

# Shifting Borders



Shifting Borders:  
European Perspectives on Creolisation

Edited by

Tommaso Sbriccoli and Stefano Jacoviello

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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European Perspectives on Creolisation,  
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## FOREWORD

### CREOLISATION ON THE MOVE

ULF HANNERZ

I first became aware of creole concepts myself close to a half-century ago, in a period when I was doing inner-city ethnography attached to a sociolinguistic project in Washington, D.C., concerned with “urban dialect” (which in the vocabulary of the time meant Black, African-American dialect). A couple of my colleagues on the project were creolist linguists, and they introduced me to their understanding of the past and present of the languages of people of African descent in the Americas. But they also directed me toward the emergent wider, comparative view of Creole language forms in the world.

Then a decade or so later a respected anthropologist colleague – perhaps characteristically, someone who had been born in a part of Germany which fairly soon thereafter became Polish, did very extensive ethnographic field research in Central Africa, and then had much of his academic career in the United States before becoming a professor in the Netherlands – rather briefly pointed to the contrast between Creole and Pidgin languages, noted that one could look at cultures in similar terms, and considered colonial and post-colonial African popular culture in that light. Some other anthropologists had recently moved in the same direction. And as I was engaged at the time in a field study in a Nigerian town, I remembered what I had learnt from my Washington colleagues, and took a creolist view of certain cultural aspects of global interconnectedness – as this was in the 1970s and 1980s, the term “globalization” was not really around yet. So on the basis of my West African work, I wrote for one thing a paper titled “The World in Creolisation”. The growing interconnectedness of the world, I argued, did not necessarily lead only to uniformity and cultural loss. There was a creation of new culture as well. Then a little later, when invited to speak to a Scandinavian gathering of American Studies scholars, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, I gave that presentation the title “American Culture: Creolized,

Creolizing”, to hint at the changing historical place of North American culture in the world.

An unexpectedly large number of people took note of these two papers, published in somewhat obscure places. And so they became quite widely cited. For one thing, many years later, I received a new volume, published in Hiroshima, with the title *The Age of Creolization in the Pacific*, edited by Takeshi Matsuda (2001), with the subtitle “In Search of Emerging Cultures and Shared Values in the Japan-America Borderlands”.

I mention all this to illustrate how notions of creolisation have recently been on the move. So now, with the present volume, they are also in Europe, and in the hands of European scholars.

Obviously this is a complex, shifting, sometimes perhaps even internally contradictory field of ideas, and this book does not really try to conceal that, or establish a single point of view. While the concepts in question have their particularly strong historical roots in the Caribbean region, populations identified in local, everyday, “emic” terminology as “Creole” (Criollo, Krio etc) are found in many parts of the world. As Creole languages and dialects have become a specialized field in comparative and theoretical linguistics and sociolinguistics, too, and as linguistic conceptualizations have come to inspire for example cultural studies and anthropology, creolist understandings are no longer so strictly connected to particular world areas. Even in the Caribbean, contemporary intellectuals are doing new things with them – of that we also learn more in this book. But Europe is not where we have been accustomed to finding these notions.

One can sense, however, their sometimes even intuitive intellectual appeal – in a set of contexts, and perhaps particularly to some people. I took the liberty above to sketch the life career of that prominent anthropologist colleague who first inspired me to see creolisation as a key metaphor for certain processes of global cultural interconnectedness: it had been a life of both historical change and personal mobility, even with borders changing place. I could imagine that someone like him could well develop a ready sensitivity to the kinds of things creole concepts tend to stand for. It may be that the life worlds of human beings have actually never been quite as stable and uniform as social theory and cultural thought have sometimes made them out to be. But in recent times, as people, goods, messages and meanings have moved over distances and crossed borders conspicuously quickly, on a large scale, and formed new combinations, even blending into newly created shapes, there have been particular openings for a new vocabulary, a fresh (well, more or less)

vocabulary to think with and argue with. Creolisation, certainly, but also hybridity, transculturation, synergy, fusion, cosmopolitanism, crossovers... Borders are not understood as absolute obstacles for movement, but as lines and zones to be manoeuvred with, perhaps to be drawn on for some purposes as resources. Frontiers are there to be explored. Some people seem to be tricksters, not tragic marginal figures – although that imagery may also sometimes come to the fore – but particularly well equipped to confront the uncertainty of crossroads and newly assembled situations, and even come out on top. At times the hybrid forms may seem a little bizarre, as when invaders use the idiom of human rights for their own purposes (see a later chapter). The landscape of power and domination may be there, just about always, but never quite obliterating the spaces for agency.

It is a pleasure to find such themes explored, in this volume, in Europe, with its extensions East and West, North and South. This is Europe as it took another turn, in the latter half of the twentieth century. In the half-century before that, as old empires fell, there had been a preoccupation with the continent-wide mosaic, with drawing sharp boundaries around nations which should preferably be culturally homogeneous – too often using violence such as ethnic cleansing and even genocide to accomplish the ideal. Now, labour migrants arrived on jumbo jets, and refugees came ashore from fragile vessels. At the same time, at the core of the continent, an economic and political structure was engineered to make war a thing of Europe's past; and if that construction effort could be clumsy and experience its setbacks, and was sometimes ambiguous as well as ambivalent in its goals, it gradually drew in more and more of the continent. Easier passages of people and goods, more mutual transparency were the overall goals sought. This was the Europe of Brussels, Maastricht, Schengen (setting its own limits) and Berlin without a Wall. There were, to be sure, also hostile reactions to these developments. Both news media and scholarship have had to attend to those groupings who preferred their world to be more like what it had once been, or the way they at least imagined that it had once been. In other words, neo-nationalism, intolerance and xenophobia have also been there as discordant ingredients of the emergent diversity.

All in all, this volume has much to say about moving and mixing in our times, and shows in more ways how creolist and related notions can be very fruitful to think with. I would also like to draw attention to the way such themes play a part in shaping the book itself, and in the way knowledge is drawn together in its making. The book crosses academic borders as well – it appears as a strikingly interdisciplinary project, the

way it brings together authors and ideas from anthropology, political studies, literary studies, semiotics, theatre studies, and other habitats within the scholarly landscape. Furthermore, while the chapter texts are all in that hypercentral language of the world language system which is English, I have seen few recent books with so many languages represented in the scholarly references. If language differences still tend to be among those facts of European life which make some borders real, which render Europe as an imagined community more opaque, not so transparent, the collective multilingualism of the authors of the following chapters also contributes to showing what Europeans can do together – shifting borders, scrutinizing them, playing with them; and indeed, sometimes disregarding them.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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An international, interdisciplinary two-year project inevitably gives rise to many more debts than one could expect to pay back with just a few words of thanks. The University of Siena, the University of Ljubljana, the University of Lisbon (Centro de Estudos Comparatistas), and Monash University (Melbourne, Australia) have all provided us with the much needed space and staff support that allowed us to complete our work. We are particularly grateful to the scholars who joined the Scientific Committee of the project and fostered the work of the research team: Helena Buescu, Laura Caretti, Elizabeth Burns Coleman, and Pier Giorgio Solinas. Special thanks are due to Andrej Kurnik, whose presence and participation in all three scientific workshops held in Siena have been much valued and inspiring. We also thank the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature of the University of Siena, Roberto Venuti, for his help and interest in our project. We would like to take advantage of the opportunity to remember and thank Omar Calabrese, who always supported our work and whose invaluable teaching can be seen throughout our research.

The research that comprises this book was conducted in parallel with the other activities of the project. This has allowed for a fruitful exchange between those from different backgrounds (the social sciences, theatre,

dance, photography, visual arts) while also producing an intellectual setting that has been incredibly exciting, pleasing, and “creolised”. We are grateful to all those who have helped to create this environment by sharing their ideas, insights, and time with us. Like us, they have so often been driven by the notion that intellectual work of whatever kind demands passion and commitment. Among them, we thank the Balletto Civile (Emanuele Braga, Alessandro Berti, Maurizio Camilli, Ambra Chiarello, Michela Lucenti, and Emanuela Serra), Marta Mantovani, Daniela Neri, Anne Pinson, and Angelo Romagnoli.

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Ulf Hannerz has been a point of reference for our work from the outset. The seminar series he gave in Siena has been fundamental to the conception of this volume and the development of our vision on creolisation. Our warmest thanks go to him.

Finally, we would like to remember and thank Édouard Glissant for inspiring us with his poetic vision of creolisation. “Poetic” comes from the Greek term “*poiesis*”, meaning “the creation of something new”. We hope that with this book we accomplish, at least in part, such a difficult task.

# INTRODUCTION

STEFANO JACOVIELLO  
AND TOMMASO SBRICCOLI

The concept of creolisation in the last few decades has become a recurrent feature in the works of scholars from many disciplines, serving as a useful metaphor for understanding contemporary societies in a “world of globalisation”. The range and modality of the term’s uses vary greatly. Critics from different corners have challenged the blurring of the concept through its expanded theoretical usage in fields well beyond those that fostered its emergence and development, namely the colonial settings of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean (Palmié 2006, 2007; Knörr 2008; Sheller 2003). The history of the “C-Word”, as Palmié (2007) ironically dubbed it, is complex and varied, and one that deserves separate treatment. What concerns us more in this Introduction is instead to provide a brief overview of the complex and far from linear trajectories that the concept of “creolisation” has taken beyond its original geographical, historical, and academic domains, doing so in order better to position the work of the present volume. While we share some of the concerns that the above authors explicitly declare when they refer to the risks of uprooting a context-specific concept and using it more widely, we nonetheless maintain that such an operation can bear fruit when done cautiously and carefully as part of a theoretical and analytical process.

Beginning in the 1970s, a number of scholars started to borrow analytical tools from creole linguistics in order to explain the increasing complexity of cultural encounters in a more and more connected world. David Parkin (1993) has grouped this scholarship under three principal labels according to their underlying epistemic paradigm: processual, structuralist, and organisational. The first, exemplified in Parkin’s typology by Johannes Fabian, intended to overcome the concept of “culture as code” by reframing it as a “developing code”, so as to be able to take into account contradictions, oppositions, contrasts, and relations of power and domination within contexts of cultural encounter and change (1978: 328). From Fabian’s perspective, such reconfiguration would

permit us “to avoid reification and [the] false concretisation of ‘culture’” (328). Creolisation is thus understood in Fabian as “the emergence of creative and fully viable new syntheses” that, without denying the continued pressures and constraints inherent in the many forms of oppression that characterize colonial as well as neo-colonial situations, points to “the emerging forms of expression, reflecting the life-experience and consciousness of the masses, [...] as evidence for cultural independence and creativity” (317).

The attention to creativity, individuals’ capacity to “play” with cultural coordinates, and the resulting development of new configurations all form one of the recurrent features of studies concerned with creolisation. Lee Drummond, the main representative of what Parkin has defined the “structuralist” notion of creolisation, indeed considers the ability of social actors in Guyana in “constantly bringing into operation a range of ethnic categories [which] form a system of interconnected meanings” (1980: 368). This kind of process is described according to a model of creolisation that looks at creole linguistics and transposes Bickerton’s model of continuum into the realm of culture (1973, 1975). Thus, according to Drummond:

[T]he systematic nature of culture is to be found in relationships which, through a series of transformations, connect one intersystem to another. A cultural continuum, like a linguistic continuum, may be identified by inserting arbitrary boundaries within a transformational series (1980: 370).

From this perspective, Drummond’s observations of Guyana acquire a particular salience in as much as they demonstrate that people there have employed ethnic categories in much the same fashion as they have grammatical competence—that is, by following multiple and incompatible rules. The system of ethnic categories was thus continuously restructured by social interactions and, consequently, could be considered as a set of potential intersystems along which subjects were able to move. Rules governing transformation, more so than any description of individuals’ different existing belongings, are significant for understanding social actors’ strategies and assessing their ability to reconfigure both cultural memory and identity. In this sense, creolisation becomes a theoretical model for the analysis of such reconfigurations.

Ulf Hannerz also draws on Bickerton’s continuum. Though more interested in the “social organisation of difference” and in the tensions between centres and peripheries in an increasingly interconnected world, for Hannerz creolisation is the principle regulating the creative interaction of social actors at the crossing between a series of different frameworks

(state, market, form of life, movements) which give shape to a complex system of organisation. According to Hannerz, “a macro-anthropology of culture which takes into account the world system and its centre-periphery relation appears to be well served by a creolist point of view” (1987: 556). As this approach considers creolisation as a general systematic process that involves us all, and not only colonial and post-colonial cultures, it can make of anthropology, in Hannerz’s words, “a truly general and comparative study of culture” (557).

Although many other scholars have recently made use of the concept of creolisation and developed it in different ways—to such an extent that it has become a central issue in cultural theory (see among others Cohen and Toninato 2010, Lionnet and Shih 2011, Stewart 2007)—the approaches outlined here are still very much alive in current scholarship and inform, often implicitly, many assumptions in such scholarship. In the works here collected, we have thus aimed to develop an approach to creolisation that has maintained its emphasis on both the processual and the systemic nature of cultural transformation. Therefore, in keeping with the work of the scholars mentioned above, we have been guided in the research that we have undertaken by the idea of creolisation as a workable theoretical model for describing and analysing cultural encounters. This idea has furthermore formed the starting-point for the present volume.

The book introduced here is in fact the fruit of a two-year research project whose main aim has been to formulate new perspectives on creolisation through the labours of an interdisciplinary, international research team. We have approached the object, “creolisation”, as a *trompe l’œil*: an image that fascinates the viewer with its many different points-of-view while at the same time compelling those who stare at it to question its hidden devices.

With our differing disciplinary backgrounds we have endeavoured to detach the historically determined concept of “creolisation” from its exclusive association with the Caribbean in particular and the post-colonial world more generally. We have thus abstracted it and identified its general “*dispositifs*”, along with the specific dynamics by which they produce subjectivity. With subjectivity becoming central to our analysis, discourse—understood in Foucauldian terms—has become the field of inquiry in which we have sought to identify the traces of the processes that set the conditions for cultural encounters to take place thanks to the constitution of common horizons of meaning between interacting subjects. All the manifestations of discourse—in the fields of literature, politics, and labour markets, as well as in the daily practices, their narrations, and representations—have been domains for our examination in order to

identify the very settings for social actors' struggles over identities. It is here where we have looked for the production of meaning, a copious and often underestimated ground where one can glimpse the creation of third spaces and new social and cultural configurations. It is also in these encounters and shared horizons where processes constituting memory and identity can be identified, as can the consequences of multidimensional power relations and their management.

An analytical and theoretical model of creolisation as “restructuring”, following Charles Stewart’s suggestion (2007b: 18), does not in and of itself imply the loss of the historical and empirical complexity of the term. Quite the opposite, it has meant for us a certain faithfulness to the term’s origins on a level that allowed us to redefine its coordinates, thus using it to shed light even on those historical processes to which it is fundamentally connected (see Van Haesendonck, this volume). In looking for the model’s specificity, we have in fact been pushed to put it in relation with other processes of cultural encounter, comparing it with often politically loaded process-models such as “assimilation–integration”, multiculturalism, mimicry, and hybridisation. This has even resulted in the identification of new ways of dealing with the Other’s positioning, for example, “mirroring” (see Perugini and Rabie, this volume).

Our shifting perspective towards our objects of inquiry (and their definition) has had a dual starting-point. First has been the idea of a creolisation of theory (Lionnet and Shih 2011). Second has been a redefined epistemology detached from a supposedly neutral “universal zero point” of observation and fixed instead to a locality (with all its historical, cultural and political dimensions) that acts as the point of departure for the constitution of a new multidimensional gaze on the world (Mignolo 2011). While the “zero point of epistemology” is the universalising—not universal—device for concepts such as assimilation or multiculturalism acquiring their heuristic and political power, reasoning in terms of creolisation inevitably leads to the multiplication (or, at least, the doubling) of the standpoints to be taken into account in developing a theoretical framework for analysis.

Creolisation obliges us to consider conflicts between two or more cultural systems and to conceive the results of such conflicts as temporary rebalancings of contrasts founded on power relations that impinge on the definition of the identities at stake. As linguistic studies on creolisation have also clearly emphasised, rules and categories of interaction are established through the encounter itself. In this respect, dialogue is the precondition for language, the latter offering itself to analysis as “discourse”: a complex structure within which power dynamics are identifiable in all

forms of expression.

In contrast to those models of globalisation concerned either with distinguishing centre and periphery or with other seemingly more refined approaches that reproduce this same mechanism within a polycentric system where each centre is, in turn, placed within a network of polarised hierarchies: in contrast to those models, the creolisation paradigm proposed here implies a relationship of conflict between at least two systems. Conflict occurs around either the definition, or the trespass, of a border. The border is thus conceived as the site of exchange and cultural transformation, the place where identities are produced. Normally understood as those points where the categories defining reality are produced and from which they irradiate, centres in our model become identifiable only as a reflection projected from the border. This shift of perspective acknowledges the fact that the values of difference and of identity are created by means of translation processes at the border and tend to be neutralised near the centre (where translation is not needed). As the border is the device through which interacting subjects manage the production of their own subjectivities within discourse, dialogue acquires a foundational character for anyone who hopes to grasp how the processes of cultural and social interaction work in contemporary society. Borders thus understood as the site, both material and immaterial, where meaning is negotiated and produced are no longer merely a barrier. Instead they become the fecund ground where one can view the mechanisms which produce, reproduce, neutralise, create, define, and redefine identities and subjectivities.

This theoretical framework intends to give centrality back to subjects as agents of transformation. It is in fact their actions that establish borders and, in so doing, delineate systems in opposition so as to operate an unpredictable transformation both of these systems and of the subjectivities comprised within. Processes of creolisation are triggered by individuals acting within an ever-changing relational network that reconfigures itself by situation and according to a given hierarchy's instability. Creolisation therefore can produce new forms of community premised on individuals' or groups of individuals' ways of acting, yet it cannot be attributed to concerted collective action. In Glissant's archipelago model, for example, different islands can be seen as connected, but that connection does not vitiate their unique cultural diversity (Glissant 1997). Creolisation has notably been studied as a socio-historical process rooted in particular settings (above all, the Caribbean), and these studies have often observed its tendency toward indigenisation and ethnicisation (Knörr 2008). At the same time, mostly in the field of

literature, claims have been made of a creole identity as the moniker of a movement. These claims have triggered a process of reification that eventually brought creolisation to be conceived as the traits of a belonging (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant 1993).<sup>1</sup> Though from different perspectives, both these positions fix their attention on the collective dimension of creolisation and arrive at an identification of new ascriptive, bounded identities. By contrast, our focus on individuals' subjective strategies at the centre of on-going processes of identity redefinition (both their and of others), leads us to understand "*creolité*" as an attitude and a condition rather than as a principle of belonging. This approach enables us to analyse historical processes linked to creolisation and thus identify the moment when the so-called "creole" as such ends.

Processes of creolisation are neither linear nor orientated towards prescriptive axiological values, as is the case with the assimilation–integration model. Rather, they are discontinuous (because they remodel themselves according to context and incessantly changing aims), strategic, and relational. Subjects do not adjust to the rules of the system that plays host to them; instead, it is the system itself that is forced into a restructuring as a result of subjects' actions. Such restructuring occurs on multiple levels of semantic pertinence. On each, the creole subject constructs a different aspect of the many that constitute her multidimensional identity, within a set of diverse configurations of intersubjective relations. A social and cultural system so reconfigured allows the creole to pass from one level to the other, from one relational microsystem to another, and consequently to neutralise some aspects of her identity in favour of others (see Jacoviello and Sbriccoli, this volume). This game is made feasible by the possibility of translating one's own subjectivity onto different planes of discourse. Translatability thus becomes a fundamental feature of the model of creolisation we propose; it is this feature, for instance, that distinguishes it from the concept of "hybridisation" as elaborated by Homi Bhabha (1994). The latter's view, in fact, considers the interstice as the "in-between" space where new subjectivities are produced in as much as it hosts the untranslatable remains between two fixed arenae of cultural identification. Subjects' ability to transpose both meanings and themselves onto different planes of pertinence<sup>2</sup> denies the possibility of such remains' existence (everything is

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<sup>1</sup> For the debate on the "*creolité*" movement that began in 1989 with the manifesto, "*Éloge de la créolité*", and Glissant's position in relation to it, see Gallagher (2007).

<sup>2</sup> It is possible to understand these planes of pertinence as textual frameworks, that

always and unavoidably consumed in the interaction). The creole subject can also place herself just on the border between two systems commonly recognised as “cultures”, or between two languages, and act as an operator able to reconfigure both cultural systems through mutual translation. This is what happens in the cases of multilingual writers such as A. Lakhous (see Campanini, this volume). Together with the translation of languages, tales, and stories, creole operators also translate subjectivities within their social and cultural settings.

The idea of a world-system reconfiguring through translation allows for the description of the processes of production by which new subjectivities “transform reality which ultimately involves the production of new truths” (Hardt and Negri quoted in Bezec, this volume). At the same time, paying attention to the way in which discursive devices structure the production of subjectivities also enables us to distinguish processes of creolisation from those, similar at first sight, which are instead structured as the negation of a possible translation. Therefore, Perugini and Rabie in their chapter show how mirroring, an effective strategy for Israeli colonists, works in as much as it configures itself as the occupation, within the legal field, of the position of the Other exactly because the latter has proved to be effective.

Understood in this way, it thus becomes possible to disentangle creolisation from the particular contexts of its emergence without losing its heuristic power while at the same time respecting its characteristics as outlined both historically and linguistically.

In order to put this framework to work, the contributors to this volume have sought to observe and analyse the complex articulation of power relations, borders, discursive and social practices, memory, and identity. This book brings together the different analytical perspectives of many scholars on the subject of creolisation. Most of the work in this volume observes processes of creolisation occurring in that social and cultural sphere we conventionally call “Europe”, without ever being able to define its borders. Some of the chapters offer the particular chance to reflect on what effects the application of a “creole model” could have in the reconfiguration of a “European identity”. While Van Haesendonck examines the relationship between Europe and its “margins” and points to

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is, as parts of realised discourse. All that remains after a translation between two texts has occurred is doomed to oblivion. According to Lotman (1995) the untranslatable is a reserve for future translations. On the semiotic theory of translation, see Fabbri (2003) and Calabrese (2000).

the possibility of rethinking European politics and identity by realising a productive, and necessary, dialogue between the two poles, Dinis and Araujo show how the contemporary politics of global security act precisely in the opposite direction, forcing people to fear and to persist in protective, but always exclusive, identities and forms of relationship. Jacoviello and Sbriccoli, looking at the discursive level of such processes, demonstrate similarly how exclusionary devices block what they define as a “creole attitude” and push it into find shelter in fixed and bounded positions and identities.

The idea of creolising Europe, therefore, means radically rethinking it starting from periphery. In this way all localities, and the communities inhabiting them, would be involved in the redefinition of a multidimensional identity in search of subjectivities capable of supporting it. This was the main concern of the Creole Performance Cycle, an artistic theatrical experiment developed alongside this research project and documented here by Montanino.

At present, the on-going enlargement of European Union corresponds to the projection onto an ever wider area of a description of a social and cultural space elaborated and projected out from a centre. This projection often surpasses the very physical limits described and assigned by geography, with the objectifying effects of its discursive style. This is why the EU has often recently looked for support from the social sciences: to identify and validate new cultural “justifications” for the newcomers’ belonging to Europe. In this way, the “objective” geographical datum could once more fit the description subjectively projected by a centre; this socio-political space could, in turn, obtain a new credibility that nonetheless maintained its pre-existing organisation and internal polarisation. Thus, a description of Europe has taken place that subjectivises and objectifies at the same time. Within this social, cultural, and political unity, peripheries can only adequately fuse themselves into the Union by taking up the preordained place attributed to them. A creole vision of European dynamics of integration would instead consider two subjectivities within the framework of their interaction: the hegemonic one of the political institution and the creolising one of the acting subject. Within this framework, it is no longer necessary that the latter comes from a country “belonging” to the EU. What is important, instead, is that the symbolic activities of a subject interfere with the production of a “Europeness” that eventually comprises the features of her identity, as well. From a creole perspective, difference becomes generative. Both completely external identities and the micro-local differences within the “institutional” borders of Europe become in this way especially significant

for grasping how a practical and multidimensional European identity is being produced—or blocked—at the grassroots level. This is how Glissant’s vision can assume the form of a model and can achieve concrete applications.

As with regards to citizenship, another central issue in this volume, it is here conceived as a heterogeneous space, “breaking the traditional homogeneity of modern citizenship” (see Bezec, this volume). Citizenship is indeed a set of relations linking a community to a political entity to which it claims to belong in various regards. European citizenship today is progressively encompassing a more and more heterogeneous social and political space. The concept of border as an exclusive device—that is, something that demarcates a territory as a homogeneous space in opposition to what is external to it—shows its inadequacy, especially as new borders cross and intersect former spaces of belonging. Thus, the internal system of restructuring tends to neutralise these exclusive devices and spreads towards other geopolitical spaces. Internal stratification of citizenship’s space thus extends to other territories, other communities, other subjectivities, and other “nationalities” that do not live in Europe but which keep up strong relationships with it.

In this stratified space citizens—now identified as those subjects endowed with agency who are capable of moving within a social space defined by the relations that constitute it—move and act. In order to inhabit such a space, subjects are seen either as embodying a repertoire of identities (a tactic linked to the hypothesis that culture is a continuum which individuals draw upon according to their strategies and interests) or, in contrast, as attempting to reconfigure the social space around them from the starting point of their own activities. It is the latter analytical framework that has led us to identify what we defined as “creole attitude” and that informs the overall perspective of this volume on the social, political and cultural phenomena investigated.

This book is the result of research on creolisation conducted within the framework of the project entitled “Playing Identities”. During the project’s development we had two opportunities to discuss the subject of every contribution during meetings held in Siena, Italy. Afterwards we maintained a running dialogue with the authors on their chapters. We have thus sought effectively to creolise methodologies and to develop an integrated perspective on phenomena of creolisation. We hope we have succeeded in this task.

The volume is divided into three parts. The scholarship in the first, “Landscapes”, concerns the ways by which spaces change, the dynamics

by which they reorganise and the rules according to which these changes take place. Communities are shown in their border-crossings and their struggles to constitute new forms of citizenship based on new relationships with history, memory, law, labour, and territory.

The second part, “Portraits”, depicts the stories of people who act in accordance with a creole attitude, producing new subjectivities and transforming reality into a multidimensional system where multiple and unexpected truths are able to emerge.

In the last part, “On the Stage”, Francesca Montanino documents and analyses the “Creole Performance Cycle”. In that theatrical project, the stage was a space for simulating creole solutions to cultural conflicts in order to observe the production of new subjectivities in the form of theatre characters. The economy of the stage drives performers briefly to depict, in original forms, a shared European heritage and a new collective identity. This labour reconfigured identity and memory and led to an artistic result that could not simply be presented to an audience but rather had to be understood and “rebuilt” by the diverse audiences who attended the performances. In this case the research was concerned with theatre both as a field of experimentation and as an interlocutor in the process of understanding how creolisation works.

By shifting from the aesthetics to the ethics of the new political forms linked to processes of globalisation, at the end of the last century Omar Calabrese (1991) prefigured a shifting of borders from an external field of existence—geographical and territorial—towards an interior universe: a space where the diverse subjectivities through which the inhabitants of new contemporary societies interact and express themselves, intertwine. We believe that the model of creolisation outlined in this volume will prove useful in understanding how people can cross the thousand borders that today articulate the sense of daily life along multiple contiguous universes. These borders are invisible and mobile, yet just as solid as those that have hindered—and continue to hinder—people in their encounters.

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**PART I**

**LANDSCAPES**



## CHAPTER ONE

### CREOLISING EUROPE?

KRISTIAN VAN HAESENDONCK

Despite the progressive and steady enlargement of the European Union over the past few decades, very little has been said on the topic of creolisation in Europe and on the effect of EU policies on processes of cultural mixing. What follows will largely focus on the question of how, and in what ways, creolisation can be thought to apply to the context of the association of countries currently known as the European Union (EU). Do EU policies favour, or counter, creolisation? While there is a consensus that cultural change is taking place in Europe, are creolising forces (in present progressive) at work in Europe, or is this process nothing but a product of our imagination? If the answer is yes, what are the major obstacles to this process? Before embarking on such a daunting task, I would like to clarify briefly why it actually makes sense to discuss creolisation in a European context.

It is mostly agreed on that creolisation is a “Caribbean concept” because of the fact that it was naturally associated to the process of creation of creole languages, foremost in the Caribbean, where it was initially spoken by slaves of African descent. Creolisation is directly related to the traumatic past of slavery, which sees the middle passage as root metaphor for the inequalities of the master–slave dialectic inherent in creolisation. While creolisation is being applied to a number of disciplines, mainly linguistics (creolistics), anthropology and sociology, truly interdisciplinary research on the subject is still to come<sup>1</sup>. As for literary and cultural studies, little attention has been given so far to the concept outside of the field of Caribbean studies. This might come as an ironic

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<sup>1</sup> The debate on creolisation has become increasingly passionate over the past decade, resulting in a range of books on the subject. Simultaneously, a growing number of scholars has criticized the way creolisation, as a concept, is being used (e.g. Lionnet & Shih 2011; Palmié 2006; Sheller 2003).

*coup de dés*, given that one of its main promoters, the Martinican intellectual Edouard Glissant, was as much an author of fiction as an essayist for whom literature and culture, beside language, were the main stage where creolisation takes place. Although its conceptual vagueness has been the target of much of the criticism of creolisation, I will not further discuss this problem here; I will limit myself to mention that I critically adhere to those who believe in the potential of the concept which is the best term available so far to describe the conflictive process of cultural mixing in Europe.

I argue it is possible to recontextualise creolisation by grounding it in the Caribbean on the one hand, while on the other keeping its extended, global field of use: one can maintain its potential for reconfiguring and cross-fertilizing a number of disciplines as well as for questioning epistemological and geographical concepts, such as “Europe”, “European identity” –the one concerned here– and “eurocentrism”. To relocate a concept in its place of origin is not a matter of nostalgia.<sup>2</sup> Such a re-grounding could, if done carefully, be useful for a range of concepts, and might be a successful remedy to the never-ending discussion on the much proclaimed “end of theory”.<sup>3</sup> Instead of providing definite answers to the above questions, I aim here to open up the debate on creolisation and creolised identities in Europe from a specific “Euro-Caribbean” perspective<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> As a reminder, in a similar fashion, Jonathan Culler (2007) made a call for grounding the literary back in literature, as the object of study gets increasingly mixed up with the subject (literary criticism).

<sup>3</sup> For a study of what creolisation can mean in the context of this debate, see Lionnet and Shih (2011).

<sup>4</sup> The term “Euro-Caribbean” refers here to those Caribbean countries and territories which, at the time of publication, adhere to EU member-states. The Euro-Caribbean comprises the outermost regions (OMRs) and OCTs. At the time of writing, the respective outermost regions are the French overseas departments: Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana. The respective OCT countries—whose links to the EU are not as strong as is the case with the OMRs’ historical, political, or geographical ties with the EU—are the overseas collectivities Saint Martin, Saint Barthélemy, the British Virgin Islands; the Dutch territories of Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten (all autonomous countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands); Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba (all the “Caribbean Netherlands”, also called the BES islands). The twenty-one OCTs depend constitutionally on four of the EU’s member-states: Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. OCT nationals are European citizens and, despite the OCTs being neither part of EU territory nor of the Schengen area, they have an important link with the EU. Officially, “they are not directly subject to EU

What about official policies, such as those of the European Union: do they favour or impede creolisation? Little is known on the subject. More specifically, what possibilities, if any, can the “Euro-Caribbean” as part of the EU special member-state territories (most of them part of non-continental Europe) offer to the current debate on rethinking a European identity in non-geographical terms? The working hypothesis is that the European Union does—up to a certain point—have the power to propel or hinder creolisation in Europe through the power of laws and projects involving European citizenship, currency, mobility, and projects involving Europe’s cultural heritage. In order to illustrate this, reference will be made below to official EU discourse, i.e. that articulated by the EU commission, to see how it imagines “Europe” and promotes the idea of European identity in a concrete and specific way. That imagining of “Europe” sees it through purely continental constructions, in a geographical sense, based on a limited concept of heritage and historical experience as the common ground on which to build a collective European cultural memory. The continental construction of Europe fails to consider how present-day diversity of identities, class, race, and gender are enacted in the space of Europe.

## 1. EU Policies and their Impact

What follows does not deal primarily with Europe as a geographical entity but rather with the European Union, whose power exceeds the purely institutional and political realm. The relevance of EU politics to the topic addressed here is not difficult to discern. The EU can steer changes in identity, either directly or implicitly. As Breakwell rightly points out,

the fact that the EU is clearly a political creation with specific boundaries that can be articulated through legal definition has significant implications for the way it impacts on identity—not least because it can do so through the processes that establish and change its formal institutions. Through its institutions (economic, legal or educational), the EU can require or motivate major swaths of behavioral change, and it would be foolhardy to believe such behavioral changes are isolated from identity changes (2004: 26).

Although I share Sheller’s concern with the erasure of the historical background of creolisation, there is nonetheless a fertile future for the

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law, but they benefit from associate status conferred on them by the Treaty of Lisbon. The aim of this association is principally to contribute to their economic and social development” (“Overseas Countries and Territories [CT]” 2011).

concept and what follows seeks to open paths for further research on creolising cultures in Europe at large.<sup>5</sup> Creolisation's utility stems from what the concept is about: the maintenance of unique, particular features in the process of new identities being created. A displacement of a concept is not necessarily bad; on the contrary, it can save it from stagnation, from its appropriation by parochial communities of scholars, and it can provide the concept with a future, provided that—and this is where things often go wrong—the links with and references to its original context are not unacceptably lost or blurred.

Since it is impossible to provide clear-cut responses on what creolisation means for Europe and since it is even impossible to give an exact definition of what creolisation actually is, I argue that the Euro-Caribbean territories can serve as a model as well as a paradigmatic “partner” for leading the debate on what creolisation can or should mean for the future of Europe and the European Union. What is particular about the Caribbean territories is that they are rightly considered to be paradigmatic places of creolisation and, as part of the EU, thus offer an original entry to the debate on creolisation in Europe. Especially in the context of the European Union's enlargement and the debate on European identity, one might easily forget about the “detached parts” of the European Union, since they are not part of continental Europe. Contrary to the popular belief that Europe must focus on itself as a continent to discover its cultural identity and collective memory, EU policies are as much relevant for these parts of the European Union as for the European continent. This is true for a number of reasons, not least among them the fact that they are critical in steering the process—or lack of process—of political integration and mobility. Inversely, the EU's periphery is key nowadays when it comes to (re)think European identity. Both in continental Europe and in the EU's outermost regions and overseas countries and territories (OCTs), creolisation is either fostered or restrained as a direct effect of specific EU policies on economic, social, and cultural integration. It is therefore necessary to study more closely the EU's official discourse on its Euro-Caribbean and other detached territories, and this essay seeks to ignite further research on the subject. By taking the Euro-Caribbean territories as case study, I do not intend to

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<sup>5</sup> For Sheller (2003: 286), one of the skeptics regarding the potential of the concept, the “failure to recognize the more critical and political implications of the term as used by Caribbean theorists leaves the current “creolisation paradigm” with little to contribute to an operative theory of conflict and unequal power relations”.