R. Burton

'Ki moun nou ye?' The idea of difference in contemporary French West Indian thought

Central to this article are the attempts by different 'schools' of French Caribbean thinkers to conceptualize the phenomenon of difference. Author discusses 3 principal theories of difference: Négritude, Antillanité, and Créolité. The main focus is on Martinique.

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RICHARD BURTON

KI MOUN NOU YE?
THE IDEA OF DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY
FRENCH WEST INDIAN THOUGHT

When Martinique and Guadeloupe became departments of France 1946, they were, despite the long-standing Francocentric orientation of their mainly colored middle class, profoundly different in cultural terms from the *mère-patrie* into which they would henceforth be assimilated politically (Jolivet 1990).¹ This cultural distinctiveness rested on, and was sustained by, an economic infrastructure which, in the case of Martinique, had consistently been in credit from 1905 onwards and would remain so until two years after departmentalization (Suvélor 1977:19). Earnings from the export of sugar, bananas, citrus fruit, and rum regularly exceeded the cost of imports from France. Peasant agriculture and fishing met the basic food needs of the local population, while most clothes, shoes, and furniture were made locally. The testing circumstances of 1940-43, when the Vichy-dominated islands were effectively severed from the outside world by an American blockade, had demonstrated the ingenuity with which Martinicans and Guadeloupeans could, when necessary, use local resources to replace the products – soap, for example, or rope – which they had traditionally imported from France.²

The *habitation* and peasant holding together formed the matrix for the colonial culture which, with variations from country to town, and with variations, too, across the class-color spectrum, was undoubtedly creole – that is, an autochthonous creation, combining a diversity of elements (principally European and African, but also East Indian and Amerindian) in a manner that is entirely distinctive, entirely *sui generis* – rather than a set of African “survivals” or a mimetic version of the culture of metropolitan

France. The creole language – a signifying system composed, very crudely, of a preponderantly French-derived vocabulary married to a syntax and morphology of basically African origin – may be seen as paradigmatic of the creole culture as a whole. Neither “African” nor “European,” but a dynamic synthesis of both with, above all, a defining identity of its own, it existed in a state of tension with the dominant French language which the colored middle classes, followed by upwardly mobile blacks, sought to master along with the French humanist culture to which it gave access. While the hostility towards creole relayed by the republican school (and by middle-class households) is not to be doubted, Roland Suvélor (1981) has argued that the relationship between creole and French in colonial Martinique and Guadeloupe was not, in terms of everyday living, as inherently conflictual as a widely held contemporary view would have it. French and creole, he claims, each had its culturally allotted space, with speakers shifting with ease and agility from one code to the other as context and circumstance demanded, creating a situation in which, despite the “official” antagonism between them, the two languages in effect complemented rather than clashed with each other.

The very disparagement of creole preserved its distinctiveness as a signifying system, protecting it from the kind of infiltration by the structures and vocabulary of standard French that is so widely attested in the contemporary French West Indies. “Officially” banished from the middle-class household, creole was in fact used by adults among themselves and by children among themselves though rarely, according to Suvélor, for cross-generational communication where French was the norm. French may have been the language of power and prestige, but creole was used on a day-to-day basis with ease, pleasure and, if Suvélor is right, with a marked absence of the anxieties and penalties generated by its use in the creolophobic context of the classroom. The relationship of French and creole, in this presentation, was one of parallelism rather than of conflict, with each preserving its separate identity and function, held apart as they were by the ideological valorization of the first and the corresponding devalorization of the second. Outside the Francocentric middle classes and those who aspired to join them, contact with the dominant language would be rare indeed: here *créolophonie* reigned with only marginal interference from standard French.

The linguistic parallelism evoked by Suvélor may be extended to cover the colonial culture as a whole. That culture was undoubtedly split between a valorized French stratum to which members of the middle classes aspired (without for that forsaking every aspect of the creole culture) and a dévalorized creole stratum to which the vast majority of the islands’ population remained confined (without, however, remaining wholly immune to aspects

of the dominant culture); the *béké* elite preserved the freedom and power to inhabit simultaneously or alternately either the French or their own variant of the creole culture. As with language, so with religion, family structure, diet, dress, entertainments, and so on: if that which was French, or perceived to be so, was systematically elevated above that which was creole, the very devalorization of the creole stratum had the paradoxical effect of preserving its integrity. But, though “officially” opposed one to the other, the French and the creole components of colonial culture were, in practice, contiguous rather than antithetical. Participation in the rituals of the Catholic Church, for example, did not exclude recourse to *quimboiseur* (sorcerer), *dormeuse* or *gadedzafé* (clairvoyants), no more than the official promotion of religious or civic marriage stood in the way of the mass of the population forming kinship relations far removed from the French ideal of the nuclear family.

The French and the creole were undoubtedly unequal, but at least they were *different*, and the relationship between them may, partly by dint of that difference, have been less conflict-ridden, and above all less anxiety-generating, than many modern conceptualizations of colonial society are inclined to admit (Suvélor 1983). To say this is in no way to idealize colonial Martinique and Guadeloupe as, ironically, many contemporary nationalists are, in their hostility to departmentalization, prone to do. Creole culture had its roots in the world of the *habitation*, but the foundation of *that* world was the gross exploitation of labor, not least that of women (the *amarreuses*) and children (the *petites bandes*). Perhaps the creole culture only preserved such vitality in colonial Martinique and Guadeloupe because the vast majority of the islands’ population was denied material and educational access to the French culture above it.

Colonial Martinique and Guadeloupe were, then, unequal (both in their internal structure and in their external relationship to France) but, in some fundamental way, *different*. The *départements d’outre-mer* (DOMs) or *régions monodépartementales* that they have become are, in theory, and increasingly in fact, the equal of any “hexagonal” department or region, but they are widely perceived as having lost, or to be inexorably in the process of losing, that margin of otherness without which no human community can exist as a separate entity. Political assimilation has been accompanied, in a way that its instigators surely did not intend, by a massive assimilation not of French culture (or selected aspects of it) but by French culture as an undifferentiated totality (Suvélor 1983).³ The agricultural base on which the traditional creole culture was founded has been eroded beyond all possibility of restoration, leaving that culture – where it survives at all – increasingly bereft of any anchorage in the actual lived experience of contemporary

French West Indians and, as such, subject to a fatal combination of folklorization, exoticization, and commodification.

The modern French West Indian is, it is often argued, as much a spectator of his or her “own” culture as the average tourist: “culture,” like everything else in Martinique and Guadeloupe today, is, it seems, something to be consumed rather than actively produced in a living human context. At every level – most noticeably in language, dress, diet, and kinship patterns – the otherness of the French West Indies has since 1946, and particularly since the mid-1960s, been subject to the pressure of homogenization as French goods, French thought patterns, French life-styles, and not least, the French language itself, have swept into areas of life hitherto reserved to the autochthonous culture. But it is not just life-styles that are subject to increasing standardization. The wonderfully variegated Antillean landscape is itself succumbing by the day to what the increasing number of Martinicans and Guadeloupeans who care scathingly call *bétonisation*: the remorseless spread of concrete in the form of hypermarkets and housing developments, *résidences secondaires*, motorways and service roads, hotels and marinas across the countryside and beaches of the two islands. On every front, both within and without, what Edouard Glissant (1981:166-79) has called “le Divers” (the Different) appears to be retreating before the inexorable advance of “le Même” (the Same), creating the threat of “cultural genocide” – an expression Glissant first used in a widely read article published by *Le Monde Diplomatique* in 1977 to set beside the threat of demographic “genocide by substitution” of which Aimé Césaire was speaking balefully at much the same time. The present essay takes as its theme the attempts by different “schools” of French West Indian thinkers to conceptualize the phenomenon of Difference and, hopefully to protect its various manifestations from the multifarious “creolocidal” pressures to which it is allegedly subject. Three principal theories of Difference – Négritude, Antillanité, and Créolité – are discussed, the focus being on Martinique (where each of these theories has received its fullest elaboration) while the sometimes very different preoccupations of Guadeloupean thinkers are examined in counterpoint to the *idées force* that it is my principal concern to elucidate.

NÉGRITUDE AND ITS CRITICS

Originally formulated in Paris in the 1930s, and receiving fuller elaboration in the pages of *Tropiques* during the period of Vichyst control of Martinique, the ideology of Négritude predates the departmentalization of Martinique and Guadeloupe and in many ways responds to a different set of

problems than the later concepts of Antillanité and Créolité which are essentially counters to the processes of cultural homogenization released by political assimilation in 1946. But the affective core of Négritude, as later, of Antillanité and Créolité, is anti-assimilationism. Through it, a group of French-educated intellectuals, most notably Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor, sought before all else to affirm their difference in the face of the reductive universalism to which their formation, relaying and reflecting the reductive universalism of the whole Republican-Jacobin tradition in France, had exposed them from early childhood onwards. This difference they formulated in essentially racial-ontological rather than historical-dialectical terms. In both colonized individual and colonized society, a surface of imposed or acquired Frenchness was held to conceal and hold temporarily captive an “African” or “black” substance or essence which it was the task of Négritude as combined theory and practice to release and bring to fruition. When it came to *defining* the “African” or “black” essence, the Négritude writers turned, *faute de mieux*, to European concepts of the primitive, particularly as expounded in the work of Lucien Lévy-Brühl, and to ideas of the “African” (or “Negro” or “black”) personality contained in the writings of European Africanists such as Leo Frobenius and Maurice Delafosse. This primary recourse to the Other for a definition of Self is proof, in the eyes of the critics, of Négritude’s underlying “heteronomy”⁴: it is seen not as a counter-discourse to assimilationism but as a sub-discourse within it which, even as it consciously challenges the dominant ideology, tends unconsciously to reproduce and perpetuate its underlying thought-patterns. Négritude is held both to counter but, more profoundly, to continue the universalist or essentialist assumptions of the assimilationist discourse that is its primary target: to the essence of Frenchness it opposes a putative essence of blackness or Africanness and, in so doing, fails to escape the transcendent, anti-historical terms in which assimilationism itself is formulated. Above all, Négritude may invert a stereotypical European definition of blackness and black culture, divesting it of its overtly racist character and transforming the negative into the positive, yet the underlying structure of that definition is retained. Négritude in this view merely substitutes one alienating definition for another and, to that extent, enmeshes the black African or West Indian still more tightly in the assimilationist problematic or scheme of things even as it seems to release the repressed and repudiated black “essence” within him.

Such criticisms of Négritude are by now the common currency of debate in both Francophone Africa and French West Indies (Blérald 1981) and would, in general, be accepted both by French West Indian Marxists – who were among the first to formulate them in the early 1960s (Menil 1963;

1981:62-77) and, more recently, by proponents of the counter-theories of Antillanité and Créolité. It is indeed true that the insertion of Négritude in the French West Indian context raised problems of a kind that do not seem to have arisen in the case of *Afrique Noire*, problems that relate in part to the political complexities of, especially, Martinique and in part to the difficulties of applying, without serious distortion, a universalist theory of blackness (as Négritude, at least in its earliest formulation, undoubtedly was) to societies like Martinique and Guadeloupe which, as a result of three centuries and more of sustained physical and cultural *métissage*, are certainly not – whatever else they are or may be – “African” or “black” in the immediately verifiable way in which Sénégal, Guinée, or Côte-d’Ivoire may be said to be. Ironically, as we shall see, Négritude, especially as embodied in the person of Césaire, has had the worst of both particularist and universalist worlds. Its race-based particularism brought it into conflict first (in the 1950s) with the class-based universalism of the French Communist Party and its local supporters and then (in the 1960s and 1970s) with the class-based internationalist analysis of the new – principally Trotskyist – French West Indian left. Then beginning in the late 1970s, it was Négritude’s own brand of “particularist universalism” – the belief in the existence of a global “black culture,” even of a universal “black essence” – that came under attack from proponents of the new ideas of Antillanité and, in the later 1980s, of Créolité. Having defended “black” or “African” particularity against the threat of French universalism, Négritude now stood accused of denying the West Indianness of Martinique and Guadeloupe, their complex *creole* particularity, in the name of a simplistic generalizing black universalism. To the elucidation of these and related complications the remainder of this section is devoted.

The context in which Négritude was originally formulated in the 1930s owed more to the anti-rationalism and organicism of the Right than to the dialectical materialism of the Left, but it was as a man of the Left – specifically as communist mayor of Fort-de-France and communist deputy for Martinique – that its leading French West Indian proponent, Césaire, came to the fore in 1945-46. The circumstances of Césaire’s “recruitment” by the Martinican branch (as it then was) of the PCF remain obscure, but Césaire must have seen – but presumably thought he could override – the potential conflict between the race-based particularism of Négritude and the class-based universalism of the strongly assimilationist political formation he had now joined. Césaire would henceforth be committed to the proposition that French West Indians were at once “French” politically and “non-French” in cultural, psychological, and affective terms: the pursuit of political assimilation would, ideally, go hand in hand with cultural and spiritual *dissimilation*

from the metropolitan model. When, in 1956, the tension between universalism and particularism became too great, Césaire opted for the particular, broke with the PCF and, two years later, launched his own political party, the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais (PPM). But the form of particularism espoused by the new party was a notably muted and mitigated one – autonomy not independence – as though *even now* Césaire was unable to break clearly with the universalist (i.e. effectively French) assumptions he owed to his formation within the Republican-Jacobin tradition. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Césaire and his supporters, harried from the Right by the stalwarts of departmentalization and from the far Left by out-and-out *indépendantistes*, strove in vain to reconcile the competing claims of the particular and the universal. They came close to an *indépendantiste* position in the late 1970s, yet forever failing, at the last, to break out of the assimilationist mind-set in which they had been formed. And so no doubt they would have remained, spreadeagled in a manner classically French West Indian between the Different and the Same, had not the victory of the Left in the French elections of 1981, and the subsequent policy of regionalization, permitted at least a pseudo-solution, in the form of the *région monodépartementale*, to the endemic problem of the particular-universal. In the course of the 1980s, the PPM was to establish itself as the hegemonic force in Martinican politics, drawing support from certain sections of both old Right and new (or newish) Left, though the notable advance of Alfred Marie-Jeanne's Mouvement Indépendantiste Martiniquais (MIM) in the regional elections of October 1990 and March 1992 suggests that the age-old question of the Different and the Same has only been fudged, and not resolved, by the so-called moratorium on discussions about the island-department's status that Césaire unilaterally declared in the wake of the Left's electoral victory in 1981.

As Césaire moved through what, in his "moratorium speech" of May 1981, he called his thirty-five-year journey in the political wilderness from bondage in the house of communist assimilationism to the "oasis" of socialist-inspired regionalism,⁵ so the content and meaning of Négritude in its Martinican expression shifted along with him. Under the influence of Marxism, it shed first its mystical Senghorian trappings and, contrary to the criticism routinely levelled against it, in fact moved some way from the notion of a transhistorical black "essence" to which, in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939), Césaire had given such memorable expression. In historicizing his concept of Négritude, Césaire also to some extent Caribbeanized it, though in his analysis of French West Indian culture he still tended to privilege the undoubted continuities between Africa and the Caribbean over the no less real discontinuities brought about by slavery. But if Caribbean cul-

ture was no longer seen simply as a set of “Africanisms,” African “survivals” or “reinterpretations” of African cultural forms, neither was much prominence given to the non-African – European, East Indian, Amerindian – components in its make-up, and little emphasis was placed on the multiple processes whereby all the constituent elements of Caribbean culture interacted with each other and were transformed – creolized – into something neither “African,” “European” nor whatever but seized of its own inalienable West Indian quiddity.

This preference for the “pure” (the “African” or the “European”) over the “impure” (the creole) is nowhere more evident than in Césaire’s attitude towards the creole language itself. Although, in the interview with Jacqueline Leiner that serves as a preface to the 1978 re-edition of *Tropiques*, Césaire denies that creole is a “patois,” he goes on to describe it as a “neo-French language, or, if you like, a new African language,” (*Tropiques* 1978, I:xvi) thus sidestepping – or so it could be argued – the actual creole character of creole itself. Moreover, in stating that “I have never imagined, not for one second, that I could write in another language [than French]” and that “for me, writing is linked to French and not to creole, and that’s all there is to it,” (*Tropiques* 1978, I:xii) Césaire had, in the view of many of his creolophile opponents,⁶ been guilty of exactly the same kind of creolophobic prejudice as the assimilationist educational system itself. His hostility to writing in creole (and, it would seem, to written creole as such) is evidence, in this analysis, of his failure, for all his talk of Négritude, Africanity and the like, truly to “decolonize” his mind and break free of the straight-jacket of the republican-universalist problematic in which he was brought up. Thus for the prominent creolophile novelist Patrick Chamoiseau (1990b:6-7), the fact that a play like *La tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963) treats a Caribbean theme is not sufficient to make it a Caribbean play for all the evident good will of its undoubtedly Caribbean author:

[The play] liberates, it raises the consciousness, but ... how French it is! ... Its French is not ours. Its sentences do not breathe like ours, our mouths will have difficulty in articulating them. In order to be at ease in them, the actor will have to become French, articulate in a French manner, think French ... Césaire treats the situation detached from the specific Haitian context [*en dehors du particulier haïtien*], with the arms of the universal seen through a European lense.

Of course, this criticism contains rigidities and unexamined assumptions of its own: it is quoted here as evidence of how readily Césaire, seemingly the arch anti-universalist, is now seen as reproducing the underlying episteme of the very universalism his works appear to denounce.

Part of the problem is that since Césaire and the PPM have implanted

themselves as the controlling force in local politics, so Négritude, or a modified version of it, has moved from being an oppositional to a quasi-hegemonic discourse. Given the close relationship of the PPM and the French Socialist party, Négritude has, in a very real sense, been recuperated by the universalist tradition (now, paradoxically, presenting itself in a decentralizing, regionalizing guise) that it originally set out to contest. In the contemporary Martinican context, Chamoiseau (1989:28) has argued, Négritude is no more than “an assertion of officialized difference” (*une revendication à la différence officialisée*): “merely to proclaim a difference that is recognized by the masters is no longer so much resistance as a form of hypnosis.” The “officialization” of Négritude since 1981 has, critics argue, fundamentally changed the meaning of the annual PPM-sponsored Festival Culturel de Fort-de-France which, when it was inaugurated in 1971, was explicitly intended to counter the Francocentric cultural discourse and practice sponsored by the French government funded Centre Martiniquais d’Action Culturelle (CMAC). In 1976, the PPM-controlled municipal council of Fort-de-France set up its own “counter-cultural” organization, the Service Municipal d’Action Culturelle (SERMAC) which provided, and still provides, a permanent base for the kind of “autonomist” Négritude-inspired cultural activities favored by the PPM. So long as the PPM remained in opposition to the political status quo, SERMAC itself played a creative oppositional role on the local cultural scene, but as, once again, Chamoiseau (1989:24), has argued,

The arrival of the [French] socialists in power, in 1981, has neutralized the cultural discourse of the Mairie of Fort-de-France. France, which has always more or less denied it, now officially recognizes a distinct West Indian identity [*l’identité particulière antillaise*]. The cultural discourse of the Mairie has become in some way “official.”

The consequence, according to Chamoiseau (1989:24), is that “the Festival is no longer heretical, it doesn’t upset anything, it doesn’t spatter people’s consciousness” (*il n’éclabousse aucune conscience*). By the time of the 1990 Festival, the SERMAC was as much part of the assimilationist-regionalist establishment as the CMAC, bringing, in the name of Nelson Mandela, the Ballets Maliens, the Howard University Jazz Orchestra, and Molière to the less than ecstatic public of Fort-de-France (Chamoiseau 1990a:9-11). Its directors shuddered at the mere mention of the words “Antillanité” or “Créolité,” little artistic production of significance took place under its aegis, and its increasingly dated Afrocentric discourse had ceased to engage any one but the accredited *grangreks* (“intellectuals”) of the PPM. As Martinique moves towards the perils and opportunities of 1993, it is, ironically, beneath the smokescreen of “Difference” defined *à la Césaire* that the island is being drawn inexorably into the clutches of the Same.

THE DIVERSITY OF THE DIFFERENT: THE IDEA OF ANTILLANITÉ

From the early 1960s onwards, a new way of envisaging French West Indian identity began to be articulated by a number of Martinican thinkers which, in contrast to Négritude's stress on the *retention* of African cultural forms in the Caribbean, dwelt rather on the *creation*, out of a multiplicity of constituent elements, of a specifically West Indian cultural configuration to which, in time, the name "Antillanité" came to be given. It seems to have been René Ménil, a former collaborator of Césaire on *Tropiques* who, unlike him, remained in the local communist party after 1956, who, in an article entitled "Problèmes d'une culture antillaise" published in the Parti Communiste Martiniquais journal *Action* in September 1964, first clearly formulated the idea of a West Indian specificity (*spécificité antillaise*) that would enjoy such success in the years that followed. French West Indian culture, he wrote, is

neither African, nor Chinese, nor Indian, nor even French, but ultimately West Indian. Our culture is West Indian since, in the course of history, it has brought together and combined in an original syncretism all these elements derived from the four corners of the earth, without being any one of those elements in particular.

Originally intended (or so it would seem) as a PCM counter to the PPM's doctrine of Négritude, the idea of a West Indian specificity was positively received in a variety of Martinican political-intellectual circles and was, in particular, refined, elaborated, and extended by the Groupe de Recherches de l'Institut Martiniquais d'Etudes which, headed by Glissant and bringing together a diverse and talented group of thinkers (Roland Suvélor, Michel Giraud, and Marlène Hospice among others), published the results of its discussions and research in the regrettably short-lived journal *Acoma* (1971-73). The concept of Antillanité is not, however, confined to any one intellectual grouping or political formation. Indeed its strength – and also perhaps its weakness – is that it is so malleable a concept that virtually everyone in contemporary Martinique, from departmentalist "dinosaurs" to militant creolists and ultra-leftist separatists, proclaims the "specificity" of French West Indian culture and the French West Indian psyche; as indicated above, the idea of Négritude has itself been perceptibly "Antilleanized" under the influence of the rival concept. The fullest formulation of the concept of Antillanité is to be found in the work of Glissant and it is to his *Discours antillais* (1981) and *Poétique de la relation* (1990) that the interested reader is referred for an elucidation and elaboration of the ideas briefly expounded here.⁷

Like Négritude before it, Antillanité is in the first place an assertion of Difference in the face of the encroachments of the Same. The whole of

Glissant's theoretical work, in particular, may be seen as a sustained polemic, conducted in the name of the "le Divers," against the claims of the "universal," to which a succession of derogatory epithets are attached in a more or less routine fashion: "abstract," "sublimated," "reductive," "generalizing," and so on (Glissant 1981:14, 134, 245, 249). For Glissant (1981:224, 213), "the preoccupation with the universal is the alienated reverse side of the uniquely western pretension to exercise universal control"; it follows therefore that the keystone of any defense of the particular must be a "firm opposition to any ideology of 'universal culture'." Where Antillanité differs most markedly from Négritude is in its conception of the constitution of "le Divers." Whereas for Négritude, the Different was monolithic (because essentially "African" or "black" in character), "le Divers" in the thinking of Glissant and his followers is itself diverse, complex, heterogeneous; it is made up not of a single substance or essence but of a multiplicity of relations, a constellation of forces held in place by a complex process of attraction and repulsion.

In contrast to Négritude's obsession with the "pure," Antillanité makes of *le métissage*, understood both culturally and, presumably, racially, a supremely positive, indeed constitutive, principle (Glissant 1981:20). Creolization itself is seen as "unlimited *métissage*," (Glissant 1990:46) a *combinaire* of diverse cultural materials that can never be halted, fixed, or tied down, forever in the process of renewing and transforming itself. If Négritude's idea of Difference is closed, fixed, and monosemic, "le Divers" is, in contrast, open, mobile, and polysemic. Whereas Négritude shares with assimilationism an essentially "extroverted" or "heteronomous" orientation (i.e. it looked outwards to "mother Africa" for its models and values, just as assimilationism looked for its to the distant *mère-patrie*), Antillanité looks both inwards (to Martinique and Guadeloupe) and outwards (to the English and Hispanic Caribbean and, more broadly, to Meso-America as a whole) in its quest for self-invention and transcendence. One of the major advances made by Antillanité is that it has in some large measure shed the regressive, matrocentric orientation common to both assimilationism and Négritude⁸: it is less a quest for origins than a project for the future.

All these considerations are summed up in the opposition that Glissant (1990:156-58) draws in *Poétique de la relation* between "root-identity" (*identité-racine*) and "relation-identity" (*identité-relation*). By "root-identity," Glissant designates univocal conceptions of identity, those modes of thinking that would assign a single origin, a single root, to a given individual or group. "Root-identity" may be highly complex, like the tree that is its fullest expression, but it is always ultimately a mono-identity which functions by exclusion: not for nothing does Glissant (1990:23) go as far as to

speak of a "totalitarian root." "Relation-identity," on the other hand, designates an open, multidimensional, polyvalent conception of identity. Refusing the idea of a single root or origin, it conceives identity as an archipelago or constellation of signifieds, none of which enjoys primacy over the others and whose unity lies not in the fact of possessing a single source but in the complex of gravitational forces that hold them in relation to each other. Taking over the distinction made by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their *Mille plateaux* (1980) between root and rhizome⁹ (i.e. a bulb or tuber) as images of two antithetical ways of thinking about the world, Glissant (1981:134; 1989a:67) is perhaps the first major French West Indian thinker to break away from the obsession with origins and rootedness that marks traditional Caribbean discourse (and above all the ideology of Négritude) towards the idea of free-floating, multiplicitous growth whose supreme image, in the Caribbean context, is the mangrove swamp: "Submarine roots: that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches."

With *Le discours antillais* and *Poétique de la relation*, French West Indian thought has undergone an epistemological shift of major importance: identity is no longer imagined as a single tree rooted in the landscape (as it is in such classics of West Indian literature as Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1946) and Jacques Stephen Alexis' *Les arbres musiciens* (1957)¹⁰ but as a tangled, proliferating growth, without beginning or end, containing within its myriad recesses infinite possibilities of interactive transformation. Négritude's concept of identity is ontological, that of Antillanité ecological: we shall return to this crucial image of the mangrove in the discussion of Créolité.¹¹

GUADELOUPEAN COUNTERPOINT

Approaches to the question of Difference in Guadeloupe have diverged in certain significant respects from those current in Martinique, not least because there was no Guadeloupean equivalent of the 1956 split in Martinique within the local communist party and, consequently, less immediate need to clarify rival positions on such crucial issues as the relationship between class and race and the racial (or other) basis of a putative Guadeloupean identity. There being, in addition, no Guadeloupean equivalents of, say, Césaire or Glissant, definitions of identity have, on the whole, been simpler there than in Martinique and perhaps for that very reason more effective and certainly more widely diffused. The idea of a "Guadeloupean nation" commands much broader support than that of a "Martinican

nation" in the sister island and, while there is certainly no unity among the autonomist-independentist groups in Guadeloupe, there do exist substantial areas of agreement as to what constitutes "Guadeloupéanité," which is certainly not the case among their counterparts in Martinique. On the other hand, if Guadeloupe has produced no theoretical construct of the subtlety of Antillanité or Créolité, it has, through the writings of women such as Simone Schwarz-Bart, Dany Bebel-Gisler, and Maryse Condé, raised the question of *female* identity in the French Caribbean with a directness and perceptiveness which, thus far, has not been matched in Martinique. In addition, the question of Indianité has been thrown into sharp focus in recent years – not surprisingly since one in six Guadeloupeans are of East Indian origin, as opposed to one in thirty Martinicans. If Guadeloupe bulks less large than Martinique in a study of the question of Difference in the French West Indies, it may be, paradoxically, because, for a whole range of historical, cultural, and political reasons, it possesses a *stronger* sense of national identity than the sister island.

If there is a key to the different way in which the question of identity has been approached in Guadeloupe, it may lie in the fact that, unlike its Martinican counterpart, the local communist party not only suffered no major internal split in the 1950s but has retained a dominant position in local politics as the principle voice of the autonomist alternative to departmentalization.¹² With not one of Césaire's personal and intellectual forces to promote it, the idea of Négritude had little influence among Guadeloupean communists who, even after they separated from the PCF to form the Parti Communiste Guadeloupéen (PCG) in 1958 (adopting an autonomist political position at the same time), continued to think along much the same class-based, assimilationist lines as before, giving priority to real or imagined class solidarity between Guadeloupean and French workers (and between black and East Indian workers in Guadeloupe) over questions of racial or national particularity. Accordingly, when independent formations like the Groupe d'Organisation Nationale Guadeloupéenne (GONG) began to challenge both departmentalism and autonomism in the 1960s, they tended to do so in the name of "race" rather than of "class"; in contrast, their equivalents in Martinique – whose principle target among the autonomist parties was the "race-based" PPM rather than the "class-based" PCM – were more inclined to speak the universalist language of class rather than the particularist dialect of race, thereby reinforcing their commitment to Martinican nationhood with a large measure of internationalism.

Thus while Martinican independentists (*Martinik* 1977, 3:2) were denouncing Césaire and Négritude for "proposing to us a false and consequently alienating African identity," it was precisely in the name of Africa-

nit and a radicalized version of Ngritude that their equivalents in Guadeloupe were mounting their attack on departmentalists and autonomists alike. Though the language of class has certainly not been jettisoned, it is clear that for GONG and for later independentist groups such as the Union pour la Libration de la Guadeloupe (UPLG) and the Mouvement pour une Guadeloupe Indpendante (MPGI), “blackness” or “Africanness” are seen as essential components of “Guadeloupanit,” raising obvious problems as far as the department’s substantial East Indian minority (not to mention its significant “petit blanc” population) is concerned. As most sections of the Martinican ultra-left began, in the late 1960s, to move *away* from Ngritude-style thinking,¹³ it was towards a version of Ngritude, enmeshed in the language of French *gauchisme*, that their Guadeloupean equivalents turned in their struggle against departmentalism and the “socialo-communists” of the PCG.

For Guadeloupean nationalists, the Africanness that is believed to constitute the core of Guadeloupanit is expressed most fully through creole and through the *gros-ka*, the African-derived style of drumming which is systematically opposed in much nationalist discourse to the allegedly “French,” “assimilated,” or “doudouiste” music of the *biguine*.¹⁴ The defense of creole began significantly earlier in Guadeloupe than in Martinique and is associated principally with the name of Bebel-Gisler who, in a series of works of which *Langue crole, force jugule* (1976) is typical, advanced a number of theses that have since become the common currency of “glottopolitical” debate in the French West Indies: the relationship between French and creole is a “colonial” one based on a fundamental and inevitable antagonism. Creole is a language of resistance, the core of the repressed cultural identity of the Guadeloupean people, the political liberation of Guadeloupe from France is inseparable from the liberation of creole from French, and so on.

As we shall see, many of these ideas will be taken over in the 1980s by the Crolit “school” in Martinique, but with one crucial difference. Whereas the Crolit school will stress, precisely, the creole (i.e. syncretic) character of creole, Bebel-Gisler (1989:23) was, as late as 1989, arguing that creole is “the umbilical cord binding us to Africa, to others, to ourselves.” In other words, creole is not, as it has become in the theory of Crolit, the basis for a *non-racial* West Indian identity but rather the expression par excellence of the underlying Africanness of Guadeloupanit. Similarly, in systematically opposing “African” *gros-ka* to French *biguine*, nationalist discourse has, in the view of the leading (and by no means pro-departmentalist) Guadeloupean musicologist Marie-Cline Lafontaine (1983:2144), been guilty of simplifying and distorting Guadeloupe’s complex musical heritage and, in the

name of an illusory Africanness, denying precisely what is most creative about it, namely its capacity to bring and blend together disparate musical materials into something uniquely and quintessentially Guadeloupean. In the course of the 1980s, the *gros-ka* was promoted by the UPLG's significantly named Radio Tambour as the very essence of Guadeloupéanité, resulting, in the words of one (again by no means anti-nationalist) commentator in a "fetishization" of the instrument (Leborgne 1981:103-19) that denied the complexity of Guadeloupe's cultural heritage and, in particular, alienated the substantial East Indian minority whose support was vital if the independentist cause was to have any chance of success.¹⁵ It is hardly surprising that, as nationalist discourse beat the *gros-ka* with ever greater vigor, so many Indians would feel the need to foreground *talom* and *matalon* (East Indian drums), not (save in the case of a tiny minority) with any separatist programme in view but rather to secure their place in Guadeloupean society by underlining the East Indian contribution to its culture: the defense and illustration of Indianité is one of the most important developments in contemporary Guadeloupe.¹⁶ At the present time, Guadeloupean thought still seems preoccupied with the problems of "origins" and "roots" which, under the influence of the concept of Antillanité, many Martinicans now seem to have moved beyond. The vociferous defence of creole does not, in short, seem to have fostered a sense of the creoleness of French West Indian cultures as a whole, the guiding inspiration of the theory of Créolité in Martinique to which we now turn.

THE CRÉOLITÉ DEBATE

The idea of Créolité – most fully formulated in the manifesto *Eloge de la Créolité* (1989), the joint work of Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant – is located within the general problematic of Antillanité, the ideas and example of Glissant being constantly invoked as an essential point of reference.¹⁷ Créolité continues Antillanité's attack on "false" universalism in the name, now, of "Diversalité" (Bernabé, Chamoiseau & Confiant 1989:55). It insists, like Antillanité, on the necessary complexity of identity in the (French) Caribbean – "the very principle of our identity is complexity" (Bernabé, Chamoiseau & Confiant 1989:29) – and, in general, develops Antillanité's polemic against the "fixist," essentializing character of the discourse of Négritude in favor of a way of thinking that is altogether more mobile, open – Créolité is indeed "defined" as an "open specificity" (*une spécificité ouverte*) (Bernabé, Chamoiseau & Confiant 1989:27) – and, above all, non-racial in character:

In multiracial societies such as ours, it is urgent that we abandon the habitual racial-logical distinctions and that we resume the custom of designating the people of our countries by the one term that, whatever their complexion, behooves them: *Creole*. Socio-ethnic relations within our society must henceforth be conducted under the seal of a shared creolity [*une commune créolité*], without that obliterating in any way whatsoever class relations and conflicts (Bernabé, Chamoiseau & Confiant 1989:29).

Whereas Négritude's essentially racial definition of identity, as well as side-stepping the whole question of *métissage* in creole societies, implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) denies, or qualifies, the West Indianness of people of non-African origin, Créolité, like Antillanité, is at pains to include all autochthonous groups – African, European, East Indian, Chinese, Lebanese – in an ecumenical definition of creoleness. There has been a notable effort to demarginalize the East Indian experience in the French West Indies and to stress the contribution of “indianité” to the creole mosaic.¹⁸ In addition – and sometimes in the face of fierce criticism from rival schools of thought – Créolité readily admits the integral West Indianness of white West Indians, insisting, for example, that the white Guadeloupean-born poet Saint-John Perse – the only West Indian writer before Derek Walcott to have won the Nobel prize for literature – is every bit as “creole” in his inspiration, vision, and styles as the black Martinican Césaire (Levillain & Sacotte 1988). Créolité locates the key to West Indianness not in “race” nor even in “culture” but in *language*: to be West Indian is to speak creole, and vice versa. Créolité is at one and the same time (though with differences of emphasis from thinker to thinker) a *prise de position* on the question of the creole language, a literary practice, a way of conceptualizing not just West Indian culture(s) but also cognate cultures elsewhere (notably Réunion and Mauritius) and, beyond that, a theory, extrapolated from the (French) West Indian instance, of cultural *métissage* as a global phenomenon of increasing importance. But the creole language itself is the paradigm of creolity, and it is with recent controversies concerning its nature, status, and vocation that our discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Créolité as theory and practice of Difference can best begin.

In the mid-1970s, a number of academics at the Centre Universitaire Antilles-Guyane, most but not all of them French West Indians, formed the Groupe d'Etudes et de Recherches de la Creolophonie (GEREC) which, through its publications *Espace créole* and *Mofwaz*, brought an entirely new vigor and passion to the study of creole and, more broadly, of cultural creolization in the French West Indies. Their actions propelled the question of creole to the forefront of local intellectual debate, whence it flowed out to engage significant sections of the population as a whole: teachers, educationalists, journalists, broadcasters and, not least, politicians and others

involved in the unending debate on the status of the French Caribbean. Two issues dominated the group's discussions. First, there was the question, often tackled but never satisfactorily resolved, of creating a single orthographical system that could adequately transcribe creole into written form: should the orthography of creole keep as close as possible to that of French (the so-called etymological system) or should it rather be rigorously based on phonetic principles and so create the greatest possible distance (*déviance maximale*¹⁹) between the acrolect (French) and the basilect (creole)? The second, allied, question concerned the relationship between acrolect and basilect and the problems caused by the emergence, under the multiple pressures of assimilation, of a whole range of interlectal forms, variously known as "français créolisé," "créole francisé," "français régional" or "antillais," "langue antillaise" (or "martiniquaise" or "guadeloupéenne") "frantillais," "francole," "fréole" or, most pejoratively, "français-banane,"²⁰ between what had, prior to departmentalization, been the clearly differentiated linguistic levels of standard French and standard (i.e. basilectal) creole. It was the perceived threat of decreolization that gave GEREC's discussions of creole and, more broadly, of creole culture their particular intensity and brought about rifts within the group which, as ever in the French West Indies, had, and continue to have, immediate political resonances and consequences.

In the course of the debate on the problem of orthography and the status of the interlectal forms between standard French and basilectal creole, two rival positions emerged which, invidiously, but, in the highly charged context of French West Indian intellectual life, inevitably, became associated with the personalities of their two leading proponents: Jean Bernabé (1989) in the case of the "radical" position, Lambert-Félix Prudent (1980, 1989, 1990) in that of the "moderate" counter-position. The "radicals" stand for the maximization, through the use of the phonetic principle, of the orthographical distance between French and creole and for the defense of basilectal creole against morphological and lexical infiltration by French, even to the point of favoring the creation of creole neologisms (*pawol nef*) such as *latouwonni* and *tirèdpotrè* for French *environnement* and *photographe*.²¹ The "moderates" advocate an orthographical system which combines phonetic and etymological principles and are notably more tolerant towards emerging interlectal forms, arguing that the relationship between French and creole is less one of opposition (diglossia) than of a continuum of overlapping linguistic forms over which the majority of French West Indians move with relative ease and assurance. Not surprisingly, these differences are coupled with, and are directly expressive of, sharply contrasted political positions. The desire of the radicals to "autonomize"²² creole vis-à-vis

French and to counter where possible the growth of an interlectal “français-banane” is symptomatic of their *indépendantiste* political stance. In contrast, the moderates’ determination to preserve the orthographical links between French and creole, and their openness towards interlectal exchanges between the two codes, is a translation into linguistic terms of their desire to preserve links with France and the French in other spheres of life and of their commitment to continuing economic, cultural and other exchanges between the metropole and its overseas departments.

“Radicals” and “moderates” are both strongly creolophile, but the kind of creole, and the associated concepts of creolity and creolization, to which they are committed differ sharply. The radicals seek to preserve the difference of basilectal creole against acrolectal penetration by French as a prelude to, and preparation for, eventual political separation from France. Their stance against decreolization, and their commitment to the principle of *déviance maximale* in writing creole, expose them to the charge of wishing to conserve a rigid “hyperbasilectal” creole that few, if any, French West Indians actually speak any more and which virtually no one, outside the inner circle of the GERECE, is capable of reading without first – and usually with great difficulty – oralizing the phonetically transcribed text. For their part, the moderates, in their tolerance of interlectal convergence between French and creole, may be favoring, willy-nilly, the eventual disappearance of creole as a distinct signifying system, hastening, by their very openness, its “glottophagic” absorption by standard French. On the one hand there is that threat of ossification and impoverishment in an exclusivist defense of Difference at all costs, on the other the threat of dissolution of the Different in the Same – precisely the same threats, in other words, that in the present French Caribbean context, are inseparable from the independentist and regionalist-assimilationist positions respectively.²³

The theory of Créolité emerged from the radical wing of the creolist movement, but there are significant differences of emphasis, indeed possibly differences *tout court*, among the three signatories of *Eloge de la Créolité*. The manifesto insists on the need for an “annihilation of false universality, monolingualism, and purity,” on the heteroclitic internal structure of the creole “diversality” that is contrasted to it and on the impossibility of ever fixing or defining the “maelstrom of signifieds” that constitute the “kaleidoscopic totality” that is Créolité. The whole contemporary world is said to be “evolving towards a condition of creolity” (*le monde va en état de créolité*), that “new dimension of man, of which we are the prefiguration in silhouette” (Bernabé, Chamoiseau & Confiant 1989:27-28, 52, 27).

It is at this point that a number of tensions begin to emerge between the theory of Créolité and the actual practice of its leading proponents. First,

Bernabé's resolute defense of basilectal creole against interlectal corruption appears to run against the open, progressive, innovative quality attributed to Créolité itself. Being the product of a myriad of human-cultural-linguistic exchanges, creole (and, by implication, creole cultures more generally) are apparently to be "frozen" at a particular stage of their development and denied the possibility of entering into further combinatory interaction with other cultures. Second, while the interlect is said by *Eloge de la Créolité* to represent a "danger of surreptitious but terribly effective alienation" (Bernabé, Chamoiseau & Confiant 1989:59) it is precisely the interlectal space between standard French and basilectal creole that Chamoiseau and Confiant have invested and exploited so imaginatively in the literary works they have published in France, thereby earning a more or less open reprimand from their fellow signatory (Bernabé 1988-89:37-41). Moreover, though Créolité is in theory oriented towards the future, what is in practice celebrated in its name – the *djobeurs* (market porters) in Chamoiseau's first novel *Chronique des sept misères* (1986), the *conteur créole* (creole folk story-teller) in its successor *Solibo Magnifique* (1988), the *épicerie créole* (creole grocery) evoked in his recent account of his childhood in the Fort-de-France of the 1950s, *Antan d'enfance* (1990) – has disappeared, or is in the process of disappearing, like basilectal creole itself, in the monolithic, monolingual, monocultural world being progressively installed by integral assimilation in its regionalist guise. Prospective and progressive in theory, Créolité is in practice often retrospective, even regressive, in character, falling back, in a last desperate recourse against decreolization, into the real or imagined creole plenitude of *an tan lontan* (olden times), of Martinique and Guadeloupe as they were before the "fall" of departmentalization or the massive disruptions of the 1960s. There is a danger, in short, that Créolité may itself be falling prey to the trap of universalism and essentialism so vigorously denounced in the *Eloge*. The dread suffix *-ité* is always capable of injecting what Barthes called the "virus of essence" into even the most dynamic historical concept, and there may be grounds, as Glissant (1990:103) has recently indicated, for preferring the verbal expression *créolisation* to the abstract and nominal *créolité* which, he cautions, runs the risk of regressing towards the "generalizing Négritudes, Francities, and Latinities" against which it protests so vociferously.

A striking feature of créolité is its close association with the burgeoning Martinican ecological movement ASSAUPAMAR (Association pour la Sauvegarde du Patrimoine Martiniquais) and it is an ecological image, the mangrove swamp, that Bernabé has himself put forward as a remedy to the threat of rigidification and re-essentialization to which the theory and practice of Créolité are undoubtedly exposed. The *Eloge* "defines" Créolité as a

“mangrove of potentialities” (*une mangrove de virtualités*) (Bernabé, Chamoiseau & Confiant 1989:28) in which, as new forms are being born, so others die, in which everything interpenetrates with everything else and in which, by definition, nothing can be defined or fixed. The same image is used by Chamoiseau (1990c:32-34) in a report on the 1990 meeting of the international creole association Banzil Kreyol to evoke the relationship between the basilectal creole defended by GEREK and what he disarmingly calls the “natural creole,” incorporating a host of interlectal and acrolectal forms, actually spoken by the majority of French West Indians. Describing GEREK as “a kind of creole super-ego” (and Jean Bernabé as the “Pope of creole”), Chamoiseau, following Bernabé, speaks of basilectal creole and standard French as of two contiguous mangrove swamps linked by an intermediary mangrove where interlectal exchanges between basilect and acrolect take place and where “natural creole,” *an Kréyol mitannnyé*, is constantly in the process of being formed and reformed, combining and recombining elements drawn from the other two mangroves into ever-changing syncretic patterns. In this presentation, the three mangroves are essential to each other’s continuing vitality; they must somehow both be kept apart, each preserving its own identity, and maintained in communication with each other lest they stagnate and are drained of life, at which point, like so many actual mangrove swamps in Martinique and Guadeloupe, they will succumb to *bétonisation* by and in the name of the Same. According to Chamoiseau (1990c:34) (again he is repeating Bernabé’s argument), this ecological model opens up a whole new way of imagining the relationship between basilect, interlect, and acrolect:

To think of the linguistic space [of the French West Indies] as an eco-system avoids a great deal of sectarianism, and opens the way for beneficial interactions. GEREK will henceforth seek to put this ecology of languages into practice. The basic principle is that there exists in Martinique, for the reasons that we know and with the imbalances that we know, an ecological niche for creole and an ecological niche for French. And that these niches have their place in the Caribbean linguistic eco-system, an eco-system which, in its turn, is coiled up in that of the world as a whole. To think in this fashion makes it possible to understand that the defense of creole is inseparable from the defense of all other languages; that the collapse of one language would impoverish all the others; that to kill off French would curiously diminish the vitality of creole; and that the question of creole must be thought through in conjunction with the political, economic, and cultural eco-systems of the region, in a state of openness towards the Caribbean as a whole, and in the presence of the rest of the world.

The ecological model thus offers at least the *possibility* of fruitful interactions between the Different and the Same in which the identity of each would be preserved while permitting a third interlectal space – the space which, culturally and linguistically, the majority of French West Indians

actually inhabit – to develop and thrive between them. If Créolité is to avoid the pitfall of nostalgic essentialism to which Négritude in time fell pray, it must, without turning its back on the cultural and linguistic basilect, open itself out towards the intercultural domain where without question the most dynamic and creative developments in the French Caribbean are currently taking place. On the evidence of Chamoiseau's article, its leading proponents are well aware of this need, and are actively engaged in making the necessary adjustments of theory and practice.

CONCLUSION: LES MARRONS DE LA DIFFÉRENCE

We have, therefore, three principal ways of thinking Difference in the contemporary French West Indies: the pre-modern (Négritude), the modern (Antillanité) and – when it resists its penchant for nostalgia – the post-modern (Créolité).²⁴ Identity as monad, as relation, as mosaic (Bernabé, Chamoiseau & Confiant 1989:53); as root, rhizome, and mangrove. But can *any* of these constructions of Difference ultimately resist the relentless advance of the Same across the physical, cultural, and psychological landscape of Martinique and Guadeloupe? Each of the theories of Difference discussed here presupposes the existence of what Glissant calls an *arrière-pays*, (Glissant 1981:166 and *passim*) a hinterland, at once physical, cultural, and psychological, in which individual and community can find refuge from the advancing empire of the Same, as the runaway slaves of old fled plain and plantation for the upland fastnesses of the *mornes* (hills). But now the hinterland is disappearing month by month and year by year, ingested physically by *grandes surfaces*, golf courses, secondary residences, and marinas, and culturally and psychologically by the remorseless spread of “French” patterns of thinking, consuming, acting, and speaking. For the would-be maroon²⁵ in contemporary Martinique and Guadeloupe there is practically nowhere, either within or without, in which to live and from which to speak, that has not already in some way been taken over by the dominant discourse, so that the language of Difference is often uncannily transformed, without the speaker's knowledge, into the language of the Same, and the status quo is sustained and perpetuated by the very counter-discourse it provokes. As Glissant (1981:171) wrote, “*there is nothing (by way of contestation and opposition) that cannot be recuperated here by the system*” [emphasis EG].

Since Glissant wrote these words, the recuperative capacity of “the system” has become even greater with the implementation of the French socialist government's regionalizing policies in the early 1980s. Where once visiting ministers of the DOM spoke the language of Sameness, stressing the

overwhelming Frenchness of Martinique and Guadeloupe, they have since 1982 taken over the language of (relative) Difference and routinely emphasized the need to foster the now regionalized overseas departments' "right to be different," to promote their "distinct cultural identity" and to take measures to ensure the "deepening of the West Indian soul" (*l'approfondissement de l'âme antillaise*),²⁶ stopping well short, needless to say, of the point at which separation, or even a meaningful degree of autonomy, from France might become a serious possibility. By this means not only has Négritude become, in Chamoiseau's words, already quoted, "an assertion of officialized difference," but the concept of Antillanité has also been absorbed back, in a modified form, into the dominant discourse, its insistence on the heterogeneity of West Indian identity falling in perfectly with recent assimilationist-regionalist thinking about "la France créole." Even the idea of Créolité – perhaps the most radical assertion of Difference in the French Caribbean to date, given that the creole language was always the most heavily stigmatized, and hence least readily recuperated, aspect of the creole culture – is susceptible to neutralization in the name of regionalism. Creole is now "officially" recognized by the Diplôme Universitaire de Langue et Culture Créoles (DULCC) run by the Université des Antilles et de la Guyane, some school classes are, with ministerial encouragement, taught in and on it, and the would-be subversive "fusion" of French and creole practiced by Chamoiseau and Confiant in their novels is regularly hailed by metropolitan critics for its "enrichment" of French through the structures and vocabulary of creole ... Identity is no sooner constructed in the French West Indies than it frays and dissolves back into the ocean of universalism from which it was drawn and where assimilationism, that Proteus, waits to absorb it back into itself. So long as Martinique and Guadeloupe remain politically attached to France, there seems no way of staunching this hemorrhage of the Different into the Same, and no guarantee, of course, that political independence would arrest what may be an inexorable process.

Finally, of course, the universal may not *always* be quite the wholly negative, wholly destructive force that almost all recent French West Indian thinkings seems routinely to assume. In a series of trenchantly argued essays, the Guadeloupean philosopher Jacky Dahomay (1989a; 1989b) has challenged the way many French West Indian writers – he is thinking chiefly of Glissant and the authors of *Eloge de la Créolité* – automatically reject "all verticality, all transcendence" in the name of "le Divers" or "Diversalité," contending rather that *some*, at least, of the values relayed by "the universal" (notably those enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and subsequent international accords on human rights) are indeed universal and not to be rejected out of hand as "abstract" or "false" or relativized out of existence

simply because they are “imported” from France or elsewhere and not produced in the West Indies, for West Indians, by West Indians (Dahomay 1989a:127, 131). Rightly stigmatizing (1989b:17) the “militant antidemocratism” of many *indépendantistes* in Guadeloupe (and, though he does not say so, in Martinique as well) and mindful, no doubt, of Duvalierist Haiti with its grotesque parody of *Négritude*, Dahomay (1989b:130) argues that “there may exist tomorrow independent West Indian political systems, completely creole [*en toute créolité*], in which human beings can be massacred.” French West Indians, he goes on, have always, when given the choice, preferred “the universal” (meaning equality with other French citizens) to “the particular” (meaning political separation from France), and there is no sign that they will in the future do and think any differently. The pursuit of equality and the pursuit of identity are, in short, antithetical in the French West Indies and, so long as this remains so, the democratic choice of French West Indians will, he says, be in favor of equality even if it entails a comprehensive loss of identity at the political, economic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological levels (Dahomay 1989b:23-24).

If Dahomay is right, and French West Indians always opt for (French) citizenship and equality rather than (West Indian) nationality and identity, then the prospects for Difference, and those who would defend it, are grim indeed. The time is surely past – if it ever existed – when it was possible to posit a single identity in which all French West Indians could find themselves, whether that identity was constructed on the basis of race, culture, language, or the simple fact of being born and living in Martinique or Guadeloupe. On this last point, it is no longer possible – if, again, it ever was – to draw an absolutely clear distinction between autochthonous, resident Martinicans and Guadeloupeans and so-called *néropolitains* or *zoreils noirs*, the 400,000 French West Indians living in metropolitan France (one third of them actually born there) who regularly revisit family and friends in the DOM, bringing with them French attitudes, French life-styles and, increasingly, French accents. French West Indians, Alain Anselin (1990:266) has written, no longer emigrate and return, they *circulate*, their endless to-and-fro movement across the Atlantic and back further eroding already fragile images of self, deconstructing the opposition of “here” and “there,” and causing the distinction of the Different and the Same on which so much French West Indian thought is based to collapse on the crowded concourses of Le Raizet, Le Lamentin, and Orly/Charles de Gaulle. For this and other reasons, any French West Indian identity must be open, flexible, complex, and contradictory. It is the great merit of the theory of *Créolité* to have recognized this, even though in practice it too often goes against this forward-looking intuition with a regressive attachment to the real or imagined

creole plenitude of the past. Yet the very open-endedness of creole identity, if it offers endless opportunities for creative exchange with other cultures, also exposes them to absorption by and into them, and one can understand Glissant's (1981:245) belief in the need to "opacify" such difference that remains in the hope of preserving it from the "transparencies" of the universal. For the would-be-maroons of contemporary Martinique and Guadeloupe, particularly the former, there is no going back on the traces of the runaways of old. Inexorably, or so it seems, the mangroves are drying up or being polluted or drained, inexorably the monolithic world of *béton*, having conquered the plains, is now encroaching on the complex creole ecosystems of the *mornes*. There is no elsewhere, no exteriority, no *arrière-pays* for the modern maroon, no possibility of getting wholly outside the system in order to resist it.²⁷ All that is left is opposition from within the system, along the cracks and fissures left by the onward march of concrete. It is here, in the gaps between the Different and the Same, along the advancing edge of the plain and what is left of the *mornes*, that the modern maroon must henceforth play out a complex and ironic oppositional game.

NOTES

1. Space, and the present writer's lack of competence, make it impossible to give Guyane the attention it deserves. For an illuminating comparison and contrast between the meanings of the word "creole" in Martinique and Guyane, see Jolivet 1990.
2. See Revert 1977. The self-sufficiency of the island economies between 1940 and 1943 is, at the cost, it must be said, of some idealization, a common topos in contemporary nationalist discourse and forms a major theme in Raphael Confiant's (1988) magnificent novel on Martinique under the Vichy regime.
3. For the distinction between "assimilation of" and "assimilation by," see Suvélor 1983:2197-98.
4. For an excellent discussion of Négritude from this viewpoint, see Lucrèce 1971.
5. The speech – essential for an understanding of contemporary Martinique – is reproduced in full in *Le Naïf* 329 (Fort-de-France, June 3, 1981). For an incisive discussion of the issues it raises, see Constant 1989.
6. For the militant creolist Jean Bernabé (1983:205) creole possesses no "anthropological density" (*épaisseur anthropologique*) in Césaire's eyes: "it is only the index of the Negro's subjugation and the recurrent symptom of the loss of Mother Africa."
7. A selection of the most important texts in *Le Discours antillais* has been translated into English under the title *Caribbean Discourse* (1989). The introduction by translator J. Michael Dash (pp. xi-xxv) is the best guide available to the complexities of Glissant's thinking.

8. On this subject, see the important and controversial essay by André 1983.
9. I have discussed Glissant's use of the root-rhizome distinction elsewhere (Burton 1990).
10. For a valuable discussion of the tree image in French West Indian writing, see Ormerod 1985:28-29.
11. Significantly, the mangrove frequently suggests torpor and stagnation in Césaire's poetry, see the poems *Mangrove* and *La Condition-mangrove* in his most recent collection *Moi, laminaire...* (Césaire 1982:25, 30, translations in Césaire 1990:107, 117).
12. The PCG has recently adopted an independentist position, partly as a response to the perceived threat of 1992, partly to avoid being outflanked by the far left. Nonetheless, its autonomist leaning remains strong, and it is not difficult to imagine it reverting to an autonomist position as and when circumstances require.
13. For discussion of this, see Burton 1978:52-56.
14. See the anonymous statement cited by Lafontaine (1983:2145): "Even if the quadrille and biguine are played in county areas in Guadeloupe, they cannot, by virtue of their origin, their style and their assimilationist character, represent the authentic music that expresses the Guadeloupean soul in its depths."
15. On the exclusion of East Indians by nationalist discourse, see Zandwonis (1990:5).
16. The key contributions to the Indianité debate are Moutoussamy 1987 and Sulty & Nagapin 1989.
17. According to Chamoiseau (1989:8), "the concept of Créolité is formulated through and with the thought of Glissant."
18. See above all the special number of *Carbet* (No. 9, December 1989) on "L'Inde en nous, des Caraïbes aux Mascareignes." The coordinator of the number, Gerry L'Etang, is close to the Créolité "school" of thinkers. There is certain vogue for "indianité" in contemporary Martinique whose implications, political and other, I discuss in Burton 1993.
19. The term "déviance maximale" is associated with the work of Jean Bernabé. For a full discussion of the orthographic controversy, see Bernabé 1983:296-348.
20. The term "français régional" (or "antillais" is favored by well-known creole linguist Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux, while "langue martiniquaise" (or "guadeloupéenne") is preferred by noted linguist Lambert-Félix Prudent. The term "francole" was suggested in 1980 by the Guadeloupean writer Germain William, in an early attempt to use the interlect as a literary language. "Français-banane" is a catch-all term, commonly used by opponents of Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant to describe the "franco-créoloïde" language of some of their literary works.
21. These examples are taken from the glossary of creole neologisms in Confiant 1987:139-40.
22. The expression "autonomisation du créole" is used by Bernabé (1983, 1:307) in opposing phonetic orthography to its etymological rival which, he says, maintains creole in a state of "objective dependence on the French language."
23. Phonetic orthography is, in general, adopted in independentist publications such as *Douvanjou*, *Magwa*, *Jougwa*, and *Ja ka ta* (Guadeloupe) and *Grif an Te*, *Kabouya*, *Antilla*, and *Koubari* (Martinique) as well as by the creole language edition of the *Courrier de l'Unesco*, *Kourilet*. In 1988 the moderate creolists joined other anti-independentist intellectuals in establishing the *Nouvelle Revue des Antilles*; the prominent PPM (and ex-Trotskyist) mayor of Robert, Edouard De Lépine, is a member of its editorial board and, in general, it adopts a "regionalist" position against the independentist implications of the idea of Créolité.

24. For an interesting discussion of Créolité and post-modernity, see Blanquart 1990.
25. The theme of the maroon, whom Glissant (1981:104) calls "the one true popular hero in the West Indies," and his modern equivalents or analogues – the runaway criminal (Beauregard and Marny in Martinique), the *quimboiseur*, the Rasta, the political fugitive (Luc Reimette, Henri Bernard, and Humbert Marboeuf in Guadeloupe) – is to be encountered everywhere in contemporary French West Indian thought and literature. See, for example, Louise 1990. The theme of marronnage in Glissant's work is discussed in Pépin (1990:88-99), and there is an illuminating comparison between Beauregard, Marny, and the maroon in Hospice (1984:143-52).
26. Such language was also spoken during the later years of the Giscard presidency, see Bebel-Gisler 1989:182-84.
27. For the distinction between "opposition" and "resistance" on which this conclusion is based, see De Certeau 1980:3-43.

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RICHARD D.E. BURTON
 School of African and Asian Studies
 University of Sussex
 Brighton BN1 9RH, England