

RECONSIDERING CREOLIZATION AND CREOLE SOCIETIES

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I

The purpose of this paper¹ is to explore some of the strengths and limitations of the concepts of 'creolization' and 'creole societies'² for analyzing cultural changes in the Caribbean. The concept of creolization has been widely used to analyze the process in which new cultures and societies emerged during the colonial period. Afro-Creole culture, for example, although derived from African and European elements, is nevertheless distinctly Caribbean (Brathwaite; Burton; Moore; Nettleford; Patterson). This emphasis on the originality of creole cultures emerged at a significant moment in the ideological decolonization of the Caribbean, in the 1970s, when the analysis of the origins of a common culture in a creole community became part of the process of nation-building. The concept of creolization is important because it avoids both the view that enslaved Africans were stripped of their cultures and acculturated into a European culture, and also the view that evidence of the African heritage in the Caribbean lies only in 'retentions' or 'survivals.' Cultural change was not a one-way process in which colonized peoples passively absorbed the culture of the dominant Europeans, and the study of African influences should not be limited to the search for African retentions as if they are items under glass cases in a museum. The use of the concepts of creolization and creole societies by anthropologists, historians and other scholars has successfully emphasized the active role of Caribbean peoples and the importance of African cultural traditions in shaping the new and distinctive cultures of the region. More recently, several scholars have explored the question of the creolization of Chinese (Ho) and (East) Indians in the Caribbean (Mohammed; Munasinghe; Puri; Reddock; Sampath; Shepherd), by which is meant their assimilation into creole culture and society. The question must be raised as to whether the same concept that is used to describe the development of creole societies in terms of their distinctive Afro-Creole culture can be used to analyse the continuing interaction and transformation of all the different cultures in the Caribbean.

In a paper I wrote in 1987³, I argued that creolization "is not a homogenizing process, but

¹ Among the people who have influenced and encouraged me to think along the lines of this paper, I wish particularly to thank Viranjini Munasinghe, who invited me to share my early reconsiderations at a seminar of the Department of Anthropology at Cornell University in 1999. I tried out some of these ideas at a conference organized by Gad Heuman and David Trotman at the Centre for Caribbean Studies, University of Warwick, in 2000 and for this I am very grateful.

² I use the capital C for the proper noun, Creole, referring to the individuals or the ethnic group that is so identified, and lower case c for the adjective, creole, and for creolization.

³ Written for a conference at the Centre for Caribbean Studies at the University of Warwick, it was published in 1992 and reprinted in Caribbean Quarterly 44.1-2 (1998): 1-32.

rather a process of *contention*" (72) in societies that are characterized by extreme social inequalities and pervasive conflicts. The concept, I argued, should be used in a dialectical analysis that takes account of those social forces and formations that are related to the cultural changes. In this paper I take that argument as my starting point and make some further suggestions.

I distinguish between analytic and ideological usages of the concepts of creolization and creole societies. M. G. Smith, in the essay "West Indian Culture," distinguished between the analytic and ideological functions of the concept culture (1-2). While scholars may use a concept analytically, the same concept is used in the culture which they study in an ideological way. What Smith said of the concept culture is true also for the concepts 'creole' and 'creolization,' which may be used analytically in the scholarly study of cultures and societies, but are also words that are used in those societies with an ideological function. We need to be aware of the problem that arises when these distinct usages of the concepts overlap.

In this paper, I compare the dualistic and dialectical versions of creolization that are derived from European philosophical traditions and suggest some comparisons with more 'organic' African perspectives. Then I critique the implications of the concept of creolization when it is used in connection with people and cultures other than those of African and European origin. The analytic use of creolization and creole society has been indispensable in the study of cultural change in the African diaspora. However, the ideological use of the concepts, when they are tied exclusively to Afro-creole cultures and societies, obscures the interconnections and cultural symbiosis that exist between 'overlapping diasporas' (Lewis).

II

In my earlier paper I distinguish between the dualistic and dialectical conceptions of creolization. The former appears in terms of a "black / white dichotomy" (Brathwaite, *Development* xiv), "the juxtaposition of master and slave" (xvi), and the dichotomy of 'colonial' and 'creole' societies (101), as if these categories are independent of each other. When these elements are conceived as if they are separate, the interaction between them is viewed mechanically and the process of creolization appears to be simply a blending of elements borrowed from each part. The dialectical perspective, on the contrary, draws attention to the contradictions and conflicts that are inherent in the relationship between these elements, a relationship that actually defines the nature of the constituent parts. 'Master' and 'slave,' for example, have no independent existence because each is defined in terms of its relationship to the other – in dialectical terms a 'unity of opposites.' Similarly, we need to understand how the socially constructed categories and identities of 'black' and 'white' were developed in relation to each other within a racial hierarchy shaped by particular historical social forces. Hence, 'whiteness' is not a kind of trait or characteristic apart from 'blackness' but is a claim of superiority over 'blackness.' Finally, colonialism, though originating from a spatially separate metropole, is not something that exists apart from the societies of the Caribbean, which are among the longest and most thoroughly colonized in history. Colonialism, far from being an "outside influence" on creolization (Brathwaite, "Caliban" 42-3) is constitutive of it. The colonial system of domination and the resistant responses to that domination are two aspects of the same socio-cultural process that creates a society that is creole because it is colonial. My purpose in that earlier paper was to clarify the analysis of the process of creolization by

outlining this dialectical approach.

My argument was noted by others, including Mindie Lazarus-Black in her account of law and society in Antigua and Barbuda (3), and Richard Burton in Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean (6). Burton agrees that creolization is a process of contention and uses the dialectical approach to transcend the old argument about whether Caribbean culture is characterized chiefly by cultural loss, retention, or creation. Burton asserts that “*both* ‘continuity’ and ‘creativity’ are involved in creolization” (5). In analyzing the central role of cultural conflict in this process Burton uses Michel de Certeau’s distinction between resistance and opposition. The former is possible only when a dominated group has enough of a base of its own that it can develop a ‘strategy’ of resistance, whereas those who are too weak to establish such a ‘space’ of their own may resort only to the ‘tactics’ of opposition from within the system. The more complete the domination the harder it is for any group to have the ‘space,’ or sufficient sense of exteriority from the system, to be able to resist the system as such. Burton draws attention to many forms of cultural opposition, including varieties of Afro-Christianity, calypso, carnival and cricket, in societies as diverse as Jamaica, Haiti and Trinidad. His emphasis on the politics in religion and the seriousness of ‘play’ helps us understand the dialectical development of Afro-Creole, and also Euro-Creole, culture.⁴ However, in his conclusions Burton appears dissatisfied with the binary opposition of resistance and opposition when he says, “there is scarcely one cultural form discussed in this book that is not at the same time a revolt against things as they are and a form of adjustment to them, scarcely one that, even as it rebels against one form of domination . . . does not contain within itself the seeds of another form of domination” (264).

The dualistic approach sometimes creeps back into the analysis of scholars who are thinking dialectically because dualism predominates in the European intellectual tradition. In Descartes’ philosophy, for example, the universe is composed of two irreducible and irreconcilable components, mind and matter. Such binary oppositions shape the hegemonic paradigms within which we think, but they may inhibit or distort our understanding of the cultural process of creolization. Instead of analyzing cultural contact and interaction in terms of static and irreconcilable opposites in the manner of dualism, dialectical analysis draws attention to changes in the nature of the opposing principles and forces that result from such interaction, so the cultural process is seen as open ended and multi-directional, rather than finite and linear. The more dynamic dialectical view of cultural change, which emphasizes the *process* of creolization more than the ‘product’ of creole culture and society, is similar to that of Edouard Glissant: “If we posit *metissage* as, generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences, creolization seems to be a limitless *metissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable. . . . Its most obvious symbol is in the Creole language, whose genius consists in always being open. . . . Creolization carries along then into the adventure of multilingualism and into the incredible explosion of cultures” (34).

The European tradition of dualism is not so universal as is generally claimed. Some African and Asian philosophies emphasize a more holistic and organic perspective. In Chinese philosophy, for example, the cosmic principles known as *yin* and *yang* interact,

⁴ Burton adds Meso-Creole, the ‘middle culture’ of the free coloured classes. This comes close to M. G. Smith’s account of the “three principal sections of colonial society” that were “differentiated culturally” (112).

like light and shadow, which suggests they are conceived as mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive. In Caribbean religions such as Vodou in Haiti and Orisha in Trinidad the philosophical perspective is closer to the African than to the European tradition. For example, the 'sacred' and 'profane' are viewed in European religions and philosophy as mutually exclusive spheres that should be kept separate. If profane elements occur within sacred rituals, for instance, the ritual is believed to have become defiled. By contrast, when the sacred and profane are conceived as more organically interconnected and mutually constitutive, rituals may remind the participants of this important relationship. The purpose of many Vodou rituals, for example, is to facilitate communication between the sacred and profane, the spiritual and the worldly, and spirit possession is the ultimate achievement of flow between them. The body of the possessed devotee is the medium "whereby the revitalizing forces of the universe flow to the community" (Desmangles 107). Similarly, the belief in a divine energy force, said to reside in Damballah, the snake spirit of Fon mythology, emphasizes the incessant alternation between day and night, birth and death, that characterizes the eternal motion of the universe. Consequently, the essence of life is its motion - formation, transformation, deterioration - in the eternal cycle symbolized by the snake with its tail in its mouth, "apparently swallowing itself, yet with no beginning or end" (Parrinder 22).⁵

The organic and dialectical development of a creole culture from diverse origins may be illustrated by a wide variety of examples of music, language, religion, or other aspects of Caribbean culture. For example, an account of a funeral, written in mid-nineteenth century Belize, suggests an organic cultural transformation in terms of continuities and creativity. The coexistence of African and European cultures is transformed from a mechanical juxtaposition of contrasting elements into the creation of something altogether new. This process, of course, occurred between African cultures as well as between African and European cultures, as this example shows:

If a slave-owner died, all his dependents and friends came together to be feasted; and the wife or mistress and her children prepared the house and provided provisions and plenty of ardent spirits. The corpse, dressed in its best clothes, was laid upon a bed and *waked* during the whole night. Cards, dice, back-gammon, with strong drink and spiced wine, helped to beguile its watches, during which the loud laugh and the profane oath were unrestrained. In the negro yard below, 'the sheck'ka' and the drum 'proclaimed the sport, the song, the dance, and various dreem' . . . [by] the different African nations and Creoles, each in parties. . . . Sometimes a tent was erected, where rum, coffee, and ginger tea were dispensed to all who chose to come and make free. After a night thus spent, the corpse was carried in the morning to the churchyard, the coffin being borne by labourers, who in their progress used to run up and down the streets and lanes with their burden, knocking at some door or doors, perhaps visiting some of the friends of the deceased, professing to be impelled by him, or to be contending with the spirit who opposed the interment of the body. At length some well known friend came forward, speaking soothingly to the dead, and calling him Brother, urging him to go home, and promised him

⁵ Alejo Carpentier initiated the literary phenomenon of 'magic realism' with El reino de este mundo in 1949 after studying Vodou in Haiti. Magic realism, contrary to the dualistic tradition, emphasizes the interpenetration and unity of the fabulous and mundane aspects of the world.

rest and blessing. They then moved all together towards the grave, and the sheck'ka's jingle, the voice of song, and latterly, the funeral service of the Established Church were mingled together in the closing scene. (Crowe 324-5).

The mention of "different African nations and Creoles, each in parties," shows that people in Belize were seen to be culturally diverse in the mid-nineteenth century, some being defined as Creole as distinct from the different African and European nations, and that they formed ethnic groups and interacted with each other on that basis. The integration of games, strong drink, dancing, and general merriment in the wake, which would be judged by most Christians as irreverent, and the custom of carrying a corpse from house to house to visit friends of the deceased, were common features of West African cultures. The bearers of the corpse were believed to be controlled by his spirit which could reveal the source of his demise in a kind of divination, a way of giving the deceased's spirit the opportunity to disclose whether he had enemies. Such divination, which would have been familiar to most Africans in Belize, was being learned by Creoles, perhaps by white as well as black and mixed Creoles. Finally, the music in the ritual, if not yet fully synthesized, combined African and European elements, the drums and sheck'ka mingling with the Anglican funeral service. The missionary who wrote this account probably viewed this mixture of sacred and profane elements as inappropriate but it is unlikely that the participants in the event made such a judgement.

The celebration in this wake may reflect the participants' belief that the spirit of the deceased is being reborn in a new dimension of life, his going home to rest and blessing. In many African religions this new dimension appears in the divine and immortal form that was the spirit's primordial state before it was manifest in a passing human shape. Among Vodouissants, for example, it is believed there are two parts to a person's spirit, the eternal, cosmic life-force and the particular 'personality' of a person. However, these two aspects are organically bound together, the former becoming manifest in the latter, and the latter being an individual 'moment' of the former. "Vodouissants do not understand their spirit as a dualism - that is, as two irreconcilable entities, one of which negates the other; rather, the two parts constitute an organic process, a dynamism which comprises divinity, authority, influence, morality, and wisdom" (Desmangles 68). How can such a holistic and organic philosophy be understood in terms of the dualistic tradition of binary oppositions?

We need to approximate the thoughts and philosophies of the practitioners in order to understand the meanings their actions had for themselves in events such as the Belizean funeral described above. The hegemonic paradigms of European philosophy and science become an obstacle when we are trying to understand the formation of Afro-Creole religions like Vodou, Kumina, Comfa and Orisha, which are so open to influence and change, are highly eclectic and unconcerned about orthodoxy. How, for example, can we understand the various relationships and patterns of change emerging in the interactions between African and Christian religions in the Caribbean unless we comprehend the philosophical orientations and propensities of the practitioners? In some instances the believers hid their real beliefs behind the permitted rituals and saints of Christianity (the 'camouflage theory') and out of this there developed associations between the two. In other cases Christian aspects were incorporated into the changing religion. In Yoruba villages in Trinidad the "predominant Catholic religion served as a transcultural belief, in that it provided sufficient continuity in perceived religious belief to bridge partially the cultural gap and soften the dislocation caused by migration" (Trotman 9). In the case of

Vodou, the relation of the diverse religious traditions from Europe and Africa is a symbiosis, meaning they “coexist without fusing with one another” (Desmangles 8), both in the sense of the spatial juxtaposition of elements of both traditions and in the temporal juxtaposition of ritual observances for the *lwas* on Catholic saints’ days. If, for the participants in these religions, the relations between European and African beliefs and practices are varied, flexible, and organic, then we must move beyond such limiting hegemonic paradigms as dualism in order to understand the nature of creolization. Instead of trying to grasp the creolization process in terms of fixed binary oppositions we should understand it as an open-ended process shaped by a dialogue of power and resistance in which shifting similarities and differences, assimilations and syncretisms, are continually renegotiated.

III

The concept of creolization has helped to identify and analyze the dynamic social process in which Africans and their descendants contested and continue to contest their oppression in the Americas, a process that resulted in some similar features but also differences in creole cultures and societies. Creolization, therefore, helps conceive of the ‘African diaspora’ in terms of a socio-historical process rather than by essentializing ‘blackness.’ In fact, the salience of, and also the changes and variations in, the concept of ‘race’ and of racial hierarchies in the Americas were constructed in this socio-historical process. Racial identity, like any other kind of identity, is both relational and historically contingent. Instead of defining the African diaspora in terms of a common ‘racial essence,’ Stuart Hall defines it in relation to a dynamic, creolized culture:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (401-2)

This diaspora experience, which consisted of the unsettling and dispersion, and the pervasive exploitation, oppression, and resistance of millions of Africans and their descendants in the Atlantic world, resulted in mixtures and differences both within and between creole societies.

The concept of African diaspora helps to define the context of the process of cultural exchanges, contestations, transformations, and creations that is called creolization, while the concept of creolization helps us analyze the *various* experiences and cultures of different peoples of African origin in different times and places (Holt 35-6). These experiences and transformations began in Sao Tome, Cape Verde and the Caribbean in the sixteenth century, with pre-echoes in the Iberian peninsula and the west coast of Africa. Successive migrations, whether forced, induced or voluntary, have not simply divided people but have also reunited them in common consciousness (Bryce-Laporte xii and xvii-xviii). The concept of creolization undoubtedly helps us understand the commonalities and differences within the African diaspora, but it may distort our understanding of the relationships between this and other ‘overlapping diasporas’ (Lewis), such as the Indian and Chinese diasporas.

In general, Caribbean creole culture and identity encompasses those aspects of the Caribbean that derive from African, European, or mixed African and European origins.

Since the sixteenth century the word *criollo* has meant 'native' to the Caribbean but of 'Old World' origins, used as a noun or adjective referring to cattle, language, food, people, and so on. Thus, 'Creoles,' who could be white, black or mixed, were simply those people who were born locally and 'creole speech' referred to the variants of Old World languages that were developed and used by people in the Caribbean, whether they were whites, blacks or mixed. In Jamaica, for example, Edward Long wrote of "the native white men, or Creoles of Jamaica" (qtd. in Cassidy, 161) and distinguished between "Creole Blacks" (156) and Africans or "salt-water Negroes" in 1774 (156). In some parts of the Caribbean, when referring to individuals, Creole pertains to people of African or part African descent unless it is prefaced with a qualifier, as in 'white Creole' in Belize, or 'French Creole' in Trinidad. Creole also refers to an ethnic group sharing common cultural characteristics that distinguish it from others. In Belize, for example, to be Creole means *not* to be Mestizo, Maya, or Garifuna, because the Creoles, unlike the others, are chiefly black, Creole-speaking and Protestant, while in Guyana Creole "pertains to the black or coloured native population (called 'Creoles' or 'Afro-Creoles')", and local whites are called 'Anglo-' or 'Euro-Creole' (Moore x), as distinct from the East Indians, Chinese and Portuguese who may be more or less creolized without becoming Creoles. In Trinidad, where similar distinctions are made, indentured Indian workers had looked down on African Trinidadians as former slaves who were also "hopelessly polluted," according to Kusha Haraksingh (qtd. in Ryan, 29), but to associate with and even be seen as Creole is no longer the awful thing it once was. Sam Selvon, the Trinidadian novelist of Indian and Scottish descent, defined himself as "completely Creolized . . . meaning that you live among the people, whatever races they are, and you are a real born Trinidadian, you can't get away from it" (Nazareth 426). In cases where members of a non-Creole group have become culturally assimilated creole becomes a qualifier, as in 'creolized Chinese-Trinidadian,' for example (Ho 21). This use of creole and creolization is identified with the authentic and national culture of the people. When Creole refers in this way to a particular culture and ethnic group, and creolization means the acculturation of others into this culture, it has a distinctly ideological quality.

Generally, when the concept creolization is used with reference to people of Chinese, Indian, Lebanese, Portuguese and other origins, it refers to the assimilation of these ethnic groups to creole, and more specifically Afro-creole, culture. The concept, used in this way, takes on an ideological quality when it is assumed that a process in the past resulted in the present creole culture and society to which 'newcomers' may become assimilated. When creolization is identified solely with the creation and assimilation of Afro-creole culture, and put at the centre of Caribbean history, indigenization and nationalism, all 'others' become marginalized. In Trinidad, for example, the establishment of the predominantly creole cultural activities of carnival, calypso and steel bands as *national* symbols marginalized Indian Trinidadians in their own country. If one had to be Creole to be a true Trinidadian, then Indians and others had to become 'creolized,' in the sense of becoming assimilated, in order to belong in the country where their ancestors first arrived in 1845. To see them as simply becoming assimilated, however, implies that they continue to stand outside the society, but they have been contributing to the popular culture in various ways - food, religion, music - for many years.

Chutney soca is a kind of Trinidadian music derived from Indian and Creole influences that became increasingly popular in the 1990s, but to describe it as "merely an Indianised version of calypso" which is evidence of "the gradual integration of the Indian population into carnival culture" (Mason 53) suggests that the Indians are simply becoming assimilated, whereas they are really participating in the continuing creation of that culture.

Chutney soca is part of creole culture, so that culture can no longer be described adequately as Afro-Creole. Moreover, the commonly held view that "influences from all the different cultures in Trinidad have mingled into one" (Mason 15), which implies that the transformation was a simple blending process that occurred in the past, suggests that the relations between the different ethnic groups are more harmonious than they really are - and that constitutes another ideological usage of the concept 'creole culture,' the ideology encapsulated in the slogan "All o' we is one." Shalini Puri points out that when Derek Walcott, in his Nobel prize acceptance speech, includes Indians in Trinidad's national culture(s) by referring to Ramleela, the popular performance of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, he "ignores the fact that performances and funding of the Ramleela are embedded in a politics of intercultural *competition* . . . of cultural struggle. . . . Indo-Caribbean cultural production may be better understood not only in relation to a politics of cultural hybridity, but also as an assertion of ethnic identity" (35). Intercultural relations, in other words, still involve a process of contention. When viewed dialectically, the present-day politics of culture between Indian and Creole Trinidadians, like that between Mestizo and Creole Belizeans, may be compared to that between Europeans and Africans in the past. In both countries one group is afraid of, or resents what it feels is already, the political and cultural domination of the other and so asserts itself in competition with the other. This intercultural contestation is not simply a competition for resources but also a struggle for symbolic representation and respect within the 'nation.' The cultures of Trinidad, Belize, Guyana, Suriname and other Caribbean nations, are still being formed in this continuing process of contestation.

When Afro-Creole culture and identity are placed at the national and regional centre in the Caribbean, Indians, Mestizos, Chinese and others feel that they are left the unenviable alternative of remaining distinguished by their ancestral culture and so being marginalized, or of becoming indistinguishable from Creoles in order to be accepted in their own nation. To identify and be identified as Indian in Trinidad and Guyana, for example, suggests an adherence to the culture of ancestral origin which implies that they are less 'national' than those who are 'completely creolised.' When Brian Moore describes cultural changes among the indentured Indians and Chinese in colonial Guyana, he implies that creolization was largely a one-way street of assimilation into Afro-Creole culture. "Creolization, even where it did take place, was thus very incomplete," he concludes (167), but 'creolization' in this sense can only be considered to be 'complete' if the development of creole culture and society is conceived as having been already completed. In Belize many Creoles, who are anxious because they have recently become less numerous than Mestizos, tend to identify all Mestizos as Spanish and even 'alien,' whether they are new immigrants or born in Belize. The growing ethnic tensions in Belize, which are related to low-wage development strategies and the immigration of Central Americans, are the consequence of the Creoles or Afro-Belizeans feeling that they are losing 'their' country to the Mestizos (Bolland and Moberg). Belize is in danger of becoming ethnically polarized, though politics is not so racialized there as in Trinidad and Guyana.

The identities of Creole and Indian, and of Creole and Mestizo, even when people think they are racially determined, have been constructed in relation to each other as mutually exclusive categories that may mingle but are not supposed to mix. Even when they do mix, as they often do in Trinidad for example, the mixing of Creole and Indian produces people - called *douglas* - who are identified only as a kind of individual, not a cultural category or group equivalent to Creole or Mestizo (Segal 96-7). There does not yet appear to be a *dougl*a identity, for example, and individuals described as *douglas* tend to become

culturally assimilated into either the Creole or the Indian community.⁶ Nor is there a 'white-Indian' continuum equivalent to the 'white-African' continuum that is historically important to the concept of creole, so someone like Sam Selvon could be identified only as Indian or creolized Indian.

Ironically, people of Indian ancestry appear to be faced by the same kind of restricted choice that was forced on people of African ancestry, namely to retain their ancestral culture or be acculturated into the dominant culture. Of course, in the development of creole societies Africans who retained their culture continued to be judged by the dominant group as backward, while those who assimilated themselves culturally were never accepted as equal. But to be limited to the choice between being either 'retainers' or 'assimilators' is to be defined as passive, thereby excluding them from contributing to their nation's culture. The concept of creolization provided a way to understand this was a false choice by showing that both continuity and creativity are involved when subordinated people contest culture with the dominant group. The combination of continuity *and* creativity that characterizes the development of Afro-Creole culture, however, is characteristic of the development of Caribbean culture in general, and this must be conceived in such a way as to include the contributions of all people in the Caribbean. Earl Lovelace makes this point in The Dragon Can't Dance through the Indian, Pariag, who lives in the community but has been largely invisible. He wants to belong, or at least just to be seen, by the Creoles among whom he lives, and to contribute his music to the carnival from which he feels excluded.⁷

In short, the concepts creole and creolization have a powerful ideological quality in their common usage. For example, people may define creolization as a threat to Indian identity and community, or claim that Indians' adoption of creole culture is evidence of their national integration. However, to limit the alternative to the persistence of differences on the basis of retained ancestral culture or the development of national unity on the basis of acculturation, obscures the fact that the development of creole culture is characterized by the persistence of differences *as well as* the creation of new phenomena. In the contested process of creolization both continuity and creativity are involved. What is *Caribbean*, in fact, is neither the insistence on mutually exclusive and immutable ethnicities, such as 'Indian,' 'Chinese,' 'Mestizo' and 'Creole,' nor the blending of one into the other in a

⁶ This may be changing, however. A self-defined *dougl*a responded to the assumption made by Dr Kumar Mahabir that people like himself were illegitimate and prone to become social deviants by writing to the Express (16 Sept. 1998) that "*Douglas* have no abnormal behavioural problems. . . . We have the highest degree of racial tolerance since we have no race. Don't talk for us, you of pure race. . . . I wish in the current situation in Trinidad, with all this racist blabber, that there were more of us" (qtd. in Ryan, 84). Rhoda Reddock has argued that since the mid-1990s "the population of mixed Indian and African ancestry was becoming more visible. Yet even then the voices raised were few but somewhat less tentative" ("Jahaji Bhai" 185).

⁷ Burton, in discussing the cultural dynamics revealed in Earl Lovelace's The Dragon Can't Dance, ignores Pariag because he is outside the Afro-Creole complex, which was precisely the point Lovelace was making (213-20).

general 'melting pot.'⁸ What is Caribbean is the development of cultures and societies that enable people to participate at different times and in different ways in a variety of activities and identities because these need not be mutually exclusive. The more open and organic view of creolization helps us understand this, as the dialectical view of creolization helps us keep in mind that the various ways people contribute culturally depends on the distribution of power in the society. Sam Selvon was both an Indian and a Creole Trinidadian because he was, as he claimed, 'completely Creolised.' But to say he was Creole does not just mean that he was assimilated, as if he were the passive recipient of another's culture. Selvon was Creole because he contributed in his own way, out of his own cultural background and influenced by those among whom he lived, to the developing creole culture of Trinidad and the Caribbean. In this perspective, 'creoleness' is not a culture that is historically fixed, though it has been shaped by the historical circumstances and struggles of its origins. Creoleness, rather, is a culture and identity in the making, and Indians, Chinese, Portuguese, Mestizos, Javanese, Lebanese and others have been participating with other Creoles in this process for many generations. People of African descent have a key role in the history and continuing development of creolization and creole societies, but Afro-Creole is not the whole or the end point of creole culture. The creole Caribbean has no end point.

IV

Kenneth Ramchand, an Indian Trinidadian, recently introduced Anthony Winkler, a white Jamaican, as "my fellow Creole."⁹ This is a claim to an ethnic identity that is not limited by their 'race' or nationality, to a Caribbean identity that is related but not identical to the more specific one of Afro-Creole. Implicit in this assertion regarding creole culture and identity are some of the persistent strengths and limitations of the concepts 'creolization' and 'creole societies.'

On the one hand, the concepts, as analytic concepts, help us to understand the relationships between cultural change and the structures and processes of social conflict in Caribbean history. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries this creative process of adaptation, transformation, and synthesis had laid the groundwork of a Caribbean culture that was neither African nor European, though it had developed out of the interaction between African, European and Amerindian peoples. In the Caribbean most people who participated in this process were of African descent and it was largely through their struggle against the double domination of enslavement and colonialism that an Afro-Creole culture developed. By the late nineteenth century, and considerably earlier in some places, this Afro-Creole culture had emerged in the Caribbean in a socially subordinate and resistant relationship with the dominant Euro-Creole culture. The inequalities in the colonies that persisted after Emancipation led to the attempt by many people of African

⁸ These ethnicities, and others such as Garifuna, Maya and Amerindian, are themselves the contingent product of Caribbean encounters. Immigrants from India who spoke different languages and were divided by religion and caste, for example, began to think of themselves as 'East Indian' through contrast with 'West Indians.' Though most people think of ethnic groups as if they are immutable categories, like species, they become identified and change through interaction with others in an open ended process of ethnogenesis.

⁹ At Colgate University, February 28, 2001.

and mixed African-European descent to become culturally assimilated to the Euro-Creole culture in order to achieve social mobility. Hence, their patterns of behaviour, beliefs, values and language, and their participation in a variety of elite and folk institutions, constituted somewhat of a bridge between the Euro- and Afro-Creole cultures. The use of these concepts, which emphasize African traditions and the active roles of people in creating culture and asserting their identity in an oppressive context, contrasts with the imperial view of the colonies as incomplete, impure, and inferior versions of their 'mother country,' and is historically linked to the process of decolonization and nation-building (Bolland 52). These concepts, undoubtedly, have made enormous contributions to the analysis of the development of Caribbean culture.

On the other hand, when these concepts, in their common usage, are so specifically linked to the experience of people of African descent they have a particular historical and ideological content that is problematic. The concept creolization helps in the comparative analysis of the cultures of the African diaspora but, if creole is used synonymously with Afro-Creole, then this limits who may be considered Creole. The concept of creolization, when used as a descriptive-empirical account of the specific socio-historical process involving people of African descent, marginalizes and excludes peoples and cultures of the Caribbean who are not part of the 'Black Atlantic' community. Consequently, although the concept helps us analyze cultural conflicts, innovations and developments within the African diaspora, it may hinder the analysis of the interrelations between this and other diasporas.

Fortunately, we do not have to create a neologism in order to find a concept which encompasses *all* the cultural interactions and changes involving all the peoples of the Caribbean. In 1940, the Cuban scholar, Fernando Ortiz, used the term *transculturation* "to express the highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place here. . . . The real history of Cuba is the history of its intermeshed transculturations" (98). Ortiz explained his preference for the new term over acculturation which describes only a process of transition from one culture to another:

I am of the opinion that the word *transculturation* better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena (102-3).

Creolization, in its ideological usage, refers to a kind of acculturation which, as Ortiz says, describes only the loss of a previous culture and acquisition of a new one, and this does not adequately express the cultural developments that have occurred in the Caribbean during the last 150 years.

Finally, I do not believe it is helpful to think of the present as "neo-creole" or "post-creole" (Ryan 33) because this suggests a break with the past. On the contrary, the interaction and transformation of cultures in the Caribbean continues. If the use of creolization and creole society is limited to refer only to the development of Afro-Creole culture, however, we do need the more general concept of transculturation to encompass the conjuncture of the various Amerindian, European, African and Asian worlds in the Caribbean. Creolization in its common usage, as distinct from its analytical function, is a more particular and

ideologically loaded concept than transculturation. If we cannot escape the widespread ideological usage of the concept of creolization then the concept of transculturation appears to be indispensable for understanding not only Caribbean cultures but also the continuing cultural transformations of the modern world that commenced in the Caribbean crucible in 1492. When we think of the creole civilization of the Caribbean we should be considering it in all its diversity, with its various peoples "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew" in an "incredible explosion of cultures."

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