *sega* from Mauritius and the *maloya* from Reunion. These musical styles and their associated practices are recognised as evidence of an African heritage in the archipelagos. To better understand their connections and singularities, I utilise a diachronic and synchronic approach, at local and regional levels. The purpose is to demonstrate the mobility of musicians and the permeability of musical practices in these islands over time, using history and narratives from the colonial period (from the end of the seventeenth century) to the present, and fieldwork observations. This approach shows how music and dance elements from Africa are creolised on the islands and how they are further adapted as islanders travel around these islands. In the process one musical practice becomes many, although they fall into a matrix of styles sharing similar features. The article approaches the emergence and the transformation of (what would become) *moutya* in the Seychelles by first describing the emergence of musical creativity in the Mascarenes and Seychelles. This is followed by a discussion of the transition from a marginal and resistance form of music to new musical categories. Finally, the article describes circulations and musical exchanges between the islands, opening the door to a better understanding of Creole culture and music in the south-western Indian Ocean islands.

Keywords: Seychelles, Mascarenes Islands, history, *sega*, *moutya*, *maloya*, creole, musical exchanges.

Introduction

The *sega* from Mauritius (including Rodrigues Island), the *moutya* from Seychelles and the *maloya* from Reunion Island, are musical practices and styles[1] unique to the south-western Indian Ocean islands.[2] They all share similar histories, musical and extra-

[1] In this article, I use "style" to refer to a convention of characteristic features of how music is played or expected to sound; while "musical practice" invokes, in addition to musical aspects, the on-going process and the social conditions of making music.

[2] These islands are called "Creole islands" because of the use of a local Creole language by the majority of their population (often called Creole), and a certain revindication (to different levels, according to islands and groups of people) of a Creole culture. Most specialists of so-called Creole societies consider that the concept of creolisation serves first to qualify, in slavery and post-slavery societies of the "New World", a process of cultural creation following a founding violence, a contact whose result is unpredictable (Bonniol 2013). Creolisation is thus approached from the point of view of cultural creation and production, or "cultural creativity" (Baron and Cara 2011). The result of this process of creolisation is called "Creole."

https://doi.org/10.21504/amj.v11i2.2311

musical characteristics. In their "traditional" or "official" forms, these musical practices include singing, drumming and dancing. The limited body of literature on music and dance in the south-western Indian Ocean islands mostly focuses on the study of local phenomena, especially from an anthropological point of view (Déodat 2017, Des Rosiers 2004, Lagarde 2012, La Selve 1984, Naylor 1997, Parent 2017, Samson 1997 and 2006). My contribution relies upon descriptions of circulations and musical exchanges in the Seychelles and between the Seychelles and Mascarenes. The aim is to show how music and dance elements from Africa are adapted on the islands and how they are further adapted as Creole islanders travel around these islands. In the process one musical practice becomes many, although they fall into a matrix of styles sharing similar features.

This article examines the development and expression of these musical practices, with an emphasis on *moutya* and the Seychellois' perspective, relying on both a diachronic and synchronic approach. The purpose is to understand how the mobility of musicians and the permeability of musical practices in these islands unfold over time. Content in the article is derived from history and narratives from the colonial period to the present, and fieldwork observations made between 2011 and 2014. The fact that Seychellois themselves refer to the past when they talk about *moutya* led me to consider the "historical turn" (Howard 2014) in ethnomusicology alongside ethnography.

I approach the emergence and the transformation of (what would become) *moutya* in the Seychelles by reflecting on the history of the Mascarenes and Seychelles and its links with the emergence of musical creativity in the archipelagos. Too little research about music has been conducted in the Seychelles[3] and very few archives are available to provide a true musical historicity.[4] The rare literature and recordings of the Mascarenes' music offers the opportunity to better understand and position *moutya* in the matrix of musical practices of Creole islands. I further discuss the transition of the music from occupying the margin to becoming a form of resistance music, to new musical categories created in the contexts of political and identity claims. This part of the article shows that musical exchanges between islands from the Mascarenes and Seychelles archipelagos was the norm during the colonial era. It also demonstrates how institutional and individual narratives of the colonial past have an impact on the construction of a musical heritage. I proceed to a description of Seychellois' *moutya*, which is in a dynamic relation with *sega* from Mauritius and *maloya* from Reunion. Last, a brief presentation of musical production that Seychellois currently associate with *moutya* illustrates continuing circulations and musical exchanges, and argues that the aesthetic contours of the musical genre are inclusive and not clearly circumscribed.

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[3] To my knowledge, Michael Naylor's work (1997) and mine are the only systematic research on music in the Seychelles.

[4] The oldest field recordings to which we have access were collected by the French researcher, Bernard Koechlin, during a mission in the Indian Ocean for Radio-France, in 1977-1978 (Ocora/Radio-France 2002 [1989]).

"Music of the slaves" in the Seychelles and the Mascarenes Islands

A brief history of the settlement of the Mascarenes and Seychelles will help one understand how musical practices developed on these islands. Uninhabited until the colonisation of these lands, the two archipelagos share a colonial history of slavery. Malagasy slaves first reached this area in 1639, a year after the Dutch East India Company launched its first attempt to colonise Mauritius. French colonisation had a greater impact on the settlement of the region. The French colonial empire took possession of Reunion in 1665, and Mauritius in 1721, and brought slaves, mostly from Madagascar and East Africa, to accompany the colonists. During the first decades of colonisation, the majority of slaves in the Mascarenes originated from Madagascar. By the 1770s, the number of east African slaves traded by French colonisers was double the number of Malagasy. This situation continued until the abolition of slavery in the French colonies, in 1848 (Allen 2010: 63).[5] The settlement of the Seychelles was from 1770. The first inhabitants, including slaves, came from Mauritius, as well as from Reunion Island, then mainly from east Africa (Mozambique and the Swahili coast) and Madagascar. The population of La Digue in Seychelles consisted of political deportees who settled there from 1798 onward (Lionnet 2001: 30), following the uprising in South Reunion. Colonial strategies of the time were to encourage immigration from other neighboring islands already colonised, for the reason that these migrants were accustomed to colonial conditions and could share their experience, knowledge and skills (Chaudenson 2013: 3). Historical research has shown that 92.4% of the slaves brought to the Seychelles in 1826-1827 were Mozambicans (Allen 2004: 37). Moreover, at the end of the eighteenth century, Madagascar often served as a depot for boats from Europe and Africa to the Mascarenes and the Seychelles islands.

On the different islands, French colonisation contributed to the constitution of vernacular Creole languages and the formation of local elements of culture. Mauritius, together with the Seychelles, was ceded to Britain in 1810. Mauritius and the Seychelles became independent republics, respectively in 1968 and 1976. Reunion remains a French overseas department. Beyond the colonial past based on slavery and colonial power relations, mobility and human displacements in the Indian Ocean area from settlement to the present explain the relations and similarities between musical practices in the area. Constant contact between people from different islands shaped these practices.

Although *moutya* has not been the subject of much scientific research up to now, many studies about culture, language and music in the south-western Indian Ocean suggest that *moutya* is similar in poetic, musical and choreographic form to African musical practices such as the *sega* and *maloya* found on the other islands of the Indian Ocean (Chaudenson 1995, La Selve 1984, Lee 1990, Naylor 1997). In the Seychelles, local specialists do not hesitate to compare *moutya* to other "Creole music" [6] from

[5] For the purpose of this article, no focus is given to the Asian and Indian *engagés* imported into the islands after the abolition of slavery and during the second part of the nineteenth century.

[6] Although the term, "Creole music" is questionable, it is used here to refer to musical practices resulting from the transformation processes undergone by the music during colonisation in the

the Caribbean. Among these styles are the *gwoka* from Guadeloupe, the *bèlè* from Martinique and even the *calypso* and the *soca* from the West Indies (N. Salomon pers. comm. 21 November 2011, P. Choppy interview 16 February 2011). Whether in relation to the themes addressed in the lyrics of the songs, the essential components of these practices (the sung voice, percussion and dance), or musical (and dance) performances, there is no doubt that *moutya* is part of the "neo-African traditional musics" (Manuel 1988: 25) born in the colonies where African slaves were taken. A more in-depth study of the historiography of musical practices in the colonies, and of the social and political history of the colonial and postcolonial periods, shows that discourses on their African legacy are the result of relatively new definitions and classifications that serve, to different levels, colonial and postcolonial ideologies, quests of identity, national constructions and heritage policies (see Déodat 2017, Lagarde 2012, Parent 2017).

In the collective memory[7], *moutya* refers to slavery[8]: "It is the music of African slaves, by which they express their suffering", I have been told several times. Because of its presumed origins and to the conditions to which it refers, *moutya* is often perceived as having the stigma of slavery. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to show that African slaves brought this musical practice to the Seychelles and that the latter has been transmitted from generation to generation, as popular mythology has it. Chaudenson drew attention to the political and cultural issues related to this "origins narrative" and pointed out "the probable mistake of those […] who absolutely want to believe in a centuries-old transmission of unchanged African music" (1992: 201).[9] The problem with this discourse which consists of apprehending these musics through their (continental African) origins, is that it fixes them in an ahistorical past and in a frozen form. It fuels the idea that national Creole traditions would only be the preservation of the ancestral practices of black slaves (Déodat 2017, Parent 2017). In these circumstances, it is not surprising to find the presence of a rhetoric of loss and the need to safeguard these musics (Déodat 2017, Lagarde 2012, Parent 2017).

Context of the emergence and development of African derived music and dance in the Seychelles and the Mascarenes Islands

The earliest record that refers to African and Malagasy slave dances in Mauritius dates to the 1760s (Alpers 2019: 90). Chaudenson affirms that it is around the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century that men and women

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West Indies and the Indian Ocean islands. These transformation processes correspond to what Khatile, calls "historical creolisation" (2011).

7 The notion of collective memory is complex and deserves further explanation. I understand it here as a construction and a representation of the past, a conception shared by several ethnomusicologists and anthropologists (Aubert and Charles-Dominique 2009, Shelemay 2006), following the work of Halbwachs (2002 [1925]).

8 As emphasised by Estralle, the word "slavery" refers to several realities in Seychelles, including the slave trade, or a situation in which an individual abuses someone by making him work for little or no income (2007: 2).

9 Translations from French or Creole into English are mine.

in the Mascarenes started to share dancing practices that, "in the eyes of the observers, characterise all the signs of lubricity" (1995: 106).[10] These could be the first expressions of what came to be called "*sega*" among the population. This "black music and dance" are subsequently found in slightly different forms and as "Creole" self-sustaining musical practices in the Creole islands of the Indian Ocean.[11] La Selve later called these first expressions of *sega* in the Mascarenes, "primitive *sega*" (1984).

Historical sources dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century identify *sega* practiced in Île de France as a Mozambican music and dance, for which Mozambican musical instruments were used (Alpers 2019: 92-94). It is interesting to note that these were not only drums, as it is often believed, but also a musical bow and a tubular bamboo zither (*ibid*.: 90-91). Malagasy music and culture were an essential component of the creole culture of the Mascarenes and Seychelles. Popular music such as *quadrille* and *contredanses*, with their origins among settlers, were also appealing to Africans slaves. During ballroom parties, black musicians could occasionally join the band, as observed by the Baron d'Unienville in 1838 in Mauritius: "they dance quadrilles and waltzes to the sound of the violin, which many of them play well enough to serve as fiddlers" (1838: 294-295).[12] Many black musicians could assimilate Western musical and dance gestures into Afro-Mauritian idioms, in a process of creolisation that could have occurred before the late 1830s (Alpers 2019: 98).

The question is how the "primitive *sega*" can be related to what would later be called *moutya* in the Seychelles. As previously stated, the connection was suggested by other researchers and local specialists who compared musical forms and performances. An exhaustive analysis of *moutya* has enabled sufficient data and knowledge to compare it to other musical practices from the Mascarenes (Parent 2017). As I will show, *moutya* is notably similar to Mauritian *sega*. Also, linguistics and historical studies (Chaudenson 1995, 2012) support the hypothesis that, like the Seychellois Creole language, the initial expression of *moutya* developed in the wake of the musical practices of slaves in the Mascarenes (then in full deployment from the late eighteenth century). The music and dance then moved with the first slaves and inhabitants who came to the Seychelles from 1770 onward. Indeed, Seychellois' Creole was already used by the entire population by

[10] The same source (Chaudenson 1995) states that men and women danced in different contexts and drew on different repertoires before this period.

[11] The colonial discourses on "Black music" and musical practices before the abolition of slavery in Reunion and Mauritius have been discussed by Chaudenson (1992, 1995), La Selve (1984) and Samson (2006). They based their observations on travel accounts. It is difficult to find specific information on musical practices in the Seychelles during this period because this archipelago did not constitute a colony in its own right before its separation from Mauritius in 1903, and it suffered from a lack of general interest on the part of the colonial administrators.

[12] The participation of slaves in the musical practices of settlers seems to have been common in the colonies. Guilbault writes to this effect, about the French and English colonies of the Caribbean: "[…] black musicians were pressed by the white masters to play for their ballroom parties. Learning their masters' musical language, black musicians not only heard the music but were also told about the moral and aesthetic values associated with the European traditions" (1984: 148).

the time slavery was abolished in 1835. Seychellois' Creole is a third generation Creole[13] introduced mainly by immigrants from Mauritius, and from Reunion island during the revolutionary period (Chaudenson 2012: 17). One could, in the same way, consider *moutya* as a third generation of the "primitive *sega*", remembering that these musical practices, at least in the form known today, would have developed nearly a century after the local Creole languages.

Under these conditions and in all probability, the first expressions of *moutya* in the Seychelles would have developed in the early nineteenth century, from musical (including dance) elements of what would become the Mauritian *sega* and the *maloya* from Reunion, but also, although to a lesser extent, from musical practices of slaves who came from the eastern part of the African continent. In short, like the *maloya* from Reunion Island, *sega ravann* (sometimes called *sega tipik*) from Mauritius, and *sega tanbour* from Rodrigues Island, *moutya* can be seen in the tradition of the "primitive *sega*." *Moutya* unfolded in a constant relationship with these musical practices (among others) over time, as illustrated in Figure 1.[14]

***Sega* as the music and dance of the Creole Islands of the Indian Ocean**

The French colonialists used racial designations such as "*la danse des Nègres*" or "*le chant des Noirs*" (Déodat 2017) to designate the musical heritage of Africa. The term *sega* was apparently first used in the nineteenth century to describe the music of slaves and workers of African and Malagasy origins in the south-western Indian Ocean islands (*ibid*., Samson 2013: 223). Etymologically, the word *sega* would have undergone phonetic and graphic transformations, making it evolve from "*tchiéga*" to "*tchéga*", and then "*chéga*" and, finally, "*séga*" (Chaudenson 1992: 191). Chaudenson supports a Mozambican origin of the word, arguing that the term "*sega*" means "to raise, to roll up our clothes" (characteristic gesture of the dance of the *sega*) in a bantu language.

Sega is now a polysemous term, referring to different types of music according to periods and territories. In the Seychelles, *sega* designates either *sega tranble* or *sega otantik* (no longer practiced) [15], or "modern *sega*"[16], a music style using "occidental"

[13] The first generation of Creole language (in the Indian Ocean) is one created by a mix of French, Malagasy and different African languages on Reunion Island (then Bourbon Island) around the end of the seventeenth century; the second developed following the settlement of Mauritius (then Isle de France) during the first half of the eighteenth century; the third is the language emerging in the Seychelles in the years following the arrival of the first inhabitants. Thus, each "generation" of the dialect is based on the previous one, to which is added the influence of the local context.

[14] This sketch indicates the beginning of the musical practices that led to musical genres being recognised today, but the appellations and contemporary forms of these musics are more recent. Also, in the interests of simplification and to clearly illustrate the relations between the music stemming from the African inheritance in the south-western Indian Ocean islands, it does not consider European or other contributions that are inherently part of this music.

[15] Although *sega otantik* shares affinities with *moutya* (Koechlin 1981:15), it is not discussed in this article. The absence of audio or video archives available during my research and the lack of a consensual description of the phenomenon makes it difficult to include in this analysis.

[16] The origin of "modern *sega*" is very controversial in the Seychelles. For some musicians, Seychellois

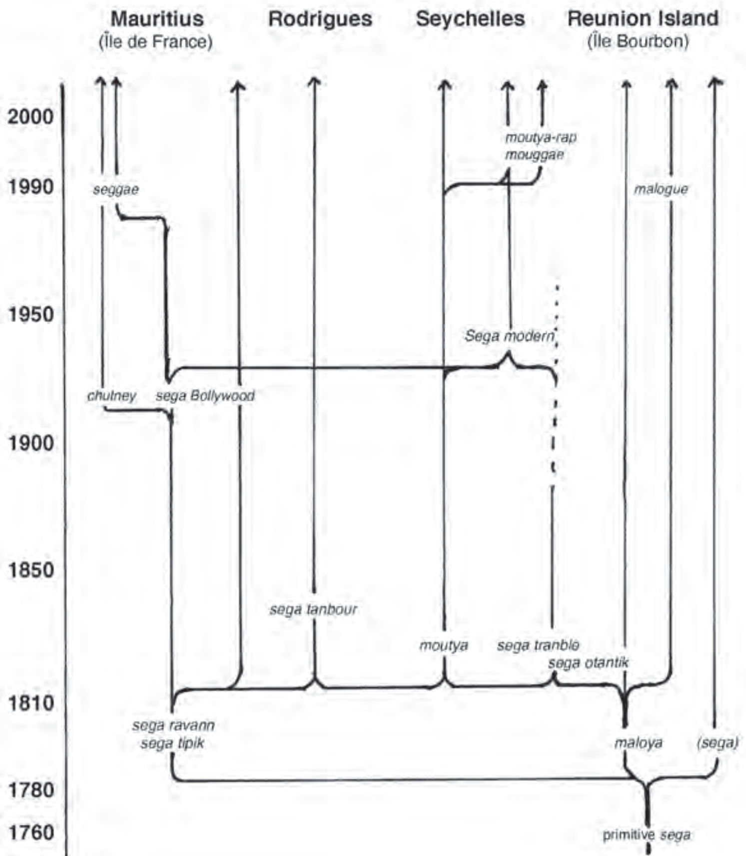

Figure 1. Development and relations between musical practices inherited from Africa in the south-western Indian Ocean Islands. Sketch by Author.

instruments such as the guitar, a bass and a drum. This combination emerged in the 1950s. In the Mascarenes, *sega*, alleged to be of African origin, has become one of the figures of the quadrille, a ballroom dance inherited from the French *contredanse* (Chaudenson 1995: 111). On Rodrigues Island, a distinction is made between *segakordeon* (*sega* played on an accordion, in the *quadrille*) and *sega tanbour* (*sega* with a drum, of "African origin"), and from *sega plant zariko* (*sega* for planting beans, related to field work) (Samson 2001: 166). In Reunion Island, the name *sega* prevails mainly in the dominant discourse and in phonographic production from the second half of the twentieth century (Samson 2013: 223). The situation is different in Mauritius, where *sega tipik* is recognised as the musical heritage of descendants of African slaves. More recent forms of *sega* in Mauritius include *sega engagé* (protest songs), *seggae* (a mix of

modern *sega* is a local appropriation of Mauritian popular *sega*. For others, it is a continuation of Seychellois *sega* and *moutya*.

sega and reggae), or *sega* Bollywood (Déodat 2017, Servan-Schreiber 2010).

The words *moutya* and *maloya* probably only date from the twentieth century. The use of the term *moutya* before this period has not been seriously investigated by historians or linguists and there is no consensus on its origin. It seems apt to hypothesise that it emerged as late as in the twentieth century. This is the case with the word, *maloya*, which appeared only in the 1930s, in the repertoire of the singer and musician, Georges Fourcade. The term was then used to refer to musical practices of the "Black community" (Lagarde 2007: 30). Research to date indicates that the oldest historical document referring to *moutya* was written by John Thomas Bradley. Bradley described the *moutya* as "a primitive romp with African overtones performed in the open air to the beating of drums" (1940: 46, cited in Naylor 1997: 159). The description is unflattering but reflects the moral standards in force at the time. The process of naming and categorising music in these Creole islands is ambiguous and reflects social values of the dominant classes and their power relations. The persistence of categorisations inherited from slavery and colonisation has also been highlighted by anthropologists and ethnomusicologists working in the Mascarenes (Déodat 2017, Desroches and Samson 2002, Lagarde 2007).

From resistance and marginal to iconic music: The construction of a "traditional" music

It is well known that musical practices of the African and Malagasy in the Mascarenes and the Seychelles were not encouraged, and were often prohibited by the administrative and religious authorities during the colonial period. Because of persecutions and the prejudice that developed against them during the major part of the colonial period, these musical practices were excluded from the official history. Although marginalised, these practices have resisted the sanctions of colonial power.

Most Seychellois I interviewed told me that between the 1950s and the 1980s, a *moutya* event could occur in remote places, in the mountains of Mahé, La Digue or Praslin, on Saturday nights after work. Furthermore, most people aged around 60 and 70 years old at the time of my research (2011-2014), and especially men, were sent to the Outer Islands[17] to work in the plantations, mostly in the coconut industry. Playing, singing and dancing *moutya* (*sega*) provided the main entertainment for these people.

Rona Barbe was born in the 1950s and raised on Mahé, the main island of the Seychelles. He started to play *moutya* drum on Desroches Island when he was twelve years old. He told me about his life as a worker in eight different islands of the Seychelles archipelago and on Diego Garcia Island (in the Chagos archipelago). In his little free time on the islands, especially on Saturday nights, he participated in community music and dance evenings. Plantation workers on these islands would call their music *sega* or *moutya*, and, particularly on Diego Garcia, Seychellois shared those musical moments

[17] The Outer Islands are situated beyond the Seychelles Plateau, which defines the location of the granitic Inner Islands archipelago to the east. They are located between 230km and 1150km from Mahé, the main island.

with Mauritians. Songs were accompanied by a guitar and two to five drums. Rona Barbe is now known by the musicians on Mahé as a Seychellois who plays drum like a Mauritian. His case is not isolated. Back on Mahé since the 1980s, the musician played with the National Troupe and had rare opportunities to travel and represent Seychelles. However, this *moutya* is, according to him, a "modern *moutya* played in hotels", and has little to do with what he experienced as a worker on the islands. He can be seen in the photograph in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Rona Barbe holding his *moutya* drum during an interview at his home, Mont-Buxton, Mahé. 20 February 2013. Photograph by Author.

Following independence, *sega*, *moutya* and *maloya* were emphasised and folklorised through a narrative that assigns them a fixed, distant origin (African or Magalasy ancestral roots) to confirm their perceived authenticity. This recognition laid the foundation for a distinction based on a "racial apprehension of musical diversity" in the islands (Desroches and Samson 2002: 208).

In Reunion Island, *maloya* is opposed to *sega*. As mentioned earlier, this official distinction between the two musical genres was made with the work of the songwriter, Georges Fourcade, in the 1930s. In the context of La Reunion (unlike the case of

Mauritius, for example), *sega* can be described as songs in the Creole language, played on modern (western) instruments, based on a typical local rhythm. It was the only official and mediatised music from La Reunion until the 1960s (Samson 2001: 159). From the 1970s, *maloya* became a political tool for the *Parti communiste*, in reaction to the domination of the "*métropole française*", and a musical icon (Lagarde 2007; Samson 2008). It would take another decade for commemorative and institutional policies to be established and for *maloya* to enter the public and media space.

In Mauritius, a similar process of differentiation started at the end of the nineteenth century with the work of the Mauritian author, Charles Baissac (Déodat 2017: 97), who defined *sega tipik* (of African origin) in opposition to *sega salon* (ballroom dance). *Sega tipik* appeared in the national media and tourist events from the 1950s-1960s, but the *Nuit du sega*, in 1964, was definitely the outstanding event where *sega tipik* was presented as a national tradition (Déodat 2017: 22, 117–118).

Until independence in 1976, the colonial government in the Seychelles did not show much interest in cultural policies. This period was troubled by political instability and, one year after independence, a coup led to a one-party system in what Seychellois call the Revolution. As part of building the new nation based on the concept of "*créolité*"[18], the different musical traditions of the archipelago were documented and put on stage, and cultural troupes were created in the different districts of the country (see also Parent 2015, 2017, 2020). At the same time, the act of playing music was restricted by the government, to the structures they had put in place. Many musicians and dancers remember how *moutya* suddenly became staged, the choreographies organised, the lyrics composed, and then approved by a committee named by the government. By recognising *moutya* as an official part of the new nation's heritage, the government contributed to folklorising *moutya*. For most Seychellois, the music soon became "a music for tourists" (Parent 2020). According to Marcel Rosalie, former director of the Culture Section at the Ministry, there was a political will to put different musical styles on stage "next to each other", "to the same level", to show the cultural diversity of the country and deny the popular belief that "the people from the Seychelles (in opposition to the colonisers) do not have culture" (Interview 1 February 2012). Paradoxically, while the idea was to make all cultural aspects "Creole", research and local newspapers presented the different cultural styles in relation to their "African" or "European" origin (Parent 2017: 10).

In fact, recognition and legitimisation of *maloya*, *sega* and *moutya* only concerns the "traditional", or even the "Africanised" dimension of the music and dance. Staged shows for tourists present these musics as coming from a distant Africa. The research of the ancestral origins of *sega*, *moutya* and *maloya* found aesthetic transformations, that correspond to what Desroches called "the staging of a musical territory" (2011). In

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[18] *Créolité* usually refers to the French Caribbean literary movement led by Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant and Jean Bernabé. In the Seychelles, *créolité* is more a nationalist, political ideology based on inclusion and has an impact on the construction of a "Creole" heritage (see Parent 2015, 2017).

this sense, the frequent use of percussion instruments, without melodic or harmonic accompaniment, is significant. These are often preferred organological choices when it comes to presenting *sega tipik* (Déodat 2017), *moutya* (Parent 2017), *maloya* (Desroches and Samson 2002), or even the *kalenda* in Martinique (Desroches 2011), in their "authentic" or "traditional" form. Similar observations could be made about danced gestures and sung voices that tend to adopt what is considered as an "African aesthetic."

***Sega, moutya* and *maloya*: Similarities and differences**

Although the *Sega, moutya* and *maloya* have much in common, each has its own specific features. Musical practices can also vary in different communities, or among different individuals, in the same country or island. While a part of the written or oral descriptions of these musics and dances might be the result of heritage making in connection with identity and political claims, it is interesting to compare current musical and dance practices, and discourses. A comparative analysis allows one to see what one community might have borrowed from another, what aspects of the musical practices or styles have been preserved by individual communities, or what appears to have been introduced more recently, for example.

The spiritual power of "Black music"

According to Floyd Jr., "scholars seem to agree that the aim of African music has always been to translate the experience of life and of the spiritual world into sound" (1995: 32). In this perspective, *sega, moutya* and *maloya* can certainly be considered as styles in tribute to an African past.[19] However, in postcolonial Mascarenes and Seychelles, only *maloya* seems to have retained an important spiritual dimension. A certain type of *maloya* is recognised as a form of communication between the ancestors' spirits and the assembly. This devotional *maloya* is called *maloya servis* or *maloya kabare*, in opposition to a more festive *maloya*, whose themes are related to everyday life. *Maloya servis* is not associated with the African continent, but with Malagasy and Malbar (from Indian origin) rituals (Lagarde 2007, 2012). Because of this specificity, *maloya servis* will not be considered in this article. Focus is on the profane *maloya*, although both practices are permeable.

Music and dance performance

Musical forms and the performance of *sega tipik*, *moutya otantik* and *maloya*, as known today, were born in the context of decolonisation, in a relationship to the past conditioned by identity and political claims. There is no doubt that islanders had music and dance practices before that movement, but, in the absence or scarcity of musical archives, narratives and memories of individuals become the main source of knowledge about these styles.

[19] Koechlin postulates an original sacred aspect to *moutya* and Seychellois' *sega*, associating them with *maloya* from La Reunion and a Malagasy origin (1981: 2). In the Seychelles, many informants mentioned the "spiritual power of *moutya*."

What Seychellois call "*moutya otantik*" (authentic *moutya*) refers to practices from before the Revolution, "*dan lakour*" (in the yard) or "*dan leo*" (in the mountains), but many of its elements were folklorised during the construction of a nationhood. *Moutya otantik* therefore carries values of the post-revolutionary period. Based on an analysis of my data and interviews in the Seychelles between 2011 and 2014, a recurring procedure for the dance is as follows:

> *Men and women gather, usually on a Saturday after work, around a bonfire made out of coconut leaves. Drummers heat the drums to get the right pitch. One or two men then start to improvise a song's lyrics on a familiar melody*[20]*, and women reply with high-pitched voices. Simultaneously, women dance, holding their skirts and swaying their hips. Male dancers join them and select a partner, direct their attention to her (without touching her) until the climax of the dance* (Fieldnotes).

This description is very similar to what has been written about Mauritian *sega* (Déodat 2017, Lee 1990: 19–21, Servan-Schreiber 2012: 12–120). Also, *sega* from Mauritius and *moutya* from Seychelles both use strictly local Creole languages, which remain very similar in the two countries. Those who performed these sung improvisations took pleasure in knowing that the masters (the *Grands Blancs*) or foreigners would not understand the full implication of the lyrics or their double meaning. The use of the double meaning is called *koze kontrer* in Seychellois' Creole. This technique, allowing an infringement of the colonial rules to a certain extent is also evident in Mauritian *sega* (Lee 1990: 31). In both cases, these descriptions became the reference for staging what is now called *moutya otantik* and *sega tipik*. As Déodat correctly observes, these new genres imply "a new definition […] that fits into a logic of restoration of the past" (2017: 125).

Beyond musical characteristics, the body language of the dancers distinguishes *sega tipik*, *moutya* and *maloya* from other musical styles, especially those of European origin. The body is anchored in the ground, with feet held parallel, flat on the ground and spaced at the width of the hips. The knees are slightly bent; the trunk is to the right or leaning a little forward, and arms often extended on each side, for women to hold their skirts. Even though men and women do not touch one other while dancing, the dance carries sexual connotations. Observations, descriptions and explanations of *moutya* dancing made by Seychellois are very similar to those written about Mauritian *sega* (Servan-Schreiber 2010: 119), which shows, once again, the affinities between the two practices. The Seychellois musician and dancer, Keven Valentin, specified that *moutya* dancers never fall on their knees or dance on the ground (Interview 5 February 2014). Mauritian *sega* dancers do fall on their knees while dancing (Lee 1990: 21, Servan-Schreiber 2010: 119). Many Seychellois differentiate *moutya* from other dances in the Seychelles (especially modern *sega*), insisting that dancers should keep the feet flat on the ground while moving. From my observations, this discourse seems

[20] There is a limited number of melodies used in the composition process. See Parent (2017: 346, 347) for more information.

simplified and the constant iteration of this reference can be understood in terms of identity positioning and the characterisation of *moutya* in comparison to other music. Boyer (n.d.) noticed the same phenomenon where Reunionnais also insist on the necessity to keep the feet flat on the ground while dancing *maloya*, as opposed to other dances from La Réunion.

If similarities between *sega* (*typik*) and *moutya* are often evoked by Seychellois, fewer of them compare *moutya* to *maloya*, although they admit both have the same roots. According to the Seychellois, Norbert Salomon, before the Seychellois' Revolution *moutya* was musically closer to *maloya* from Reunion, and it was more "*pile*" and stronger (Interview 26 January 2012). A few informants used the term "*pile*" without being able to explain it in words, but our discussions led me to understand that it refers to the bass sound of the *moutya* drum which emphasises the beat.[21] These sounds tend to be less audible in contemporary *moutya*, where the sound on the upbeat is often more accentuated and louder than the beat itself, as is the case in the Mauritian *sega* and the Seychellois modern *sega*. The latter is, for many Seychellois, inspired by (some of them would say plagiarised) Mauritian *sega*, which has a faster tempo than *moutya* and has been very popular everywhere in the Indian ocean islands in recent decades. Another way to interpret this recent change in *moutya* comes from the affirmation made by many Seychellois that *moutya* comes from La Digue island. The historical relationship between La Digue and Reunion could explain why *moutya*'s older sound was closer to the *maloya*. With time, Mahé became the cultural centre, being influenced by what was played on the different islands, including Seychellois islands, and Mauritius.

Formal musical elements and instruments

It is not possible within the framework of this article to propose an exhaustive, formal analysis of the referred musical practices. I describe common elements and others that are distinctive, to understand the musical practices and styles, and underlying structures of the musics.

Musically speaking, *sega*, *moutya* and *maloya* present a unique sort of polyrhythm that lies somewhere between the Western 6/8 and 4/4 time signatures, and it is charged with rhythmic tensions caused by accented upbeats. *Sega* and *moutya* do not consist of a variety of rhythms to mark different parts of an event, order a variety of dance steps or refer to deities, as is sometimes the case in other music. *Maloya* presents a more complex rhythmic organisation, depending on performance contexts (see also Lagarde 2012), although a part of the repertoire played by cultural troupes is based on a rhythm that is similar to *sega* and *moutya*.[22]

The basic rhythm of the *moutya* and *sega* (drum) can be simplified as a 6/8 time

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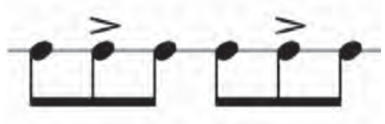
[21] The term "*pile*" is used in Reunion and refers at the same time to the sexual act and the act of dancing *maloya* (Lagarde 2012: 239).

[22] The *maloya* troupe of Firmin Viry in La Reunion offers a good example in this sense: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gmah0g3Hvwc [accessed 10 February 2019]. The first song is similar to *moutya* and *sega* rhythmically, in the call and response form, shouted interjections and dancing style.

signature, with a distinctive syncopation marked by a loud, open stroke on the second and fifth subdivisions (see Transcription 1).[23] The length of the first quaver tends to be longer at times, giving the impression of a binary metre. Analysis demonstrates that the *moutya*'s polyrhythmic character takes form in the superimposition of the different elements that compose it: drumbeats, hand strokes, singing and dancing (Parent 2017). The addition of instruments such as bass or guitar adds to the polyrhythmic nature of the music.



Transcription 1. *Moutya* and *sega* basic rhythm. Transcription by Author.

Although these styles of music can be played on various instruments, the staging of their "authentic" forms for events or for tourists implies specific instruments that refer to an ancestral Africa. *Sega* and *moutya* are played on a shallow, circular frame drum, sometimes equipped with jingles[24], on which an animal skin (usually goat, but sometimes cow) is glued (Seychelles) or nailed (Mauritius). It is called *moutya* drum in the Seychelles and *ravann* in Mauritius. It is now considered "traditional" in both countries, although it replaced the large drum and the musical bow (*bob* or *bonm*) during the process of achieving national acceptance (Alpers 2019: 101). This type of frame drum is also found in many islands of the south-western Indian Ocean: the *amponga tapaka* in Madagascar, the *tari* in Mayotte, the *tar* in the Comoros, the *tanbour malbar* in Reunion, and the *tanbour* on Rodrigues and Agalega Island. Within the area, it is only in Seychelles, Mauritius, Rodrigues and Agalega that the frame drum has become the prerogative of the Creole descendants of African slaves. In Mayotte and the Comoros, it is played by Islamic communities, as in East Africa and parts of Asia. In Reunion, the *tanbour malbar*, with its origins in southern India is related to the ritualised plantation music of the Malbar population (Desroches 2000). This is the case in the French West Indies, where the frame drum (*tapou*) is used in religious ceremonies of Hindu origin (Desroches 1996). Thus, *moutya* and *ravann* drums are characterised by the specificity of the population (Creole) who uses them, and the contexts (secular, entertainment) in which they are used. Moreover, it is one of the rare drums that is held vertically on the leg of the drummer (see Figure 3). It is interesting to note that this position is also used in the French Antilles by the *tanbou di bass* (Basque drum) players.

[23] See examples of *sega tipik*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wv6u8GNivr8; and moutya: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AaKiYcWScPs&index=15&list=PLwO-xnhvvwNe2XAInYHjLcIOtPJnZriuY&t=0s. Both were filmed in the 1990s [accessed 10 February 2019].

[24] The presence of jingles on *moutya* drums has been confirmed by most informants. They are optional on the *ravann* (Ballgobin and Antoine 2003: 78–79), but present on the *tanbour* from Rodrigues (Samson 1997: 19).

Figure 3. *Moutya* drum from the Seychelles (without jingles), belonging to Brian Matombe. Grande-Anse, Mahé. 10 February 2011. Photograph by Author.

Today, the *moutya* drum is very similar to the *ravann*, but many informants told me that it could sometimes have a smaller diameter to the *ravann* (approximately 35 to 55 centimeters to the *ravann*'s 45 to 55 centimeters), and the frame could be as thick as 12 centimeters (between 5 to 7 centimeters for *ravann*).[25]

Table 1 summarises the main features of the drums used in the musical styles recognised as part of the African heritage in the Mascarenes and Seychelles:

[25] For further detail on frame drums used in the south-western Indian Ocean, and especially on *moutya* drum, see Parent (2017: 298-306).

Table 1. Typology of drums used in "primitive *sega*" in the Mascarenes and Seychelles.

	Selected typology criteria	Types of drums			
		Moutya (Seychelles)	*Sega (otantik)* (Seychelles)	*Ravann* (Mauritius) and *tanbour* (Rodrigues & Agalega)	*Roulèr* (Reunion)
Physical characteristics	Drum shape				
	• Circular with one membrane	X		X	
	• Conical drum (wooden slats) with one membrane				X
	• Conical drum (trunk) with one membrane		X		
	Method of fixing the skin on the drum				
	• Lacing				X
	• Gluing	X	X		
	• Nailing			X	
	Presence of accessories				
	• Jingles	Yes	No	Sometimes	No
Execution modalities	Drum skin struck with hands	X	X	X	X
	Playing position				
	•Drum held vertically on the thigh	X		X	
	•Drum lying on the ground		X		X

The frame drum is not used in the *maloya* from Reunion. The *maloya* drum, called *roulèr*, is a conical drum made of wooden slats with a single skin membrane laced on the body of the drum. It is different to the *moutya* drum and *ravann*, but it is closer to what Seychellois call *sega* drum, a drum that was used in the now obsolete musical genre "authentic *sega*." To play *roulèr* or *sega* drum, the musician sits on the drum, which is positioned on the ground.

The *moutya otantik* is generally described as using only drums, but many Seychellois told me they could use different everyday objects to beat the rhythm. Jerry cans were the most common.[26] Most performances observed during fieldwork included the use of idiophones. These are borrowed from other local or regional musical genres. The addition of the triangle in the *moutya* seems to date from no more than fifty years ago. The triangle is recognised in Seychelles as being part of the accompaniment of *kanmtole* and *kontredans*, ballroom dances of European origin. The triangle may have gradually been integrated into *moutya* more or less from the 1970s and the 1980s.

[26] Koechlin wrote that *moutya* was played on two "large tambourines" (*moutya* drums), but the sketch that illustrates his description shows one of the men playing on a large jerry can (1981: 15–16).

At this time, modern *sega* and *moutya* were becoming confused, being presented frequently in similar contexts where a single musical genre was formed. The triangle is used in other musical practices from the "primitive *sega*" in other islands of the Indian Ocean, similar in style to the music from the French West Indies and Louisiana. It is considered an integral part of the Mauritian *sega tipik* (Ballgobin and Antoine 2003: 80), but there is no further knowledge about when it was introduced, nor its importance in accompanying *sega*. There is more information about the presence of the triangle in *sega tanbour* from Rodrigues (Des Rosiers 2004, Samson 1997). Des Rosiers suggests that its use is a recent development, that is, since the second half of the 1970s, a period which corresponds to the formation of the first groups of traditional music and the staging of the practice (2004: 241). Samson compared musical instruments dating from this period and observes that triangles are absent from *sega tanbour*, while they are present in accordion music, in the 1978 recordings made on Rodrigues Island by Claudie Marcel-Dubois and Maguy Pichonnet-Andral. Triangles appear a few years later in the album "*Maurice: Sega ravann mauricien et Sega tanbour de l'Île Rodrigues*", recorded in 1981 and published by Ocora in 1983 (Samson 1997: 21). In Reunion, the triangle would be used as much in *maloya* and *sega* as in any other musical form (La Selve 1984). The use of the triangle in *moutya* seems fairly recent and seems to have followed a trend similar to that observed in the neighboring islands.

The presence of a musical instrument called *lasinyal* has been noted on the Seychellois island of La Digue. It is not specific to *moutya*, but to all "Seychellois music" as presented by the group, *Masezarin*. The group consists of women of the Ladouce family, whose musical activities have been known to the population of the island for at least three generations. This idiophone is vibrated by striking, with two sticks, a hollow body, traditionally made of bamboo. The instrument I saw on La Digue was not made of bamboo, but of a piece of sheet metal fixed on a wooden support (see Figure 4).

This organological change has a considerable effect on the instrument's tone, which is more metallic. There is a similar instrument in Reunion and Madagascar, with the body made of bamboo called *piker* (Lagarde 2007: 30, La Selve 1984: 223) or *tsipetrika* (Emoff 2008: 128). It is interesting to recall that the first inhabitants of La Digue came from Reunion, which could explain why this instrument is restricted to this island.

Another instrument, never previously presented as "Seychellois", accompanies almost all *moutya* observed during my fieldwork, with the exception of performances on the islands of La Digue and Praslin. Known as *maravann* or *kayamb*, this type of idiophone is found in the *sega* of Mauritius and the *maloya* of Reunion. It is not locally made, but usually comes from nearby islands. It is a raft rattle, made of a wooden frame, covered on both sides with tied or studded sugar cane rods. This receptacle usually contains tropical plant seeds. The musician holds the instrument with both hands lengthwise and shakes it from side to side, thereby creating the characteristic sound of the instrument (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. *Lasinyal* player. *Domaine de l'Orangeraie* hotel, La Digue, Seychelles. 29 March 2013. Photograph by Author.

Figure 5. Presence of the *kayamb* (on the left) in a rehearsal with Norville Ernesta's family. Mont-Buxton, Mahé. April 2011. Photograph by Author.

Beyond cultural heritage: The emergence of a regional sound

As cultural heritage, *moutya* cannot be studied, described and explained without considering similar practices in neighboring islands. Parallel to the development of stage performances from the end of the colonial period, musical styles in the Seychelles and Mascarenes developed through recordings. In the 1990s, many Seychellois artists and musicians such as Jean-Marc Volcy, Keven Valentin and El Manager decided to reintroduce elements of *moutya* in their music. Even though these musicians oriented their research and creation towards Seychellois' music, the influence of Mauritian music was never far. During the 1980s, Mauritius was vibrating to the sound of *seggae* (a mix of *sega* and *reggae*) of the Mauritian singer, Kaya. The movement was soon followed by the introduction of *malogue* (*maloya-reggae*) in Reunion. El Manager introduced *mouggae* in the Seychelles, thereby mixing *moutya* and *reggae*. In 1993, the singer Jean-Marc Volcy won the First Prize in the African Category of the international song competition sponsored by *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) with a musical arrangement of an "old" *moutya* song called *Vandredi Sen* (Good Friday). He has achieved success in the Seychelles and in Mauritius, where he recorded most of his albums. More recently, the band *Fek Arive* became a reference among Seychellois for the style they named "*sega-moutya*", a music influenced by Seychellois *moutya*, popular *sega* and other local music such as *kontredans,* and Mauritian *sega tipik*. Musicians of the group play *ravann* (made in Mauritius, with a plastic membrane), *maravann* or *kayamb* (an instrument lent to *sega* and *maloya*, described above), and *djembe*. The *djembe* was recently introduced in *moutya*, to occasionally replace *moutya* drums.[27] Seychellois musicians usually sit on it and play it as if it were a *roulèr* (from la Réunion), a *gwoka* drum (from Guadeloupe), a *tanbou bèlè* (from Martinique), or even the (former) *sega otantik* drum from Seychelles (see Figure 6). This illustrates continuing circulations and musical exchanges in the region, and beyond.

It is necessary to re-position *sega*, *moutya* and *maloya* in a broader and more flexible geographical and historical/memorial setting to better understand their development to the present time. The political and social dynamics of the region are essential to discuss the creolisation processes of music in the Seychelles (Naylor 1997: 156) and in the south-western Indian Ocean region. Creole music is inclusive and can be compared in many aspects to African popular music, under the prism of "social reconstructionism" (Emielu 2011: 372). It is part of a tradition of continual change, not only the result of original exchanges over time, but also a continued process of exchange, with no geographical limit. *Sega*, *moutya* and *maloya* share the same roots. They became different musical practices and genres, while falling into a matrix of styles

[27] The scarcity of *moutya* drums is explained, according to several interviewees, by the lack of availability of goat skins. Investigation during my fieldwork (between 2011 and 2014) reveals that it is more a lack of motivation to collect skins and prepare them as this task consists of rather difficult work. As for the *djembe*, this West African instrument has been introduced in the Seychelles in the last fifteen years, by tourists or members of the Seychelles diaspora returning from Europe and North America.

Figure 6. *Fek Arive* during the *Festival Kreol* show, 30 October 2011. Photograph by Author.

sharing similar features. While this music emerges on the international scene, one will no doubt soon be talking about a Creole sound from the islands of the Indian Ocean, in tribute to the ancestors of African slaves.

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