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The Meandering Politics of *Créolité*

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In the dynamics of the struggles for decolonization and political emancipation, cultural constructions and practices often accompany the contestatory claims they seek to legitimize. In the Caribbean, and particularly in the French islands, Africanity and then *créolité*, or “creoleness,” were claimed and perceived as forms of cultural contestation by the political order. The first of these, promoted by Aimé Césaire, was translated into a Negritude that reacted to the Frenchness that was perceived as exclusive and negating the other components of the West Indian culture. The second rehabilitates cultural plurality in a call for creole identity, to the dismay of Édouard Glissant, who sees it as an essentialist approach.¹

In reality, these two movements have an undeniable political dimension. First, because they arise at singular historical moments in the political development of the French territories of the Caribbean they challenge, from a cultural standpoint, the metropolitan power. Second, because those behind the movements are actors engaged in political action and particularly in defense of autonomy, on the one hand, and the independence of the other on Martinique, on the other.²

¹ See Édouard Glissant, “Intervention à la Fnac de Rennes,” 26 May 1993, in Fred Réno “Lecture critique des notions de domination et d’identité chez les auteurs-militants de la créolité,” *Pouvoirs dans la Caraïbe* (1997), 194–213.

² Aimé Césaire, member of the French Communist Party, deputy, and reporter of the assimilation act in 1946, founded in 1958 the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais, whose aim was autonomy. Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant are in favor of independence.

Césaire, who supported the so-called law of assimilation that made the colonies into departments in 1946, and was disappointed by the economic effects of departmentalization, adopted the slogan of autonomy in the 1960s. The *créolité* of Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, authors of *Éloge de la créolité*, appeared later. It emerged at a time when the independence movements and the associations for the preservation of cultural and linguistic patrimony were significantly integrated into the public space. In varying forms, the Creole language and culture were set up as a source of social and political mobilization. They were then often activated as unifying elements in nationalist or patriotic demands.

In reality it is necessary to distinguish the collective approach contained in *Éloge de la créolité* from the subsequent political writings of each author. There is sometimes a discrepancy between collective discourse and individual reflections, which leads one to question the existence of a creolist referential to which all authors would adhere. Even if the gap does not reveal deep contradictions between the authors, it reflects differences in direction. For example, if the collective work seeks to make a direct association between *créolité* and politics, the individual authors do it implicitly or avoid doing so. We will not, therefore, attempt to impute personal political views to the *créolité* movement unless, of course, the authors state that it is a shared discourse. We cannot finally isolate the political writings of the three authors. They write a lot, and not just novels. Politics can be detected in all the literary genres they practice. While I do not ignore the quality of Confiant's politicohistorical narratives and Bernabé's stimulating articles and academic works, I have chosen to refer mainly to the writings of Chamoiseau.

This choice is explained in particular by the fact that he is the one who, after the release of the *Éloge*, sought to construct a political discourse of *créolité* and creolization. He did so, and he develops the essay by combining the themes of domination, identity, and globalization. My essay is based on two main ideas. The first is founded on the observation of a proto-political discourse

of *créolité* that does not lead to an alternative political approach. The second idea, complementing the first, deduces that politics remains ultimately an unconsidered element of *créolité*. This double observation does not mean, however, that politics is absent from the writings of the authors of *créolité*.

The Absence of an Alternative Political Project

We do not expect a literary movement, even a contestatory one, to produce a political project. In general, in this type of text, if the work through its content and foci contains a political dimension, it is rare that it proceeds to propose an alternative to the decried system. This programmatic approach is most often reserved for political organizations.³ The *Eloge de la créolité* is one of those exceptions. Through its content, its foci and its conclusion, its authors attempt to articulate political proposals by means of a claim for identity. Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant are militant writers.⁴ Consequently, their writing reflects, to a large extent, their political commitment in defense of such causes as ecology and the independence of their “natural nation.”⁵

To the question of a journalist who asked him if he had thought of engaging in political activities, Patrick Chamoiseau replied without hesitation: “I am a political person, not a politician,” proof if it were needed of a conception of the role of the writer, necessarily involved in public life.⁶ *Éloge de la créolité* has a strong political dimension because it is above all a pamphlet of protest. By means of a claim for identity, the work attacks the established political order. In their text, the

³ See Robert Merton, *Eléments de théorie et de méthode sociologique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1997).

⁴ See Fred RENO, “Lecture critique des notions de domination et d’identité chez les écrivains-militants de la créolité,” *Pouvoirs dans la Caraïbe*, 10 (1998), journals.openedition.org/plc/781.

⁵ The expression “natural nation” (“nation naturelle”) is proposed by Patrick Chamoiseau in “Les identités dans la totalité-monde,” interview by Silyane Larcher, *Cités* 1, no. 29 (2007): 121–34.

⁶ “Je suis un politique, pas un politicien”; Patrick Chamoiseau, “La radicalité est nécessaire,” interview by Joseph Confavreux, *Le monde*, 2 May 2013.

three authors express a desire to intervene in public life both by the refusal of the status quo and the announcement of a new era. The approach is related to identity, but the intention is fundamentally political. This intention is first announced in the declaration, “Neither Europeans nor Africans nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles.”⁷ This proclamation is certainly a challenge to “rooted identities,” but it cannot be understood without reference to the politico-legal situation of the French dependencies. As in Guyana and Réunion, the state authorities implemented cultural and educational policies that valued Frenchness to the detriment of the other cultural components of the colonies.

The Negritude of Aimé Césaire was a first cry of opposition to the assimilationist temptation. Some authors saw it as a way of responding to the impossibility of republican integration, as if assimilation was a dream that never came to be. Jean-Loup Amselle, for example, writes, “For Césaire, the dream of republican assimilation is impossible, since the West Indian society irremediably carries the stigma of slavery and of the colonial situation. Its emancipation can come only through highlighting its singularity, that is to say its African ancestry, and therefore the establishment of the cultural ties uniting it to the ‘black’ motherland.”⁸ This view seems excessive to me, for with Césaire the dream of republican assimilation is above all political. It is embodied in the assumed social departmentalization, then the regionalization, that would be respectful of all differences, which he desired for populations who turned away from independence. Negritude is the cultural dimension of political opposition.

⁷ “Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Créoles”; Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 13.

⁸ “Pour Césaire, le rêve de l’assimilation républicaine est impossible, puisque la société antillaise porte irrémédiablement les stigmates de l’esclavage et de la situation coloniale. Son émancipation ne peut advenir que de la mise en lumière de sa singularité, c’est-à-dire de son ascendance africaine, et donc de l’établissement des liens culturels l’unissant à la mère patrie ‘noire’”; Jean-Loup Amselle, “Négritude, créolisation, créolité: L’ethnisation de la société française au prisme des auteurs martiniquais,” *Les Temps Modernes* 1, no. 662–63 (2011): 341.

Créolité shares with Negritude the acknowledgement of a situation of dependency in the French West Indian territories and the wish to denounce this situation through a discourse of identity. Born in a context of independence-centered contestation, paradoxically, *créolité* is no more radical than Negritude. Above all, it presents itself as a desire to recognize “diversity.”⁹ Against false universality, it calls for the assertion of the cultural originality of the “departmentalized” people without, a priori, giving primacy to one of the components of their identity. Gathered on the same soil by the “yoke of history,” the Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements constituted a new humanity, a *créolité* by means of an “interactional or transactional aggregate.”¹⁰

Créolité thus invites us to “rehabilitate our interiority.” In so doing, it rejects the established political order, founded on the monopoly of the symbolic power of French culture. If Negritude rebels against French hegemony, *créolité* refuses to reduce Caribbean cultures to their European and African components. It thus reveals the Asian and Levantine inputs contained in the creole rhizome.

The posture of the *créolité* authors, like that of Césaire, reminds us of Pierre Bourdieu’s reflections on the social dimensions of art.¹¹ In the context of the dependency of the West Indies, culture and politics are intimately linked, often maintaining relations of mutual instrumentalization. The most obvious aspect of this correlation is contained in the single appendix to the *Éloge*. This document, titled “Creolité and Politics,” two and a half pages in length, distills the political proposals of the authors, without constituting an alternative project. This appendix is surprising, unexpected, in that it gives the impression of an addition, a hasty gesture without a clear link to

⁹ “Diversalité”; Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, *Eloge de la créolité*, 55.

¹⁰ “Départementalisés”; “joug de l’histoire”; “agrégat interactionnel ou transactionnel”; *ibid.*, 24.

¹¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

the rest of the text. It probably reflects the fact that the construction of a political project was not the priority of the authors of the *Éloge*, or simply that the articulation between *créolité* and politics is still in the planning stage.

Politics is presented in the appendix as one of the main engines of social activity, *créolité* being associated with different social sectors. In this section, we learn that creoleness is a claim that “is not only an aesthetic one” and that it “has important ramifications in all fields of activity and especially in those that drive it: politics and the economic.”¹² The political intention is therefore undoubtedly present in the will to break the links of dependency that persist between the metropolis and its former colonies that are now established as French departments. *Créolité* would carry a demand for full sovereignty for Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyana. On the ideological level, the proponents of *créolité* mark their distance with what they call “primary Marxism” and “bounded nationalism.” The first would exempt “our leaders and political organizations from reflecting in depth on the content of a true Martinican, Guadeloupean or Guyanese culture.”¹³ The second would make the Martinican a foreigner for the Guadeloupean and vice versa.

In fact, the argument denounces and stakes claims, on the basis of a militant logic that is little concerned with a prior critique of the notions the authors evoke. What does “full and complete sovereignty” mean in the Caribbean context? What is a “true culture” in a creole world? On reading these two pages, one remains skeptical on the absence of references or ideas that would inspire the notion of a political *créolité* or a creole politics. One might ask why we should expect from *créolité* these references and ideas. In reality the expectation is provoked and

¹² “N’est pas seulement de nature esthétique”; “présente des ramifications importantes dans tous les domaines d’activité et notamment dans ceux qui en sont les moteurs: le politique et l’économique”; Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, *Eloge de la créolité*, 57.

¹³ “Le marxisme primaire”; “le nationalisme borné”; “Nos leaders et nos organisations politiques de réfléchir en profondeur au contenu d’une vraie culture martiniquaise, guadeloupéenne”; *ibid.*

nourished by the political intention of the authors, who appear as prisoners of a militant approach. This last observation is verified in the propositions made by the authors. Here we see the pattern of a new political configuration that is without real links to *créolité* other than to the Creole language. The historical and geographical proximity of the territories apparently justify their rapprochement.

As for the political organization of Caribbean societies, the *Éloge* contains a set of general ideas and proposals whose creole character is difficult to identify. The entanglement of politics and creoleness is barely perceptible in the overall scheme of things. According to the authors, creoleness evokes the hope of political regroupings within the archipelago, then with the South American continent. These would then present themselves in the form of concentric circles of solidarity between island territories and the nations of South America. The first circle would be built on the basis of belonging to Creole-speaking world. It would group precisely those territories that have in common a French-lexicon Creole language. In the text, the territories concerned are Haiti, Martinique, Saint Lucia, Dominica, French Guyana, and Guadeloupe. It would also encompass territories creolized culturally but that speak English or Spanish. The second circle would add “the nations of South America.” This precision by the authors seems surprising. Indeed, it excludes Central America and reinforces our sense that this annex devoted to politics was drafted hastily. Why this reference to South America and not to Latin America? Why would Mexico of the Yucatan, Belize, or Panama, which are located in Central America, not be part of the creole grouping? The federation or confederation that would result from these rapprochements are apparently, according to the appendix, “the only means of effectively fighting against the various hegemonic blocks that share the planet.”¹⁴

¹⁴ “De lutter efficacement contre les différents blocs hégémoniques qui se partagent la planète”; *ibid.*, 58.

These initial ideas call for some additional questions and remarks. In what ways would this project be creole? Why should belonging to the Creole-speaking world or to creole culture favor the emergence of a singular political project? In reality, the architects of this scheme do not specify by which mechanisms creoleness and politics interpenetrate to lead to a political creoleness or a creole politics. These first proposals are complemented by geopolitical considerations, which also raise some questions. Observing the international scene and particularly the conflictual relations between political blocs, the authors see in these projects of insular and continental regroupings “the means to fight effectively.”¹⁵ Should one infer that a “creole regrouping” could constitute a bloc that would be in a position to face up to the other blocs? This is probably not the conclusion of Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant. In what ways, moreover, would such an entity be in harmony with creoleness? If this is not the authors’ conclusion, the formulation of this proposal leaves room for doubt. The text also contains a caution whose imprecision limits the project’s scope. “We remain convinced,” they say, “that, because they have not incorporated into their strategy the reintegration of our peoples within this Creole culture . . . our political leaders are preparing us for a disappointing future.”¹⁶

Does resettlement or reintegration within the creole culture mean that these people have been evicted from it? At what moment, how, and by whom? Would decreolization be an illustration of such an eviction? What would be the content of political strategies for the reintegration of peoples into creole culture? All these questions, whose answers would clarify the articulation between creoleness and politics and which give the impression of an incomplete approach to the issue, thus confirm that political creoleness is a wandering, imprecise concept.

¹⁵ “Le moyen de lutter efficacement”; *ibid.*

¹⁶ “Nous demeurons persuadés que faute d’avoir intégré à leur stratégie la réinstallation de nos peuples au sein de cette culture créole . . . nos dirigeants politiques nous préparent des lendemains qui déchantent”; *ibid.*

This comment raises a more fundamental question about the authors' conception of culture and identity. Indeed, unless we have a "fixist" approach to these questions, can we be reintegrated into a shifting creole culture whose essence is precisely not to have one? It is on this very point that Édouard Glissant distances himself from the authors of the *Éloge*.

Politics, an Unconsidered Aspect of Creoleness?

The conditions of this work's genesis reveal its limits and perhaps those of political creoleness. "The idea was really to pay homage to Glissant, simply to tell the Martinican people how it was thanks to him that I had succeeded in liberating my creativity," Chamoiseau confided in an interview. "It is Confiant who called it *In Praise of Creoleness*. But really, for me, it would have been *In Praise of Édouard Glissant* because that was what it was. Confiant instead favored the Creoleness angle. . . . Glissant was also informed at all stages of the work's writing. He read them."¹⁷

If everyone's views seem to have since changed, on the political level the text appears to remain true to their ideals: "I believe that the *Éloge* as the foundation of a new politics, a new conception of the existence of a people and a nation," Chamoiseau continued, "a new, perhaps, definition of relations between peoples, which are much more complex, in their interdependence; that political idea is still there in a certain way. This is what I continue to explore today."¹⁸

¹⁷ "L'idée était vraiment de rendre un hommage à Glissant, simplement pour dire aux Martiniquais comment, grâce à lui, j'avais réussi à libérer ma créativité. . . . C'est Confiant qui l'a appelé *Éloge de la créolité*. Mais, à la limite, pour moi, ça aurait été *Éloge à Édouard Glissant* car c'était ça. Confiant a plutôt pris l'angle de la créolité. . . . Glissant était d'ailleurs informé de toutes les étapes de l'écriture. Il les lisait"; Patrick Chamoiseau, quoted in Luigia Pattano, "Sur l'*Éloge de la créolité*: Un entretien avec Patrick Chamoiseau," *Mondesfrancophones.com*, September 2011, mondesfrancophones.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Entretien_avec_Patrick_Chamoiseau_version_PDF.pdf, 2, 3.

¹⁸ "Je pense que l'*Éloge* comme socle d'une nouvelle politique, d'une nouvelle conception de l'existence d'un peuple et d'une nation . . . une nouvelle, peut être, définition des relations entre les peuples, beaucoup plus complexe, en interdépendance, est toujours là, d'une certaine manière. C'est ce que je continue à approfondir aujourd'hui"; *ibid.*, 5.

Against the will of its authors, creoleness is now classified in “those forms of essentialization that originated in the former and present French colonies.” And in the following remark, Jean-Loup Amselle questions Negritude, creolization, and creoleness: “Do they really have the liberating potential that is attributed to them or do they not have the effect of enclosing the people of France and the West Indies in identity prisons from which they will have the greatest trouble escaping?”¹⁹ Glissant himself, who inspired the writing of the *Éloge*, has distanced himself from his friends in unequivocal terms, preferring creolization to Creoleness, which tends to fix a process that cannot be fixed.

“Creolization is the bringing into contact of several cultures or at least several distinct cultural elements in one part of the world, the only result of which is a new phenomenon, which is totally unpredictable in relation to the sum or simple synthesis of these elements,” says Glissant.²⁰

If you take the *Éloge de la créolité*, it is a summary of the ideas contained in *Le discours antillais*. I made a remark ten years before *Éloge de la créolité* appeared . . . , I made a note on the word *créolité*, saying that for me it is a supposed theory of people who fix a process and try to define an essence . . . because for me creolization is a process where one changes oneself, changing the other and exchanging with him or her. And when Patrick, Raphaël and Bernabé wrote their work, they believed that it was more convenient to trace a line between Negritude, Caribbeanness, and creoleness. . . . It was clear, it was well balanced. . . . But for me, it is a process in which I do not recognize myself. On the one

¹⁹ “Ont-elles véritablement le potentiel libérateur qu’on leur prête ou n’ont-elles pas pour effet d’enfermer les acteurs sociaux de France et des Antilles dans des prisons identitaires dont ils auront le plus grand mal à s’échapper?”; Amselle, “Négritude, créolisation, créolité,” 353. See also, Michel Giraud “La créolité: Une rupture en trompe-l’œil,” *Cahiers d’études africaines*, no. 148 (1997): 795–811.

²⁰ “La créolisation est la mise en contact de plusieurs cultures ou au moins de plusieurs éléments de cultures distinctes, dans un endroit du monde, avec pour seule résultante une donnée nouvelle, totalement imprévisible par rapport à la somme ou à la simple synthèse de ces éléments”; Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 37.

hand, because my starting point is not Negritude, and on the other because I do not end up at creoleness.

(Si vous prenez l'*Éloge de la Créolité*, c'est un résumé des idées contenues dans *Le Discours antillais*. J'ai fait une note dix ans avant que ne paraisse *Éloge de la Créolité*, . . . j'ai fait une note sur le mot créolité, en disant que pour moi, c'est une prétendue théorie de gens qui figent un processus et essaient d'en définir une essence . . . parce que pour moi, la créolisation, c'est un processus où on se change soi-même, en changeant l'autre et en échangeant avec lui. Et quand Patrick, Raphaël et Bernabé ont fait l'*Éloge de la Créolité*, ils ont cru qu'il était plus commode de faire la trace Négritude, Antillanité, Créolité. . . . C'était visible, c'était bien équilibré. . . . Mais moi, c'est un processus dans lequel je ne me reconnais pas. D'une part, parce que je ne pars pas de la Négritude et d'autre part parce que je n'arrive pas à la Créolité.)²¹

Chamoiseau and Confiant were activists in the Movement of Democrats and Ecologists for a Sovereign Martinique (MODEMAS). According to this organization, the identity of Martinique and the defense of its heritage require a political commitment to safeguard the culture. In the writings of this party, which is strongly influenced by the creolist authors and in particular by Chamoiseau, the references to the creole culture are omnipresent without clearly establishing a link between creoleness and politics.

With MODEMAS it was believed that the form of creoleness that was allied with political ecology would break into the political sphere. The relative success of the movement and the early resignation of the creoleness activists may have delayed or prevented the formulation of a political

²¹ Glissant, "Intervention à la Fnac."

version of creoleness that, twenty-five-plus years after the *Éloge*, has not seen the light of day. The claim for “optimal sovereignty” asserted by this movement is the only notion that illustrates any kind of attempt to articulate between the creole world and the political sphere.

Another way of claiming independence is, according to the MODEMAS, “to gather around a societal project that includes a new autonomous status for Martinique.” As is stated in the first document published by the new party, “A phase of responsibility, sharing of competences and control of Martinique’s interests, this period of transition is indispensable for obtaining our optimal sovereignty.”²² According to this logic, sovereignty would not be a rupture with France; it would be achieved in the context of necessary and inevitable interdependencies.

“It is no longer a matter of the justifiably aggressive national rupture under an anthem and a flag, which seeks vengeance on the colonizer. It is a sovereign inscription in concert with the others To enter into better relations with France we therefore refuse to disappear into France. . . . We claim for Martinique . . . all the sovereignty necessary for its flourishing and its inscription into the world,” write the authors of the “Mutation Martinique.”²³ Relation is preferred to rupture.

“Better than the idea of independence, the idea of sovereignty is the only one that can put an end to all forms of colonization. One can be independent and not be sovereign,” says Patrick Chamoiseau. “By ‘process of optimal sovereignty’ I mean: the recovery of all the spaces of

²² “De rassembler autour d’un Projet de société qui inclut un nouveau statut pour un État autonome martiniquais. Phase de responsabilité, de partage des compétences et de maîtrise des intérêts de la Martinique, cette période de transition est indispensable pour l’obtention de notre souveraineté optimale”; MODEMAS, “Une alternative,” mimeographed document, October 1992.

²³ “Ce n’est plus la rupture nationale légitimement agressive sous un hymne et un drapeau, qui veut la peau du colonisateur. C’est l’inscription souveraine dans le concert avec les autres. . . . Pour mieux entrer en relation avec la France nous refusons donc de disparaître dans la France. . . . Nous réclamons pour la Martinique . . . toute la souveraineté nécessaire à son épanouissement et à son inscription dans le monde”; Garcin Malsa, *La mutation Martinique: Orientations pour l’épanouissement de la Martinique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1991).

sovereignty, authorized by the collective consciousness, and the relationship between the manifestly present political forces.”²⁴

Although original and conceivable, the notion of “optimal sovereignty” is decontextualized and seems to underestimate the weight of the Jacobinism of contemporary French political culture. Nevertheless, the idea of shared sovereignty is possible under conditions that remain to be negotiated. In the French context, it has been materialized in New Caledonia. But this is an exception, which indicates an exclusive sovereignty for the benefit of a future Caledonian State whose creation is clearly envisaged.

In truth, French society is multicultural, but the state is not multinational. At best it can be defined as multiterritorial. The idea of political meanderings or wanderings therefore consists in proposing things that are unlikely to come to pass, and the link with creoleness or relevance in the context in which they occur. This last remark could be applied to Chamoiseau’s analysis of domination. If optimal sovereignty and meta-nation are both manifestations and instruments of interdependence, domination expresses above all dependence and even subjugation. It does not therefore directly concern creoleness as such, but rather the situation in which most Caribbean societies find themselves.

The domination of the French dependencies appears to Chamoiseau total or even totalitarian. It would manifest itself in all areas of individual life and collective life. It is insidious because it is exercised by symbolic violence. It is reflected in particular in a colonization of the imaginary and manifests itself in particular in literary production.²⁵ According to Chamoiseau, the literary current of Negritude maintained an illusion: that of fighting a battle against a dominion that

²⁴ Patrick Chamoiseau, “Déclaration pour la méta-nation,” 22 November 2010, blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/les-invites.../declaration-pour-la-meta-nation.

²⁵ See Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres créoles* (Paris: Hatier, 1991).

in reality it fed by its complicity with the language of the dominant culture. In other words, resistance cannot avoid a challenge to the linguistic apparatus through which the symbolic violence of the dominant culture is exercised.²⁶

Finally, Chamoiseau says, domination became widespread. Henceforth “one no longer strips the tree that one wants to dominate, one no longer prunes the major branches, one works at its root in the sediments even of its sap—for us the imaginary,” he adds.²⁷ Self-dehumanization would be the consequence: “We are aiming for another form of domination, unprecedented, which calls for the invention of new weapons. To oppose this new domination, we must create what I call the new warrior. My role is to amplify and enlarge the political imagination.”²⁸

It is as if domination applied itself to living beings without their consciousness and without the will on their behalf to contest or sustain it. And what if domination was accepted because the dominated had succeeded in developing strategies to convert dependence into a resource?²⁹ Finally, Chamoiseau aligns himself with Glissant’s approach, according to which the modes of thought that prevailed in the West are not capable of defining the present world, which is marked in particular by unpredictability. It is therefore necessary to develop other modes of thinking that, according to Glissant, are based on a poetic vision.³⁰ The notion of meta-nation is part of this vision. It is borrowed from Edgar Morin, who evokes it in a European context. Faced with the

²⁶ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Écrire en pays dominé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 60.

²⁷ “On n’effeuille plus l’arbre que l’on veut dominer, on ne lui taille plus les branches majeures, on le travaille à sa racine dans les sédiments même de sa sève—pour nous l’imaginaire”; *ibid.*, 136.

²⁸ “Nous visons une autre forme de domination, inédite, qui appelle à inventer de nouvelles armes. Pour s’opposer à cette nouvelle domination, nous devons créer ce que j’appelle le nouveau guerrier. Mon rôle est de fournir à l’imaginaire politique des amplifications”; *France-Antilles Magazine* (Martinique), 17–23 May 1997.

²⁹ See Fred R  no, “Qui veut rompre avec la d  pendance?,” *Autrement: Guadeloupe, Temps Incertains*, no. 123 (January 2001): 236–49. See also Fred R  no, “Re-sourcing Dependency: Decolonisation and Post-colonialism in French Overseas Department,” *European Journal of Overseas History* 25 (2001): 9–22.

³⁰   douard Glissant, *Introduction    une po  tique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 75.

present limits of the nation-state and therefore of the nationalist idea, the meta-nation would be a necessary overcoming of the national model by opening up to other cultures and preserving state values.³¹ The nation-state would have become too small for the big problems of life and too big for the small problems of life.³²

In the creole context, is it a question of conceiving of a Caribbean meta-nation that would be like a European meta-nation? To my knowledge, there is no indication that this is the case. In reality, the idea of the meta-nation is evoked, but it cannot be distinguished from what Morin wrote. Chamoiseau also sees the limits of the nation-state and positions himself in favor of a new kind of political organization that could correspond to the totality of the world without having the limits and contours of this reworked idea of the nation, nor its links with the creole world.

“As regards the political aspects,” he says, “I consider that we are natural nations, nations without a state.”³³

I am in favor of independence, but the majority of the people of Martinique are not. . . . To go beyond the stage of the natural nation, there must be an aspiration for a form of sovereignty. . . . The nation state, in its traditional forms, is not capable of dealing with problems that belong to the whole world. . . . So what form of state, what organization should we consider for the various nations, natural or not? How to imagine a *meta-nation*? This is the great difficulty.

³¹ Edgard Morin, *Penser l'Europe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

³² Anthony Giddens, *Les conséquences de la modernité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994).

³³ “En ce qui concerne les aspects politiques, je considère que nous sommes des nations naturelles, des nations sans État”; Chamoiseau, “Les identités dans la totalité-monde,” 122.

(Moi, je suis indépendantiste, mais les Martiniquais dans leur majorité ne sont pas indépendantistes. . . . Pour dépasser le stade de la nation naturelle, il faut qu'il y ait aspiration à une forme de souveraineté. . . . L'État-nation, dans ses modalités traditionnelles, ne parvient plus à traiter des problèmes qui relèvent de la totalité-monde. . . . Alors quelle forme d'État, quelle organisation faut-il envisager pour les différentes nations, naturelles ou pas? Comment concevoir une *méta-nation*? C'est la grande difficulté.)³⁴

The answer is partially given by Morin himself. "Europe must undergo metamorphosis both in the provinces and in the meta-nations," he writes.³⁵ If local or national territory in the age of globalization can barely serve as effective frameworks for political action, the planet may be the desired level for concerted action but not necessarily for decision making and implementation of public policies. A variable regional level that changes according to contexts and issues can be considered relevant. Morin evokes this recomposition of a world marked by the end of territories and the relativity of sovereignties.³⁶ But his imagined meta-nation is European, thus regional. Therefore, in regards to the prospect of political creoleness, why not conceive of a creole meta-nation based on the cultural and geopolitical developments contained in the *Éloge*? This is not the path chosen by Chamoiseau.

Ultimately, independently of the theories, the link between creoleness and politics is inscribed in the history of the plantation societies that have succeeded in limiting the emergence of socioethnic conflicts. In the context of creole societies, politics, generally informed and fertilized

³⁴ Ibid., 122–23.

³⁵ "L'Europe doit se métamorphoser à la fois en province et en Méta-nation"; Morin, *Penser l'Europe*, 199.

³⁶ See Bertrand Badie, *La fin des territoires* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).

by the cultural sphere, has benefited from a process of hybridization that has contained and limited ethnic-based threats. The universalist vocation of politics is thereby reinforced. Strongly segmented societies, marked by the violence of socioracial plantation-derived relations, have succeeded, through creolization, in transcending discourse and practices of cultural or racial purity: “The hybrid reality of the Creole society does not accommodate the idea of cultural or racial purity.”³⁷ From this point of view, it is difficult to understand the references to cultural authenticity or true culture contained in *Éloge de la créolité*.

The cases of Martinique and Jamaica, analyzed by Kamau Brathwaite, are privileged fields, among others, in which to observe and conceptualize creolization.³⁸ In Martinique, there is a phenomenon that goes unnoticed and yet can be interpreted as a creolization of politics.³⁹ In its history and particularly between 1946 and 2010, this island revealed its capacity for integration, through the emergence of political leaders of different ethnic origin. Aimé Césaire, “the fundamental Negro,” was for more than fifty years a charismatic leader. Before the death of Césaire in 2008, the Martinican electorate chose as its leader the president of the Mouvement Indépendantiste Martiniquais, Alfred Marie-Jeanne, a mixed-race person nicknamed “Chabin” whose European phenotype and political choices radically differentiated him from Césaire, a black who favored autonomy within the French Republic. After two terms at the head of the Martinican Executive, and although he was reelected as deputy in the French Parliament, Marie-Jeanne was replaced as Martinican leader by Serge Letchimy, who is of Indian origin. This says much about the creoleness of this society, and therefore of the creole impact on politics in the popular quasi-

³⁷ Percy Hintzen, “Race and Creole Ethnicity in the Caribbean,” in Verene Sheherd and Glen Richards, eds., *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers/James Currey Publishers, 2002), 94.

³⁸ Edward [Kamau] Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971).

³⁹ See Fred Réno, “La créolisation des institutions politiques et administratives à la Martinique,” in Fred Constant and Justin Daniel, eds., *1946–1996: Cinquante ans de départementalisation outre-mer* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997).

consensus not to evoke the origins of these leaders during the election campaigns. The vast majority of voters decide on the basis of political or clientelist preferences without ethnic origin interfering in their choices. It seems easier to creolize politics than to politicize creoleness. The orientations of the initiators of the creole literary movement attest to this. Indeed, one must leave the framework of creoleness to find the political reflections of the authors of creoleness, and particularly of Patrick Chamoiseau. If his thought takes at times Martinique or the West Indies as a place, this reflection is now globally oriented in the same way as it is for Glissant's notion of the *Tout-monde*.

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