

**Cahier ICF-2006**

**THE AFRICAN DIASPORA  
&  
CREOLIZATION**

**LITERARY FORUM**

**May 2006**

**Presented by**

**A.C.T.I.O.N. Foundation**



*Funding for this organization is provided in part by the Broward County Board of County Commissioners as recommended by the Broward Cultural Council*



Publication:  
A.C.T.I.O.N. Foundation, Inc.

Cover illustration:  
*The Shadow Within* (1995), painting by Levoy Exil. Private collection.

ISBN 978-0-9790440-0-7

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## REMARKS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

KARL-ERIC BOUCICAUT  
*A.C.T.I.O.N. Foundation*

A.C.T.I.O.N. Foundation Inc. is a non-profit organization founded in Haiti in 1987 and registered in Florida in 2001, with the goal of promoting the Creole culture by the means of education and information. The education program targets our at-risk youth at the elementary school level where art is used to educate, promote self-esteem and empower. Our information program aimed at a larger public and encompassed a month long cultural series entitled: "From a Legacy of Freedom to an Explosion of Culture". After four years of presenting this event, A.C.T.I.O.N. Foundation introduced in 2005 the yearly International Creole Fest (ICF). This multi-disciplinary three-day cultural event, organized by A.C.T.I.O.N. Foundation Inc., promotes and celebrates the richness of the Creole culture. In the context of this festival, the Creole culture is defined as: any Eastern or Western cultures influenced by the culture of the African Diaspora whether or not the encounter happened during the plantation era.

Cahier ICF is the literary voice of the International Creole Fest. Just like the festival itself, the literary forum embraces all facets of the Creole expressions and articulates its arts, music, cuisine, dance, literature, architecture and cinematography.

The topic: "The African Diaspora and Creolization" presented in Cahier ICF-2006 chosen for A.C.T.I.O.N. Foundation's 2006 cultural series was motivated by the organization's work through art education with our diverse community, especially our youth. Migrants' children adapting cultural expressions through language, clothing, eating habits, significantly informs the notion of identity. Reciprocally, the mainstream's integration of new cultural traits, such as some food or music –deemed exotic at a time and now part of the mainstream culture-, tells a lot about the influence of the Diaspora on its new environment.

The term "African Diaspora" generally covers diverse ethnicities scattered all around the world, sharing African ancestry and cultural heritage. In our effort to educate about the Creole culture(s), we found it important to take the time to define this term as far as our context –the Americas- is concerned, and to analyze the process through which identities were forged within this context, itself diverse by essence.

Cahier ICF is A.C.T.I.O.N. Foundation's contribution to help shed some light on this multifaceted process identified by researchers as creolization.

We are pleased to acknowledge the Broward Cultural Division's support in advancing our mission and to extend our thanks to its dedicated staff. We express our gratitude to all of those who always support and attend our programs. Finally, we want to express our warm thanks to the contributors to this project. Dr. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (Haiti) in his article "**Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context**" gives an in-depth account of the historical context of the colonization in the Americas and its role in the creolization process. Babacar M'Bow (Senegal), in his presentation "**Creolization, Créolité and the intellectual struggles of the African Diaspora**" concentrates specifically on creolization and Créolité in the African Diaspora in South Florida. Dr Peter Machonis (USA) analyses "**The Origins and Evolution of French and Creole in Louisiana**". Professor Machonis walks us through a lively laboratory of language and cultural expressions in the making. Augusto Soledade (Brazil), with "**Afro-Fusion Dance: a Perspective from the African Diaspora**", plunges us in the creative process while residing in a foreign country. Jessica Alarcón in her "**Creole Seasoning: Roasting of Identities and the Making of the African Diaspora**" nails the Diaspora's ambiguous re-interpretations of its own identity, when redefining some physical traits to fit Western standards. Finally, the "**Evolution of Kreyòl in the Era of Globalization**" is examined from Roger Savain's perspective as a Creole interpreter/translator.



# CULTURE ON THE EDGES: CREOLIZATION IN THE PLANTATION CONTEXT

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*Le lieu est incontournable.  
Edouard Glissant*

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Creolization is a miracle begging for analysis. Because it first occurred against all odds, between the jaws of brute and absolute power, no explanation seems to do justice to the very wonder that it happened at all. Understandably, the study of Creole cultures and languages has always left room for the analyst's astonishment. Theories of creolization or of Creole societies, assessments of what it means to be "creole" in turn, are still very much affected by the ideological and political sensibilities of the observers<sup>1</sup>. It may not be possible or even meritorious to get rid of these sensibilities, but the knowledge of creolization can benefit from a more ethnographic approach that takes into account the concrete contexts within which cultures developed in the Americas. The plantation-society system, the plural-society and the creole society models –and even Bolland's "dialectical" approach<sup>2</sup>– all seize creolization as a totality, thus one level too removed from the concrete circumstances faced by the individuals engaged in the process. All these models invoke history; some even use it at times. Yet the historical conditions of cultural production rarely become a fundamental and necessary part of the descriptions or analyses that these models generate. Calls for a more refined look at historical

particulars<sup>3</sup> remain unheeded. Worse, current apologies of *créolité*<sup>4</sup> pay even less attention to the historical record than their predecessors in cultural nationalism, perhaps because the historiography of slavery is much weaker in French than in Dutch, or especially, English.

The article, which draws primarily from the experience of Afro-Caribbean people, tries to give due credit to the creativity that Africans and their descendants demonstrated right from the beginning of the plantation slavery. However, praise for the creativity of the Afro-Caribbeans may mask the struggles that are also inherent in the creolization unless we take the analysis one step closer to changing historical contexts. From a wide range of changing historical circumstances I abstract three contexts as key heuristic devices: a plantation context; an enclave context and a modernist context. I then return to the plantation context to illustrate the many ways in which such a framework may improve our knowledge of creolization.

### **The Afro-American Miracle**

From the family plots of the Jamaican hinterland, the Afro-religions of Brazil and Cuba, or the jazz music of Louisiana to the vitality of Haitian painting and music, or historical awareness of Suriname's maroons, manifestations of Afro-American cultures appear to us as the product of a repeated miracle. For those of us who keep in mind their conditions of emergence and growth, the very existence of cultural practices associated with African slaves and their descendants in the Americas is a continuing puzzle. Afro-American cultures were born against all odds. Even if we define culture in the restricted sense of artistic and intellectual production ultimately sanctioned by power (what some anthropologists call "high culture"), the Antilles alone suffice as exemplars of the repeated wonder: in relation to their size, the Caribbean islands have given birth to an impressive array of individuals who left their intellectual mark on the international scene. But the real achievement is, of course, that of the anonymous men and women who have woven, along the centuries, in spite of slavery and other forms of domination, the cultural patterns upon which rest the highly individualized performances of the intellectuals.

Afro-Caribbean cultures came to life unexpectedly, unforeseen developments of an agenda set in Europe, by Europe for Europe. Caribbean territories have experienced Western European influence longer than any other area outside of Europe itself. They are territories that Europe claimed to shape to fit its particular goals, territories through which Europeans moved as if they were empty lands. And indeed, they were emptied, in so far as the native population had been wiped out without even the dubious privilege of slow death on a reservation. Almost everything that we now associate with the Caribbean –from sugarcane, coffee, mangoes, donkeys and coconuts, to the people themselves, whether African or Asian in origin- was brought there as part of the European conquest. Cultural concerns did not figure among European priorities during most of the conquest. For more than a century, the search for gold and the rivalries it provoked obliterated most other issues. Then, from the seventeenth century on, European attention slowly turned to the production of agricultural commodities in the tropical areas of the mainland and in the Antilles. Cultural considerations entered into the design of plantation America, but only as prerequisites of political and economic domination, as corollaries of the plantation system. Thus, although the Afro-Caribbean world came to life on the plantation and, in part, because of the plantation, Afro-Caribbean cultural practices emerges against the expectations and wishes of plantation owners and their European patrons. They were not meant to exist.

Because Afro-Caribbean cultures were not meant to exist, many observers came to believe that they did not exist, in spite of all evidence to the contrary. Up to the second part of this century, most observers and many speakers viewed the creole languages of the Caribbean as burlesque versions of European tongues, "*français petit nègre*," "patois," "broken English," unworthy of serious attention from linguists and writers.

Interestingly, however, Caribbean cultural practices never became exactly what European planners and owners might have expected. From the very beginnings of slavery, it was clear that the Africans and their descendants were shaping modes of behavior, patterns of thought and their expression. Caribbean languages provide good examples of this creativity. Africans brought to the Caribbean during the slave trade spoke a wide variety of African languages. Yet, in many circumstances, which we have yet to specify, they were also forced to draw from the vernacular of their respective masters. That itself is not surprising. More interesting is the fact that, once taken over by the slaves and their descendants, European languages did not remain the same. They acquired sounds, morphological and syntactic patterns unknown in Europe. More important, they were shaped to express the joys, pains and reflections of hundreds of thousands of humans. In one word, they were creolized<sup>5</sup>

### **From Creole Linguistics to *Créolité***

For a number of reasons, these creole languages became the first products of the creolization process to attract the attention of scholars.<sup>6</sup> First, creole languages were obvious. The features that demarcated them from European vernaculars could not be denied.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, these features had to be acknowledged if only for the purpose of communication. Even when the linguistic status of creole was denigrated, such denigration also reinforced the acknowledgment that they were different. Second, a vibrant tradition in the observation of non-Western languages existed in Europe since at least the seventeenth century. Lastly, language was politically safe –or thought to be so. It was thought to be amenable to study without long encounters with a mass of natives. It was one of the few products of creolization least likely to engage the scholar in immediate political controversies about the people who had been creolized.

Controversies there were, however, especially on the matter of origins. Here also, wonderment played its role. Since the early nineteenth century analysts felt the need to explain the puzzle of the emergency of creole languages, to ponder the significance of their existence.<sup>8</sup> This obsession with origins, still central to creole linguistics<sup>9</sup> gave rise to two methodological tendencies.

First, since actual slave speech was –for all practical purposes- inaccessible, creolists had to infer the past from the present. Current Caribbean speech or changing patterns in more recent non-Caribbean creoles supposedly documented what must have happened in some undetermined pan-Caribbean past. Second, since the ultimate purpose of the exercise was, more often than not, to explain or dissipate the wonder of the creole emergence, creolists tended to use one exclusive all-encompassing theory after another. Either all creoles had evolved from a singular source, most probably a Portuguese pidgin (monogenesis theory); or all followed the same genetically programmed elementary structures (bioprogram theory).

From an epistemological and methodological viewpoint, the striking similarity between these theories is their exclusiveness. Their adherents, past and present, right or wrong, tend to be virulently monocausal.

In the works of Claire Lefebvre, creolists “[try] to explain everything the same way at the same time.”<sup>10</sup> Fidelity to a unique explanation in turn tended to preclude detailed examination of changing historical contexts in spite of Sidney Mintz’s crucial demonstration at the first international conference on creole languages –in Mona in 1968- that the study of linguistic change had to take into account “the socio-historical background” of creolization.<sup>11</sup> Available documents were not used to their full potential. Known historical facts, periodization, empirical questions of space and time, demography and social norms, took secondary positions within pre-developed schemes. Even when creole linguistics focused on the past, even though it emphasized the process of linguistic change, it generally ignored the socio-historical process. History was always evoked, often used, yet rarely treated in its complexities.

Since the mid 1980s, in part in response to Bickerton's bioprogram hypothesis, in part because of the influence of non-Caribbean creolists,<sup>12</sup> linguists are increasingly aware of the historical complexities involved in Afro-Caribbean creolization. The distance between two hallmark conferences<sup>13</sup> reveals a tremendous growth in historical sophistication between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s. However, such sophistication<sup>14</sup> has yet to inform fully the study of specific linguistic changes.

The linguistic stalemate is reinforced by the lack of exchange between linguists and non-linguists and by the weakness of cultural theories of creolization. First, students of socio-cultural history have yet to provide as detailed answers as the more sophisticated linguists have questions. Moreover, in recent years, grand pronouncements by some cultural and literary critics have increased the gap between many linguists' empirically-oriented inquiries and socio-cultural theories of creolization. For instance, the repeated announcement that the world is now in –or moving toward- a state of hybridity or creolization<sup>15</sup> is too sweeping to reinforce a dialogue between the cultural theorists who make such statements and historical linguists interested into knowing who actually taught what to whom and when in particular Caribbean territories.<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, such sweeping statements reinforce, perhaps inadvertently, the proclivity to treat creolization as a totality, thereby reinforcing the worst tendencies of the socio-cultural theorists.

Indeed, both the tendencies to infer the past from the present and the predilection for all-encompassing explanations, which together characterize creole linguistics, reappear in socio-cultural studies of creolization with some noteworthy differences. First, the technical apparatus of Creole linguistics could not be transferred to studies of creolization outside of the language. Whereas linguistics generally agree on micro-methodologies and definitions (e.g., what are noun phrases and how to break them down), social scientists and cultural theorists do not have this fundamental agreement on a technical apparatus. Thus, second, non-linguist students of creolization find themselves in the awkward situation of having fewer tools (at least apparently) to do yet a larger job. Socio-cultural life is an object of study admittedly more fluid and harder to delimit than language, which it encompasses. Without a common technical apparatus, the theoretical claims made by students of socio-cultural creolization are even less controllable than those of the linguists. Or, to put it differently, the distance between these claims and the organization of the facts into a coherent object of study is greater than in linguistics. Faced with the wonder of creolization, the need to explain a cultural emergence that seems to defy their implicit assumptions about culture, social scientist used strokes as broad as those of the linguists but on a greater range of topics. The range of topics has actually increased with time. With methodological issues further relegated to the back burner, current studies of creolization return, in a cycle, to the wonder of origins with the added value of the ideologies of the day.

The increased relevance of ideology is understandable. First, social scientists are increasingly aware that creolization still goes on. Even though analysts are not much closer to an agreement in defining creolization as an object of study than they were, say, in the 1950s, they have both the increased feeling of being witness of the ongoing wonder and the conviction that it matters how they explain it. Second indeed, the ongoing denigration of many Afro-American population continues to incite praise for the "creoleness" that they are said to typify.<sup>17</sup> Third, now that globalization and hybridist have become suspiciously fashionable –some would say too fashionable<sup>18</sup>- the creolization process in the Afro-Americas appears, in retrospect, as an early state of grace only now accessible to the rest of humanity.<sup>19</sup> The cultural idealism that now so happily masks increased inequalities worldwide further fuels the historical tendencies of creolization studies.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, if there is a difference between the *créolité* movement of the 1990s and predecessors such as Haitian *indigénisme* of the 1930s<sup>21</sup> and the Jamaican creole-society school of the 1950 and the 60s,<sup>22</sup> it is the increased persistence to further divorce the wonder of creolization from the very history that made it possible. As social theory becomes more discourse-oriented, the distance between data and claim in debates about creolization and *créolité* increases. Historical circumstances fall further into a hazy background of ideological preferences.

## The Context of Creolization

Historical circumstances are what I would like to emphasize here: creolization cannot be understood outside of the various contexts within it occurred. Many features shaped such contexts. First among these was the regimentation of the populations involved, including their regimentation as labor force. The nature and degree of such regimentation necessarily skewed the daily expressions of cultural creativity. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the kind of materials needed, available, and used to “produce culture” were quite different for the member of a cane field gang in Barbados than for an enslaved coffee grower in Dominica or in Saint-Domingue. Regimentation, including labor regimentation, crystallized such differences. Differences in labor regimes in turn, proceeded from the crops involved, but also from the number of years a particular crop had been cultivated in a territory.<sup>23</sup> Regimentation, so construed, thus centers around labor but includes all the factors that limited daily activities of the laboring populations both before and after slavery.

Second, the frequency and nature of outside contact—in and out migrations, communications, the ease or difficulty of individual movement—also helped to define the context of creolization. Clearly, creolization must have proceeded differently in contexts marked by constant influx of enslaved Africans than in situations where such influx was negligible. Third, creolization cannot be understood without some attention to its participants as subjects of history. Edouard Glissant suggests that creolization implies some awareness of heterogeneity, the impossibility to deny mixed origins.<sup>24</sup> But surely, that awareness includes both an implicit sense of cultural ideals—what Mintz calls target cultures,<sup>25</sup> and an implicit attentiveness to facts of power on the ground, which Glissant himself tends to neglect. Cultural ideals and power relations, including actors’ understandings and interpretations of the stakes and forces available to reach their self-defined goals fundamentally shape the context of creolization. A short example may make the point. We can assume that to practice what is now known as Haitian vodoun is to engage knowingly or not in creolization. Yet even if we assume an unchanging content of vodoun—a dubious assumption indeed—we must concede that what it meant to serve the gods changes in space and time. Imagine first, the negotiations, trials and tactics necessary for African-born slaves just to set a ritual in colonial Saint-Domingue: how to do it away from the masters’ ears; whom to include and on what grounds; which gods to evoke or invoke. Imagine, then, the relative freedom of association and the related freedom of choice in the isolated mountains of independent Haiti, away from memories of both Europe and Africa before the growth of the Catholic clergy at the end of the nineteenth century. Imagine, in turn the fears unleashed by the US occupation of 1915-34 and renewed by the repressive campaign of the 1930s and 1940s. Today, the change is monumental: the holders of state power in Haiti officially recognize vodoun as religion. Even before that recognition, vodoun had become truly transnational; some of its canonical rituals are routinely held in Cuba’s Oriente or in Brooklyn, New York. Not all its practitioners are Haitian. Some are white North-Americans. Yet the poverty of the Haitian countryside has also undermined vodoun at the base, limiting its ritual possibilities among the peasantry.<sup>26</sup> Throughout all this, nevertheless, vodoun has figured and continues to figure as a key manifestation of Haitian culture, an emblem of its successful creolization. There is no way to follow that thread of continuities and breaks without evaluating these changing contexts.

In short, we need a framework to approach the changing contexts of creolization. Using time, space and power relations as my main markers, I suggest three such contexts for the study of creolization: (a) a plantation context; (b) an enclave context; (c) a modernist context.

Each of these contexts emphasizes, in turn, one of the factors highlighted earlier. The regimentation of populations is the defining moment of the plantation context. The frequency and nature of outside contact help to distinguish the enclave context. The awareness of heterogeneity and power are inherent in the context of modernity. Since all three factors are always relevant, it follows that these contexts are heuristic devices. Further, in the case of the Spanish Caribbean, it may be useful to devise a pre-plantation context that would help to account for the markedly

different base and outcome of the creolization process there.

At my rate, the context describe here are not meant to duplicate real life situation, but they may help us understand such situations by focusing attention on “the specific sorts of community settings within which groups became further differentiated or intermixed.”<sup>27</sup> They do not delineate fixed periods: often they overlapped in historical time within the same territory. What I hope they do best is to sketch with broad strokes the notably different historical dynamics of creolization as a cultural process so as to bring forward the particulars of the populations involved.

By plantation context, I have in mind situations defined primarily by plantation slavery both during and immediately after the centuries of legal enslavement. Most enslaved Africans and their immediate descendant throughout the Americas engaged in creolization within a plantation context until –and at times way into- the second half of the nineteenth century.

By enclave context, I mean situations marked by the relative autonomy and isolation of the population under study. Early maroon societies from St. Vincent to Suriname, the Haitian peasantry from 1804 to the 1880s, highland villagers in the Windward Islands up to the first decades of this century creolized mainly within such enclaves.

The modernist context became dominant only with the decline of the plantation. I do not mean by this that modernity itself came late to the Caribbean or is a post-plantation phenomenon. On the contrary, the Caribbean was in many ways as modern as Europe by the first quarter of the seventeenth century, especially because of the plantation. Indeed, creolization itself is a modern phenomenon if only because it implied the awareness and event the expectation of cultural differences.<sup>28</sup> Further, frequency and ease of contact with the outside world marked the daily routine of many urban slaves, especially in the port cities where news of other territories circulated to an extent we have yet to appreciate.<sup>29</sup>

My modernist context combines elements of both modernity and modernization. It implies a different kind of technical and institutional support to creolization. It implies alos a sense of global history and the awareness of progress –or bakwarkness, which are part of modernity, and which spread quite unevenly among Caribbean populations from early conquest until the second third of this century. The degree to which the awareness of both target cultures and facts of power become explicit and voiced, the degree to which organic intellectuals harness institutional and technical support for cultural practices help define a modernist context.<sup>30</sup>

These three contexts bring us closer to actual situations, yet we need to specify them further by way of number of changing parameters. The relative proportion of populations of diverse origins, including individuals of mixed descent (see Mintz’s “The Socio-Historical Background to Pidginization and Creolization”); the impact of prior moments of creolization; and the extent of social differentiation are among such parameters. Their relevance will vary with the case under study, but the point is precisely to use these three contexts as starting points and to refine them with the relevant particulars so a to get closer to actual situations.

Thus the scheme outlined here puts on hold most theories of creolization and creole societies for trying to do too much, too fast. In that sense, I am not proposing an alternative mode. Rather, I am suggesting that we have not thought enough about what went on in specific places and times to produce a framework sensitive enough to time, place, and power. I now turn to the plantation context to illustrate the complexities that we need to address.

## The Plantation as Cultural Matrix

During the long centuries of the slave trade, Africa was no more static or cultural unified than Europe was at the time. We simply do not know enough of African variations and change. Ignorance and ethnocentrism may explain the general tendency to acknowledge differences among Europeans and ignore them when referring to Africans. Second, whereas European residents of particular territories usually came from similar –when not the same- milieu, enslaved Africans did not necessarily end up among tribal fellows. Further, the Middle Passage had cut the African-born slaves from their roots, without the possibility, open to many Europeans, of maintaining regular contact with their original milieu. Thus, although they kept their memories, they could not reproduce the societies whence they came.

Only since the 1980s have we begun to acknowledge the restrictions imposed by the trade and plantation slavery on African cultural transfers, but the achievements seems even more spectacular against this limiting background. As Sidney Mintz and Richard Price argue in the path breaking essay that launched this new awareness given the conditions of their passage, the enslaved “were not able to transfer the human complement of their traditional institutions to the New World. Member of tribal groups of different status, yet; but different status systems, no. Priests and priestesses, yes; but priesthood and temples, no. Princes and princesses, yes; but courts and monarchies, no.”<sup>31</sup>

Limitations applied as much to the collective as to individuals. Surely, no African slave came to the Caribbean carrying a drum from the motherland. But the memory of African music lingered long enough to catch up with the memory of drum making; and Afro-Caribbean used their new environment to create drums and music that were close to those of Africa yet distinctively Caribbean. Likewise their dances may have been influenced by the minuets and waltzes they learned to play sometimes for their European masters, but their own Sunday performances were not likely to be minuets and waltzes –though some musicologists may rightfully argue that these were also influenced by minuets and waltzes. In short, Africans and their descendants had to create, so to speak, a new cultural world, with elements gathered from the many African cultures they came from and the European cultures of those who dominated them.

How was such a process of selective creation an cultural struggle –in one word, creolization- possible among the enslaved: How could Africans and Afro-Americans forge entirely new cultures out of the remnants of Old World values and patterns, both African and European? How did they come to dominate the process of cultural formation in societies such as those of the Caribbean where they were kept by daily terrorism at the bottom of the socio-political ladder?

Sidney Mintz and Richard Price suggest that the West African cultural heritage is to be found mainly in unconscious, underlying “grammatical” principles: cognitive orientations, attitudes, expectations common to the diverse communities whence most of the enslaved came. They argue that these underlying principles ordered the process of creolization by making certain choices more appealing or more significant than other possible ones.<sup>32</sup>

This argument needs to be refined in light of more sustained research on the institutional impact of African ethnicity on slave practices in specific territories. In other words, the underlying principles that Mintz and Price highlights had to work through tensions among Africans in order to produce meaningful practices and we need to know how and when they did so. More important, however a *modus Vivendi* on cultural grammar was obtained among slaves, shared principles –old and new- had to survive the European exercise of power. How did they do so? When and how were they given space and time to breathe and to breed? How did they survive and reproduce themselves enough to generate new institutions?

Answers to these questions, tentative as they may be, require that we turn to the plantation. Afro-American slavery was plantation slavery. The plantation was the institution around which the system was built; it provided the model after which were shaped the actual units on which slaves labored. But to phrase it this way is already to suggest that the word “plantation” covers in fact different types of realities that we may want to keep separate even if for heuristic purposes: the institution itself, in the restricted sense of a type of agricultural enterprise; the socio-economic and political system built upon it (in this particular case, plantation slavery); and the actual units of production modeled after this ideal type.

As a form of labor organization, the plantation is an agricultural enterprise, distinguished by its massive use of coerced or semi-coerced labor, producing agricultural commodities for market situated outside of the economy within which the plantation itself operates. One of the better treatments of the type comes from sociologist Edgar T. Thompson.<sup>33</sup> suggests that, as a unit of production, the plantation is an economic institution, an agricultural unit operating with an industrial dynamic. It is also, in his view, a settlement institution, in the sense that it arranges peoples in a “new” territory, a political institution, inasmuch as it operates as a small state, with an authorization structure. Plantation owners claim a monopoly of violence, control over the life of the people who inhabit the plantation. The plantation is, finally, a cultural institution. It tends to generate a distinguishable way of life for owners and workers alike, but it also divides them along racial and ethnic lines. It is a race-making institution.<sup>34</sup>

Needless to say that few if any actual plantations ever exactly matched the prototype. Whether inferred or planned, social models are peculiar kinds of abstraction, the dual products of the typological exercise that projects them and the historical units through which they are actualized. In other words, the plantation, as such, never existed historically, not even in the Americas of slavery. Rather, thousands of plantations did, that tried to conform to the ideal type, but always within the limitations imposed by specific circumstances. This is an obvious enough assertion, but it implies that in almost every instance there were varying limits to economic efficiency, to the organization of settlement, to planters’ political power, or to the cultural apartheid premised in the organization of labor. The very actualization of the institution, whether or not premised on the planter’s pursuit of the ideal the ideal type, allowed the slaves much more room to maneuver than implied by the type itself.

Latitude came also from elsewhere and perhaps in more important ways. Units of production never operate alone. As units of production serving distant markets within the strict order of slavery, the plantation of the Americas felt even more the pressures of the system. Indeed, we can conceptualize an inherent tension between plantation slavery as a system and the system belong to the same order of things; but the fact that the system is a construct does not make it any less real than actual estates. It had its requirements, its logic; but the very fact that this logic and these requirements were not of the same kind as the daily exigencies that masters and overseers had to face within individual units of production created an inherent tension.

Reactions to *marronnage* provide us with a good entry point in this world of tensions and broken lines. In principle, throughout the Americas, slaves were forbidden to leave the plantations without authorization, and infractions to this code were punished. On the ground, however, planters’ attitudes varied, according to the particulars of the case at hand: the time of the infraction, the mode of discovery, the climate of the colony, the individual slave involved, or indeed the personality of the owner or overseer. More important, beyond these variations, planters often acknowledged a difference between desertions intended to be final and temporary absences. The French even distinguished them by name, coining the former “*grand marronnage*.” Throughout the Americas, whereas system and practices tended to overlap in cases of the first kind, planters sometimes closed their eyes on instances of *petit marronnage*, when slaves ran away to visit relatives, to take part to certain rituals, or sometimes even to make a symbolic gesture of protest.

This indulgence did not necessarily come from kindness. Its deepest roots were systemic: planters knew that the code was not always enforceable, that not all instances of unauthorized absence could be punished without encroaching on the working routine of their particular plantation. One suspects that slaves came to the same realization and took repeated risks at manipulating this systemic fissure, often to their detriment, but as often perhaps with the expected results. Communication across plantations, for instance, must have depended on such “illegal” absences as much as on the “free” time officially allotted by the planters. And as slaves repeated such manipulations, on the one hand acknowledging the system, on the other circumventing its actualization in carefully chosen instances, they solidified the detour, the social time and space that they controlled on the edges of the plantations.

Thus, even though *grand marronnage* stands as a privileged example of Afro-American resistance under slavery, maroon societies are better seized within what I call the enclave context.<sup>35</sup> *Petit marronnage*, in turn, stands as a more accurate model for the kind of behavior through which most slaves established the institutional continuity of Creole patterns within the plantation context. For a majority of enslaved Africans and Afro-Americans, prior to the mid-nineteenth century, creolization did not happen away from the plantation system, but within it.<sup>36</sup>

I suggest that this creation was possible because slaves found a most fertile ground in the interstices of the system, in the latitude provided by the inherent contradictions between that system and specific plantations, historically situated. Afro-Caribbean cultural practices developed within the plantation system, but on the margins of the units through which the ideal type was actualized. They were born within the plantation but on the edges of particular plantations. The tensions between the logic of the system and the daily life of actual estates provided a context full of minute opportunities for initiatives among the enslaved. We need to look closely at the mechanisms by which slaves seized upon these contradictions and repeatedly turned latent opportunities to their advantage, further stretching the time and space that they controlled. But even before further empirical research on the so-called slave sector illuminates these mechanisms, we can assess the opportunities. I will give one more example of an opportunity seized upon by the slaves, on quite different from planters’ attitudes to *petit marronnage*, but which ultimately makes the same point.

In many Caribbean societies, slaves were allowed by their masters to grow their own food, and at times, to sell portions of what they harvested. This was a fundamental contradiction within the plantation system. The practice of allowing slaves to cultivate their own gardens whenever they were not working on plantation crops emerged because particular planters wanted to save money, given the high cost of imported food.<sup>37</sup> Planters were not in the business of feeding slaves. The name of the game was profit; and it is to enhance their profits that many planters passed on to the slaves the responsibility of feeding themselves. Indeed, the extent and viability of slave provision grounds depended on a series of factors operating within the unit of production and on the impact of these factors on the planter’s cost accounting. Steep and broken terrain, less fertile lands not used for the production of plantation staples, the flexibility of work regimes, all worked to reinforce the use of provision grounds within a unit. Within a given territory so did the unavailability of cash, the availability and acclimation of imported plants and animals.

Eventually however, these practices, which first emerged because they provided concrete advantages to particular owners, went against the logic of the plantation system itself. Provision grounds provided both time and space that were both within the order dictated by the plantation and yet detached from it. They provided a space quite distinct from the plantation fields congested with sugarcane, coffee, and cotton. Space where one learned to cherish root crops, plantains, bananas; space to raise and roast a pig, to run after a goat, or to barbecue a chicken; space to bury the loved ones who passed away, to worship the ancestors and to invent the new gods when the old ones were forgotten.

Time used on the provision grounds was also slave-controlled time to a large extent. It was time to develop new practices of labor cooperation, reminiscent of –yet different from- African models of work. Time to talk across the fences to a passing neighbor. Time to cross the fences themselves and fish in the adjacent rivers. It was time to create culture knowingly or unknowingly. Time to mark the work tempo with old songs. Time to learn rhythm while working and to enjoy both the rhythm and the work. Time to create new songs when the old ones faded way. Time to take care of the needs of the family. Time to meet a mate. Time to teach children how to climb a tree. Time indeed to develop modes of thought and codes of behavior that were to survive plantation slavery itself.<sup>38</sup>

Such survival, in turn, depended on the consolidation of institutions. For instance, we know that in some colonies –Saint-Domingue, for instance- slaves sold produce at urban markets. We can assume that the practice of producing and especially producing for sale involved a number of individual and economic decisions. Slaves not only had to engage in a cost-benefit analysis –as any petty producer would- but in a cost-benefit analysis that took into account their ideals (what and when to cultivate, how to profit; what to buy with the profit, for whom and why). Such a culturally-informed cost-benefit analysis, in turn, necessarily implied the distribution and consolidation of roles within the households. In short, practices of that kind –and there were many more we need to think about- influenced also the institutions that would survive slavery.

How they did so remains, of course, open to serious concrete investigation. Such investigation can only benefit from analyses that try to integrate the three contexts suggested here. As enclaves and plantations slowly gave way to populations that experienced creolization mainly in a modernist context, how did cultural context and, especially, patterns of accommodation, resistance and struggle change? For instance, how did the transformation of target cultures accommodate the perception of past practices: We can already assume that here again historical particulars played their role. Contact between different populations within and across political boundaries, influx of newcomers, impact of prior creolization, political control and social differentiation enter into the process. But my main point is that we need to rehistoricize creolization.

Creolization is a process rather than a totality. To enable us to seize it in its movement, I have suggested the use of three contexts as heuristic devices but bearing in mind that these contexts often overlapped in particular places and times. My longer exploration of the plantations context is meant as an illustration of the complexities we need to acknowledge at the very beginning. Ideally, the analysis would need to integrate the overlap of the three contexts in historically specific cases.<sup>39</sup> The point remains that we need to look at creolization as a process, constantly influenced not only by prior history but by the numerous factors that characterize(d) the times, the territories and the peoples to which it bears witness.

### **Conclusion: Plantation Coda**

The provision ground of slavery, the reluctant tolerance toward petit marronnage, the unequal ranking and treatment of slaves constitute only conspicuous examples of tension among many to be found in the plantation context. The general lesson remains the same. Cultural practices markedly Afro-American emerged, at least in part, because of the slaves' ability to use the contradictions inherent in the fundamentals of the system and the daily workings of specific plantations. Time and space matter enormously here –that is, social time and social space seized within the system and turned against it.

This ability to stretch margins and circumvent borderlines remains the most amazing aspect of Afro-American cultural practices. It encapsulates their inherent resistance. Afro-American cultures are cultures of combat in the strongest possible sense they were born resisting. Otherwise they would not have existed at all. For they were not meant to exist. But the resistance they

encapsulate is not best seized by the epics that typify cultural nationalist treatments of creolization. The heroism of the creolization process is first and foremost the heroism of anonymous men, women and –too often forgotten- children going about the business of daily life. And for more than three centuries, such daily life was conditioned primarily by the plantation.

Afro-American cultural practices emerged on the edges of the plantations, gnawing at the logic of an improved order and its daily manifestations of dominance. Filtering in the interstices of the system, they conquered each and every inch of cultural territory they now occupy. In that sense, the plantation was the primary cultural matrix of Afro-American populations. But it was so against the expectations of the masters. It was an imposed context, and quite a rigid one at that, an institution forced upon the slaves but one within which they managed their most formidable accomplishments, that of creating what has indeed become a New World.



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<sup>1</sup> Nigel Bolland, “Creolisation and Creole Societies,” in Alistair Hennessy, ed. *Intellectuals in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Caribbean, 1992), 50-79; Annie Le Brun. *Statue cou coupé* (Paris: Jean-Michel Plac, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> “Creolisation and Creole Societies.”

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Sidney W. Mintz, “The Socio-Historical Background to *Pidginization and Creolization*,” in Dell Hynes, ed., *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 481-96; Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price. *The Birth of an African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992 [1976]).

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité* (Paris: Gallimard and Presses Universitaires Créoles, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> The extent of linguistic creolization varied. In some cases, creolization led to the rise of entirely new languages spoken by the entire population, like Haitian Creole, common to Martinique, Guadeloupe, and to a lesser extent Dominica and St. Lucia). Sranan (Tongo) emerged in Suriname. Papiamentu in Curacao. In many of the former British territories, we witness a different phenomenon. The linguistic spectrum presents itself more like a continuum with the more Creolized forms at one end and the forms closer to the European standard at the other.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, sociohistorical studies of the Caribbean have dealt with creolization since colonial times (Gordon Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1983), but the delineation of creolization and of its products as a specific object of scholarly research, and the subsequent labeling of creolists as specialists of the field so defined first happened in linguistics.

<sup>7</sup> Joachim M. Magens, *Grammatica over det Creolske sprog, som bruges paa de trende danske eilande, St.Croix St. Thomas og St. Jans I America. Sammenskrevet og opsat of enpaa St. Thomas indfød mand* (Kopenhagen: Trykt udi det Kongelige Wayenshusets Bogtrykkerie, af Gerhard Giese Salikath, 1770).

<sup>8</sup> Glenn Gilbert, “The Language Bioprogram Hypothesis: Déjà vu?” in Pieter Muysken and Norval Smith, eds., *Substrata versus Universals in Creole Genesis: Papers from the Amsterdam Creole Workshop, April 1985* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1986), 15-24.

<sup>9</sup> Mervyn C. Alleyne, *Comparative Afro-American* (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1980); Muysken and Smith, *Substrata versus Universals in Creole Genesis*.

<sup>10</sup> Claire Lefebvre, “Relexification in Creole Genesis Revisited: The Case of Haitian Creole,” in Muysken and Smith, *Substrata versus Universals in Creole Genesis*, 282.

<sup>11</sup> Mintz, “The Socio-Historical Background to Pidginization and Creolization.”

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Suzanne Romaine, *Pidgin and Creole Languages* (London and New York: Longman, 1988); Gillian Sankoff, *The Social Life of Language* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980); and Jeff Siegel, *Language Contact in a Plantation Environment: A Sociolinguistic History of Fiji* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>13</sup> Hynes, ed., *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*, and Muysken and Smith, eds., *Substrata versus Universal in Creole Genesis*.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Marie-Josée Cérol, "What History Tells Us about the Development of Creole in Guadeloupe," *New West Indian Guide*, vol. 66, nos. 1 and 2 (1992), 61-76; Gilbert, "The Language Bioprogram Hypothesis"; Lefebvre, "Relexification in Creole Genesis Revisited"; John R. Rickford, "Short Note," *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 1 (1986), 159-63; and John R. Rickford, *Dimensions of a Creole Continuum: History, Texts, and Linguistic Analysis of Guyanese Creole* (Palo Alto Stanford University Press, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité*; Ulf Hanerz, "The World in Creolization," *Africa* 57 (1987), 546-59; and Ulf Hannez, "The Global Ecumene as a Network of Networks" in *Conceptualizing Society* (London: Routledge, 1992), 34-56.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Rickford, "Short Note"; Rickford, *Dimension of Creole Continuum*; and Cérol, "What History Tells Us about the Development of Creole in Guadeloupe."

<sup>17</sup> Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité*.

<sup>18</sup> David Harvey, "Globalization in Question," *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1995), 1-17; Brackette F. Williams, "Review of *The Black Atlantic*," *Social Identities*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1995), 175-92.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Hannez, "The Global Ecumene as a Network of Networks."

<sup>20</sup> Micaela di Leonardo, "It's the Discourse, Stupid," review of Michael Taussign, *The Magic of the State, The Nation*, 17 Mar. 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Jeux de mots, jeux de classe: Les mouvances de l'indigénisme," *Conjonction* 197 (Jan.-Mar. 1993), 29-44.

<sup>22</sup> Bolland, "Creolisation and Creole Societies."

<sup>23</sup> Ira Berlin and Philp D. Morganz, eds., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1993); B.W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean 1807-1834* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

<sup>24</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Mintz, "The Socio-Historical Background to Pidginization and Creolization."

<sup>26</sup> Gerald F. Murray, "The Evolution of Haitian Peasant Land Tenure: A Case Study in Agrarian Adaptation to Population Growth," Ph.D. dissertation (Anthropology), Columbia University, 1977.

<sup>27</sup> Mintz, "The Socio-Historical Background to Pidginization and Creolization," 481.

<sup>28</sup> Edgar T. Thompson, *Plantation Societies, Race Relations and the South: The Regimentation of Populations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975); Glissant, *Introduction à une politique du divers*.

<sup>29</sup> Julius Sherard Scott, III, "A Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution," Ph.D. dissertation (History), Duke University, 198.

<sup>30</sup> Late twentieth-century developments in linguistic ideology and speech practice in Haiti and the geographical and social expansion of both reggae music and Rastafarianism within and beyond Jamaica are two cases that may illustrate the point event briefly. The increased technical and institutional support to Haitian as a language—from its use in print and audiovisual media in Haiti and abroad to its official recognition as one of the two national languages—is part of a process of modernization. (This modernization is now obvious, but keep in mind that Napoleon's army issued proclamation in Creole to the revolutionary slaves.) But these recent technical and institutional changes intertwine with modernity, with the recognition of indifference and the recognition of an identity that claims to be specifically Haitian. Similarly, reggae music and, by extension, Rastafarianism have benefited from the profound changes in both electronics and communication that have affected the music industry worldwide. But the opportunity that these changes offered had to be seized by artists, cultural nationalists, and local entrepreneurs quite aware of Jamaican modernity. In Jamaica as in Haiti, organic intellectuals have integrated the knowledge that the world is now their context if not always their interlocutor.

<sup>31</sup> Mintz and Price, *The Birth of an African-American Culture*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 9-10.

<sup>33</sup> Edgar T. Thompson, *The Plantation* (Chicago, 1935); Thompson *Plantation Societies, Race Relations and the South*.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 31-38; 115-17.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979 [1973]).

<sup>36</sup> Even the Haitian Revolution, which stands as the most significant act of resistance against slavery, does not actually fit the *grand marronnage* model. To start with, there is no evidence of a continuous maroon community in the northern part of Saint-Domingue, where the revolution started. Rather, in part because the local topography prevented the establishment of permanent camps where fugitives could regroup, the slaves from that region could not escape the contradictions of the system through organized forms of *grand marronnage* (Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Ti difé boulé sou istwa Ayiti* [New York: Koléksion Lakansiel, 1977]). Indeed, our knowledge so far suggests that the original rebellion involved primarily slaves located on the plantation that were burned, even though some historians infer maroon participation. Further, there are indications that slave drivers and privileged slaves established the inter-plantation network of communication without which the widespread revolt that destroyed the northern plains and launched the revolution would have been impossible.

<sup>37</sup> For more detailed treatment of the provision grounds in the Caribbean, see Sidney W. Mintz's article "Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?" (*Review* vol. 2, no. 1 (1978), 81-98 and Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Peasants and Capital: Dominica in the World Economy* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> It is not at all surprising that when slavery ended, Caribbean slaves did the most to maintain access to their provision grounds. And almost everywhere after the end of slavery, planters unanimously condemned the former slaves' attachment to these provision grounds.

<sup>39</sup> For instance, although a society such as eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue (between 1763 and 1789) was primarily a plantation society, one would need to examine both the impact of port cities, where creolization had a strong modernist component, and the impact of Le Maniel's enclave and of coffee frontier areas, which operated as cultural enclaves, on the creolization process. Given the location of these port cities and enclaves and the history of settlement (Yvas Debbasch, "Le Maniel: Further Notes," in Richard Price ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* [Baltimore Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979], 143-48; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Motion in the System: Coffee, Color and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Saint-Domingue," *Review*, vol. 5 no. 3 [1982], 331-88), this immediately suggests that the research should eventually look at specific regions within the territory. In the 1770s, creolization around Jacmel—close to Le Maniel and close to new coffee areas—could not have worked the same way on the ground as in the northern plains.

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*This article started as a contribution to the colloquium The Plantation System in the Americas, Louisiana State University Baton Rouge, 27-29 April 1989. It was revised in 1996-97, mainly at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, CA, and at Johns Hopkins. I thank Edouard Glissant, who invited me to the Baton Rouge colloquium, and all the participants who commented on the original version. Thanks also to the National Science Foundation, which supported my fellowship at the CASBS, to Marie Espelencia Baptiste, and Niloofar Haeri for sharing their views on creolization. Haeri and A. James Arnold also commented on later version.*



# THE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF FRENCH AND CREOLE IN LOUISIANA

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## ***Abstract:***

*Historically, there were three different Francophone populations in Louisiana: French colonists, who spoke colonial French; African slaves, who spoke Louisiana Creole, a variety of French Creole; and Acadians, speaking Acadian French or Cajun. The 1921 Louisiana constitution banished French from schools and the state underwent an intensive period of Anglicization. In 1968, however, Louisiana reversed course and declared itself an official bilingual (English/French) state and created a government agency CODOFIL (Council for the Development of French in Louisiana), whose mandate is to teach French at the elementary level. Although Colonial French had just about vanished, and Louisiana Creole and Cajun French were disappearing, this action helped to create a Renaissance of Creole and Cajun culture, with “Cajun Power” bumper stickers, Cajun festivals, etc. This article discusses not only the linguistic heritage of Louisiana, where French or French Creole is still spoken by almost 200,000 inhabitants, but also Cajun and Zydeco music, an important unifying aspect of Cajun and Creole culture.*



**I**n 1682, the French explorer Robert Cavalier de La Salle, took possession of a large territory which extended from the Appalachian to the Rocky Mountains, and from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River delta. He named it “Louisiana” in honor of King Louis XIV. Cotton and sugar plantations were soon established along the Mississippi in the area of the present State of Louisiana. By 1763, there were already 5,000 French colonists and just about as many slaves brought from Africa and the West Indies. As in other French plantation colonies of the time, a French-based Creole soon developed alongside Colonial French, and is referred to by linguists as Louisiana Creole. In the Treaty of Paris (1763), France relinquished territories east of the Mississippi to England, while lands to the west, including what is today Louisiana, were

handed over to Spain. The colony managed to keep its French flavor, however – cities such as St. Louis and New Orleans were major French-speaking centers up until the Civil War. In fact, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century another Francophone group, the Acadians, were warmly accepted in Louisiana.

To briefly trace the origins of the Acadians, at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Great Britain took control of France's New World colony of Acadia (now Nova Scotia). In 1755, the Acadians – descendants of colonists from western France – and living in Acadia since the 17<sup>th</sup> century – were deported in what was euphemistically called the *grand dérangement* or “big inconvenience.”

These Catholic Acadians, who for religious reasons refused to swear allegiance to the King of England, were dispersed along the American coast with a large number arriving in Louisiana. Others took refuge in France or in the West Indies.

A large number, however, died during the forced deportations and many families were separated, a tragedy that the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow immortalized in his long narrative poem “Evangeline, a Tale of Acadie” (1847).

The Louisiana Acadians, who became known as “Cajuns,” kept their traditions and culture – many remained fishermen and farmers, while others became trappers and hunters. Meanwhile, many of the Acadians living in New England, where they weren't exactly welcome, heard from relatives in Louisiana and decided to join them there. By 1790, the Louisiana Cajuns numbered approximately 4,000.

During the Spanish Period, there were thus three different Francophone populations in Louisiana: (1) French colonists, who spoke Colonial French; (2) African slaves, who spoke Louisiana Creole, a language based on the French lexicon that became a native language for many; and (3) Acadians, speaking Acadian French or Cajun. These three varieties existed in contact, but Colonial French was the only one with a written form and thus was the prestigious variety of the time. To these three groups were also added aristocrats escaping the 1789 French Revolution, as well as many whites, blacks and persons of mixed race fleeing Haiti after the 1804 Revolution.

In 1800, Louisiana became French again for a short time, but Napoleon sold it to the United States in 1803 and thus arrived another linguistic group – English speakers. Louisiana became the 18<sup>th</sup> American State in 1812 as a fairly prosperous state with an increasing number of plantations. Although Louisiana remained very French in flavor, its progressive Anglicization had begun. The emancipation of the slaves after the Civil War led to the decline of the plantations, of the French aristocracy, and of Colonial French. Large urban centers such as New Orleans and Baton Rouge, which attracted the largest number of English speakers, underwent an intensive period of Anglicization.

Cajun French then became the “standard” French by default, persisting alongside Louisiana Creole in the prairies and bayous in the rural southern parishes of the state, an area extending from Texas to New Orleans in what is called today the “Francophone Triangle.” It is here where we find a fairly complex and fascinating linguistic situation, a continuum of Cajun French spoken by blacks and whites, alongside French Creole, also spoken by blacks and whites, at times the two varieties being difficult to distinguish. According to Picone (1997:122), “from its earliest period until today, French in Louisiana has been dialectically diverse and the population of its speakers has always been multiethnic and polychromatic.” Traces of this are even reflected in anecdotal evidence from the Lewis and Clark expedition.

The intensive Anglicization of the state, already begun in the Reconstruction era, culminated in the 1921 Louisiana constitution, which banished French from the schools. The Cajuns and the former slaves out in the bayous, were able to avoid this assimilation, however, until the mid-

20<sup>th</sup> century, when obligatory education in English, mass media, especially television, and the discovery of natural gas led to the subsequent Anglicization of rural areas as well.

In 1968, however, Louisiana reversed course and declared itself an official bilingual (English/French) state and created a government agency CODOFIL (Council for the Development of French in Louisiana), whose priority was to teach French at the elementary level. Although Colonial French had just about vanished, and Louisiana Creole and Cajun French were disappearing, this action helped to create a Renaissance of Creole and Cajun culture, with a destigmatization of the terms “Cajun” and “Creole,” with “Cajun Power” bumper stickers, and Cajun and Zydeco music festivals. However, this reintroduction of French was problematic. In the first place, what happened was not a case of preserving French in the area, but rather of resuscitating it, since most of the children had never spoken French at home. An entire generation of speakers was lost due to the banishing of French in schools. Parents used regional French as a secret language among themselves and encouraged their children to speak English, so as not to be punished in school as they themselves had been. Furthermore, what was first introduced was really standard French, and not the regional variety of Cajun French or French Creole, since the teachers brought in by CODOFIL were from France, Belgium and Canada, who could not understand or who disparaged the local varieties. Some local French teachers now combat this by using regional Louisiana French in schools along with standard French.

Although there is not much TV programming in French, and only one bilingual newspaper, *La Gazette de Louisiane*, one does still hear regional French, along with Cajun and Zydeco music, on the radio throughout the Francophone Triangle.

Although Louisiana Creole was not actively promoted like French by CODOFIL, recent efforts at revalorizing Creole through such organizations as C.R.E.O.L.E. Inc., founded in 1987, do exist. Nevertheless, Louisiana Creole is still stigmatized, and referred to by pejorative terms such as *franse nèg*, (as opposed to *bon franse*), *gonbo* and *kouri-vini*, derived from the frequent use of these two verbs (“to go” and “to come”) in combinations with other verbs.

White speakers will sometimes deny that they even use it, adding to the difficulty of researchers in determining the status of French Creole in the various parishes. Due to stigmatization, and since, grammatically speaking, Louisiana Creole is the French-based Creole closest to French, many Creole speakers will gravitate to Cajun French, or Standard French if they are able to in their speech. Thus according to Valdman and Klinger (1997:11) “there exists no clear line of demarcation between Cajun French and French, or between Louisiana Creole and the more prestigious Cajun French.”

Louisiana Creole and Cajun French are very similar in vocabulary and, except for the front rounded vowels of Cajun French (*u*, *eu*), in phonology as well. While Cajun French is spoken throughout the Francophone Triangle, French Creole is limited to four main areas of southern Louisiana: (1) St. James and St. John parishes in the East, (2) Pointe Coupée parish in the North, (3) St. Martin parish in the center, and (4) Saint Tammany parish just north of New Orleans. One characteristic of Louisiana Creole that distinguishes it from Haitian Creole is the abundance of agglutinations of French articles as in *dimyèl* “honey”, *so lamèn*, “his or her hand”, *en bon divèn* “a good wine”, *en pye defig* “a fig tree”.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Louisiana Creole does exhibit typical Creole grammatical features, such as postposition of definite articles (*chòp-la* “the shop”, *mo frer ki muri la* “this brother of mine who is dead”, *dibwa-ye* “the trees”, *mo zariko-ye* “my beans”) and pre-verbal markers (*m ap vini bèk byen vit* “I’m returning right away”, *li te gen en char* “he used to have a car”). These excerpts of a popular folktale<sup>3</sup> translated in Cajun French and Louisiana Creole illustrate the subtle differences between the two varieties:

Cajun French: Mon j’après espérer le Bon Dieu m’envoie la viande Louisiana Creole:

M'apé esperer Bon Dieu voie mon la viande English: I'm waiting for the Good Lord to send me meat

Cajun French: I m'a attendu mander pour la viande et i l'a envoyé à mon Louisiana Creole: Li tend moin mande pour la viande et li voyé pour moin English: He heard me asking for meat and he sent it to me

As can be seen in these examples, another distinguishing characteristic of Louisiana Creole is the use in some cases of variant subject and object pronouns, rather than using a unique form as in Haitian Creole.

At the same time, just as there is a fair amount of code switching between French and English in Cajun French, there is a great influence of English on Louisiana Creole:

Ye se **hang li up** "They could hang him"  
Li **gallòp** en chòp "He runs (manages) a shop"

Notice how the verb of motion *gallòp* "run" takes on the meaning of "manage", as in the English expression *he runs a store*.

I'll finish with a few words on music – an important aspect of Cajun and Creole culture. Cajun and Zydeco music are two terms that are sometimes used synonymously, as in the recent "Florida Cajun Zydeco Festival" in Deerfield Beach. Even though both have some of the same defining musical elements (e.g., the accordion), Cajun music and Zydeco, which developed from Creole music, are distinct musical forms. The folklorist Barry Jean Ancelet claims that Cajun music can be defined as the convergence of African and European musical traditions in the New World. It started out as French songs imported from France and Acadia, to which were added the musical style of the American Indians (descending notes and drums), as well as the rhythm and drums of African tradition. The first instrument to be eventually introduced was the violin, the heart and soul of Cajun music to some, then came the banjo, introduced by the Creoles, and finally by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the accordion, invented in Vienna during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which plays perhaps the most prominent role in Cajun music today. Cajun dance is characteristically the two-step or waltz, which is done traveling around the dance floor.

While Cajun music evolved from the original Catholic Cajuns living on the bayous, Zydeco music has its origins in the French and Creole-speaking people of color of Louisiana. Up until World War II, both forms were fairly similar, but after that time, Creole music began to be influenced by the blues and rock and roll. The instruments generally associated with Zydeco are the accordion, electric guitar, drums, and the grooved metal rhythm instrument called the *frottoir*, or washboard. According to the online Panfrancophone dictionary, the *frottoir* is "a sheet of corrugated metal attached over the shoulders and worn over the chest and abdomen. It is scraped with bottle openers or spoons to maintain the syncopated rhythm associated with Zydeco music." The first written Zydeco songs date from the 1950's by Clifton Chenier, while modern Zydeco has taken on the influences of hard rock, reggae, rap and so forth. Zydeco music is moresyncopated than Cajun, and more energetic than the blues, and Zydeco dance, also a two-step, is generally done in place rather than traveling around the room.

There is still some debate about the origins of the word *zydeco*. The musical genre obtained the name from the expression *Les haricots sont pas salés* "The beans aren't salty", which appeared in many Creole songs, and which became *Zydeco sont pas salé* in Clifton Chenier's famous song. The traditional popular meaning of the expression is that since salted meat used to be thrown into the pot of beans, if times were tough and you didn't have meat, then the beans weren't salty. Thus it's a metaphor for difficult times in general. Although no Cajun songs speak of the *grand dérangement* or exile, nor Zydeco songs of slavery, both genres feature themes of misery, isolation,

separated families and parting of lovers.

Barry Ancelet<sup>4</sup>, however maintains that the term *zydeco* is not French in origin, but rather West African, since you can find words similar to *zarico* associated with music and the fertility cult in at least ten different West African languages. According to Ancelet, the term *zarico* or *zydeco* connotes “dance,” “the courting event,” “finding a loved one.” Thus the meaning of the phrase *Les haricots sont pas salés*, becomes “the courting process is going bad” and when Clifton Chenier says *Allons les zydeco* the pronoun *les* is a direct object standing for women. Ancelet points out that the word *zarico* can also be found in songs from the Indian Ocean islands of Rodrigues and Réunion, former French colonies that also imported slaves from West Africa, as in the following example:

Idée moi, idée toi, Azéline cari **zarico**  
Quand la lune fait séga mouliné cari **zarico** (Tétu 1993: *la musique zarico*)

The Indian Ocean *séga* dance includes steps miming the planting of beans. Tisserand (1998) writes:

... in the *séga* is a step called *en bas en bas*, meaning “bend low” – suggestive of a Louisiana-born dance called the *baisse bas*. That low bending in the *séga* and the *baisse bas* tested the limits of what was acceptable in polite dances. Ancelet reports that the traditional *séga* connects beans, fertility, and sex in a symbolic dance. Similarly, the phrase “*zydeco sont pas salés*” may be working as a double entendre, giving “zydeco” an origin similar to the word “jazz,” which began as a term for sex in American black slang.

Whatever its origins, the term *zydeco* continues to evolve and today means not only the music, but also the event where the music is performed, as well as what people do at the event. In fact, Tisserand (1998) translates Clifton Chenier’s *Allons les zydeco* as “Let’s zydeco.”

In conclusion, although Colonial French is virtually gone and Louisiana Creole is quickly disappearing, the 2000 census shows that there are almost 200,000 Louisianans who speak some variety of French at home – included in this figure are also “Cajun”, “patois”, and “French Creole” speakers. If French continues to be spoken in Louisiana, it will be because of its contacts with other Francophone areas and countries and to a concerted effort to speak French. Although Valdman et al. (1998) estimate that only 20,000 - 30,000 people still speak Louisiana Creole, the language is still an important symbol of identity for the Louisiana Creole community. Encouraged and supported by CODOFIL, C.R.E.O.L.E. Inc., and other organizations, music and cultural festivals likewise contribute to a resurgence of pride in Cajun and Creole culture, and reinforce the use of the French and Creole languages in Louisiana.



## NOTES

1. Linguists refer to these verbal combinations, typical of West African and Creole languages as “serial verbs”. Here are some examples in Louisiana Creole taken from the *Dictionary of Louisiana Creole* (Valdman et al. 1998):

E kon vou vini konè, Lapen kouri dòrmi  
“And before you knew it, Rabbit was sound asleep” (p. 483)

Lès nou kouri vini balye lòt bout-la  
“Let us finish sweeping the other end” (p. 13)

The expression *kouri-vini* also means “to go back & forth” in Louisiana Creole.

2. All linguistic examples of Louisiana Creole in this article are taken from the *Dictionary of Louisiana Creole* (Valdman et al. 1998) and Valdman and Klinger (1997).

3. The folktale of “The Buzzard and the Chicken Hawk,” a very popular story in French Louisiana, was used by Thomas Klinger to illustrate the subtle differences between Cajun French and Louisiana Creole at the Fifth Creole Language Workshop at Florida International University in 2000.

4. See the video recording *Voix de Louisiane* (Tétu 1993): *La musique zarico*

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<http://www.tlfq.ulaval.ca/bdlp/>

C.R.E.O.L.E. Inc. : <http://www.creoleinc.com>

Encyclopedia of Cajun culture: <http://www.cajunculture.com>

# CREOLE SEASONING: THE ROASTING OF IDENTITIES AND THE MAKING OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

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*Miss Jane jus hear from 'Merica  
Her daughta proudly write  
Fe sey she fail her exam, but she passin' dere fe wite!...*

*Jane get bex, sey she sen de gal  
Fe learn bout edication  
It look like sey de gal gwan weh  
Gawn work pon her complexion...*

*Her fambly is nayga, but  
Dem pedigree is right,  
She hope de gal noh gawn an tun  
Noh boogooyagga wite.*

*De gal pupa dah-laugh an sey  
It serve 'Merica right  
Five year back dem Jim-Crow him now  
Dem pass him pickney wite.*

*Louise “Miss Lou” Bennett 1*

I am an artist of the African diaspora, straddling across historical frameworks that have driven me into my current skin. Today I feel the shake of the saddle as my base gallops further into the world of academia, sometimes pulling me too far away from the reality of my youth. I was not born into privilege, but was able to make something of the “good horses” I inherited. I hear them neigh as I yank the empty cords of “old money”. I bare the brand of supremacist “prestige” that allowed the President’s *cursed seeds* to be educated for generations. This education allowed me to be able to read their story and become a Master in my own right (*after all I am seeking a Master’s degree*). As I hold a copy of James K. Polk’s parchment scripted ‘Last Will and Testament’, I stare in the faces of my ancestors who were inherited to his children (*although they too were his children*) to pay for those children’s education. NEIGH! The horses scream and I squint at their tan hides, hoping they never tried to claim other skin. *Why is it that we grapple with Africa?*

I am a true child of the diaspora. My veins are blue with branches that run their rivers from the South Pacific Philippine Islands, to the Antilles and Caribbean Sea; these veins have crossed the Nuse (river), the Hudson, the Seine, the Rivière Lézarde, and even the Miami River. My veins speak Tagalog, Español, créole, Patois, Proper English and Slang.

And I am not alone. It just seems that at times, those of us in the diaspora are like an old African (American) spiritual, sometimes we feel like a “motherless child, a long way from home” and we “imagine home?” because Africa seems so far away. Conversely, I propose that this is true only if we choose to sever the connection. This paper seeks to analyze the concepts of creolization within an African Diaspora framework.

The discourse on *creolization/creolite* is complex especially since there are so many different definitions and layers to “Creole”. For example, there are Creole **identities**<sup>3</sup>, **Creole languages**<sup>4</sup>, and Creole **seasonings**<sup>5</sup>. Stuart Hall talks about Race being a “Floating Signifier”; that is that its implications will change and “float” based on the context. In a like manner, the same applies to “creoleness”, which can shift by definition depending on where one is; however, from a diasporan perspective, which is broad and vast, the subject of creolité must be regarded in a different light. One who may be considered Creole within one’s own country may take on a different identity as he or she moves throughout the diaspora.

Since it has now been established that Creole is not a singular issue, it is important that the reader know that this body of work is by no means an attempt to cover the entire span of Creolization and its related topics, and will instead focus on a few concepts and approaches commonly associated with the discourse, namely: Creole approaches and Creolization as process. A more in-depth analysis of this subject matter will be explored in future essays. The following section will discuss the approaches to Creole, beginning with a brief discussion on Gilssant and Bernabe, Confiante and Chamoiseau’s *Eloge de la Creolité* (1989) followed by Kamau Braithwaite’s (1974) concepts of Creolization which predates the former by over a decade.

## CREOLE APPROACHES

The infamous book *Eloge de la Creolité*, Chamoiseau, Bernabe and Confiante opens by telling the reader “*ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Creoles*” - neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we call ourselves Creoles. Creolité was a movement that was in response to the Negritude movement spearheaded by authors such as Leon Damas, Aime Césaire, Léopold Senghor and others who wrote about celebrating Blackness in the African Diaspora. The Creolite movement criticized the aforementioned authors for using French so heavily in their writings and for them not using the Martiniquan Creole language. This creolité movement is based on the notion that it took more than Africa to create the Caribbean; however, the criticism is that in their elegy they seem to leave Africa completely out of the picture. Predating the aforementioned text’s discussion on Creolité was Kamau Braithwaite’s *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (1974) in which he not only defines “creolization” but he also explains the process by which one becomes a Creole. The next section will discuss the origin of the word “creole” and will lead to the discussion of creolization as process in the manner defined by Braithwaite in the 1974 publication.

## CREOLE ORIGINS

Many scholars trace the New World use of the word “Creole” to the Spanish who called those born in Americas that were of European descent *criollos*. Criollo is thought to have derived from the words *crio* meaning child and/or *criar* meaning to raise or to grow (someone/something); but what is it that was *criado* by the *crios* in the New World? The process in the New World was such that they [colonizers] sought to “bred” another race.

If one researches the name, one will find that Criollo is a type of horse found in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Cuba, and Brazil, and as one advertisement for the purchasing of Criollos states, they are “known worldwide for their endurance and stamina”. Some scholars prefer the word “hybridity” as an alternative to the word Creole<sup>7</sup>, however the word itself is problematic when applied to humans for a number of reasons. Hybridity is defined as “characteristic of plants or animals that are the offspring of individuals belonging to a different species” (Macey 2000: hybridity). The word is derived from the latin *hybrida* which means a mongrel or the cross between a tame boar and a wild sow.

In the article “Moving the Caribbean Landscape” Isabel Hoving<sup>8</sup> further discusses this concept:

*...racial taxonomies arose out of a new science of colonial plant propagation and animal breeding.. By 1840, European scholars began to defend the view that there were different human species and that the hybrid offspring of parents of different species would prove to be infertile...sexual relations between people of different “races” were defined as contrary to nature’s order...Seen in the larger historical context, claims to the superiority of undiluted European culture justified colonialism and the slave trade, much as they constituted the ....missionary project[s] in the Caribbean... (Hoving 2005: 158)*

As the above definitions illustrate, creolization and the commonly used hybridity both trace their origins to animals and science labs. I will argue further that the aforementioned notion of Creole was imposed in many ways other than physical. Braithwaite calls the integrated process of psychological, cultural and physical adaptation of Africans (as well as Europeans) to the New World – Creole Seasoning”.

## CREOLE SEASONING

Creolization is not a product it is a process<sup>9</sup> and Braithwaite argues that this seasoning was, “... a period of one to three years, when the slaves were branded, given a new name and put under apprenticeship to creolized slaves” (Braithwaite 1974: 13) he further states that Creolization itself is a process which comes by way of: *ac/culturation – the yoking (by force and example, deriving from power/prestige) of one culture to another (in this case the enslaved African to the European) and Inter/culturation – unplanned, unstructured, but osmotic relationship proceeding from this yoke...the creolization which results becomes the tentative cultural norm of the society.* (Braithwaite 1974: 6)

In the book *The Reawakening of the African Mind* (1998) Asa Hilliard states, “ After being kidnapped, enslaved and carried to Brazil, the Americas, the Caribbean, and other places, our ancestors still knew who they were... Upon our arrival in America, however, the whitening process started. The longer Africans have remained disconnected from Africa, the more vulnerable we have been to efforts to dilute our culture. This has left many of us divided and confused” (Hilliard 1998: 32).

I will provide a few examples delineating the implementation and results of the confusion caused by the process of Creole seasoning in the New World. The first is representative of an intentional breeding of African peoples as crops of creoles/hybrids have been grown (criado). *The Bullwhip Days* (1988) chronicles the lives of enslaved African peoples through interviews and other testimonials that are transcribed in this volume such as the one listed below recounted by Hilliard Yellerday:

*When a girl became woman, she was required to go to a man and become a mother. There was generally a form of marriage. The master read a paper to them telling them they were an 'wife. Some were married by the master laying down a broom and the two slaves, man and woman, would jump over it. The master would then tell them they were man and wife, and they could go to bed together. Master would sometimes go and get a large, hale, hearty Negro man from some other plantation to go to his Negro woman. He would ask the other master to let this man come over to his place to go to his slave girls. A slave girl was expected to have children as soon as she became a woman. Some of them had children at the age of twelve and thirteen years old. Negro men six feet tall went to some of these children. (Mellon 1988: 147)*

Once the process of physical/psychological creolization was begun, an environment was established whereby the generations to follow would begin to creolize themselves. The following example comes from Colin Powell in an interview for *The New Yorker* as transcribed in Asa Hilliard's *African Power* (2002):

*Those who work with him tend to shy away from the subject of his [race], but Powell has thought about it a good deal. He has said that his descent from blacks of the West Indies, where slavery ended earlier than in the United States and where the mixing of African and European bloodlines was more common, gave his people a greater self-assurance than descendants of American slaves. That was reinforced in the comparatively meritocratic world of the Army. He is light skinned, with the ethnically neutral voice of a television anchor and an inviting face, which the writer Henry Louis Gates Jr. described as having "a sort of yearbook openness," This makes him an easy man to be around. As he told gates in a remarkably candid series of interviews for *The New Yorker*: "One, I don't shove it in their face, you know? I don't bring any stereotypes or threatening visage to their presence. Some black people do. Two, I can overcome any stereotypes or reservations they have, because I perform well. Third thing is, 'I ain't that black'. (Hilliard 2002: 47)*

Powell's mentality as represented above, reflects the culmination of the creole grafting that was bred in the human science lab known today as the Americas. Unfortunately Powell is not alone in his absurdity. This way of thinking has spread throughout the diaspora. Rather than bask in the deleterious impacts of creolization of our community, I instead propose that we, at this moment seek means to decolonize ourselves from the densely woven patterns of enslavement that have grown more and more translucent through the years, but whose weight seems to draw heavier upon our backs.

Those of us in the academy (institutions of higher learning) must also take the knowledge to which we have access and circulate the information to our communities who may either not be privy to the same information as we, or who may not know where to begin in the plight to decolonize. The more informed we become as a whole, the looser the translucent shackles become that tie us down. Even the most amateur of cooks knows that seasoning can be overbearing and when the salt gets too much, rather than wasting everything one can go back to the source and neutralize the flavor with the original, and if this is not an option one seeks out ingredients that compliment the base.

## CONCLUSION

*I'm loving the skin I'm in.  
Of all civilization  
I AM  
the origin.*

*I've survived  
the horror of enslavery,  
and now,  
the diaspora  
receives my legacy.  
I'm building,  
despite centuries  
of brutality.  
I'm singing praises  
to my melanin,  
and loving,  
yeah loving the skin  
I'm in*

(Springer 2005: 171)

Once we begin to “love the skin we’re in” we will begin to see the reversal of the creolization process. While it is recognized that the intermingling of cultures is inevitable and adds richness to the world, it is the dehumanization and the yoking of one “subordinate” culture to another that is deemed superior that this essay calls into question. We are conditioned to think that creole is something seductive and exotic. We may feel that it a distinction or makes us different to be called creole. All the while, not realizing that Africa has been around the world since the world has been round. What is interesting is that many of the cultures that are deemed to make one Creole can trace their origins back to Africa. We have to be careful of inverting white supremacy; painting Africa as if it were a “dark continent” making it seem as if slavery was Africa’s first venture into the world, and homogenizing African peoples. Who are not only diverse in genetic makeup, but who’s diversity of features and phenotypes are infinite. We cannot buy into pseudoscience that uses statistics to confuse. For example, how it is said that there is more variation in the gene pool of Black peoples than there are between blacks and whites, which is used oftentimes to highlight the comparative dissimilarity between Black people, which is misleading. Of course we have more variation in our gene pool ‘cause we’ve been swimming in this world just a little bit longer.

When we move into the diaspora *creolite* becomes a moot point because that is when our interconnectedness truly shows. Our drums beat the same rhythms and not only do we feel the joy of the same sunshine, but generally we can find home wherever we go amongst our people in the diaspora. We can even taste the salt of the same tears all around the world. Like Fanon being called a nigger, Langston Hughes connecting with rivers, or how it feels to be “in your element” and marginalized at the same time. Perhaps, the animalistic relation to Creolite is befitting because today we are still treated as Creoles and Hybrids. When most, if not every country populated by people of color is still called 3<sup>rd</sup> world, even though some places in the 1<sup>st</sup> world remind you of 3<sup>rd</sup> world places; even though the 1<sup>st</sup> world only became the 1<sup>st</sup> world through the calloused and bruised hands of the 3<sup>rd</sup> world – and as the creolists may say – their blood wasn’t just African; no,

it was red and then brown.

In conclusion, you can change the noun, but the adjective remains. *What does it matter what you call me, if you treat me just the same?* Maybe we should ask Fanon; maybe we can summon Diallo; perhaps we can talk with the Medical Forensicist from the boot campcase, or take a walk through a Maghreb community in France.

Or maybe...

When they ask you for your papers, you should say, “no, I’m a Creole”

When they act agitated in the Immigration Office, you tell them, “listen, I’m a Creole”

When they watch you in stores –*Soy una criolla, triguena, mulata* - say, “I am a Creole”

When they ask you if your hair is real, tell them “yeah I got that Creole hair”

When the police harass you – *Mais je suis creole*

When they make it a felony for you to live in their country – *damn, but I thought I was a Creole Yeah*, you tell them you are a Creole, but the world will still tell you that you’re Black.



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1 (Bennett 2005: 284 – 285)

2 “imagine home” –Sydney Lemelle , R.D.G. Kelley and J. Didney, *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (Verso Books, 1994)

3 *passant blanc* of New Orleans, the *criollo* of the Hispanic Diaspora (meaning a European usually Spanish) born in the New World), and there are many other creoles in the African diaspora such as the Sierra-Leonean Creole. Creole sometimes indicates that a person is of mixed ancestry, sometimes it means that she or he is not. Sometimes it has nothing to do with sanguinity at all and it has everything to do with location and the mixing of multi-layers of cultures.

4 In that mixture, there are elements such as Creole **languages** which have many names such as pidgins or dialects; in the U.S. diaspora there is Geechee, Gullah, and other regional languages, in the Caribbean there are patois, kreyol, krio, Papiamentu (Portuguese and Dutch), Kokoy (Dominica),etc. and in the in the Hispanic diaspora, there are aspects of language that vary from country to country such as in the “dialect” some call Cubanismo using words like *fula* meaning dollars

5 Cajun Creole, Creole dressing, Zattaran’s Creole mustard, and even Chef Creole

6 Crios have criado – (esp.) the children (of Europe) have created

7 see Homi Bhabha, Gatriy Spivak, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall

8 DeLoughrey, Gosson & Handley’s *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*

9 Braithwaite (1974)

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# CREOLIZATION, CRÉOLITÉ AND THE INTELLECTUAL STRUGGLES OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

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*If dismemberment deconstitutes the whole...then  
Re-memory functions to re-collect, re-assemble,  
and organize into a meaningful sequential  
whole through... the process of narrativization.*

*-Henderson, Mae G.*



**D**iscussions of Creolization and the African Diaspora in South Florida have espoused US racial hierarchic organization of socio-cultural space. Although recent advances in the Studies of Africans worldwide (Alpers 1997, Palmer 1998, Gordon & Anderson 1999, Okpewu, Mazrui and Davies 2001, Zeleza & Eyoh 2003, Gomez 2005, Nzegwu 2006) may have shaken some assumptions -at least in the context of importance of a color shade over another, the terms Creolization and Créolité continue to be imagined in a color coding hierarchical scheme in South Florida Diaspora. In this contribution, I focus attention on an aspect of both terms that requires greater scrutiny: Creolization -as a process through which new identities are forged from resistance to oppression and de-humanizing enterprises and the always ability for re-creation and synthesis and Créolité -the manifestation of a privileging of Europe as a defining marker some want us to swallow.

This contribution concentrates specifically on creolization and Créolité in the African

Diaspora in South Florida, a place that I will term a “Diasporic Space”. This label emphasizes South Florida as a new focal point for African descendents encounter. In this regard, the idea of “African Diaspora” provides a backdrop for a discussion of the highly complex effects of historical and contemporary experiences, the movement of peoples across national boundaries and the various outcome-processes such as Creolization. Créolité I will argue is a smoke screen established to substitute the “slavocracy” of the historical era with a contemporary class of intellectual compradors in the “business” of maintaining western supremacist epistemology.

This essay’s treatment of Creolization and Créolité in the African Diaspora is aware of various theories of the concepts (Glissant, Braithwaite, Wynter, Barnabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant) particularly Sylvia Winter’s theory of the human and its two “major, and interconnected, diacritics” of norm and humanity (Winter 2001). Following Winter’s lead, I will explore the ways in which Créolité plays upon the structuring of social organization and identity across South Florida African Diaspora. The various levels of definitions of Creolization from South Americans, the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean, Brazilians, and Africans in South Florida help to illustrate not only the “complex interconnectivity” of the African Diaspora but also the point of friction which develops from that interconnectivity. Finally, the interpretation of Créolité as it manifests in communities in South Florida will offer an important contrast to the discourse on Africanness in the same site, I aim to put a face on a more complex and slippery tendency of blurring the lines between Creolization as a cultural process and Créolité -its neocolonial interpretation which access requires the erasure of the black skin.

#### Créolité and Africanness in South Florida

The scholarly articulation of these two terms has spawned a rather laborious tradition in the African Diaspora literature. While I break with such tradition to address their neocolonial manifestations, I also consider it useful to cite examples of authors who have considered each term in relation to one another, specifically in the context of African Diaspora.

First, Edouard Glissant juxtaposes Creolization and Africanness underscoring a more sophisticated notion of the former in its “liberating of itself; finally we hear it. We now distinguish its part in our voice. We listen to the explanation of the origins, the peregrination of the ancestors, and the separation of the elements. Then, the noise of the sea that rhythms our words; the irremediable cadence of the ship; this laugh they could not drown.” Second, Boyce-Davies defines the African Diaspora as various locations in which one finds the presence of a people of African descent. Davies’ definition provides us with a global scale on which to explore the Diaspora in locations such as Africa, the Gulf States of the Middle East-Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, in India and Pakistan. From there, we come down to Europe and Australia to the Americas-North, South and Central.

An exploration of the concept of Creolization -that is the process of dynamic constant re-fusion by peoples of African descent and what emerges from it in terms of languages, identities and cultures would require time and space this publication cannot afford. Hence, I focus on a small geographical part -the Americas specifically in the zone where the process occurred in the confrontation between African and the French languages -that is the so-called Caribbean Francophone.

For the past seventeenth years, the African Diaspora gazed at language, culture, and identity through the lenses of Edouard Glissant’s *Politique de la Relation* and more

specifically l'Eloge de la Créolité by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant. My concern is not an inventory of Creolization and Créolité; these processes occurred in many parts of the world- but the ways in which the authors of l'Eloge de la Créolité and other similar works such as Anthony Appiah's *In my Father's House* Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* and *It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at* are being reproduced in identity performance in South Florida.

Consequently, we must proceed as Antilles of the Savannah in that if we pursue something, we shall catch it and escape if something pursues us. Of particular importance for the why we shall escape is the ways in which intellectual imperialists of the "metropolis" deploy an array of legitimizing instruments for carrying negropolitan authors on their shoulders and exhibiting them as the new alternatives to Black formulations such as Negritude and Pan-Africanism.

Immediately after the publication of l'Eloge de la Créolité, France seemed to have found new prophets for its in-direct rule of our intellectual creativity: Both Confiant and Chamoiseau received respectively the Prix de la Littérature 1991 for *Eau de Café* and the Prix Goncourt for *Texaco*. It is this Créolité in its 'Parisian Left bank' 2.0 version that the colonial metropolis heralds as the new encyclical. Its defining characteristics are: "Neither African nor European, nor Asian but Métisse"-a kind of unsalted soup tasting like a piece of bread that sojourned in a cup of water! Its location? A nowhere-ness of a citizenship implanted in the Antilles with a genesis in the fruit of the raping of enslaved African women. From this genesis, the French media and intellectual circles infuse concepts of Métissage and universalism in large dose into the so-called francophone African Diaspora consciousness in a rallying cry for Créolité expecting us to applaud this myopic vision that leaves intact their privileges and historical falsifications and perpetuates their control over our destiny.

While the paternity of the concept of Creolization had been attributed to Edouard Glissant and its determinacy to the authors of l'Eloge, I would argue that, years before these, Creolization has already been spoken about as a cultural analytical theory of the experience of peoples of African descent. In deed, as early as December 1970, at the conference on Cultural Diversity and National Integration held at the University of Ife in Nigeria, Edward Kamu Braithwaite theorized the concept and expanded it later in *The Development of Creole society* a paper presented at the 1973 John Hopkins University's conference on Creolization in Africa and the Americas. Braithwaite is important in that he pointed at the outset that "creolization refers to a cultural process perceived as taking place within a continuum of space and time which may be divided into two aspects of itself: acculturation, which is the yoking (by force deriving from power/prestige) of one culture to another (in this case the enslaved/African to the European); and inter/culturation which is an unplanned, unstructured but osmotic relationship proceeding from this yoke. The Creolization which results (and this is a process not a product), becomes the tentative cultural norm of the society."

Following Braithwaite then, this norm, because of the complex historical factors involved in making it (mercantilism, slavery, rapt and violence of all sorts, materialism, racism, superiority/inferiority syndromes, etc.) is not whole but cracked, fragmented, ambivalent, not sure of itself, subject to shifting light and pressures, hence, the idea of Euro-later mulatto-creolization as the ideal and norm in most slave plantations situations. It is this norm of Euro-Creole that is proposed as signifier of an African Diaspora identity in South Florida.

Hence, the necessity to define the word Creole and the formulations around it; The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, in its third Edition defines Creole as "1. A person of European descent born in the West Indies or Spanish America. 2. a) A person descended from or culturally related to the original French settlers of the Southern United States especially Louisiana. b) The French dialect spoken by these people; 3. A person descended from or culturally related to the Spanish and Portuguese settlers of the Gulf states. A black slave born in the America as opposed to one brought from Africa etc. Thus, if we were to take the American Heritage Dictionary as the

Bible in this matter, we would have to stop right here to dismiss the name as having anything to do with Africans in the Diaspora and this highlights the reactionary nature of the formulation of Créolité in South Florida.

For M.S. Daney in *Histoire de la Martinique* Volume 1 page 415, quoted by Braithwaite in the paper indicated above, “the word Creole appears to have originated from a combination of the two Spanish words. *Criar* (to create, to imagine, to establish, to found, to settle) and *colon* (a colonist, a founder, a settler) into *criollo*: a committed settler, one identified with the area of settlement, one native to the settlement though not ancestrally indigenous to it.”

In this contribution, I explore Creolization and Créolité through l’Eloge de la Créolité not in a presentation of an inventory of the Creole; depending on the definition this process has occurred in many parts of the world-but the ways in which they have been formulated and passed down in South Florida. I want to focus on their content and usage from the point of view of language that is how they play in the process of communication, carrying of culture, and projection of identity. In so doing, I am attentive to the questions of race, shades of color, class, and locations. Hence, my position on creolization espouses that of Braithwaite as a version of the two accepted terms acculturation and inter-culturation: the former referring, to the process of absorption of one culture by another, the latter to a reciprocal activity, a process of intermixture and enrichment, each to each.

This contribution is also informed by other texts such as *Poétique de la Relation* d’Édouard Glissant (1990), *Lettres Créoles. Tracées Antillaises et Continentales de la littérature 1635-1975* de Chamoiseau & Confiant (1991), and *De la négritude à la Créolité: éléments pour une approche comparée* by Bernabé (1993). In l’Eloge de la Créolité, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, & Confiant affirm, “Créolité is neither mono-linguistic nor multi-linguistic with water proofed compartments. Its domain is language. Its appetite: all the languages of the world”. The central questions that inform this undertaking are as follow: What is to be understood by Créolité and Creolization? Are the terms antagonist? Is Créolité as defined by Confiant, Chamoiseau and Bernabé the same as its deployment in language and identity formation in the African Diaspora and specifically in Haiti for example?

Let us sketch a framework for responses to these questions by first visiting Glissant’s own judgment on Créolité as defined by the authors of l’Eloge” « It is sure that the arguments found in l’Eloge de La Créolité, those that have been cited and those that have not been cited came from *Discours Antillais* or *Soleil de la Conscience* meaning from my essays and the signatories rendered them direct homage. However, in *Discours Antillais*, I spoke at length of creolization, which has given birth to l’Eloge de la Créolité. Créolité for me is a bad interpretation of creolization. Creolization is a perpetual movement of cultural and linguistic interpenetration that makes one not got stuck on a definition of the being” He went on, “There is only the act of being- of particular existences that correspond, that enter in conflict or, and this is what makes Créolité: to define a Creole being. It is a way of regression. Thus, by trying to define a Creole being, Créolité puts an end to the process. I believe in the infinite-that is the process of creolization. And this process that plays in the Antilles also plays in the entire world. The entire world is being creolized; all the cultures are creolizing themselves at this particular time in the contact of the ones with the others.”

While critical of Créolité, Glissant is also proposing creolization as a universalistic flight we all have to board. For Bernabé, Confiant and Chamoiseau Créolité is the ““foundation of the being, foundation with all possible solemnity, Créolité is the major aesthetic vector for knowledge of ourselves and for knowledge of the world”

Hence they cheep “Neither Europeans, nor Africans, or Asian, we proclaim ourselves Creole. This would be an internal attitude, better; a vigilance or a sort of mental envelop at the Mitan of which our world will be built in full consciousness of the world” Thus, we are presented

with a Euro Créolité with which to say the mass for our own historical experience and our vision of ourselves on the map of human geography.

Sylvia Wynter's formulation of "Mistaking the Map for the territory" is useful here because the concepts Creolization and Créolité that may seem to cover the same realities at first look need to be unpacked. First, the notion of "being" as located in the Eloge's argument espouses a western definition of the term in which whiteness thrones to construct all other humanities in a decrescendo hierarchy at the margins of which Africa and its descendents are locked. The socio-historical processes that have produced this Euro-Creole-mulatto are not of the same nature than those that are at work in identity discourse in the African Diaspora even if the two occurred in the same matrix and timeframe. Créolité that is Euro-Creole and the identity emerging from it describe old practices of rapping of black women by both Arabs and Europeans going back to African prehistory. Chancellor Williams provides a glaring narrative of this Euro/Arab- Créolité in how Egypt turned from black to Brown due to the raiding and raping of black women and the forced interbreeding of the races, which began around the northern Egyptian perimeter, and how the Creole half brothers of the Africans that were the outcome of the rapping set out to distinguish themselves from the race of their mothers - African. According to Williams, "they bitterly objected to being identified as Africans and usurped old appellations of Africans such as Egyptians, Moors, Carthaginians, etc. and to crown their new identity, a doubtful physical anthropology provided the space by artificially creating first a "Black Africa" and later a "Sub-Saharan Africa." It is the same process we are witnessing in Créolité. Is it by coincidence that the theoreticians of Créolité and other similar formulations all happen to be mulatto? Boyce-Davies tells us that "coincidences are nothing but the deliberate placing in conjunction of a series of events by forces well beyond rational interpretations".

It is this Euro-creolization- a progressive self-alienation and adaptation of African descendents populations to the realities of whiteness baptized universal that the authors of L'Eloge propose for a vision of ourselves at the global level. However, we have been breastfed in the Narratives of Resistance which enable us to say "hell no we won't go!" We won't even go to Glissant's call for creolization as "not a geographical concept but to designate the brutal contact in either insular or enclave territories of culturally different populations generally assembled within a plantation economy, and ordered to invent new cultural schemas allowing the establishment of a relationship of co-habitation."

The camouflage of Europeanism into Créolité that is proposed to African descendents as the sole path for access to a "human" entity which emerges from these processes must then be something else than simply that. Creolization as proposed in this framework possesses this universal character and is not proper to the European and that a contact [even] brutal would lead sooner or later to a progressive adaptation they tell us.

This concept of creolization has no cultural future for the African Diaspora because it allows a white man from Louisiana to share in the Créolité while legislating the most abject Jim Crow discriminatory policies, enjoying the privileges of the racist social order which locates him at the head of the bus and the one, two or three drops and blacks at the back!

"Our first richness we Creole writers are to possess several languages: Creole, French, English, Portuguese, Spanish, etc. It is now about accepting this potential bilinguism and to exit from the constrained usages we had of it

For Sylvia Wynter, this is the "Creole Eye" which vision of the African Diaspora is part the eye of the native part the eye of the stranger. "It is deceptively lucid. A confusion of self-image haunts its most illuminating discoveries. It looks out upon the world with a myopic brilliance. It pins the facts down in a precise analytical stare. But the search light of its gaze is directed by a grid of misconceptions pre-packaged in the cornflakes of a colonial education".

From an African Diasporic viewpoint then, we cannot see how to meaningfully discuss Creolization and its outgrowth Créolité outside the context of the social forces which have made them issues demanding our attention. On the one hand, imperialism and its neo-colonial compradors continuously gang-globalize our hands to turn the soil over and put on us blinkers to make us view the path ahead only as determined by a Eurocentric epistemology and its new advocates. In other words, Eurocentrism continues to control the cultures of Africans and Africans of the Diaspora. But on the other hand, pitted against this epistemological hegemony, are our ceaseless struggles to dechouké knowledge from the European stranglehold to usher a new era of true intellectual equality and self-determination.

We struggle to seize back our creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space. The choice of language and identity and how they are defined are then central to our self definition in relation to natural and social environment. Hence, language has always been at the heart of the two contending social forces in Africa and its Diaspora.

For African descendents whose language have been extirpated in the hell of the plantations of the new-world, their names and religions erased, their gods debased, their humanity parenthesized, the construction of a language and an identity with which to express their creativity and a vision of themselves in relation to other selves, the way in which the language is talked about and how the talk distorts or clarifies the debate are important issues.

The kind of joke that consists at juggling with linguistic notions in a great opaque ambiguity and often blatant contradiction presented as the canons within which to theorize African Diaspora experience need to be challenged. For example, in the above quotation about the richness of Creole writers, is it about Creole and one of the enumerated languages or is it about French Creole, Portuguese Creole or English Creole? The absence of determination in the enumeration renders the declaration ambiguous. Secondly, the question of bilingualism needs to be unpacked to see how it is “potential” when one states having several “languages”. In the colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guyana, French is not a foreign language; it is a maternal tongue, the official language, the language of the metropolis. We are not in Haiti here. It is the French of France whether, French, Antillean, Creolized or other appellation contrôlée. Let us not forget that whether in one or the other departments of out of sea, one is still in a part of a “tropical France”. The authors of l’Eloge tell us that they have “conquered French”, and “If Creole is our legitimate language, the French language (emerging from the white Creole class) was simultaneously given and captured, legitimized and adopted. Créolité has marked French language with an indelible stamp; in short, we live in it” All that remains is for them to tell us that that their Creole is really French.

What is beginning to stink in the discourse is the erasure of Africa. To speak of Africa as the Poteau Mitan of the Haitian Creole is heresy for these Creoles because it will send back to negritude and we know their position on Césaire. For them, African needs to be erased à la Dorothea Smart: “bleach it, scrub it; step blindly into tubs of Clorox, perm it, lighten it, make it go away”.

This is what Wynter calls “the politics of rhetoric”. For her, it is the politics of those who want the appearance of change without its painful reality. “Rhetoric is the weapon with which they obscure the areas of conflict; and creates a verbal consensus which seeks to dam up new directions in the dry river bed of Creole custom”. This question and the resentful consciousness which it implies is the organizing principle of what is been proposed to the African Diaspora in l’Eloge de la Créolité

For this vision of Euro-Créolité, it is in the plantation that the forces of the oral and the written are confronted and this is where multilingualism, is made and remade. For it, the Plantation offered marvelous laboratories of observation of languages in formation practically in vivo from

which all kinds of hypothesis have been elaborated. The problem with this argument is that it reifies the atrocities in the plantation transforming it into “marvelous laboratories” and one has to be located in the master’s house to find anything marvelous in the plantation. Besides, from an African Diaspora standpoint, the plantation has always been a site for resistance and the ultimate goal was to burn it down or runaway from it. In Haiti and throughout the Anglophone Caribbean, this has led to the emergence of the Maroon communities.

Hence, the Euro-Creoles want to present us with a Creole identity framework in which no political or ideological agency participates! No historical memory! No re-membling! It is almost by accident that the Caribbean arrived at the construction of this language. However, Jean Paul Sartre in the foreword of *Ethiopiennes* has something to say about it “From the language imposed on them, the Blacks engaged in dismantling it piece by piece and from its ruins, built a sacred language with which to express their humanity”.

Thus, Creole as a language, at least in the liberated territory of Haiti and using Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s formulation performs two functions: “It is both a mean of communication and a vehicle of culture”. Let’s take French for example; it is spoken in France and Haiti. But for the Haitian it is only a mean of communication with non-Haitian. It is not a carrier of his/her culture despite the noisy claim of Haitian neo-colonialists. But Haitian Creole is inseparably both a mean of communication and a carrier of the culture for those Haitians to whom it is a mother tongue.

Karl Marx in *German Ideology* defines another function of language he calls the “language of real life”. For Marx, “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of wo/men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of wo/men, appears at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people”. Wo/men are then the producers of their conceptions, ideas etc., as they are defined by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest form.

There is also language as written signs imitating the spoken words. Whereas language in its two first aspects of communication and spoken words emerged almost simultaneously, writing is a much later development. According to Ngugi, there is more to language “communication between human beings is also the basis and process of evolving culture. In doing so, similar kinds of things and actions over and over again under similar circumstances, similar even in their mutability, certain patterns, moves, rhythms, habits, attitudes, experiences, and knowledge emerge.

In the vision of the Euro-Creole, we see a gross naivety with regard to the questions of language in its voluntary gliding from the problematic of oral language to preoccupation with writing, and norm of usage reducing the role of linguistic to stereotyped aspects. However, if the principles of fixation and of transcription are indispensable, they remain to be imagined given the constitutive marginality of Creole variable systems that would distinguish from the simple repartition of variants between Haitian, Guadeloupean, and Guyanese etc Creole language.

Central to the Euro-Créolité they want to fold us into is the vacation of Africa and an identity located in a nowhere in which France is still the reference. Is the Creole as defined in the French colonies of the Antilles the same as in the first Black Republic? We respond by the negative. In Haiti, Creole is a mean of communication and a carrier of culture. Creole as culture is thus mediating in Haitians’ very being, transmits or imparts images of the world and reality through spoken word-that is through a specific language. Thus, Creole as communication and as culture in which Africa stands as a *Poteau Mitan* in Haiti is then a product of each other. Communication creates culture; culture is a mean of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries particularity through orature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How we perceive ourselves affects how we look at our culture, at our politics, at the social order and at our entire relationship to nature and other beings. Creole is thus

inseparable from the revolutionary nature of Haitian history and culture.

Thus, to hear those like the authors of *l'Eloge* proposing from the colonies a formulation with which to speak about language as a liberation talk is an oxymoron. Audrey Lord already warned us that “We cannot destroy master’s house with master’s tools”. For Nguggi, “colonialism involves two aspects: the destruction or deliberate undervaluation of our culture, our art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizers”. The domination of a people’s language by the language of the colonizing nations is then crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized.

Poet, President of the Republic of Senegal, Leopold Sédar Senghor is an enlightening example, when he declared “although French has been forced upon me by French colonization, if I had been given the choice I would still have opted for French”. He continues his subservience to French in these terms: “We express ourselves in French since French has a universal vocation and since our message is also addressed to French people and others. In our languages [i.e. African languages] the halo that surrounds the words is by nature merely that of sap and blood. French words send out thousands of rays like diamonds”. Senghor was then rewarded by being anointed to an honored place in the French Academy-that institution safeguarding the purity of the French language.

### The African Diaspora

While various types of migrations (forced, induced, and voluntary) have much to do with our presence all over the world, the struggle for freedom, independence, justice and equality is the basis of African Diaspora culture. Built on an African base, our songs, stories, languages, identities and worldview have been shaped by our presence in the new –world first in physical enslavement then bound by racial, educational and cultural oppression. The emergence of new levels of blackness, the globalization of black ethnicity in a new meaning of African Diaspora are providing international tendencies among peoples of African descent to establish linkages symbolic and real across the boundaries of societies vast distances apart and with significant difference in culture and scale of organization.

Through the works of dedicated black intellectuals, the term African Diaspora is acquiring symbolically generic proprieties-representing a rising consciousness of kind which transcends formally accepted/imposed distinction of tribes, shades, colonial states, and religion and language group. In this term, “No matter where you come from, if you are a black wo/man, you are an African” Unless you choose otherwise that is to be just a skin-folk.



1 Discours Antillais, 1981

2 L'imaginaire des langues in Études françaises ,1993

3 Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, Jean Bernabé Eloge de la Créolité, Gallimard 1993

4 Chancellor William, The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of A Race from 4500 B.C to 2000 A.D., Third World Press, 1976.

5 Stokely Carmichael /Kwame Toure statement on the Vietnam war

6 Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, Jean Bernabé Eloge de la Créolité, Gallimard 1993

7 Sylvia Wynter, Creole Criticism-A Critique

8 Karl Marx and Frederic Engels, Feuerbach: Opposition of the Material and Idealist Outlooks, London 1973 p.8.

9 Ngugi Wa Thiongo, The Language of African Literature in Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism ed. by Gauvar Desai and Supriya Nair, Rutgers University Press 2005

10 Senghor in response to a question during an interview by Armand Guiber and published in Presence Africaine under the title: Leopold Sédar Senghor, 1962



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# AFRO-FUSION DANCE: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

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## Introduction

*I remember...*

*I remember a time when I was clearly interested in dance. I remember one day asking my aunt, the youngest of my father's sisters, to teach me how to dance samba the way she did. Her style is known as "miudinho" – tiny. The feet are flat on the floor and inch up through the space marking the rhythm. This style of samba is believed to be the traditional form performed in the "Samba de Roda".*

*I remember...*

*I always participated in all the school plays and dance events, which usually came as part of the celebration of national holidays in Brazil, like the day of Folklore. Girls would dress up as "Baianas" - Black Bahian women, who sell fruit and goodies of the Afro-Bahian cuisine on the streets, wearing long white skirts, which go on top of layers of other ironed and starched hard cotton skirts that would support, give volume, and a bounce to the hips; a loose light-weight cotton blouse, which would fall off of one shoulder, exposing it; and a white head wrap that followed the traditions of dressing the heads in the Afro-Brazilian religion of Candomblé. Boys would dress as "Pescadores" (fishermen) Black Bahian men, wearing a pair of white cotton pants, which went down to the length of the calves, bare chest and a straw hat on the head.*



## Afro-Fusion: A Natural Condition

**M**y Afro-Brazilian condition speaks of the experience of a multi-cultured dancing body. I seek to articulate a more detailed account of an individual's artistic voice that surfaces, sometimes, through conscious aesthetic choices, and sometimes, as a spontaneous reactive mechanism to the functioning of an internally inscribed and lived history. The inherent objective of the "Afro-Fusion" approach to dance is to establish a coherent dance idiom that adequately captures this experience.

I now realize that reminiscing is a strong characteristic in my creative process. By consciously accessing the memories of my childhood and early adulthood in Brazil, I am able to place myself in a state of mind that functions as the resource to produce and generate the creative idea as well as movement, which are an important part of the initial stage in creating an artistic dance. The state of reminiscing brings about a sentiment of longing for things and places of the past, both geographically and historically. Thus, connecting myself, at the moment of creation, to “Home.” “Home” as in the place and time where I lived my early embodiment of discoveries, experiences and experiments; the moment of identity formation, identification with, and sedimentation of specific cultural values. The “Home” that I first got to know with a sense of belonging, which is, in its essence, a construction of a collective historical memory. This “Home” is a place that becomes easily recognizable especially when contrasted with someone else’s representation of that same concept, or through the process of physically relocating oneself. The experience of residing in a foreign country, for instance, provides the natural environment to become aware of “Home” and to attempt to relive it as memory of place.

The contact with a spoken language that does not flow as fluently as one native’s tongue and the interaction with people whose attitude towards the self and other are constructed based on the same principles as your own, but reflects different insights and biases present other ways of understanding “Home.” *“In the broadest sense the Africanist aesthetic can be construed as a principle of contradictions and an encounter of opposites. The conflict, or paradox, that is innate to and insinuated by difference, disagreement, discord, or irregularity is embraced, rather than erased or resolved.”* (Gottschild 5) “Home” is, therefore, an essential element in the representation of my cultural matrix, in locating my creative self and in setting the foundation for an identification that will come forth as a fresh artistic outlook when contrasted with a different “Home.” .

However what happens to the creative imagination after living in a foreign culture for an extended period of time, when consciously or unconsciously, a shift in one’s perception of what initially was different, oppositional or even plainly unknown occurs, and a construction of interactive dichotomist relationships start to submerge in personal and collective spheres?

On one side there is “Home” and on the other side there is “home”- “the home one makes for oneself, the home of one’s adult life.” (Kincaid 98) “Home” is always in the present, never in the past. *The fact that we as a culture have made such a big deal of the oppositional nature of binary concepts, ignoring the symbiotic relation of opposites defining each other says a lot about how we perceive, what we value or devalue, what we do, and how we do it. It is heartening that some groups in our contemporary culture are showing signs of receptivity toward Asian and African concepts which are more sophisticated than ours in embracing competing opposites, or contrarities* (Gottschild 168)

“Home” becomes a place where an audience, here identified as a group that is outside Brazil and its collective assumptions of ‘Brazilianess,’ has the power to perceive, to name, and influence the artistic outcome in the interpretation of Afro-Fusion dance. *New practices necessarily arose within the new historical context of slavery, which mixed Africans from many distinctive linguistic and social groups and resituated these “crowds” (their tem) within the parameters of the subjugating relationship of slavery. New religious practices, male and female relationships, reworkings of kinship patterns and their meanings, as well as artistic practices arose from these new conditions of prohibitions and possibilities.* (Desmond 35, 36)

## Fusion: A Loaded Term

As a dance artist (choreographer, performer and teacher) who can identify the binary relationship of “Home” and “home”, I am interested in looking at the symbiotic relationships of opposites as the context from which to draw the creative impulse. The definition of such model becomes the instigating event for memory and the prerogative and locus for imagination, recollection, and approach to dance, dancing and the creation of dances.

“Fusion” brings in its etymology the symbiotic quality which reflects the interactive nature of an artistic creative process. “Fusion” emerges as a defining term to represent the creative working mode to: generate choreographic ideas and dance material, access embodied histories, assess the artistic outcome and structure expression in dance. “Fusion” has been a recurrent approach to dance that seems to, historically, interest many dance artists in the African Diaspora. Numerous choreographers have presented a blend of dance forms and cultures as the driving force in their creative work. The blend may not always be termed as “Fusion” by the artists, but it undoubtedly represents the same dichotomist nature described above.

In *The Black Dancing Body: a Geography from Coon to Cool*, Gottschild interviews various dance artists about their definition of Black and White Dance. The responses speak to the attitudes of the artists themselves towards fusing forms in order to reach a personal aesthetic voice and a sense of identity: *Garth Fagan comments, “When I use my cultural background, which is Caribbean and African, and when I get rid of the African adornment and the straw hat and the fabric – which is nothing wrong with that, I love that – but when I choose to just take the movement and blend it into the modern ballet vocabulary, then people can’t see it [as the category that is labeled and recognized as black dance], and they get upset. But if it were another culture [that is, white culture] done that way, it would be wonderful, hello and hosannas, you know.”* (Gottschild 18)

“Fusion” may come as a natural personal response to the pressure of disempowerment. Despite my involvement and interest in dance from an early age, the fact that I pursued a dance career at twenty five was a challenging endeavor to say the least. I came into the dance department at the Federal University of Bahia with what I would evaluate now, by academic standards, as a minimum acceptable sense of conventional dance and dance training at the beginner level. What I brought in was nothing more than my many years of quadrille and samba dancing from “Home.”

Quadrille, Samba and the ever changing, spontaneous street dances in secular manifestations in Bahia were the more influential forms of social dance and interaction that established my early notions of performance - culturally, aesthetically and socially - apart from other modes of living tradition, learning movement and social behavioral patterns. The quadrille fueled my sense of representing what is not lived on a daily basis, through the imaginative re-placement of the individual in an adverse environment (we were kids brought up in an urban center re-presenting the rural life style); Samba was reliving history; while the street dances were an exercise of contemporaneity. *“One of the easiest ways to disempower others is to measure them by a standard which ignores their chosen aesthetic frame of reference and its particular demands.”* (Gottschild 171)

The shaping of my artistic self draws on the continuous dialog and negotiation within my Afro-Brazilian and worldly body. I, here identified as an Afro-Brazilian descendent who assumes that my Afro-Brazilian condition already addresses complex issues of hybridity and fusions, both African and otherwise, in a new world country, live and produce dance work to an audience, mainly, in the United States. I am now presented with the opportunity to make artistic choices and develop an aesthetic preference that I feel would be outlined differently if I were to create dances in Brazil. In her article “Some Thoughts on Choreographing History,” Gottschild states that all texts are intertexts. “That is, forces, movements, motifs, trends, languages – text in other words – of previously and contemporary societies influence us, live within and around us, and constitute the threads through which we weave our “new” patterns.”

“Intertextuality” constitutes, therefore, a leading principle in “Fusion” and the intrinsic operating system that places acquired bodily text<sup>1</sup> in a chronological order - text is acquired as the experience is lived - available for potential access and reference. *“By enlarging our studies of bodily “texts” to include dance in all its forms – among them social dance, theatrical performance, and ritualized movement – we can further our understanding of how social identities are signaled, formed, and negotiated through bodily movement.”* (Desmond 29)

### **Afro: A Matter of Identity**

Regionality and Nationality are the underlying construct of identity which the quadrille, the samba and street dances help set up, playing an important role in my individual process of demarcating the geographical, psychological and emotional reach of the self. Understanding micro and macro structures is an useful tool in accessing the complex web of personal experience, thus, assisting the process of reliving a comparative history.

Samba as the national dance of Brazil, with origins in the Congo-Angola region, reenacts and rearticulates the history of slavery, rape, disempowerment and partial annihilation. However, samba articulates as well the history of resistance, through deception; survival, through rebellion; strategy, through fusion; and empowerment, through dance. The case of samba is not any different from many other cases throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. *“In the 1800 and even before, African-Americans throughout the Americas, from Brazil to Louisiana, danced similar dances. These dances had a variety of names – calenda, chica, batuque, samba – but they were variations of a common theme. Many features of the dances would carry on into dances like yuka, and from there to rumba.”* (Crowell Jr. 15)

A dance that was initially associated with a marginalized group developed to the status of “national” due to the “more dialectical conception of cultural transmission.” In their work on African American cultures in the Americas, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price have argued persuasively for this more dialectical conception of cultural transmission. They emphasize the strong influence that slavery, as an institution, exerted on both African-and European-derived cultural practices. They argue against a simplistic back-writing of history, which would unproblematically trace African American practices to origins in Africa. While they acknowledge that some specific practices as well as very large epistemological orientations toward causality and cosmology may have survived the violence of enslavement, they emphasize instead the particularity of African American cultures – their distinctiveness from African cultural institutions and practices.” (Desmond 35)

As an artist who approaches dance through “Afro-Fusion”, I am interested in looking at the controlling standards set by the Brazilian society to measure and maintain notions of aesthetic authenticity and identity and how these notions are perceived by an adverse audience. In the case of samba, I attest to the fact that the standards of normalization and authenticity echo the original form, despite the development of variations due to forces of regionality and even political, as in governmental strategies to support an ideology that erases and covers fundamental issues of social, political and economic scope and the significance of the African contribution in Brazilian society.

The function of samba remains rooted primarily in representing sexual play and modes of male-female interactions. Within the Roda-de-Samba in Brazil, the guiding rules of samba aesthetic call for fluid hips, eloquent feet and subtle shoulders, and a strong sense of improvisation, which are all traits inherited from Africans that set the model for the “sambista” - samba dancer.

## Conclusion

The objective investigation of my own creative process as a method in which to identify and articulate the practice of creating contemporary artistic dances in the African Diaspora surfaced as a natural route in the pursuit of a dance career. As I view various contemporary dance artist's works I perceive a strong connection in the choreographic structure. We all seem to rely on the interpretation of our subjectiveness in order to present an artistic view of the world within and around us. My intention in presenting a discussion of my creative procedure is to encourage artists to continue looking for ways to innovate and advance the understanding of our shared humanity.



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# EVOLUTION OF KREYÒL IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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*Bonjou tout moun alawonnbadè!*

Good day everybody “all around by there”.

**M**y first inclination was to make my presentation in Haitian, the language commonly called Kreyòl and spoken by the entire population of Haiti. However, I decided to proceed in English because I had no idea how many among you, the learned participants in this event would be fluent in Haitian. A professional interpreter myself, I do not trust interpreters. Therefore, instead of the mother tongue over which I have more mastery, you will have to endure my rather imperfect English as I share with you my thoughts on the “Evolution of *Kreyòl* in the era of Globalization”. Although the theme of this “woumble” refers to “*Kreyòl* Culture”, I will limit my talk to the *Kreyòl* languages as essential component of diverse Cultures, and to their encounter with Globalization.

## **What is Globalization?**

Among multiple definitions of Globalization, one can see it as an economic phenomenon that involves the growing integration of national economic systems in the sphere of international trade, investment and capitalization. There is evidence, however, that Globalization has extended beyond this point to the realm of social, cultural and technological exchanges. Such a development has raised concerns for the survival of national identities, regional beliefs systems, languages and local ethos.

According to those who favor Globalization the consensus is that “it will bring necessary change to the countries it reaches” ... Indeed, new global media and of course the internet, do leap beyond the boundaries of traditional culture”.

Defenders of globalization also argue that the expanded availability of Western or essentially American cultural products throughout the world is harmless. Besides, they maintain, this development is successful because it provides effective and useful goods and services that people want.

The opponents of Globalization see it as an immense shadow threatening national and regional identities. A report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), confirms the gigantic scale of the process when it revealed that “the world trade in goods with cultural content almost tripled between 1980 and 1991: from 67 billion dollars to 200 billion dollars.”

Worldwide US film, music, television productions are dominant in the image and sound industry. Some fear that the consequences of Globalization will be the end of cultural diversity, and the triumph of a uni-polar culture continuously adding to the wealth of a few transnational corporations. Not too surprisingly, opponents of Globalization perceive it as Americanization, and find the dominant stance of the English language as dangerously intrusive.

### **Languages and Globalization**

Originally, the official languages at the United Nations were Chinese, English, French and Russian. The choice was largely political. These were the languages spoken for the most part in countries regarded then as major powers. In 1973, the UN added Spanish and Arabic because apparently these are the languages of a substantial number of member nations.

In 2001, the United Nations released a new directory of all the national delegations represented in New York. When preparing the directory, U.N. officials, for the first time, asked the delegations to indicate in which language they would prefer to receive correspondence and publications. The choices offered included English, French and Spanish, but not the other U.N. languages – Arabic, Chinese and Russian – considered too difficult for most word processors and e-mail programs to handle.

One Hundred Thirty (130) nations chose English, 36 selected French and 19 indicated a preference for Spanish. In other words, the overwhelming majority of representatives of the Earth’s population chose English. It may be that most staff of the UN delegations in New York are fluent in English.

Others might see in this survey a sampling of a new global reality. The writer Jeremy Rifkin, commenting on this trend, said “The American Dream puts an emphasis on economic growth, personal wealth, and independence. The new European Dream on the other hand focuses more on sustainable development, quality of life and interdependence.

“The English language, in the context of globalization”, he continues, “is often perceived as an extension of the American Dream - a dream that pays homage to the work ethic and Christian religious heritage. Expressed in many languages, the European dream in its contemporary form presents itself as secular to the core. The American Dream for its part thrives on assimilation. The European Dream favors the preservation of individual cultural identity in a multicultural world”.

### **The *Kreyòl* Languages**

By these standards, the *Kreyòl* languages are indisputably part of the multicultural world. Even occupying a relatively small space in the community of languages, they hold their own in a struggle for relevancy and linguistic survival. Acknowledging that reality, UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity recognized in 2001, the importance of all languages in promoting cultural diversity.

A celebration is planned for a European Day of Languages, on September 27

In France, meanwhile, the government accepted the recommendation of an authorized Committee to recognize as regional languages some 10 languages including *Kreyòl*, but at first, it decided to set *Kreyòl* aside. Ultimately, *Kreyòl* was added to France’s new roster of regional languages in October 2000.

This decision authorizes its use as a teaching language, and then, the French education ministry announced the creation of a *Kreyòl* CAPES, the acronym for “*Certificat d’Aptitude à l’Enseignement Secondaire*” - a High School Teacher’s Certificate for *Kreyòl*.

On April 25, 2001, Mr. Jacques Lang, French minister of National Education, carried the process a step further. He declared his intention to widen the scope of bilingual education in order to “end the unjust system in the schools of the Republic which for too long had overlooked several languages and cultures”. He added that “there is no minority language; there are distinct languages and cultures, each an integral part of a region’s heritage.”

### **What is a *Kreyòl*?**

This is the question for which Linguist-professor Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux proposes an answer in the introduction of her book, “LES CRÉOLES: L’INDISPENSABLE SURVIE” – *The Kreyòls: The Indispensable Survival*, published in 1999, “Edition Entente”.

“The term *Kreyòl*, she explains, refers to diverse languages spoken in several regions of the world. They came to life during the European colonization of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among these are French *Kreyòls*, English *Kreyòls*, Portuguese *Kreyòl*, Dutch *Kreyòls*, and according to some researchers a few Spanish *Kreyòls* ...

“The term *Kreyòl*, she continues, comes from a Spanish or Portuguese word ‘criollo’. Initially, its use designated those born in the islands of parents not native to these islands. The term applied as well to humans as it did to animals or plants. In time, they used this designation interchangeably to describe the new language of this new population. *Kreyòl* became the language of the *Kreyòls* ...”

However, there is a wide variety of *Kreyòl* languages. This is easily understood, when you compare ‘English *Kreyòl*’ and ‘French *Kreyòl*’, - meaning vocabulary base English or French.

However, Hazaël-Massieux reminds us that, “even among *Kreyòls* that are undoubtedly related to French, there are important differences”.

### **Haitian *Kreyòl* and Globalization**

Most of the efforts seeking to preserve and develop Haitian *Kreyòl* have come from individuals or religious organizations, many from outside of Haiti, without true government or civil society support. It would be interesting to know how many literate Haitians formally studied Haitian *Kreyòl*? I suspect they are few. How many can read and write the language they speak? How many among the 80,000 Baccalaureate candidates and how many among the teachers at all grade levels do read and write the language? How many are aware of the language particularities of the illiterate majority?

Gerard Barthelemy remarks that in Haiti, “literate elites and the illiterate masses speak the same language but are not using the same tongue”. This is probably the case in most countries, where class differentiates on the use of the same language. Therefore; is the Haitian linguistic dilemma emblematic of the greater tension of the haves and have not? Alternatively, is the fact that we are discussing this issue indicative of a new dawn of heightened recognition of the value of distinct expressions? It is at least salutary that all Haitians speak the same language, albeit somewhat differently. However, can there be genuine development without all becoming involved in the nurturing of the language?

Although *Kreyòl* enjoys the status of an official language, the practice of its use, however, still relegates it to oral communications; while written materials or truly official documents are

mainly drafted in French. Adding to the complication is the increasing use of English due to the large Haitian American population and the dominance of that language in technology and commercial exchanges.

The danger therefore is that a language that is not made an integral part of all aspects of its users' life runs the risk of disappearing or becoming obsolete in significant facets of a society and culture. In a work on this subject entitled "What Do You Lose When You Lose Your Language", Joshua Fishman observes when you are talking about the language, most of what you are talking about is the culture, and where loss occurs, it encompasses "all those things that essentially are the way of thought, the way of valuing, and the human reality".

In an article published in The UNESCO Courier in 1983, on "National language and cultural identity", Clifford Fyle, adds to this point. He notes that "Countries seeking to achieve rapid development for their peoples need rapidly also to provide education for all their citizens. Only by mobilizing their total manpower and putting it to effective use can they hope to make the economic strides a nation and its people desire. This means mass education, the mass teaching of reading and writing; a constant flow of information and ongoing positive communications; the teaching of new habits and new attitudes, and not least among these, extensive training in new skills. All this is impossible without a vast national mass education program. Smart leadership is usually quick to realize that such a program can only succeed if it is conducted in the language or languages with which people are familiar".

It is then on that simple proposition that the question of Globalization and *Kreyòl* rests. Both are propelled by their own compelling force and that dynamic calls for accommodations on both sides. This is all the more so, since I suspect that unique cultures and languages are here to stay and the jury is not all in on globalization's fate.

Now, allow me to leave you with a Haitian proverb as I always do in my newspaper columns: "*Bouch granmoun ka santi move men pawòl-yo santi bon.*" "Old folks' mouths may smell bad, but their spoken words have a pleasant odor."



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ISBN 978-0-9790440-0-7



Published by A.C.T.I.O.N. Foundation, Inc.

1350 E. Sunrise Blvd, Suite 121

Fort Lauderdale, FL 33304

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