

# Créolité and the Process of Creolization

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I begin with two apologies. First, for the schematic nature of my presentation. I am trying to map together a number of different areas in order to pose some basic questions about the process of creolization. This inevitably means that I cannot go into the complexity and detail which each of them deserves. Second, an apology for obliging Derek Walcott to listen to yet another exercise in “cultural theory,” which I know he thinks is a tremendous waste of time.

I want to think about the passage from Édouard Glissant quoted in the notes prepared by the Documenta11 team for this Platform, to the effect that “the whole world is becoming creolized.” What can such a statement mean, and what are its conceptual implications? I explore these questions in the context of the themes proposed in the notes: “Can the concept of *créolité* be applied to describe each process of cultural mixing, or is it peculiar to the French Caribbean? Does it constitute a genuine alternative to the entrenched paradigms that have dominated the study of postcolonial and postimperial identities?”<sup>1</sup> Do “*créolité*” and “creolization” refer to the same phenomenon, or does “creolization” offer us a more general model or framework for cultural intermixing? Should “creolization” replace such terms as hybridity, *métissage*, syncretism? In short, what is its general conceptual applicability?

Obviously, Glissant’s remark that the whole world is becoming creolized is a metaphorical, or better, a metonymical, statement. That is to say, it depends on the extension or expansion of a specific concept to other historical situations, other historical moments, other kinds of society, other cultural configurations. This can be a dangerous exercise, because it means mapping a concept across a number of conceptual frontiers; and the question is, at the end of this process, what relationship does the expanded concept have to the original? Has it moved so far as to have destroyed all the richness and specificity present in its first, more concrete, application? This is certainly the critique of “creolization” offered today by some Caribbean scholars, who say that its ubiquitous application has eroded its strategic conceptual value. Of course, it is impossible not to generalize concepts in theoretical work. The issue is, what is the appropriate level of abstraction, and what is gained/lost in the process of generalizing it? I have tried to be aware of these traps in the exercise undertaken below.

I will try to stage this argument over two sessions. In the first, I want to ask whether notions of “creole” and “*créolité*” can be expanded from their meanings and conditions of existence in the French Antilles to other parts of the Anglophone Caribbean. And in tomorrow’s session, I want to follow this by locating the question of “creolization” in the wider processes of globalization. In general, I would describe my approach as a strategy of “conjectural theorization.”

We need to clear the ground by drawing some distinctions between the different meanings of these terms. First, the term “creole” itself. Its most common usage is as a way of describing the vernacular form of language which has developed in the colonies and become the “native tongue” of the majority of its inhabitants, through the combining of elements of European (mainly French) and African languages. Though the term originally had as strong a connection with Spanish (*criollo*), it has acquired, historically, particular resonances for the French colonial world. In “Free and Forced Poetics,” Glissant describes Creole as “an idiom based on a French-derived vocabulary and an original syntax mixing African structures with speech habits from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Norman sailors.”<sup>2</sup> In the French sugar colonies — including the French Antilles, French Guiana, and, as

Françoise Vergès argues,<sup>3</sup> places like Réunion in the Pacific Ocean (an island with a history similar to the Antilles and, like the others, part of “Les Vieilles Colonies” [the Old Colonies]) — Creole was long considered a debased, corrupted “patois” or “bad French” spoken by “the natives.” It long retained this association with the “native” and the “abjected.” This is, indeed, how Europeans for many years regarded all the vernacular ideolects of native speakers in the Caribbean. More recently, however, as part of a concerted struggle for recognition against a former imperializing hegemony, Creole has come to be acknowledged as having many of the characteristics of a so-called proper language in its own right, as well as being powerfully expressive of local conditions — and thus, as the *créolité* theorists argue, capable of sustaining a distinctive “vernacular” literature of its own.

The term “creole” has also been used sociologically, to refer to an identifiable fraction of colonial society, and this terminology is more common in the French territories than in the Anglophone Caribbean. It is still widely used in this sense in Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Haiti, as it is in Réunion and indeed in some of the African Francophone countries. In a looser sense, “creole” has also been used to refer to the traditions of early French and Spanish settlers in the Gulf States of the US. It is worth noting that, in the Anglophone Caribbean islands, the term is much more common in St. Lucia and Dominica, where the French influences remain strong, than in, say, Jamaica, where it is rarely used, except in an academic — and often pejorative — sense (e.g., “creole nationalism”). Elsewhere, the two places where it is to be found are Guyana and Trinidad, where it has a quite different meaning. There, it signals the difference between those of “Indian” and “African” descent. Guyanese talk about “Indians or creoles,” and by creoles they mean “blacks” (whatever their actual skin-color), descendants of Africans born in Guyana, whereas “Indians” refers to the indentured population from Asia. These examples suggest that “creole” remains a powerfully charged but also an exceedingly slippery signifier. It seems impossible to freeze this term in its meaning, or to give it any kind of fixed or precise racial referent.

Originally, creoles were, of course, white Europeans born in the colonies, or those Europeans who had lived so long in the colonial setting, that they acquired many “native” characteristics and were thought by their European peers to have forgotten how to be “proper” Englishmen and Frenchmen. Shortly thereafter, the term came also to be applied to black slaves. The distinction in any 18th-century plantation document listing the slaves employed on an estate or owned by a particular slaveholder marked the distinction between “Africans” and “creoles”; and much hung on it in terms of how well “seasoned” to local conditions the slave was, how far already acclimatized to the harsh circumstances and rituals of plantation life. “Africans” were slaves who were born in Africa and transported to the colonies; “creoles” were slaves born in, and thus “native to,” the island or territory. The essential distinction is between those from cultures imported from elsewhere and those rooted or grounded in the vernacular local space.

Originally, the term “creole” in the Caribbean context had both a white and a black referent. It was applied to both native-born white and black populations, and only subsequently did it acquire the more specific, contemporary meaning of “racial mixing” — or as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it, “the result of inter-cohabitation between the two ,races.’” It was never historically, and is not today, fully fixed *racially*. This is a critical point in the argument, because in recent times it has come primarily to signify, as the dictionary suggests, “a person of mixed European and African blood,” with the emphasis on racial miscegenation. But its primary meaning has always been about cultural, social, and linguistic *mixing* rather than about racial *purity*. However, “creole” seems to have been subject to the same semantic slide or struggle for appropriation and transcoding as other related terms, like “hybridity.” Some theorists, like Robert Young, have, until recently, insisted that the term “creole” refers to racial categories and cannot help being drawn back to its inscription in racial theory.<sup>4</sup>

However, contemporary theoretical usage has in fact emphasized the hybridity of cultures rather than the impurity of breeding and miscegenation, attempting to dislodge the term from its biologized and racialized inscription.

In his book, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*, Edward Kamau Brathwaite discusses the creolization process which, at the beginning of his argument, primarily relates to white settlers who had become adapted or indigenized, and is later extended to include native-born black slaves and their descendants.<sup>5</sup> Toward the end of the book, Brathwaite projects the process forward into the present. He discusses the possibilities that are open to blacks now (i.e., at the time of writing, the middle of the 20th century), who could, if they chose, become part of a not yet completed creolization process. It is clear that, at this point in his career, Brathwaite saw creolization as a kind of continuum: a process involving, at different historical moments, different groups, always in combination, in a society which is the product of their entanglement. The argument is about their mutual implication in a process of "indigenization."

Writers like Édouard Glissant use the term "creole" in a broader sense, to describe the entanglement — or what he calls the "relation" between — different cultures forced into cohabitation in the colonial context. Creolization in this context refers to the processes of "cultural and linguistic mixing" which arise from the entanglement of different cultures in the same indigenous space or location, primarily in the context of slavery, colonization, and the plantation societies characteristic of the Caribbean and parts of Spanish America and Southeast Asia. In Glissant's terms, slavery, the plantation, and the tensions and struggles associated with them were necessary conditions for the emergence of creole. This process of cultural "transculturation" occurs in such a way as to produce, as it were, a "third space" — a "native" or indigenous vernacular space, marked by the fusion of cultural elements drawn from all originating cultures, but resulting in a configuration in which these elements, though never equal, can no longer be disaggregated or restored to their originary forms, since they no longer exist in a "pure" state but have been permanently "translated."

Mary Louise Pratt calls such sites of entanglement "contact zones" — "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination."<sup>6</sup> The qualification is critical. Contrary to simpler versions of the colonizer/colonized paradigm in its truncated binary form, this "grappling" process is always a two-way struggle as well as always reciprocal, and mutually constituting. The colonized refashions the colonizer to some degree, even as the former is forced to take the imprint of the latter's cultural hegemony. This does not mean that in creole societies cultural elements combine on the basis of equality. Creolization *always* entails inequality, hierarchization, issues of domination and subalterneity, mastery and servitude, control and resistance. Questions of *power*, as well as issues of *entanglement*, are always at stake. It is essential to keep these contradictory tendencies together, rather than singling out their celebratory aspects. As James Clifford persuasively argued, every "diaspora" carries profound costs.<sup>7</sup>

However, the vernacular or indigenous "ground" which emerges out of this collision of cultures is a distinctive space — the "colonial" — which makes a whole project of literary expression and creative cultural practices possible — "the good side," if you like, of creolization and the essence of the argument about *créolité*. But there is always also "the bad side": questions of cultural domination and hegemony, of appropriation and expropriation, conditions of subalterneity and enforced obligation, the sense of a brutal rupture with the past, of "the world which has been lost," and a regime founded on racism and institutionalized violence.

I would argue that the process of creolization in this sense is what defines the distinctiveness of Caribbean cultures: their “mixed” character, their creative vibrancy, their complex, troubled, unfinished relation to history, the prevalence in their narratives of the themes of voyaging, exile, and the unrequited trauma of violent expropriation and separation. These are all, also, in different ways, what I would call translated societies — subject to the “logic” of cultural translation. Translation always bears the traces of the original, but in such a way that the original is impossible to restore. Indeed, “translation” is suspicious of the language of the return to origins and originary roots as a narrative of culture. Its modalities are always more multiple — a “traveling” conception of culture, to borrow Clifford’s term:<sup>8</sup> a narrative of movement, of “transformations,” rather than of “roots” or return. Translation is an important way of thinking about creolization, because it always retains the trace of those elements which resist translation, which remain left-over, so to speak, in lack or excess, and which constantly then return to trouble any effort to achieve total cultural closure. No translation achieves total equivalence, without trace or remainder. This is the logic of *différance* in the Derridean sense: of a kind of difference which refuses to fall back into its binary elements, which cannot be fixed in terms of this or that pole, but remains unsettled along a spectrum, and which has what Derrida calls the “play of *différance*” as one of its consistent effects.

Heuristically, I have tried elsewhere to think of the process of creolization in the Caribbean in terms of three “presences”: *présence africaine*, *présence européenne*, and *présence américaine*.<sup>9</sup> *Présence africaine* is the subterranean trace or voice of “Africa” — that “Africa” which is “alive and well in the diaspora.” It refers to that submerged element which was rarely allowed to speak in its own voice. For centuries, it could only express itself by indirect means, through what Henry Louis Gates calls the strategies of “‘signifyin’”:<sup>10</sup> by detour, evasion, mimicry, by subverting the cultural dominant from below, by appropriation, translation, and expropriation. Its subterranean rhythms have continued to surface — in surprising, often transformed, ways. As the West Indian novelist George Lamming put it, “Africa invades us like an invisible force.”<sup>11</sup> This is the presence which has been, until quite recently, almost impossible to hear in the Caribbean *on its own terms*. The “rediscovery” of this voice — its return to the surface, in societies like Jamaica in the 1960s and ,70s — constituted the basis of a cultural revolution, which made the place, self-consciously, for the first time, a “black society.”

*Présence africaine* only sometimes appears as a set of literal “survivals.” Its broader, more ubiquitous “presence” is in and through its many translated forms (i.e., creolized). And it is not always *africaine* in the geographical sense. There are other powerful “presences” which belong to the same pole of “the below,” the excluded majorities, which are not African. Most significantly, there is the powerful presence of the East Indian communities, the survivors of that “second slavery” called indenture, which is central to the story of rural labor and identity in the Caribbean; as well as the Chinese and other minorities, who belong, for the purposes of this argument, to the experience of dispossession associated with *présence africaine*; though the relation between these minorities is also a deeply troubled one (the designation “African” being itself one of the principal sources of antagonism).

*Présence européenne*, by contrast, is the voice that speaks all the time, the one we can never not hear. It is the colonizing voice, which everywhere until recently confidently assumed its own ascendancy. Nevertheless, culturally speaking, it is no purer than *présence africaine*. Insofar as it has become “indigenized” within Caribbean society, and is not simply an external noise beamed at the region from outside, it too is consistently “translated.” It has been subject to the “tropicalization” of having to exist alongside a set of very different cultural impulses in the intimacy of a very different, “undomesticated,” native space. What is more, this *présence européenne* is also internally diverse. It derives from the influence of the French, British, Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish empires, which struggled for ascendancy in the Caribbean, each of which inflects the way in which it combined with *présence africaine* across the region. Today, it “speaks” with a richly demotic American accent.

However, the crucial element that distinguishes creolization belongs with the third presence — *présence américaine*. I mean by this, not the region's big cousin to the North, which is a cultural, economic, military, and indeed imperial force of its own right in the Caribbean of yesterday and today. I am referring to an older concept — "America" as the New World — a sort of "primal scene" of the encounters between different worlds for which the Caribbean has historically provided the crucible. Early woodcuts, like Jan van der Straet's engraving of Amerigo Vespucci's arrival in the New World, *Europe Encounters America*, do indeed represent the encounter as the prelude to a rape: "America" signified here as a native woman, "surprised" in her hammock in the primeval forest by the Spanish male conquistadors. However, the colonizers — always men — have their feet firmly planted on *terra firma*, bearing aloft the insignias of power — the standard of Their Catholic Majesties of Spain surmounted by a cross. The primal scene, then, is a "scene" of violent expropriation and conquest as well as the "site" of a tabooed desire, where the scandal of "cultural miscegenation" between these worlds is staged. It occurs at a liminal distance from all the sites of origin. It represents the disruptive force of "the local" — the vernacular, the indigenous, the "native ground" — with which they are all required, in one way or another, to come to terms.

In most of the Caribbean islands, after the first century of conquest, all the social forces which created plantation societies came from "somewhere else." They did not "originally" belong. They were "conscripted," whether they wanted to be or not, to a process of indigenization. We must think of this emerging colonial space as constituting a distinctive "third space" — a space of unsettledness, of conquest, of forced exile, of unhomeliness. This aspect is often missing in our accounts of creolization; creolization as the process of "indigenization," which prevents any of the constitutive elements — either colonizing or colonized — from preserving their purity or authenticity; the critical interruption of hybridity, the rupture which breaks or interrupts the lines that connect the different *présences* to their originary pasts. This is the New World as the necessary site of *dis*-placement, of *diaspora*. Viewed as a potential space of intense and original creativity, this creole or diasporic third space is an example of what George Lamming has recently called "the premature global character of its [the Caribbean's] formation":<sup>12</sup> a symbolic anticipation, *avant la lettre*, of the very diasporic public sphere described by Okwui Enwezor, which — under the much transformed circumstances of transnational, transcultural, postcolonial, and global developments — Documenta11 is trying to represent.

To define the distinctiveness of any one of these creolized societies in the Caribbean, all these different elements must be present. What differentiates one from another is the "logic" of their combination. The foregrounding of one element over another in the "set" is what defines Caribbean cultural particularity. Think of the different ways in which "*présence africaine*" appears in, say, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Cuba. It is as if the three "presences" form a sort of Levi-Straussian combinatory which, without pushing the structuralist language too far, gives a "deep variant structure" to the culture. Run the combination one way, and — as it were — you get Cuba. Inflect the elements differently and you suddenly see Martinique, Jamaica, Dominica, Grenada. All three elements are always present in each; but they are never actively combined or dynamic within the culture in the same proportions. It is a question of accentuation. Cultural change is thus a matter of de- and re-accentuation within the combinatory. For example, the cultural revolution of the ,60s and ,70s to which I earlier referred marked the decisive, dramatic, epochal shift of accent from the European to the African pole. This is to think the distinctiveness of Caribbean societies in terms of the way in which similarity and difference are, as it were, differently combined under the pressure of colonization, postplantation and postcolonial society at the level of the deep structure of the culture. There is no perfect or completed model of this process. Everything is a variant. Everything is still in trans-formation.

This “cultural model” gives us a different perspective on the thematics of *créolité*. The characteristics Glissant lists include multiplicity of sources; the acceptance of dissemination and the movement as against any idea of a closure or a teleological return to the beginning; a resistance to notions of cultural authenticity; a preference for the languages, the imagery, and the strategies of exile, displacement, of voyaging, migrations, and returns. For Glissant, it is marked by entanglement. But it would be strange to describe the thematics of Caribbean vernacular culture without also including the notions of trauma, rupture, and catastrophe: the violence of being torn from one’s historic resting place, the brutal, abruptly truncated violence in which the different cultures were forced to coexist in the plantation system, the requirement to bend and incline to the unequal hegemony of the Other, the dehumanization, the loss of freedom ... So there are also, always, within *créolité*, the recurring tropes of transplantation and forced labor, of mastery and subordination, the subjugations of plantation life and the daily humiliations of the colony; as well as the whole range of survival strategies — mimicry, signifyin’, vernacularization, substitution of one term by another, the underground, subversive, rhythmic “rereading” of an overground, dominant harmonics ... “Language,” George Lamming recently reflected, “is a source of control. Language is also a source of invention.”<sup>13</sup>

*Créolité*, in its narrower sense, must be understood as a specific discourse, arising from a certain critically self-conscious Francophone reading of, or a theoretical reflection on, the broader processes of creolization we have just described. It has been philosophically elaborated in the French Caribbean, where writers and literary theorists like Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant have reflected on what we might call the literary and artistic consequences of the creolization process.<sup>14</sup> The *créolité* theorists argue that creolization has produced, not the debased, hybrid, vulgar, vernacular culture incapable of sustaining great work of literature and art, but a potential new basis from which a popular creativity which is distinctive, original to the area itself, and better adapted to capture the realities of daily life in the postcolony, can be, and is being, produced. *Créolité* is thus, for them, the existential and expressive basis for cultural production — for writing, poetry, music, art. It has the status of a literary program or philosophical “manifesto,” a call to arms for creative practitioners and intellectuals, almost an appendix to the project of national self-constitution. *Créolité* references the construction of a literary or artistic project out of the creolizing process. However, I would argue that it is the cultural processes of creolization which provide the necessary conditions of existence for the *créolité* program.

Since the conditions of creolization exist everywhere across the region, we would therefore expect to find aspects of *créolité* elsewhere in the Caribbean, even if called by another name. Heather Smyth has recently reminded us that the literary preoccupation in the Caribbean with creolization has produced several versions or models, including “Wilson Harris’s study of syncretism; Édouard Glissant’s *Antillanité*; the *créolité* of Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant; Antonio Benítez Rojo’s *The Repeating Island*; and Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s work on creolization.”<sup>15</sup> Though few artists and intellectuals outside the French Caribbean call this phenomenon *créolité*, its underpinning conditions are certainly not limited to the French context. However, this fact may require us to modify the strict protocols of *créolité* which the Francophone intellectuals deploy. I want to give three brief examples.

First, there is the project of what has been called “nation language,” very much associated with the work of the poet, historian, and critic Edward Kamau Brathwaite. We have already referred to Brathwaite’s seminal historical work on creolization. An important milestone in this debate was Melville J. Herskovits’ 1941 book *The Myth of the Negro Past*, the first major anthropological text which ran against the grain of orthodoxy — namely, that everything of the African past was destroyed in the Middle Passage — and began to talk seriously about African survivals. Extraordinarily important work

has been done since then on African survivals in such areas as Caribbean religion, religious practices, and folklore; in music, musical form, and dance; in daily life, social customs, and rituals, as well as in language itself. Its effect has been to shift the balance toward the study of how "Africa" survived as a subterranean force in Caribbean culture. Brathwaite has made a critical contribution to this project.

In both his historical and critical writing and his poetic practice — a major body of work — Brathwaite has highlighted the need to challenge the hegemony of the language of the colonizer, which he calls a "prison language," and return to the inspiration of "nation language." "Nation language," he argues in *History of the Voice*, "is the submerged area of that dialect which is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean. It may be in English: but often it is an English which is like a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun, or the wind or a wave. It is also like the blues. And sometimes it is English and African together."<sup>16</sup> In his poetic work Brathwaite has explored this subterranean vein, focusing on the force of oral tradition, the spoken rather than the written, "as much on sound as on song." His experimentation with sound, rhythm, and the structure of the poetic line has sought to destroy the tyranny of the pentameter and other classic English literary cadences, and to intrude the acoustic and the oral elements into poetry. He charts how, for younger poets, nation language has become "the classical norm": coming "out of the same experience as the music of contemporary popular song: using the same riddims [rhythms]; the same voice-spreads, syllable clusters, blue notes, *ostinato*, syncopation and pauses."<sup>17</sup>

Ostensibly, Brathwaite's practice seems to — and has been read as if it does — stem from and lead remorselessly back to an ancestral African source. His perspective is certainly "Afrocentric" rather than Creolist in emphasis. But this may be to misread a necessary re-accentuation for a wholesale substitution. Although his argument begins with the significance of pre-transportation ancestral African culture for the Caribbean, by the time Brathwaite gets to the end of the argument, he has to recognize that its "survival" in the Caribbean can only happen as a consequence of multiple *translations* in the New World itself, and their *reshapings* in the conditions of the plantation, the colony, and postcolony. They surface in the form of, not the repetition of, a set of traditional inherited forms, but in combination with other factors, and as a *continuum*. When he specifies "the ancestral," he includes not only Shango and Anansesem, and of course Kumina, but also "Spiritual (Aladura) Baptist services, ground-nations, yard-theatres, ring games, tea-meeting speeches etc." — typically Caribbean events and occasions. His concluding summary points, it seems, toward the creole as we have tried to define it here. "In the same way as we have come to accept the idea (and reality) of Caribbean speech as continuum: ancestral through creole to national and international forms, so we must be able to begin to recognize and accept the similarly remarkable range of literary expression within the Caribbean and throughout Plantation America. To confine our definition of literature to written texts, in a culture that remains vital in most of its people proceedings, is as limiting as its opposite: trying to define Caribbean literature as essentially orature — like eating avocado without its likkle salt."<sup>18</sup>

In my second example, I want to be impertinent enough to speak briefly about Derek Walcott's project in his presence. Walcott's project, if I may so describe it, is certainly not a Jamaican one, like Brathwaite's. Further, we know that they have in fact clashed publicly on the very question of the use and abuse of "nation language." Walcott's "project" belongs to St. Lucia, which is interestingly poised between different versions of the dominant colonizing presence, France and England, instead of, as in the Jamaican case, Spain and England. Whereas in Jamaica, the local languages were often described as "patois," St. Lucia has a fully formed, recognized, French-based Creole. Walcott, however, has said that he has tried to write in Creole, but the writing for which he is best known is not in Creole or in patois, and he has actually spoken in important debates as to why that would seem to him an intolerable limitation. Indeed, one might say that the one aspect which most distinguishes this supremely important body of Caribbean work is its absolute mastery of the complexities of English of

English prosody, English rhythms, English writing, including not only contemporary practitioners, but the whole lineage of literature in the English language. So, at last we find a noncreolized Caribbean poet. Derek Walcott, we might say, gets the Nobel Prize for Literature for an outstanding literary performance, but not because he is a poet of creolization or a practitioner of *créolité*.

However, I want to suggest that, if you read the settings and situations, or look at the imagery, of Walcott's poetic work, lyric, epic, or narrative; or if you consider the structures of feeling at work in the text; if you look, above all, at the rhythms of the language, and the rhythmic structures, of the work; if you consider its imaginary universe; if you think of the ways the heightened diction dips into the rhythm and intonation of the spoken vernacular; or of the "spoken," conversational opening of his great epic poem *Omeros* itself; if one confines oneself to the first six or eight lines — you need to go no further than that; or if you think of the whole project of the poem — remapping the departures and returns of Caribbean history and the Antilles onto the Aegean and the *Odyssey*; you will see that Walcott's poetic practice constantly struggles to harness these rich poetic resources into the service of forging a distinctively Caribbean "voice" for a highly Caribbean imaginary. His poetic sentences move continuously in and out of the cadences, the stresses, and inflections, if not of the strictly syntactical form, of the vernacular. *Omeros*, despite its classical connotations, is not written in the pentameter, but deliberately departs from it, adopting — and adapting freely — instead, the *terza rima* from the model of Dante's *Divine Comedy*: Dante, a master in his own time of the vernacular, who is also, to our surprise, quoted admiringly by a very different kind of poet — Edward Kamau Brathwaite ("it all begins with Dante Alighieri ..."). Musing on the question of language in the largest sense, Walcott has written, in his poem *A Far Cry from Africa*:

*I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose  
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they give?*

*How can I face such slaughter and be cool?*

*How can I turn from Africa and live?*

George Lamming, who quotes this passage in *The Pleasures of Exile*, is right to insist that this ambivalence is a major source of Walcott's creative energy. That ambivalence is also dead-center to the creolizing project. This, then, is not the performance of a "creole poet." But to say that Walcott's work exists or could have been produced outside of the context of a creolized culture seems to me untenable. *Omeros* is, without question, a great poem of the creolizing imaginary.

For my third example in this thought-experiment, I want to take the model of Rastafarianism. Here at last we find a cultural phenomenon which insists on tracing everything back to its ancestral African roots, and which does want to make the return journey. The return journey is not only, for Rastafarians, the essence of their spiritual and political "program"; their world view is predicated on the myth of the redemptive return. This is one of the most profound mythic structures of the New World. One cannot understand the culture of the plantation Americas — before and after Emancipation — without the redemptive promise of a return to the Promised Land: though it is translated as "Africa" and the release from the bondage of slavery in Babylon by Rastafarians, whereas it symbolized the escape from servitude and Freedom to the enslaved, who often found its promise in borrowed, translated, Christian language of the only book slaves were encouraged to read — The Bible. In fact, the one may well have been modeled on the other in the mythic imagination. Both have deployed this idea



as a vehicle for expressing the resistance to bondage, "suffering," and the profound hope for Freedom and liberation. The same idea is at the center of Garveyism, which had a significant relationship to the emergence of Rastafarianism in the early years of the 20th century. It constitutes a profound trope throughout the New World.

Rastafarianism in its many forms has had a massive impact on Anglophone culture in the Caribbean, above all in Jamaica, where it was the motor of the cultural revolution of the ,60s and ,70s to which I have referred. So, here, you might think, is — at last — an example of a truly noncreolized alternative, a viable alternative cultural strategy. The Rastafarian version is predicated on a notion of "roots," whereas creolization deploys the logic of "routes." From within the imperative of the Rastafarian or an Afrocentric world view, creolization is a disaster, because it weakens by an intolerable "mixing" or hybridity the purity of faith and "tribe," and the commitment to a redemptive return.

The essence of returning to Africa is condensed, for Rastafarians, in their belief in the divinity of Haile Selassie, the former ruler of Ethiopia and, at the time, emperor of the first independent black African state. Selassie is revered as Ja — the Lion of Judah, King of Kings. Selassie was an important symbolic figure for a Pan-African perspective, since he was the king of the only independent black society on the continent — Ethiopia. Of course, people of African descent in the Caribbean came from many places in Africa, especially on the west coast of the continent. The one place they didn't come from was Ethiopia! There are instructive stories about Rastafarians who in the ,70s did actually attempt to return to Ethiopia, and who had a hard time being either recognized or accepted by the Ethiopian people. This is not to deny that Ethiopia has an important symbolic function in Pan-Africanism and in the re-identification with Africa, and a significant religious impact on Jamaican society, especially in the form of a variety of Ethiopian and Coptic-based churches and sects. Many sacred African texts have been absorbed into the Rastafarian belief system. But the sacred book, their most sacred source of interpretation (or as they would put it, "reasoning"), is the Bible, originally introduced to Christianize the slaves by European missionaries, which the Rastafarians have wholly appropriated by the textual strategy of inversion — reading the Bible backwards, against the grain; reading it upside down; reading it according to an alternative code; translating it metaphorically from its meaning as the story of God's Chosen People (the Jews) to the story of the enslavement and the dreams of freedom of Ja's "chosen tribes," and their long servitude in the "Babylon" of slavery and colonialism.

Rastafarianism has had a profound impact on popular culture, especially through music. If you ask about reggae's sources, I think most Europeans, who love reggae music, think it derives from the rediscovery of an original African rhythm. Certainly, some aspects of reggae are based on the persistence into the present of submerged traditions of African drumming and other rhythmic patterns in Jamaican folk culture. But another aspect of reggae combines this with a whole range of other, more recent, musical and rhythmic influences. Its worldwide interest, which imagined it as a triumph of the "folk" over modern commercialism, was sustained on the back of an incredible technological revolution. This was a "folk music" [*sic*] produced by small commercial companies in backyard fit-ups of the modern recording studio and mixing desk, augmented by the wonders of modern sound amplification through its sound systems, transported worldwide via the transistor set, the vinyl, and CD revolutions, and universally copied with the help of the latest recording devices by "rastas" and "rude boys" in Handsworth, Birmingham, or Atlantic Avenue, New York, living with their own, diasporic versions of "Babylon." So even this example, which looks at first sight as if it were grounded in an authentic African source and the return to origins, turns out, when examined more closely, to be another variant in the long and complex creolization repertoire.

I am fully aware of the synoptic and superficial level at which I have been obliged to approach this complex problem. My primary purpose here has been to open up the interrogative space around the question of the process of creolization. I am aware that, in stressing the common features of the way the process has unfolded in the Caribbean, I have tended to lose sight of what is specific to each of these variants: specific to place, to history, and especially to the forms of the culture itself. I have not dealt with the question of the creolizations of the Indian Ocean, which have many similarities; or of the African city, where there is colonization but no plantation society, and the economic exploitation of labor in a colonial context but no chattel slavery, but where, nevertheless, something like the same creative "third indigenous space" has emerged. Nor have I considered whether "creole" is an appropriate term to apply to the vibrant and hybrid black British cultural forms which have arisen in Britain in the wake of the postwar migrations. Without ignoring the specificities, which remain critical, my provisional conclusion is that there is something quite distinctive, throughout these and other colonial settings, where different cultures were brought together and forced to coexist under the brutal impact of colonization, slavery, and transportation, which produced a specific cultural model: and the heart of that model is the process of creolization. This is to be understood, not by going back to and disentangling mythic origins, but by analyzing the ways in which creolization is a historical and an ongoing process, and moreover the one which produced the Caribbean and Caribbean people as distinctively "modern," albeit modern in a peculiarly "colonial" or "postcolonial" way. Despite the humiliations and the suffering which slavery and colonization entailed, creolization remains the only basis in the present of creative practices and creative expression in the region. Whether creolization also provides the theoretical model for wider processes of cultural mixing in the contemporary, post-global world remains to be considered.

*Stuart Hall. Créolité and the Process of Creolization, in: Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya (ed.): Créolite and Creolization. Documenta11\_Platform3. Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit. 2003, pp. 27-41.*

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