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# Creolization, Hybridity and Archipelagic Thinking: Interrogating Inscriptions of Postcolonial Agency

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## Abstract

The terms *creolization* and *hybridity* are neither parallel nor interchangeable. The former cannot be fully understood without taking into account its historical background and geographical context so that creolization is a phenomenon of exchange and transformation that is indispensable to understanding the New World experience. Hybridity, on the other hand, claims to provide a framework for avoiding the binaries of colonialist thinking, enabling agency particularly in postcolonial contexts involving subaltern subjects. Such a reading posits contact and chaos, cultural relativity, exchange and transformation as key tools in a polyvalent system of thought. The resulting nonbinary, archipelagic framework leads to the concept of archipelic rather than continental thought, transcending the universalist presumptions of the either/or and revising and rewriting traditional notions of boundary and location.

**Keywords:** creolization; hybridity; exchange; postcolonial; archipelagic; positionality; transformation

Despite their currency in literary, cultural, and critical circles, the terms *creolization* and *hybridity* are neither parallel nor interchangeable. The former certainly cannot be fully understood without taking into account its historical background and geographical context. Seen in this way, creolization is not simply a synonym for hybridity, but rather a phenomenon of ethnocultural exchange and transformation that is indispensable to understanding the New World experience. Hybridity, on the other hand, can be characterized as an approach arising out of the analysis of a race-based set of hierarchies inherited from, or put into place by, colonialism. Lorna Burns sums up this dichotomy well in an important article: "Distinct from hybridity's problematic associations with Victorian theories of inter-racial mixing … creolization is rooted in the New World experience… . This provenance links both

creole and creolization to notions of settling and colonization, not as in the case of hybridity, inter-racial mixing."[1] Clearly then, both terms claim to provide competing frameworks for avoiding the binaries of colonialist thinking, enabling agency particularly in postcolonial contexts involving subaltern subjects.

Although the debt that the concepts of creolization and the archipelagic owe to the Martinican philosopher Edouard Glissant will become indubitable and, arguably, ineluctable as this analysis continues, we would be well served to begin with the origins of the term *creole*; for the Caribbean region, the foundations of this term lie in the early attempts at exploration that engendered the contested and inter-related processes of colonization, slavery, and migration that both brought the New World into being and gave it impetus and direction. The specific context that gave rise to the term was Spanish and Portuguese expansion into the Caribbean and central and northern South America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The term can be said to have originated with a critical conjunction of the Spanish term *criollo* and the Portuguese *crioulo*, terms that were originally descriptive nouns used throughout the Spanish and Portuguese colonies to distinguish the locally born members of that ethnic group from their immigrant counterparts. But this is only one aspect of a complex set of convergences. In their introduction to *The Creolization Reader*, Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato point out that "the Portuguese *crioulo* is derived from *cria*, meaning 'infant, nursing or sapling.' Another strong possibility is that it was derived from the Latin *creare* ('to create')."[2] Although the cultural and etymological origins of the term are certainly multiple, then, the fact remains that we can locate the core usage of the term in patterns of immigration and othering; in other words, it is in establishing subjective categories of difference and belonging within an overall framework of location that presumptions of dissimilarity produced creolization's initial iterations of doubleness.

Extrapolating from these complex contexts of cultural intersection and difference, close examination of the term *creole* shows it to be an inherently unstable category, shot through with the ambiguities and essentialisms of its designatory origins in the colonial period. Interestingly, the *OED* standard definition gives its etymological origin as the Spanish *criollo* and inscribes the ethnocultural category of the creole in terms of instability, ambiguity, and alterity because it denotes a European *or* an African subject linked to displacements of place rather than race: "In the West Indies and other parts of America, Mauritius, etc.: orig. A person born and naturalized in the country, but of European (usually Spanish or French) or of African Negro race: the name having no connotation of colour, and in its reference to origin being distinguished on the one hand from born in Europe (or Africa), and on the other hand from aboriginal."[3] From this perspective, a creole subject can be either white or Black, colonizer or colonized, thereby extending colonialism's original inscription based on the conjunction of difference and geography. But even more striking

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[1] Lorna Burns, "Becoming-Postcolonial, Becoming-Caribbean: Edouard Glissant and the Poetics of Creolization," *Textual Practice* 23.1 (2009): 99–117, esp. 99.

[2] Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato, "Introduction," in *The Creolization Reader*, eds. Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato (London: Routledge, 2010), 3.

[3] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1992 edition.

is the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* definition, where the depth and breadth of racialized assumptions and stereotypes are nothing short of astonishing: "CRE-OLE (the Fr. form of *criollo,* a West Indian, probably a negro corruption of the Span. *criadillo*, the dim. of *criado*, one bred or reared, from *criar*, to breed, a derivative of the Lat. *creare*, to create), a word used originally (16th century) to denote persons born in the West Indies of Spanish parents, as distinguished from immigrants direct from Spain, aboriginals, negroes or mulattos. It is now used of the descendants of nonaboriginal races born and settled in the West Indies, in various parts of the American mainland and in Mauritius, Reunion and some other places colonized by Spain, Portugal, France, or (in the case of the West Indies) by England." Those prejudices of the period grounded in race and place that are all too apparent in this entry reinforce the fact that contemporary discourses, from science to popular culture, understood the creole to be marked and overdetermined by its difference from a recognizable and definable norm. Such differences were inevitably linked to hierarchical distinctions of class and place between whites, based on geography and climate; as the definition continues, "In the West Indies it designates the descendants of any European race; in the United States the French-speaking native portion of the white race in Louisiana, whether of French or Spanish origin … The difference in type between the white creoles and the European races from whom they have sprung, a difference often considerable, is due principally to changed environment—especially to the tropical or semi-tropical climate of the lands they inhabit.'[4] Notoriously tendentious stereotypes such as these that seek to inscribe the implicit and inescapable destabilization, degeneration, difference, and inferiority of the European subject once under the corrupting influence of the tropics has long been a staple of colonialist discourses, perspectives, and prejudices, and the overwhelming degree to which this persistent trope overdetermines contemporary, contestatory conceptions of creolization will shortly become apparent.

It is in the evaluation of the product of the process of population transfer, of large-scale migration, *métissage*, and cultural exchange that emerged following the establishment of additional colonies in the Caribbean by the French and the English in the 1630s and 1640s, that we find the instantiation of the creolization phenomenon. Such a (re)reading allows us to "distinguish[ing] creolization, in particular, as the generation of something wholly new."[5] In this way, Glissant's take on the scope and specificity of the concept of creolization becomes increasingly clear, when he writes, "When we speak about creolization, we do not mean only '*métissage*,' cross-breeding, because creolization adds something new to the components that participate in it."[6] These themes and tropes of place, ethnicity, and encounter bring us to the origin story of what arguably became Caribbean ethnopluralism; for in a key way, the true significance of Columbus's arrival in

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[4] Hugh Chisholm, ed., 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica.* See entry for "Creole" at http://www.study light.org/encyclopedias/bri/view.cgi?number=8113.

[5] Burns, "Becoming-Postcolonial, Becoming-Caribbean," 100.

[6] Edouard Glissant, "Creolization and the Making of the Americas," in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas*, eds. Vera Lawrence and Rex Nettleford (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 268–75, esp. 269.

the "New World" in 1492 lies not in his act of "discovery," but in the ethnic and cultural synthesis that was produced in its wake for the five centuries that followed, as its various iterations inscribed creolization as variable forms of combination and transformation.

This newly emergent, post-Columbian world of Caribbeanness, whether conceived in geographic, ethnic, cultural, or representational terms, is ultimately a settler and immigrant society. Read in this way, transplantation became the *de facto* norm for these successive Caribbean arrivants, as Stuart Hall has pointed out: "None of the people who now occupy the islands—black, brown, white, African, European, American, Spanish, French, East Indian, Chinese, Portuguese, Jew, Dutch—originally 'belonged' there. It is the space where the creolisations and assimilations and syncretisms were negotiated."[7] Ultimately, these conjunctions of encounter and transformation became the ground of the complex patterns of multiplicity that are located at the core of any definition of Caribbean subjectivity, one whose foundation lies in a lengthy history of ethnographic exploitation and exchange, and one of whose primary markers is language.

Catalyzed by the slave trade, which forcibly removed untold numbers of peoples of diverse racial, cultural, linguistic, and geographical origin from their African homelands and transplanted them onto vast island plantations, Caribbean creole languages arose from a key series of ethnocultural encounters, one of several critical, interactional contexts produced through this process that can serve to focalize our perspective regarding the generation of the creolized identitarian framework that would come to define the peoples and cultures of the region. Plantation slave labor was drawn from hundreds of ethnic groups speaking as many languages, and arriving slaves were deliberately fragmented and widely dispersed both ethnically and linguistically to reduce their ability to communicate among themselves, thereby assuaging the planters' fear of revolt. The plantation thus became the crucible of Caribbean language formation, the result of forced interaction among numerous African ethnic and linguistic groups as well as between them and the metropolitan linguistic constructs of the slave-holding class, literally birthed from contact between groups that spoke mutually unintelligible languages, as Peter Roberts explains: "In the Caribbean as a whole, Creole languages are the result of contact between English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch (or 'languages of colonising people') and West African languages ('languages of a colonised people').[8] Broadly speaking, then, Caribbean creole languages as distinct vernaculars were therefore instantiated through these creative conjoinings of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic pluralism, the newness that defined and characterized their deep-seated mosaic embodying an initial iteration of what would become a much broader cultural phenomenon.

Following British slave emancipation in 1834, and that by the French in 1848, other transplanted peoples from South Asia, China, and the Middle East arrived

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[7] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 400–01.

[8] Peter A. Roberts, *West Indians and their Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 14.

in the region between 1845 and the end of the First World War to compensate for labor shortages and to launch a range of commercial ventures. Each of these groups brought with them their patterns and practices of language, food, music, and religion, with the resulting intersections giving rise to an interactive, transnational, and transcultural paradigm of Caribbean subjectivity and identity. As a result, the Caribbean region quickly became a prime example of the generation of newness deriving from the extended process of creolization produced by the complex conjoining practiced by these displaced, composite populations.

The next major intervention seeking to define creolization through cultural interaction was established through several works by the Barbadian poet and historian Edward Brathwaite. On the one hand, Brathwaite refined and extended the accepted etymological basis of the term *creole*: "The word itself appears to have originated from a combination of two Spanish words *criar* (to create, to imagine, to establish, to found, to settle) and *colon* (a colonist, a founder, a settler) into *criollo*: a committed settler, one identified with the area of settlement, one native to the settlement though not ancestrally indigenous to it" (13–14).[9] Here, he reconfirms the imbrication of the creole with ethnicity, settlement, and encounter. Brathwaite went on to propose that the binary principles of cultural distinction and unitary origin through which societies were typically analyzed and categorized be rethought in the Caribbean case, ascribing greater importance instead to the now-embedded ethnic and cultural pluralism of the islands. In a key passage of *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* (1971), he claims, "Nothing is really fixed and monolithic. Although there is white/brown/black, there are infinite possibilities within these distinctions and many ways of asserting identity. A common colonial and creole experience is shared among the various divisions, even if that experience is variously interpreted" (310).[10] In other words, the cultural intersection, ethnic admixture, and linguistic cross-fertilization that together pointed to the boundless possibilities emerging from the Caribbean experience would be made to contest the either/or political and historical perspective through which the region had traditionally been framed. These insistent pluralisms and their corollaries of transformation valorized the production of new patterns and practices of identity and experience; from the musical and culinary arts to the linguistic legerdemain of creole expression and the rich religious practices of *vodun* and *santerîa*, the coalescing of cultural influences into unheralded horizons of articulation and representation persistently subverted and undermined the assumptions of reproductive sameness that were arguably at the core of the colonial enterprise. Linking the philosophies of Brathwaite and Glissant, then, is a rejection of colonial binaries and their assumption of a linearity that implicitly confers continuity and legitimacy, as Lorna Burns argues: "Glissant presents creolization as the production of

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[9] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean" (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou, 1974); cited in Nicole King, *C.L.R. James and Creolization: Circles of Influence* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

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

identities apart from the discourse of filiation and genesis that legitimized the colonial project... . In other words, filiation fixes identities and is closed to the possibilities of cross-cultural mixing and creolization."[11] Creolization, then, extracts and extrapolates the transformative from the traditional; ground-breaking and even transgressive in nature, it shelves the colonial binaries of the either/or, of the universal and the same, in favor of an infinite unpredict-ability that is intrinsic to the process of creolization itself. As we shall see, Glissant makes a critical linkage between creolization and archipelagos, positing the inherent capacity for diversity, multiplicity, subversion, and destabilization of the latter as archipelagic thinking, itself inalterably opposed to the systemic binaries and linearities of continental thought.

Now if we attempt the instantiation of an initial reading of cultural hybridity here, it seems to have the capacity to inscribe itself along antinomial lines, as Robert Young has pointed out; it tends to generate "an ambivalent axis of desire and aversion: a structure of attraction, where people and cultures intermix and merge, transforming themselves as a result, and a structure of repulsion, where the different elements remain distinct and are set against each other dialogically."[12] It is worth recalling that the Caribbean context serves as the basic paradigm for ever-increasing patterns of creolization for Edouard Glissant:

> What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word creolization, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible. It is not merely an encounter, a shock (in Segalen's sense), a métissage, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and else-where, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry. If we posit métissage as, generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences, creolization seems to be a limitless métissage, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforesee-able. Creolization diffracts, whereas certain forms of métissage can con-centrate one more time.[13]

By contrast, the axis of desire and aversion that characterizes cultural hybridity for Young and stresses encounter and imbrication as the initial iterations of a phenomenon still arguably grounded in essentialized patterns of subjectivity and othering remains separate and apart from the creolization—as a transforma-tional evolution of cultures—that emerged from colonialism's intersectional encounters.

Edouard Glissant's pluralist, historically inflected vision of Caribbean episte-mology as encompassing both transplantation and transformation sought to inscribe the plurality, the discontinuity, and the dispersal inherent in these experiences as the initiatory site grounding the inalterable characteristics of the

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[11] Burns, "Becoming-Postcolonial, Becoming-Caribbean," 100–01.

[12] Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 19.

[13] Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990); Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. and intro. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 34.

Caribbean heritage. This mutability would prove to be the foundation of the principles of cross-culturality and counter-duality that form the framework of ever-more complex and nuanced iterations of creolization, and its imbrication with globalization, in Glissant's later *oeuvre.*

The interpenetration of languages and cultures that lies at the core of this process of creolization makes the Caribbean a key paradigm of a composite society and posits contact and chaos, cultural relativity, and exchange and transformation as key tools in a polyvalent system of thought. As he argues in *Poetics of Relation*:

> The Caribbean … has always been a place of encounter and connivance … What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word *creolization*, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible … a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and else-where, rooted and open.[14]

For Glissant, an inscription in the composite provides a direct link to the pluralized phenomenon of newness that is the mark of creolization: "We can make conjectures about what these composite cultures … gain by being able to choose among many different experiences … and … syncretize them into a new form."[15] The incessantly variable and limitless process of creolization emerges from these patterns of intersection, change, exchange, and synthesis. Glissant frames this generative framework by stressing principles of combination and transformation rather than opposition and opacity, division and rupture; the infinite openness and fluidity of this practice expands on and extrapolates from the plural encounters of the collective Caribbean experience, as Lorna Burns explains:

> Glissant's fundamental assertion is that being cannot be understood apart

> from lived experience, and that lived experience must acknowledge cross-cultural exchange and the creolized identities that have resulted … Under-scoring creolization as a process, as a becoming, in opposition to fixed, essentialised identities … Glissant here promotes creolization as a mixed identity that refuses to solidify into a specified and fixed model.[16]

Looked at in this way, Glissant's vision of a creolized world order arguably puts into place key principles "of openness, of *errance* and of an intricate, unceasing branching of cultures," as Michael Dash puts it,[17] that would ultimately lead, through a broadening and refining of this process, to patterns of heterogeneity and interconnectedness that intrinsically contest the linear filiations of coloniality and their corollaries and hierarchies of self and Other. Rather, through this

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[14] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 33–34.
[15] Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 115.
[16] Burns, "Becoming-Postcolonial, Becoming-Caribbean," 101.
[17] J. Michael Dash, *Edouard Glissant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 147.

critical conjoining that characterizes the creole, he "obtains a concept of cultural identity which is of sufficient openness to correspond to the complexity of Caribbean reality and the state of the world in a postcolonial era" and "achieves a cultural model which no longer aims at the hermetic seclusion of a national culture but transcends it in order to absorb the imagery of the creolization process," as Andrea Hiepko explains.[18] In *Introduction à une poétique du* divers he writes:

> The active creolization going on within the belly of the plantation—that most unjust and sinister world—is nevertheless creating itself, but it leaves the "Being" struggling ... Creolization requires the heterogeneous elements put into relation to "intervalorize" themselves: ... And why creolization rather than hybridity ["métissage"]? Because creolization is unforeseeable, whereas one can calculate in advance the effects of hybridity ... creolization is hybridity with an added value, namely unforeseeability.[19]

It is to this unforeseeable and therefore infinite conjoining and intermixing of cultures on a world scale that Glissant's vision of creolization points, insisting on intersection, proliferation, and unpredictability as key characteristics of this process. Hiepko glosses this position by highlighting creolization's origin in and difference from colonization, as well as the key role it now plays in contemporary processes of globalization: "The expansionist and intentional process of colonization established a world-wide network of relations which, after the progressive loss of power of the imperial centre, is now able to bring any given culture into contact with another and to allow continuous exchanges whose effects cannot be calculated in advance. What and how much is to be exchanged is not subject to rules or regulations.[20] In sum, then, creolization should be read as an intersectional, transformational concept, inscribing an alternative framework grounded in interconnection and interdependence and mediating both individual and collective modes of being.

In a key way, the conjunction of creolization and globalization is what introduces the concept of archipelic, or archipelagic, thought. In glissantian terms, what we are faced with is a complete revision of traditional systems of thought and of conceptualizing the world, those inherited from the European hegemon and which, grounded as they are in absolutes, fixities, either/or binaries, and hierarchies he terms *continental*; instead he favors an alternative system, which, incorporating and inscribing his key principles of creolization and relation, valorizes the forging of unforeseen connections and ways of becoming, and which by contrast he strategically terms *archipelagic.* By using this nonbinary, intersectional framework drawn on Caribbean materiality to

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[18] Andrea Schwieger Hiepko, "Creolization as a Poetics of Culture: Edouard Glissant's 'Archipelic' Thinking," in *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean* eds. Gordon Collier and Ulrich Fleischmann (Matatu 27–28; Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2003), 23–59; esp. 251.

[19] Edouard Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, trans. Celia Britton (Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 8.

[20] Hiepko, "Creolization as a Poetics of Culture," 256.

undergird globalized patterns of thought and encounter, Glissant creatively joins the principle of creolization to the pioneering concept of archipelagic rather than continental thought. As Michael Wiedorn explains:

> Archipelagos and creolization with the latter consisting in the cultural phenomena that Glissant believed to be proper to archipelagos, manifest a set of characteristics … he perceived archipelagic thought and creolization to be spreading throughout the world … Hence, the creolization that is increasingly an attribute of the entire world signifies that the unpredictable will manifest itself everywhere.[21]

Glissant's vision of the concept of the archipelagic, then, allows it to engender a creative path out of the binary-laden trap of colonialism's presumptive hierarchies and contrasts: "What I call creolization is encounter, interference, shock, the harmonies and disharmonies between cultures, in the material totality of the world … The examples of creolization are endless and we should note that they first took shape and developed in archipelic rather than continental contexts."[22] These subversions of the binary chronologies and opposites inscribed by the colonial script transcend the universalist presumptions of the either/or and revise and rewrite traditional notions of boundary and location, inclusion and exclusion, ultimately reconceptualizing long-established historical perspectives and teleologies and mediating the emergence of compound, nontraditional forms of identity, belonging, and representation.

Importantly, Glissant sees Europe itself—arguably the location of origin for most of the subjective hierarchies and practices of territoriality and othering of the colonial era—as now become subject to the unpredictable pluralities of this transformational process: "What is clear today is that Europe is archipelizing. In other words, beyond national boundaries, we note the appearance of islands that are in relation with each other… . To my mind, then, it seems that working towards the unity of Europe means developing these islands, perhaps to the detriment of the idea of the nation and beyond that, of national frontiers."[23] As European paradigms of nations, borders, and others and their corollaries of systemic hierarchies of self and Other are increasingly contested, subverted, and supplanted by the creative ambiguities and linked insularities of archipelic thought, the functional framework for these ideas becomes truly global, as we see in these extended excerpts:

> Today this systematic thought, which I also like to call "continental thought," has failed to account for the generalized non-system of the world's cultures. Another form of thought is developing … stemming from

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[21] Michael Wiedorn, "On the Unfolding of Glissant's Archipelagic Thought," in *Karib: Nordic Journal for Caribbean Studies* 6.1 (2021): 1–7, esp. 2–3.

[22] Edouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde: Poétique IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 194; my translation.

[23] Andrea Schwieger Hiepko, "Europe and the Antilles: An Interview with Edouard Glissant," in *The Creolization of Theory*, eds. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 255–61.

a vision of the poetics and the imagination of the world. I call this thought "archipelagic," that is non-systematic, inductive thought that explores the unexpected in the world-totality and reconciles writing with orality and orality with writing. What I see today is that the continents are turning themselves into archipelagos … The Americas are "archipelagizing," they are forming themselves into regions across national frontiers … Europe is "archipelagizing." The linguistic and cultural regions, crossing the barriers between nations, are islands, but open islands, and that is the principal condition for their survival.[24]

What these passages make clear, in their deliberate choice of a postcolonial positionality and their philosophical displacement of continental materiality in favor of an archipelagic perspective, is the extent to which such positional perspectives can trace their origins to the displacements and pluralisms of Glissant's earlier Caribbean-themed principle of relation, paradigmatic in this *schéma* through its very penchant for openness and diversity. From a starting point that wrote identity out of a historically and culturally grounded core Antillean experience, the larger theoretical concept of "relation" (la relation) inscribes a nonhierarchial principle of unity, a relation of equality with and respect for the Other as *different* from oneself. On a larger scale, the concept leads to an interconnectedness among cultures.

 In the resulting network of contact and communication, it is the conceptual and epistemological inscription arising out of the geographical structure of the archipelago that (re)locates this relational network toward an interconnected, nonhierarchical world. Indeed, in his last published work, *Philosophie de la relation*, Glissant insists on this point: "The archipelago is this non-unique original reality, from which the following imaginaries spring: simultaneous notions of belonging and of Relation."[25] In other words, if here the figure of the archipelago is inscribed as both symbol and catalyst of pluralism and diversity, it immediately separates itself in an important way from continental systems and their binary corollaries of universalism and totality; this critical division becomes clear as he continues: "Wherever a propensity toward the archipelic subtended global diversity, by way of contrast the aim of continental thought was to impose a unicity which was facilitated by such perspectives, and the latter in turn quickly organized themselves into systems of thought."[26] Viewing the globalized world in this interconnected way shifts our perspective on any economic and political lineages drawn on continental conceptualizations because they are effectively subverted by archipelagic thinking. Michael Wiedorn explains this well: "The archipelago is neither closed nor contained; it is an opening. It has neither beginning nor end in time or in space, or even in our conception of it … For Glissant, system thought was proper to continents and stood in sharp contrast to archipelagic thought … Archipelagic thought is … a source of creation and

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[24] Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, 26.
[25] Edouard Glissant, Edouard *Philosophie de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 47; my translation.
[26] Glissant, *Philosophie de la relation*, p. 50; my translation.

creativity."[27] And so importantly, not only are openness, interconnectedness, and creativity valorized in this new visualization, once again brand new, as Glissant explicitly links this archipelic thought to patterns of resistance: "We also come to realize that archipelic thought eventually supplants continental thought … and that resistance subsists in every periphery. You don't see it, and in any event you wouldn't recognize it, because you don't even recognize the existence of peripheries."[28] From this discursive gesture, meant to sweep away those thought-systems that gave rise to slavery, colonialism, and racism by assimilating the perspectives and positionalities of the periphery to the burgeoning scope of the archipelagic, it is increasingly clear that this new world, inscribed in and enriched by resistance, is the product of modernity's ever-expanding networks of cultural connection and expression, where relational creativity enables in turn the complex articulations of a world in contact with itself.

By drawing on the complex patterns of Caribbean (dis)continuity from which creolization was ultimately eventuated, then, Glissant is able to position this last as a resistive framework that compels the systematic or continental perspective governing the erstwhile colonial framework to give way to the unpredictable yet interlinked ambiguities of the archipelago; the borders and boundaries that had heretofore demarcated continents, countries, and cultures cede to new regimes of philosophy and positionality dominated by patterns of plurality that favor the unpredictability of the territorial encounter over the singularities of the nation-state.

It is the presumptive globality of these linked insularities of archipelagic thought that recently has given rise to a range of new approaches to community and subjectivity; as an example here, we will examine the theoretical and representational foundations of archipelagic American studies. These discourses arguably abandon the either/or binaries that have historically shaped the divisions and hierarchies of alliance, affiliation, and exclusion that have long undergirded ascriptions of agency and (in)humanity in various iterations of continental thought, in favor of highlighting an analytical framework that draws on the archipelago's key metaphor; a paradox that draws on the simultaneity of grouping and scattering across ocean, sea, and land. In their introduction to the recent volume *Archipelagic American Studies*, editors Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens sum up the positionality of this approach this way: "The term 'archipelago' ceased to name a specific sea and began structuring and describing a formal and indeed tropological human relation to material geographies that span the planet … the concept of 'archipelago' repays and indeed demands engagement through a critical awareness that takes into account its situation as a prime metaphor within the structuring grammar of colonial modernity."[29] In other words, what such an approach locates and identifies, in its double inscription between the metaphoric and the material, between the

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[27] Wiedorn, "On the Unfolding of Glissant's Archipelagic Thought," 5–6.

[28] Glissant, *Philosophie de la relation*, p. 86; my translation.

[29] Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, eds., "Introduction," in *Archipelagic American Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 8.

solidities and liquidities of culture and geography, is the motility and malleability of many subjectivities whose ground is both plural and polymorphous.

As a field of study, this approach draws on the cultural and subjective ambiguities and pluralisms that emerge from and simultaneously problematize the colonial experience. The act of conjoining effectively subverts the insularities produced by colonial subjection, the resulting discourse framing a creative instability that breaks new discursive, analytical, and diegetical ground; it marks "a turn toward approaching islands, island-sea assemblages, and littoral formations that goes beyond colonialist tropes and requires a new world of archipelagic understanding."[30] In an initial gesture, the scale and scope of the reconception that this "new world of archipelagic understanding" requires is given substance by revisiting the consequences of continental assumptions as we have known them; if "continental presumptions have tended to disrupt a hemispheric consciousness,"[31] compelling in this way the historical inscription of colonial divisions based on the multivalence of their binary codes, then these hemispheric materialities must perforce hold myriad implications for the archipelagic linking of multiple subjectivities and their geopolitical and cultural connections to geographic frameworks that are no longer bounded by borders, frontiers, or oceans.

This archipelagic framework also paradoxically serves to confirm the conjunction of encounter and transformation whose complex and multiple creolizing consequences became the foundation of Caribbeanness, making its geopolitical and ethnocultural multivalences the enabling matrices of a new agential and subjective structure. "Continentalism has also stymied general acknowledgment of the Caribbean as an archipelago of jolting geopolitical diversity, with multiple political affiliations (in addition to independent nation-states, we see affiliations with the Netherlands, the United States, Britain, France, the European Union, etc.) mediated by proliferating modes of governmentality (territory, department, protectorate, municipality, commonwealth, and others)."[32] Deploying the perspectives and positionalities that attach to this framework is where the archipelagic, and the full range of its resonances and implications, begins.[33]

Clearly, the island is key here, the properties of sea and soil that conjoin and extend the geographic, metaphoric, and ontological properties intrinsic to its insularity standing in stark contrast to the strict binary divisions of continentalism's fixed worldview. This ductile, variable interactivity "holds in productive tension the insights produced by such newly emerging fields as island studies and ocean studies, attentive to the materialities of archipelagic existence as well as to the ways in which the island's wide deployment as a metaphor has

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[30] Roberts and Stephens, *Archipelagic American Studies*, 11.

[31] Roberts and Stephens, *Archipelagic American Studies*, 9.

[32] Roberts and Stephens, *Archipelagic American Studies*, 9.

[33] I analyze many of these facets of Caribbeanness in my "Introduction: Non-Sovereignty and the Neoliberal Challenge: Contesting Economic Exploitation in the Eastern Caribbean," in *The Struggle of Non-Sovereign Caribbean Territories: Neoliberalism Since the French Antillean Uprisings of 2009*, ed. H. Adlai Murdoch (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 1–52.

continually exerted influence on those materialities.[34] Assessing the linkages between creolization and the archipelagic, then, reveals the shaping force of the concept of the archipelago as an idea or an approach that abandons notions of boundaries and fragmentation in favor of an interactive, productive assembly of island, mainland, and sea. Asserting the differences from the divisions and limitations of continental binaries inherent in this approach allows us to "view, represent, talk and write about, or otherwise experience disjuncture, connection and entanglement *between and among* islands. In doing so, we first assume, *a priori*, and then seek to map, the existence, implications and affect of archipelagic relations."[35] Rather, by stressing the dynamics of an in-betweenness that produces continuity from contiguity, the result is a malleable and transformational philosophical and metaphoric framework, one that projects "a re-presentation of identity, interaction, space and place that comes across in different combinations of affect, materiality, performance, things."[36] Here, interconnection and interaction are the core sites and strategies of the analyses that result.

Throughout this varied set of encounters, we have continued to see the production of critical sites of multivalent culturality, where the initial duality of Caribbean-European or Caribbean-African exchange is translated and transformed into plural patterns of encounter and transformation. These processes articulate what can arguably be called a distinct, and distinctive, third space, separate from either of its original components but more than the sum of both. But key to the importance of articulating a so-called "third space," particularly where it serves to locate a postcolonial position, must also be the simultaneous recognition of how this space functions in discursive terms. Homi Bhabha's useful formulation is of interest here: "The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity … is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority."[37] It is thus hybridity's spatial and symbolic force in formulating alternative discursive positions, rather than the binary framework driving hybridity itself, that becomes crucial in formulating a framework separate from the process of creolization. But we shall return to these crucial issues of spatiality and discursivity shortly.

To return to "creolization" briefly, then, it denotes the experiences of displacement, exchange, and transcultural mixing whereby new identities are forged as transplanted peoples seek to retain aspects of their individual traditions, even as they are exposed to unexpected patterns and praxes of being and representation. Creole cultures are the products of contentious processes of creolization that first emerged in the contact zones and slave societies of the New World, southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean. And so creolization in the strict

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[34] Roberts and Stephens, *Archipelagic American Studies*, 10.

[35] Elizabeth McMahon, Carol Farbotko, Godfrey Baldacchino, et al., "Envisioning the Archipelago," *Island Studies Journal* 6.2 (2011): 114; emphasis in the original.

[36] McMahon, Farbotko, Baldacchino, et al., "Envisioning the Archipelago," 114.

[37] Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207–21, esp. 211.

sense is therefore specific to discrete colonial sites and violent moments of world history. It has, at the same time, become a constructive if controversial model for understanding broad-ranging reciprocal or asymmetrical exchanges mediated by differentials in (neo)colonial power; at the same time, it retains a strict difference from the concept of hybridity.

Hybridity, in its critical iteration as a term of academic exegesis, was introduced by Homi Bhabha and is generally associated with critical encounters arising out of a range of postcolonial sites and contexts. Now Bhabha's usage of this term, and of others, like mimicry, that have come to be associated with his writing, arguably derive from ideas and terminology drawn from Freud and French thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. Hybridity in a postcolonial context provides the most common context for Bhabha's usage of the term, but its most immediate reference here was to colonial subjects from Asia or Africa who had found a means of engaging in a range of ethnic and cultural mixing between East and West; in addition, it is often read as embodying a critical category of potential for a radical (re)conception of agency. It is therefore of critical importance, as Anjali Prabhu strategically notes, to "distinguish between hybridity as a theoretical concept and a political stance that we can argue, and hybridity as a social reality with historical specificity."[38] The theoretical genesis and articulation of hybridity, then, should be differentiated from its articulation or representation of social and cultural strategies and positionalities; the latter formulation would include those multivalent forces that, as we have seen, give rise to historically driven phenomena of creolization and *métissage.* Prabhu points out that the former formulation stems from "theoretical and political discourses dealing with the idea of minority constituencies ... with diaspora discourse having to encounter and accommodate itself to other experiences of minority status or new immigrations ... It also has to do with the need for mobility in the new setting and the opportunities that are not equally available across this population for numerous reasons."[39] Importantly, then, given the articulation of minority constituencies, and the need to inscribe their presumptive corollary of agency through these discourses and their varied subjectivities, it is important to note that related terms, including creolization, métissage, syncretism, and transculturation, emerge from a different set of material encounters from the theoretical and the political as the adumbration outlined above makes clear.

Now in this latter incarnation, and as an analytical and prescriptive term, *hybridity* has entered many academic arenas, ranging from traditional disciplines like literature, anthropology, and sociology to interdisciplinary venues such as postcolonial theory and performance studies. Ultimately, it can be argued that its meanings and resonances are related to and draw on colonialism's fundamental tripartite manipulations of race, language, and ethnicity. Homi Bhabha's specific conceptualization of hybridity locates it in a post/colonial context, focusing on its emergence from binary relations between colonizer and colonized. And so while, ultimately, it operates within the ambivalent space of cultural identity—

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[38] Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects.* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), 2.
[39] Prabhu, *Hybridity*, 4.

defined by Stuart Hall as "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being' ... belong [ing] to the future as much as to the past"[40]—its encapsulation of difference arguably works to establish an uncharted pathway, an enabling framework for the longstanding struggle to establish an independent identity matrix; that is to say, one free from the strictures outlined in Benita Parry's well-known dictum that "a reverse discourse replicating and therefore reinstalling the linguistic polarities devised by a dominant centre to exclude and act against the categorized, does not liberate the 'other' from a colonized condition ... the founding concepts of the problematic must be refused."[41] To diverge from the presumptive singularity of colonialism's dominant discourses, then, hybridity can take advantage of such ambivalences to inscribe itself as an agent or embodiment of a postcolonial empowerment whose appropriation of space allows new sites and strategies of agency to emerge:

> It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory ... may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity.[42]

It can certainly be argued that hybridity's internationalism can be read as a resistive sign of transborder openness, such that what is implicit in such a position is the alternate, unprecedented positionality that such internationalism implies. Nevertheless, disputes do remain regarding the specificity of its meaning and implications.

So hybridity's dismantling of binaries certainly seems to have the latent capacity to subvert political and cultural domination as its third path stresses the ambivalent aspects embedded and embodied in its new positionalities. It can be made to stand against cultural imperialism on the one hand, its insistent difference highlighting the multivalency of admixture that, in its turn, creatively transforms both identity and culture as well as the terms in which they can be articulated. On the other, it is hybridity's capacity to interrupt and disturb, to "disrupt what is known and knowable in a linear modality,"[43] as Anjali Prabhu puts it, that makes it an important mediator of decolonization, migration, diasporization, and globalization. In an important essay, Homi Bhabha has adumbrated in greater detail hybridity's subversion of colonialist knowledge and discursive domination and its unleashing of cultural difference as a form of agency:

> Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other "denied"

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[40] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222–37.

[41] Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," *Oxford Literary Review* 9 (1987): 27–58, esp. 28.

[42] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 38.

[43] Prabhu, *Hybridity*, 119.

knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition ... What is irremediably estranging in the presence of the hybrid ... is that the difference of cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply *there* to be seen or appropriated.[44]

Key to such a reversal is hybridity's inscription and articulation of new and alternate knowledge frameworks, their signifying role now breaking new discursive and descriptive ground. This articulation of fluid postcolonial frameworks displaces colonialist authority even as it makes the otherness of alternative cultural values viable: "Hybridity reverses the *formal* process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonization becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse. The presence of colonialist authority is no longer immediately visible."[45] As the predominance of colonial binaries gradually cedes its authority, this subversion of authoritarian positionalities and their presumptive hierarchies now allows the strategic articulation of hybrid difference in order to enable subaltern agency, as Bhabha explains further: "It is from this hybrid location of cultural value—the transnational as the translational—that the postcolonial intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical and literary project."[46] As such a project emerges from these burgeoning tensions and takes shape through its elaboration of alternate discourses, its positionalities trace new parameters for the definition and inscription of community.

Bhabha makes this point clear in an exegesis of what he calls "the 'new' internationalism,"[47] the multivalent discursive, ethnocultural, and geopolitical ground that these subaltern subjectivities and positionalities have enabled. Looked at in this way, if the overall discursive framework of contemporary postcolonial culture is the pluralized product of hybridity's emergence, then the transnational foundation that makes this hybridity work displaces the singular epistemologies of traditional definitional boundaries to empower new sites and strategies that chart a path for such departures. Bhabha terms this "the changed basis for making international connections"; instead of "the sovereignty of the national culture" as we have long conceived and known it, he now envisions "'national' cultures ... produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities."[48] The myriad implications of such a shift in positionality and perspective for the reconception, redefinition, and redeployment of community and the articulation of its corollary of agency are nothing less than groundbreaking, producing "a radical revision in the concept of human community itself."[49] It is here, perhaps, that the theories of displacement and difference that

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[44] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 114.
[45] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 114.
[46] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 173.
[47] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 5.
[48] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 6.
[49] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 6.

have figured in this analysis, in their disarticulation of binary presuppositions and their corollaries of thought and analysis, will find their greatest value.

## Conclusion

What is now clear is that the process of creolization, as embodied in successive iterations, was envisioned by Glissant as a global process of change and transformation. He explains this succinctly in *Traité du Tout-Monde*: "Creolization is marked by the coming into contact of several cultures or at least of several elements of various cultures, in a specific world-space, and resulting in a new reality, one completely unforeseeable in terms of the sum total or the synthesis of these elements."[50] Ultimately, these pluralized patterns of cultural inscription and production would give rise to globalized shifts in community, belonging, representation, and performance, as the materiality envisioned and embodied by archipelagic discourses reshapes the boundaries of the world-spaces in which it emerges. By contrast, Homi Bhabha valorizes the cultural diversity that emerges from the hybridized traces of the post/colonial encounter, writing that "cultural diversity is an epistemological object—culture as an object of empirical knowledge—whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture … adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification."[51] By drawing attention to the importance of process in these articulations of culture, Bhabha highlights the conjunctive potential for hybrid constructions of subjectivity and community. The compound discourses that emerge as a response to the erasures driven by coloniality emphasize their heritage of difference—"where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between*,"[52] as Bhabha puts it—allowing both concepts to reinscribe the nonsingular character of these relational frameworks of belonging through the impress of their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic connectivity in multiple aspects of today's globalized networks. In particular, as I have shown, they both subvert the imposing dominance of binaries engendered in the wake of the plantation encounter and seek alternative solutions to the historical and discursive linearities implied by colonialism's acts of assimilation and definition.

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50  Glissant, *Traité du Tout-monde*, 37.
51  Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 34.
52  Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 219; emphasis in the original.