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

Indra Persaud
University of Seychelles
Seychelles
Indra.Persaud@unisey.ac.sc

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> *Prezan zot in vwar ki nou en nasyon ki annan son langaz ek son sanson.*
> (Now they see that we are a nation with our own language and our own song.)
> Patrick Victor (*Zwe Sa Lanmizik*).
> *Dan nou lalang nou a ekrir pour nou zanfan lir.*
> (In our language we can write for our children to read.)
> Patrick Victor (*Liberte Total*).

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

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

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

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

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

Curriculum Philosophy: cosmopolitan and *Kreol*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

[1] Interviews with geography teachers were conducted as part of the author's doctoral research (Persaud, 2017). An article (Persaud, 2019) summarises the methodology used to gather geography teachers' stories.

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

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

Source: Ministry of Education (2007).

Curriculum governance: economies and diseconomies of scale

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

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

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

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

---

[2] Personal communications, May 5, 2011 and February 13, 2014; see Persaud (2017).

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

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

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

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

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

Curriculum making: connections and disconnections

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

---

[3] Personal conversation, May 20, 2015; Persaud (2017).
[4] Ministry official, personal conversation, May 20, 2015; Persaud (2017).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Curriculum entitlement: individualism and the global 'knowledge economy'

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

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

---

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

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

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

Multi-scalar identities in the Seychelles geography classroom

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Disclaimer

This article did not benefit from research funding.

References

Allen, J. and Massey, D. (1995). *Geographical worlds*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
Anderson, B. (2006). (2006). *Imagined communities*. London; Verso.
Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity al large: Cultural dimensions of globalization.* Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.
Baldacchino, G. (2008). Studying islands: On whose terms? Some epistemological and methodological challenges to the pursuit of island studies. *Island Studies Journal*, 3(1), 37-56.
Blum, N. (2008). Ethnography and environmental education: understanding the relationships between schools and communities in Costa Rica. *Ethnography and Education*, 3(1), 33-48.
Bray, M. and Steward, L (1998). *Examination systems in small states: Perspectives on policy, models and operations*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Bray, M. and Adam, K. (2001). The dialectic of the international and the national: secondary school examinations in Maldives. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *21*(3), 231-244.

Campling, L., Purvis, M-T. and Confiance, H. (2011). *Social policy in Seychelles*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Clandinin, D. J. and Connelly, F. M. (1992). Teacher as curriculum maker. In P. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of curriculum* (pp. 363-461). New York: Macmillan.

Crossley, M., Bray, M. and Packer, S. (2011). *Education in small states: Policies and priorities*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Crossley, M. & Holmes, K. (2001). Challenges for educational research: international development, partnerships and capacity building in small states, *Oxford Review of Education*, *27*(3), 395-409.

Dale, R. and Robertson, S. (2009). *Globalisation and Europeanisation in education*. New York: Symposium Books.

Department for Education (2014). *The national curriculum in England*. Framework document, UK Government.

Domingue, J-M. (2001). Secondary education in Seychelles. In Report of the Third Annual Education Conference: *Secondary education: Challenges of the 21st Century*. Mahé, Seychelles: Ministry of Education, Government of Seychelles.

Elliott, A. and Urry, J. (2010). *Mobile lives.* Oxford: Routledge.

Fauvel, A.-A. (1909). Documents on history of the Seychelles anterior to 1810. Government Printing Office, Mahé, Seychelles, via World Digital Library. Retrieved from: https://web.archive.org/web/20140707084223/http:/www.wdl.org/en/item/2396/#regions=africa&page=4

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977.* Brighton: Harvester Press.

Green, A. (1997). *Education, global and nation state*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gregory, D., Johnston, R., Pratt, G., Watts, M., & Whatmore, S. (Eds). (2009). *The dictionary of human geography*. 5th edn. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Gruenewald, D. A. and Smith, G. A. (Eds.) (2008). *Place-based education in the global age: Local diversity*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Hall, S., Held, D., Hubert, D. and Thompson, K (Eds) (1996). *Modernity: An introduction to modern societies*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hargreaves, A. and Shirley, D. (2012). *The global fourth way: The quest for educational excellence.* New York: Corwin Sage.

Hicks, D. (2007). Lessons for the future: a geographical contribution. *Geography*, *92*(3), 179-188.

Hobsbawm, E. (1977). *The Italian road to socialism: An interview by Eric Hobsbawm with Giorgio Napolitano of the Italian Communist Party*. London: The Journeyman Press.

Hobsbawm, E. (2000). *The new century*. London: Little, Brown & Co.

Howell, M. (2014). IGCSE Geography: A perspective from a first-time teacher, Blog post 26.4.2014. Retrieved from: https://markhowell101.wordpress.com/2014/04/26/igcse-geography-a-perspective-from-a-1st-time-teacher/

Hviding, E. (2003). Between knowledges: Pacific studies and academic disciplines. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 15(1), 43-73.

Jackson, P. (1996). Only connect: approaches to human geography. In E. Rawling & R. Daugherty (Eds.) *Geography into the Twenty-first Century* (pp. 77-94). Chichester: Wiley.

Johnstone, D. (2009). *Reveil Seychellois: Life in Seychelles 1770-1903*. Seychelles: Calusa Bay Publications.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. New York: Blackwell.

Lowe, J. (1999). International examinations, national systems and the global market. *Compare*: *A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *29*(3), 317-330.

Marsden, B. (1997). On taking the geography out of geographical education: some historical pointers. *Geography*, *82*(3), 241-252.

Ministry of Education (2014). *Education sector medium term Strategic Plan 2013-2017 and beyond.* Seychelles: Government of Seychelles

Ministry of Education (2013). *National Curriculum Framework.* Seychelles: Government of Seychelles.

Ministry of Education (2007). *Geography in the national curriculum: Teaching and learning programme - Units S1-S3*. Seychelles: Government of Seychelles.

Ministry of Education (2004). *Geography in the national curriculum*. Seychelles: Government of Seychelles.

Ministry of Education (2000) [2003] *Education for a learning society: Policy statement of the Ministry of Education*. Seychelles: Government of Seychelles.

Ministry of Education (1990). *The physical geography of Seychelles*. Geography Book 5, Primary 9. Seychelles: National Institute of Pedagogy.

Ministry of Education (1984). *The human geography of Seychelles*, Geography Book 6, Primary 9. Seychelles: National Institute of Pedagogy.

Ministry of Education (1983). *General physical geography,* Geography Book 2, Primary 7. Seychelles: National Institute of Pedagogy.

Mitchell, K. (2003). Educating the national citizen in neoliberal times: from the multicultural self to the strategic cosmopolitan. *Transactions: Institute of British Geographers*, *28*(4), 387-403.

Morgan, A. (2011). Place-based education versus geography education? In G. Butt (Ed.), *Geography, education and the future* (pp. 84-108). London: Continuum.

Morgan, J. (2012). *Teaching secondary geography as if the planet matters*. London: Routledge.Morgan, J. (2001). Popular culture and geography education. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, *10*(3), 284-297.

Morgan, J. (2001). Popular culture and geography education. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, *10*(3), 284-297.

Morgan, J. (2000). To which space do I belong? Imagining citizenship in one curriculum subject. *Curriculum Journal*, *11*(1), 55-68.

Nolan, J. (2008). *The Seychelles education and training system: A report* (Prepared for the President of Seychelles by Dr J. Nolan, Special Advisor on Education), unpublished.

Persaud, I. (2019). Insider and outsider analysis: constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing narratives of Seychelles' geography education. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *18*(1), 1-12.

Persaud, I. (2017). Unpacking paradise: geography education narratives from the Seychelles. Unpublished PhD thesis. University College London, Institute of Education. Retrieved from:
http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1536401/1/Persaud_Indra_Thesis%20Final%20Jan%202017.pdf

Purvis, M-T. (2004). Education in Seychelles: an overview. In *Seychelles Medical and Dental Journal,* Special Issue, *7*(1), 46-51.

Roberts, M. (2013). *Geography through enquiry: Approaches to teaching and learning in the secondary school.* Sheffield: Geographical Association.

Roberts, M. (2011). Conclusion. In G. Butt (Ed.), *Geography, education and the future* (pp. 244-253). London: Continuum.

Robertson, S. and Dale, R. (2006). *Changing geographies of power in education: The politics of rescaling and its contradictions*. University of Bristol: Centre for Globalisation, Education and Societies. Retrieved from: http://www.bris.ac.uk/education/people/academicStaff/edslr/publications/03slr

Rohlehr, G. (2011). Preserving Caribbean cultural identity in the face of globalisation. In UNESCO (2011). *Island as crossroads, sustaining cultural diversity in small island developing states* (pp. 101-116). Paris, France: UNESCO.

Royle, S. A. (2002). *Geography of islands*: *Small island insularity*. Oxford: Routledge.

Scott, D. (2008). *Critical essays on major curriculum theorists*. London: Routledge.

Sharp, J. (2009). *Geographies of postcolonialism*. London: Sage.

Sheller, M. (2013). The islanding effect: post-disaster mobility systems and humanitarian logistics in Haiti. *Cultural Geographies*, *20*(2), 185-204.

Shillington, K. (2009). *History of modern Seychelles*. Oxford: Macmillan Education.

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonising methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. London: Zed.

Thiem, C.H. (2009). Thinking through education: the geographies of contemporary educational restructuring. *Progress in Human Geography, 33*(2), 154-173.

UNESCO (2011). *Island as crossroads: Sustaining cultural diversity in small island developing states*. Paris, France: UNESCO.

Waugh, D. (2009). *The new wider world.* 3rd edn. London: Nelson Thornes.

Whalley, W. B., Saunders, A., Lewis, R. A., Buenemann, M. and Sutton, P. C. (2011). Curriculum development: producing geographers for the 21st Century. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *35*(3), 379-393.

Wilson, P. and Tan, G. C. I. (2004). Singapore teachers' personal and general efficacy for teaching primary social studies. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education, 13*(3), 209-222.

Winter, C. and Firth, R. (2007). Knowledge about education for sustainable development: four case studies of student teachers in English secondary schools. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 33(3), 341-358.

Young, M. (2012). The curriculum, 'an entitlement to powerful knowledge': a response to John White. New Visions for Education Group. Retrieved from: http://www.newvisionsforeducation.org.uk/about-the-group/home/2012/05/03/the-curriculum-%e2%80%98an-entitlement-to-powerful-knowledge%e2%80%99-a-response-to-john-white/

Young, M., Lambert, D., Roberts, C. & Roberts, M. (2014). *Knowledge and the future school: Curriculum and social justice.* London: Bloomsbury.

Young, M. and Muller, J. (2010). Three educational scenarios for the future: lessons from the sociology of knowledge. *European Journal of Education*, *45*(1), 11-27.