Introduction: Creolizing Europe: 
Legacies and Transformations

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‘The whole world is becoming an archipelago and becoming creolized’.

Édouard Glissant, ‘The Unforeseeable Diversity of the World’

‘creolization’ in political, economic, cultural and theoretical terms,\(^1\) has been underestimated in these writings.

*Creolizing Europe* aims to reverse this tendency by critically interrogating creolization (see in this volume Spivak; Hall; and Vergès) as the decolonial, rhizomatic thinking necessary for understanding the social and cultural transformations set in motion by transnational dislocations, a Glissantian analytics of transversality and what Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2011; and in this volume) terms ‘transversal conviviality’. In this sense, Stuart Hall’s chapter on ‘Créolité and the Process of Creolization’ sets out the theoretical orientation that guides this volume in his challenge to seek out creolization’s applicability outside of the Caribbean. Gaytri Chakravorty Spivak’s ‘World Systems and the Creole, Rethought’ also addresses the limitation in grasping the theoretical and policy implications of the proposal of creolization. Discussing creolity rather than kinship as a model for comparativist practice, Spivak suggests that we start with Dante’s understanding of popular Italian as varieties of Creole and his choice of an aristocratic (‘curial’) political Creole as ‘Italian’, as this will enable us to perceive the beginnings of European nationalisms as grounded on a creolized understanding of themselves while asserting kinship. Engaging with the French-Reunion politics of remembrance, Françoise Vergès’s chapter on ‘Creolization and Resistance’ discusses the persistence of politics of oblivion in the former metropoles of colonial power. Her discussion on the Maison des civilisations et de l’unité réunionnaise argues for a need to imagine a postcolonial museography for a society still undergoing creolization.

Departing from these theoretical insights, *Creolizing Europe* engages in an interdisciplinary, transnational dialogue between the social sciences and humanities as it juxtaposes US–UK debates on debates on ‘hybridity’ and ‘mixing’ (see in this volume Tate, Klesse and Erel), ‘mixedness’ (see in this volume Klesse; and Erel) and the ‘Black Atlantic’ (see in this volume Patel) with Caribbean and Latin American (see in this volume Moreno and Saldivar) theorizations of cultural mixing in order to engage with Europe as a permanent scene of Édouard Glissant’s (1981, 1990, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 2002) creolization (see in this volume Murdoch; Gutiérrez Rodríguez; and Almeida and Corkill). This last is important given the political changes multicultural societies have undergone particularly since 9/11 (Gilroy, 2004; Lentin and Titley, 2011), articulated in increasingly restrictive immigration policies and calls for ‘integration’ allied with ‘failure of multiculturalism’ discourses. Such a context leads to urgency in revisiting once again the decolonial potential of creolization which we have seen historically in the locations of its emergence.

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\(^1\) For further elaboration, see Gordon 2009; Gordon and Roberts 2009; Monahan 2011.
The historical dimension

The term ‘Creole’ was applied in areas of European colonial overseas expansion. A list of localities where people, at one time or another, have been called ‘Creole’ (or called themselves thus) would have to include not just the Caribbean and much of Latin America, but also parts of the south-eastern USAs (and Alaska), several island groups off the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of Africa, a number of mainland regions on that continent (including Sierra Leone, Equatorial Guinea, Angola and Mozambique) and a few pockets in the former Portuguese and Dutch colonies in Southern Asia (Knight, 1997; Spitzer, 2003; Eriksen, 2003; Palmié, 2006). Yet the common point of reference in the contemporary literature on creolization tends to be the Caribbean.

The term ‘Creole’ first appears as ‘criollo’ in the documentary records of the Iberian colonization of the Américas as a Portuguese term whose genealogy is still being debated.² By the second half of the sixteenth century the term began to designate fairly consistently the modification that Old World life forms were perceived to undergo upon becoming ‘native’ to the Américas. What it certainly did not imply at this time were notions of explicitly ‘racial’ or ethnic difference or mixedness. What early usages of criollo tend to connote is a sense of alterity from the metropolitan world brought about by the indigenization of self-identified peripherals (Arrom, 1951). This is also the sense that such terminology continued to carry in its translation into English and French in the second half of the seventeenth century as a referent to New World-born Europeans and Africans (Palmié, 2007; Stephens, 1983). Thus there was a differentiation between the ‘creolized population’ and the first-generation European colonizers. By the end of the eighteenth century, and especially upon the founding of the first Latin American nation states in the early nineteenth century, the semantic cargo transported by the term criollo in continental American Spanish began to diverge dramatically from the older meanings it continued to hold in Spain’s remaining Caribbean colonies.

Latin American criollismo mutated into an ideology of exclusion by the early twentieth century. On this basis a citizenship model of insiders and outsiders to the nation was developed, serving to demarcate supposedly

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² Stephens suggests that the first appearance of the term ‘Creole’ was in Portuguese (crioulo). Yet, the first use of the term is documented in Spanish. The Spanish colonizers born in the Américas were named ‘criollo’ (Stephens, 1983, 28–39). Further, Arrom (1951, 175) notes that the etymological root of ‘crioulo’ and ‘criollo’ lie in in the verb ‘criar’ (to raise, nourish, create) and noun ‘cra’ (infant, baby, person without family) and that the ending –oulo or –olo refers to a diminutive, which leads him to the conclusion that the term was originally used to refer to children born in exile, and later on to adults.
‘non-Creole’ collective identities and exclude them from citizenship rights, as was the case for the indigenous and African heritage populations. Such postcolonial ideological elaboration of the concept of ‘criollismo’ was characteristic of mainland Ibero-America and the Hispanic Caribbean (Alberro, 1992). This model introduced an ethnic and racialized social order and socio-economic structure in which ‘criollo’ meant the ‘new elites’, largely descendants of White Spanish colonizers. In this context, cultural mixing was inscribed in power asymmetries as the economies of mainland Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean were in the hands of the ‘criollos’ (Buisseret and Reinhardt, 2000).

Due to the near-genocide of the Caribbean’s indigenous populations at the hands of the Spanish, colonialism’s demand for plantation labor was met initially by indentured labor from Europe, then several centuries of African enslavement, with post-abolition indentured laborers mainly from the Indian subcontinent and China (Mintz, 1985). Plantation slavery, along with maroonage and subsistence farming, created transcultural contact zones where cultures met, clashed and grappled with each other, often in highly uneven relations of power (Ortiz, 1995; Pratt, 1992). The articulations of new cultural and social forms were intrinsically linked to histories of struggle against slavery and for independence in mid-seventeenth-century Anglophone Caribbean plantation societies (Brathwaite, 1971; 1974). In the French Antilles it was not the white elites but the African-descent population who were the point of reference for the process of creolization (James, 2001 [1938]). In the Caribbean context, creolization was founded on the necessity to survive the plantation system and was carried forward in the face of suffering by the affective and creative potential of agents to recuperate loss and re-create social identity.

Creolization

It is this aspect of power asymmetries that Stuart Hall (1993; and in this volume) discusses as emblematic of the process of creolization in the Caribbean. For him this process represents the primal scene of tragedy in the matrix of cultural contact and negotiations between what he termed présence africaine, présence européenne and présence américaine. These represent the productive antagonisms of racial oppression, imperialism and indigenization in which the Caribbean was formed. It is in this conjunctural axis that we discuss ‘creolizing Europe’, focusing particularly on Hall’s (2003, 31) assertion that creolization ‘always entails inequality, hierarchization, issues of domination and subalternity, mastery and servitude, control and resistance’. Needless to say, Hall’s approach to creolization is inspired by Glissant.

As early as his writings in the 1950s, Glissant embraced the visionary and revolutionary spirit of decolonization. In 1958, when he was awarded the
renowned French literary Prix Renaudot for his novel *Le Lézarde*, Glissant was already part of a group of well-known decolonial African and Caribbean intellectuals writing in French and English (for further discussion, see Dash, 1995; Vergès, and Murdoch in this volume). As a member of the ‘Fédération des étudiants d’Afrique noire en France’, the ‘Société Africaine de culture’ and contributor to the journal *Présence africaine*, Glissant actively participated in debates on an independent future for African and Antillean states. In 1956, he attended the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists, in Paris, and, with other Antillean intellectuals and writers such as Albert Béville, Cosnay Marie-Joseph and Marcel Manville, he founded the ‘Front des Antillais et Guyanais pour l’autonomie’, in 1961, supporting the decolonization of the Antilles and French Guyana.3

Drawing on this legacy but setting a rather different accent, the Martinican intellectuals Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Rafaël Confiant developed the concept of ‘*creolité*’ (creoleness) to emphasize the quality of existence established by the process of creolization. In their 1989 publication *Éloge de la Créolité* (translated in 1990 as *In Praise of Creoleness*),4 they established the concept of ‘*créolité*’ as a point of departure for thinking creoleness. Drawing on the work of Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant (1990,10) sought to elaborate an ethics of vigilance, ‘a sort of mental envelope in the middle of which our world will be built in full consciousness of the outer world’. Through the concept of *créolité*, they tried to capture the specificity of Caribbean people, who were not Europeans, Africans or Asians, but Creoles (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, 1990). Thus, they introduced a vision of diversity, which, although based on the intellectual tradition of the Negritude movement, went beyond it by creating a space for what they described as a ‘kaleidoscopic totality’, the ‘nontotalitarian consciousness of a preserved diversity’ (28). This perspective introduces us methodologically to what Glissant (1996) calls an ethnographic ‘poetics of relation’ and an ‘analytics of transversality’. However, this approach has not been without critique.

For example, the eminent Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé has identified the limitations of *creolité*, as it has not taken into account other historical creoles, such as those to be found on the west coast of Africa (see, for further discussion, Cottenet-Hage and Condé, 1995; Kemedjio, 1999). From Spanish Caribbean and Latin American and Anglophone Caribbean perspectives, we could also note that the concept of *créolité* is specific to the French Caribbean context. Thus, we need to consider the modern and historical usages and meanings of creolization, as without this we risk the erasure of historical semantic and regional differences (Palmié, 2006; Knörr,

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3 For further biographical notes on Glissant, please see www.edouardglissant.fr.
4 Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant 1990.
Glissantian creolization is useful for understanding contemporary European societies because of its focus on the analysis of power asymmetries. As Glissant notes, creolization must not be confused with métissage, the mechanical act of cultural mixing. Rather, creolization engages with the ‘unforeseeable’ (‘l’inattendue’) (Glissant, 1996), ‘le différance que se mette au contact et que produise l’imprévisible’⁵ (Glissant, 2010). Creolization is an outcome of racialized living together which goes beyond racial coding through the contact of different affects, desires, energies and intensities that break the established normative order of the governance of diversity. It is this break through the analytics of transversality that produces transversal conviviality that challenges the normative power of the One (Gutiérrez Rodríguez in this volume). Thus, creolization, as decolonial rhizomatic thinking, engages with an ethics of conviviality. Therefore, its interest is not in accommodating cultural differences under a hegemonic order because of its departure from a racialized understanding of conviviality itself. Thus, while Sidney Mintz (1998) counters celebratory approaches to cultural mixing that flatten the historical specificity of creolized nations,⁶ Glissant is interested – as we are in this volume – in the potential of creolization for challenging occidental notions of identity and belonging that reproduce the Self/Other binary. In the postcolonial context, the ‘Other’ is constructed as inferior to the hegemonic White, Male, European Self and this was foundational to the establishment of the racial social classification system sustaining the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) that still persists.

In our contemporary times of economic crises, austerity measures and cuts in public spending affect, in particular, poor white people, post/migrants and refugees. The cuts in health care for undocumented migrants in Spain; the July 2013 discussion in the UK that people who stay longer than six months in the country should pay for National Health Service (NHS) care to stop ‘health tourism’; and the deportation of undocumented migrants throughout Western Europe represent the tip of the iceberg of responses to Europe’s ‘exteriority’ (Dussel, 1995). Here those coded as non-citizens are removed from the realm of human and citizenship rights. It is in this context that the decolonial epistemological move that Glissant and Hall propose through creolization becomes a vital resource for analyzing European societies.

⁵ English translation (Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez: EGR): ‘the difference that comes into contact and produces the unforeseeable’.

⁶ Creolization ‘had been historically and geographically specific. It stood for centuries of culture building rather than culture mixing or culture blending, by those who became Caribbean people. They were not becoming transnational; they were creating forms by which to live’ (Mintz, 1998, 119).
Translating creolization to Europe

The differences embedded in the concept of creolization show the necessity for resisting ahistorical and solely celebratory uses of this term. Indeed, to French Antillean cultural critics, créolité and creolization are distinct notions. Glissant favors creolization over créolité because the former refers to an ongoing process which always leads to unknown consequences that cannot be foreseen. As the organizers of documenta 11 Platform 3 note, there is a productive experience of the unknown, which we must not fear. Talking of this experience, Glissant harks back to the plantation, a gouffre-matrice, one of the 'wombs of the world'. Today's world is again experiencing the chaos of the plantation, especially in the context of globalization. (Enwezor et al., 2003, 15)

Glissant elaborates a theory of creative disorder that transcends the battle lines of center and periphery, North and South, dependence and independence.

In the European context, we need to relate creolization to the colonial past and the transformation of societies produced through postcolonial migratory, diasporic and exilic movements. Thus, creolization frames a space in which national rhetoric about identity and community are contested and challenged. This leads us then to think more broadly of moments of cultural mixing and transversal conviviality. In this sense, Glissant (1997a; 1997b; 2002; Glissant and Chamoiseau, 2009) describes Europe as inevitably inscribed in the project of creolization. Following Glissant’s (1997a; 1997b; 2002; Glissant and Chamoiseau, 2009) observation of the ‘irreversible creolization of the world’, what do we mean by ‘creolizing Europe'? Instead of the cultural fusion of multicultural and hybridity discourses, Creolizing Europe means living with cacophonies, irritations and discordances within the raced intersectionalities of everyday life. Thus, creolization is not just a ‘syncretic process of transverse dynamism that endlessly reworks and transforms the cultural patterns of varied social and historical experiences and identities’ (Balutansky and Sourieau, 1998, 1). Rather, creolization speaks about the creation of new articulations not inscribed in any hegemonic script. It is the creation of a new vocabulary that transcends the normative order still invested in recreating the colonial gaze. In this sense, Glissant speaks of the languages of the ‘creolized streets’ of Rio de Janeiro, Mexico, the Parisian suburbs or Los Angeles (Schwieger Hiepko, 1998). For him these spaces show the speed of cultural innovation and creativity. He notes that not all of these cultures and subcultures last, but they leave affective traces in their communities. For Glissant, the moment of creolization is not fixed by geography as we live in a world in motion where languages, identity and cultures are in a constant state of flux. It is this flux that Creolizing Europe
interrogates as it continues the Glissantian project of decolonizing and deconstructing a Europe that refuses to attend to the unforeseen.

In her chapter, ‘Are We All Creoles? “Sable-Saffron” Venus, Rachel Christie and Aesthetic Creolization’, Shirley Anne Tate goes beyond the debate of hybridity by discussing the aesthetics of creolization. Introducing the cultural politics of beauty into Glissantian creolization she shows that aesthetics has the potential to take us beyond a simple métissage to enable us to see how a nation understands itself. Christian Klesse’s chapter, ‘Queering Diaspora Space, Creolizing Counter-Publics: On British South Asian Gay and Bisexual Men’s Negotiations of Sexuality, Intimacy and Marriage’, discusses the rather troublesome experience of ‘multiculturalism’ in queer spaces. Going beyond the analysis of ‘mixedness’, Klesse highlights the potential of queer diaspora counter-spaces. Also, Umut Erel’s chapter, ‘Creolizing Citizenship? Migrant Women from Turkey as Subjects of Agency’, drawing on life-stories of migrant women from Turkey in Germany and Britain, proposes to reconceptualize migrant women’s citizenship by inquiry of the potential of creolizing citizenship. In his chapter, ‘Re-Imagining Manchester as a Queer and Haptic Brown Atlantic Space’, Alpesh Patel seeks to re-invoke and rework the term ‘Black Atlantic’ by suggesting the ‘Brown Atlantic’ as an actual and imaginary space that recognizes the specific colonial and postcolonial legacies that the United Kingdom and North America share. In ‘Comics, Dolls and the Disavowal of Racism: Learning from Mexican Mestizaje’, Mónica Moreno Figueroa and Emiko Saldivar Tanaka explore the limits and potential of creolization by contrasting it with discourses of mestizaje (racial and cultural mixture) in Mexico. Arguing that the Mexican case can offer a mirror and some interesting lessons to processes of mixture and diversity to Europe, they examine the politics of public recognition of racism. Tracing colonial poetics within contemporary Europe, H. Adlai Murdoch’s ‘Continental Creolization: French Exclusion through a Glissantian Prism’ examines the ways in which migrant Caribbean diasporas inscribe critical paradoxes of migrancy and citizenship within France, concentrating on displaced inhabitants of French Caribbean overseas departments who were made citizens of France in 1946. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez’s chapter, ‘Archipelago Europe: On Creolizing Conviviality’, continues this discussion by focusing on conviviality. She examines the epistemic and ethical underpinning of the project of creolization through the example of ‘Latinizing Manchester’, discussing the potential of cultural and social urban transformation through the example of the Spanish and Latin American diaspora. The implications of the European colonial project in tracing new cartographies and phenomena is addressed by José Carlos Pina Almeida and David Corkill’s chapter, ‘On Being Portuguese: Luso-tropicalism, Migrations and the Politics of Citizenship’, inquiring about the limits of this concept in the understanding of the impact of Portuguese colonialism on its former colonies. Critically discussing Gilberto Freyre’s work on luso-tropicalism, it contrasts creolization with the politics of miscegenation within imperial and fascist expansionist projects.
Introduction

While some of the chapters keep a critical distance to Glissant’s concept of creolization (Almeida and Corkill; Moreno and Saldivar), all chapters contribute to a further thinking of Creolizing Europe. They engage with Édouard Glissant’s approach to creolization through the analytics of transversality which is echoed in different locations, affects, politics and practices of transversal conviviality. Thus, all of the chapters explore the usefulness, transferability and limitations of creolization for thinking post/coloniality, raciality and its intersectional otherings not only as historical legacies but as immanent to and constitutive of the ongoing transformations of European societies.

Works Cited


