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## **Creolization and diaspora – the cultural politics of divergence and some convergence**

**Robin Cohen**

### **Introduction**

At first sight, creolization and diaspora are divergent forms of cultural politics, with different sensibilities and different trajectories. I provide an exposition and comparative discussion on creolization, setting the scene by quoting a 1969 pop song. The concept centers on the cross-fertilization between different cultures as they interact. When creolization occurs, participants select particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, endow these with meanings different from those they possessed in the original culture and then creatively merge these to create totally new varieties that supersede the prior forms. Creolization is thus a 'here and now' sensibility that erodes old roots and stresses fresh growth in a novel place of identification. A diasporic consciousness, by contrast, generally reflects a degree of unease with cultural identities in the current location. 'Homeland' or a looser notion of 'home' is reconstructed and revalorized through fabulation, recovered historical memory and social organization. The past provides a continuing pole of attraction and identification. By contrasting these two forms of cultural politics, I hope to illuminate both. Perhaps unexpectedly, there are also possibilities and examples of convergence which I explore, before concluding this chapter.

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## Melting Pot

Take a pinch of white man  
Wrap him up in black skin  
Add a touch of blue blood  
And a little bitty bit of red indian boy  
Oh like a curly latin tinkies  
Oh lordy, lordy, mixed with yellow chinkies, yeah  
You know you lump it all together  
And you got a recipe for a get along scene  
Oh what a beautiful dream  
If only it could come true, you know, you know

What we need is a great big melting pot  
Big enough enough enough to take  
The world and all it's got  
And keep it stirring for a hundred years or more  
And turn out coffee coloured people by the score

Rabbis and friars  
Vishnus and the gurus  
We got the beatles or the sun god  
Well it really doesn't matter  
What religion you choose  
And be thankful little mrs. graceful  
You know that living could be tasteful  
We should all get together in a lovin machine  
I think I'll call up the queen  
It's only fair she knows, you know, you know

What we need is a great big melting pot  
Big enough enough enough to take  
The world and all it's got  
And keep it stirring for a hundred years or more  
And turn out coffee coloured people by the score  
Coffee coloured people  
Coffee coloured people  
Coffee coloured people by the score

*Lyrics of 'Melting Pot', released 15 November 1969 by Blue Mink*

The lyrics of a 1960s popular song hardly form the basis of a serious social analysis, yet the very naiveté of the sentiments cannot but evoke some sympathy from those who are troubled by the destructive effects of a resurgent nationalism (for example in the USA), an unyielding ethnicity (as in the Balkans and Rwanda) and fundamentalist religious affinities (as in the Middle East). In the face of such experiences, which are hardly unusual, the reader might wonder, in evoking a song by *Blue Mink*, whether the author is still in the grip of a hallucinogenic haze, lingering from an earlier era. My response is two-fold.

First, it is common to find dogmatic assertions in the face of a subterranean shift in reality. At a surface level, a resurgent and invincible US nationalism seems to have been signaled with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the declaration of a 'Long War' against terrorism, especially Islamic *ihadists*. Some of the cracks emerge on closer examination. The USA is overextended militarily, its share of global GNP is declining, its erstwhile allies (like Germany and Turkey) are not so compliant, its enemies (like Iran and Venezuela) are openly defiant, its trade and fiscal deficits are massive, it is facing sustained resistance in Iraq, and it has lost the soft war (the power to persuade) in many parts of the world. US nationalism is thus better understood as the thrashing about of a dinosaur, not the emergence of a new species. Similar arguments can be mounted in the cases of at least some other strident expressions of nationalism, ethnicity and religious zealotry.

Second, by contrast, we easily miss subtle, discreet but undeclared social changes that cumulatively but slowly generate major shifts in social behavior and consciousness. Behind the thunderous nationalist, fundamentalist and monocultural noises are the soft but pervasive sounds of diversity, complexity and hybridity. This is akin to what Bauman (2000:14) described as 'the new lightness and fluidity of the increasingly mobile, slippery, shifty, evasive and fugitive power'. In contrast to the naked, brutal, heralded power (say of the Pentagon), my notion of fugitive power stresses the hidden, subtle, sub-rosa, elusive (i.e. difficult of catch or detect) forms of power found in collective shifts of attitudes and social behavior. Creolization is one form of fugitive power.

### **Etymology and implications of 'Creole' and 'creolization'**

The terms 'Creole' and 'creolization' are used in many different contexts and generally in an inconsistent way. It is instructive to start with the origins of the root word. It was probably derived from the Latin *creara* ('created originally') (Cashmore 2004:94). The most common historical use was the Spanish *criollo*, which described the children of Spanish colonizers born in the Caribbean. The Furetière dictionary (1690) uses the word *criole* in this way. The French transformed the word to 'créole' and, Jolivet (1982, 1993) argued that it become synonymous with any white person born in the colonies. However, the racially exclusive definition, which confined the term to whites, had been challenged as early as 1722 when in a 4-volume travelogue by a French missionary, Father Labat, a distinction was drawn between 'Créole slaves' and 'traded slaves'. 'Creole corn' and 'Creole livestock' soon followed (Jolivet 1982). The implication was clear – 'Creole' referred to something or someone that had foreign (normally metropolitan) origins and that had now become somewhat localized. There is a further implication, though this was less explicit. There would have been no point in distinguishing a 'Creole' from a 'colonizer' if there were no perceived differences between the two. The Creole had

become different, taking on some local ‘color’, a word that I use deliberately to suggest a figurative and emotional relationship with the local landscape and a social and sometimes sexual relationship with the local people.

And who might those locals be? Ultimately, all of us are migrants. The DNA ‘architecture’ revealed by the human genome project conclusively situates the common origin of humankind in particular parts of Africa. Humans living elsewhere were subsequently dispersed by the disintegration of the continents or by relocation. Flight from natural disasters, adverse climatic changes, competition from other species or communities, and transhumance were common causes of movement. If they lived elsewhere for a long time, or bonded emotionally with the local territory, people claimed autochthonous or indigenous status. They frequently ascribed divine properties to the earth, the fauna, the flora, the climate and the geological features in their places of settlement. You will notice we now have a trichotomy (an insufficient description, as we will see later, but it will do for now). First, we have the colonial, born in the metropole, or anchored there psychologically and affectively. Next, we have the Creole, born in a new place from foreign parents, who nonetheless identifies with his or her immediate surroundings or is so identified by others. Finally, we have the indigenous people whose had lived there for so long they are assumed to, or claim to, ‘belong’ to the land.

### **Re-examining mixed heritage populations**

Any full account of creolization would have to include discussion of creolized popular cultural practices (especially in food, music and dancing), syncretic religions and Creole languages. Whereas these have been studied for decades, new understandings of creolization have emerged more recently in sociology, anthropology and the study and practice of cultural politics. This has led to a renewed interest in recognized Creole societies in countries as diverse as Sierra Leone, Nicaragua, the Guyanas, Cape Verde, the Caribbean islands and coastal zones on the edge of the Caribbean Sea, Réunion, Mauritius, Seychelles, Liberia and Nigeria. More ambitiously, the substantial mixed heritage populations in Brazil, South Africa and the USA have been re-examined using the lenses of creolization, the three examples that I discuss below.

#### *Brazil: official and subversive creolization*

In the case of Brazil, Wagley (1952:143) maintained that ‘By the end of slavery the intermediate freeman class made up of people of Negroid, Indian and Caucasian racial stocks, and of a wide variety of *mestiços*, was numerically more important than the white elite or the Negro slaves’. Subsequent census data in Brazil use the categories *branca* (white), *preta* (black), *parda* (brown/*mestizo*), *amarela* (yellow/East Indian) and *indigena* (native/indigenous). In the 2000 Census, 66 million (of the total of 169.7 million) described themselves as *parda* (39 per cent) compared to 8.7 million *parda* of the total population of 41.2 million in 1940 (21.1 per cent) (Sansone 2003:22–4).

Sansone’s (2003) innovative account of ‘blackness without ethnicity’ in Brazil starts with the observation that many social scientists studying Brazilian society have been highly skeptical of the official, elite and popular celebrations of hybridity and mixture – where, in effect, creolization has been reconstituted as the national ideology. Such scholars are determined to reduce the Brazilian experience to the terrain of ethnic segmentation familiar to the pattern of Anglophone race relations. Brazilian society

comprises, they say, Afro-Brazilians, Italian-Brazilians, Japanese-Brazilians, and so on. Such views, Sansone argues, are erroneous, because Brazilian forms of ethnicity are constructed only fitfully, episodically and situationally. In Brazil ethnicity is never 'strong' or determinant, and certainly never is primordial.

He also has reservations about the idea of a 'pigmentocracy', a color continuum with many intervals, but with the high-ranking whites at the top and low-ranking blacks at the bottom. The statistics of self-identification still confirm a general aspiration to whiteness or lightness, but this does not mean that a positive idea, image and imaginary of blackness in Brazil are not salient. Sansone suggests that in the past blackness was associated with those locked into a diasporic tradition, asserting their African roots and 'with closeness to nature, magical powers, body language, sexuality and sensuality' (2003:12). Now, however, black Brazilian culture is reaching out to modernity and even globalization via the intermediation of Jamaica, the USA and rest of the 'black Atlantic'. (As the last expression indicates, Sansone is influenced by Gilroy (1993), who he acknowledges fulsomely.) 'Black' has become revalorized among the young, the better educated and those plugged into international youth and musical currents. Other affirmative aspects of black culture include the elaborate Angolan-derived martial art *capoeira*, the syncretic religion Candomblé and the famous Carnival. These have all created 'black spaces' that invert and subvert the pigmentocracy.

In short, if we return to our central concept of creolization, we can argue that creolization has developed in two directions – the first involving a state-led appropriation of 'mixture' that is identified with the Brazilian national character and celebrated accordingly. The official tourist board, for example, suggests that while tourists think first of the country's natural beauty, they discover 'such hospitality that they soon become enchanted with the mixture of colors, races and cultures of the people, as well' (<http://www.turismo.gov.br>). The second version of creolization is more subversive. It rejects bland renditions of 'mixture' and relies much less on a recovered memory of Africa by a relatively isolated population displaced by slavery. Instead, those who have been marginalized by poverty and cultural alienation have discovered new circuits of cultural capital that they can tap into to create alternative and dissident forms of 'black' creolization.

#### *South Africa: from Coloured to Creole*

A fundamental reassessment of mixed identities in South Africa has also taken place in the wake of political democratization. As is well-known, South Africa has a large mixed population. In mid-2005, the 'Coloured' population group (a first approximation of those of mixed heritage) numbered 4.1 million out of the total population of 46.8 million. At 8.8 per cent of the total, the Coloured group is just below the proportion of whites in the population (Statistics South Africa 2005:9). The attempt to enforce racial segregation had to await the coming to power in 1948 of the (white) Nationalist Party, the Population Registration Act and the elaborated ideology of apartheid articulated notably by Verwoerd (see Cohen 1986:1–14). The South African case was particularly absurd in that creolization had reached such a stage of maturity that the mixed population had to be recognized in itself as one of the primordial ethnic groups – so the South African apartheid regime distinguished between whites, Bantu (African), Asian and Coloured, the

last rendered with a capital letter in order to signify its supposed primordial status. In fact, of course, the colored community was none other than the Creole community.

In common with the implacable refusal by many intellectuals and political activists in post-apartheid South Africa to accept apartheid nomenclature, biological categories are firmly rejected by Erasmus (2001:22), who insists that 'colouredness must be understood as a creolized cultural identity', an identity, moreover, that is derived not merely from two 'pure' traditions, African and European, but from multiple sources that themselves are impure and contingent:

In re-imagining coloured identities we need to move beyond the notion that coloured identities are 'mixed race' identities. Rather we need to see them as cultural identities comprising detailed bodies of knowledge, specific cultural practices, memories, rituals and modes of being. ...The result has been a highly specific and instantly recognizable cultural formation – not just a 'mixture', but a very particular 'mixture' comprising elements of British, Dutch, Malaysian, Khoi and other forms of African culture appropriated, translated and articulated in complex and subtle ways. These elements acquire their specific cultural meaning only once fused and translated (Erasmus 2001:21)

Soudien (2001:123) presents an even more ambitious proposition, suggesting that South Africa at its birth 'presented as an embrace of difference. Europe, Africa and Asia are figuratively assimilated, incorporated and naturalized on the rich soil of the Cape. There is in this figurative construction, in some senses, the notion of the African cradle of humanity receiving back its diasporic seed'. Attentive readers will note that later in this paper I will address the links and contradictions between creolization and diaspora more fully, but here we can merely note that one possibility raised by Soudien is that a thorough-going creolization ends, or resolves, diaspora. The spirit of reconciliation that marked the foundational moment of the new, post-apartheid South Africa implied that backward glances towards culturally distinct roots were no longer appropriate or necessary. A creolized identity could thus be conceived as the embryonic form of a truly South African, perhaps even a tri-continental, identity. It transcended the claims for primacy, purity and authenticity on the part of black and white South Africans and fatally undermined the racial categories inherited from the apartheid era.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The USA: heritage and new multi-racial identities*

The US South, and more particularly New Orleans, provides a rich array of contrasting experiences of creolization. There, from the eighteenth century, people of mixed ethnic backgrounds maintained a precarious intermediate status, distancing themselves from the black parts of their origins but not being accepted by polite white society. In fact, the social struggle for status revolved precisely around the expression 'Creole'. A section of whites determinedly continued to describe *themselves* exclusively as 'Creole' and authenticated this claim by referring to the original sense of the word, i.e. that they were proud descendants of French or Spanish settlers, but born in the New World. This claim, a form of heritage politics common in the USA, was reasserted as late as in Herrin's (1951) book titled *The Creole Aristocracy*. The 'white Creoles' sent their children to Paris to study if they could afford it, continued to speak a version of French and lionized French culture. However, their snobbery did not extend to their sexual practices where

many males found black or so-called 'light' or 'yellow' mistresses, setting them up in the French quarter of New Orleans in bijou houses of their own.

Descendants of such liaisons were Creoles, or 'black Creoles', who were augmented by people of purer black origin, who had nonetheless made a cultural shift into French New Orleans society. In New Orleans there are both black and white Creoles and many who are somewhere between black and white. All 'non-white' Creoles were under threat in the period after the Civil War when the reactionary Jim Crow laws (exemplified in the Louisiana Legislative Code III) insisted that any person with the smallest amount of 'black blood' was to be described as a Negro and to suffer the discriminatory consequences. This is described as the 'one-drop' rule (or, more technically, 'hypodescent').

It is noteworthy that the Creole imaginary was prevalent despite the ideological dominance of biological categories, Social Darwinism and legal codes requiring that people be reduced to primordial 'races' even where this was manifestly inappropriate. In the context of the USA, particularly the southern states, elaborated Creole cultures had already emerged and white power holders, including the Ku Klux Klan tried, with considerable success, to use the period after 1865 to force Creole peoples into the category of 'Negro'. Ringer (1983:215–384) shows how Supreme Court decisions over a period of 50 years facilitated these assertions of white power. The post-bellum period 'depended heavily on the coercive arm of the law and where necessary a vigilantism of community sentiment; it thereby sought to draw a sharp line between black and white without exception and spread the authority to maintain this line to a variety of public officials, bureaucrats, and ordinary white citizens' (1983:225).

In fact people of mixed heritage seemed to get it in the neck from all sides. As David Pilgrim (2000) shows, in popular culture in the USA, the person of mixed origin, particularly if she was a woman, was depicted in tragic terms:

Literary and cinematic portrayals of the tragic mulatto [*sic*, this should read mulatta] emphasized her personal pathologies: self-hatred, depression, alcoholism, sexual perversion, and suicide attempts being the most common. If light enough to 'pass' as White, she did, but passing led to deeper self-loathing. She pitied or despised Blacks and the 'blackness' in herself; she hated or feared Whites yet desperately sought their approval. In a race-based society, the tragic mulatto found peace only in death. She evoked pity or scorn, not sympathy.

Such arguments were sustained with particular force around emerging iconic figures like Billie Holliday – the great jazz singer – and Dorothy Dandridge, the star of the musical *Carmen Jones* (1954) who was the first Creole actress on the cover of *Life*. Both women committed suicide in despairing circumstance and were poignant instances of the tragedy of creolodom. While Hollywood often focused on the tragic beautiful mulatta, it did not fail to remind us also of the case of male and child mulattos, as in the popular film, *Angelo* (released in 1949), who found it impossible to live 'in a *white man's world*' (every emphasized word counts in this description).

As if this popular disdain of mixed heritage people were not enough, black American attitudes were also often hostile. The black leader and founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Marcus Garvey (1977:37), was perhaps the most explicit:

I believe in a pure black race just as how all self-respecting whites believe in a pure white race, as far as that can be. I am conscious of the fact that slavery brought upon us the curse of many colors within the Negro race, but that is no reason why we of ourselves should perpetuate the evil; hence instead of encouraging a wholesale bastardy in the race, we feel that we should now set out to create a race type and standard of our own which could not, in the future, be stigmatized by bastardy, but could be recognized and respected as the true race type anteceding even our own time.

Though an extreme version, such attitudes were common among black leaders in the USA. Assertions of purity were also the focus of later political movements – like the Black Panthers – and the more popular expressions of the day like ‘black power’, ‘black pride’ and ‘black is beautiful’. This counter-hegemonic expression of black self-regard rather than black self-hatred left little room for those who were phenotypically more ambiguous. Any demur was met by the charge that people of mixed ancestry who could not admit that they were black were experiencing denial and betraying their black brothers and sisters. Explanations for this position vary. They include hostility to those who were favored in the plantation system, the perverse influence of white racism, social Darwinism and Nazism; and complex psychological and gender tensions. Resolving this question is not particularly salient to my current argument. What is salient is that the effects of this hostility were to force those of visible mixed heritage into declaring their undivided loyalty to the black ‘race’ or to join the white ‘race’ by ‘passing’.

It is difficult to date exactly at what point a third choice opened between these two paths, but one powerful symbolic moment was when the successful golfer Tiger Woods suggested on an Oprah Winfrey show in April 1997, that he was not an African American but a Cablinasian (a mixture of Caucasian, black, Indian and Asian). ‘I’m just who I am, whoever you see in front of you’, he told the talk-show hostess. *Time* magazine recorded that the golfer’s remark infuriated African Americans who saw him as a ‘sell-out’, while no less a figure than the former general and secretary of state for defense, Colin Powell, ticked Woods off by announcing that ‘In America, which I love from the depths of my heart and soul, when you look like me, you’re black’ (Kamiya 1997).

Spencer (2004:369 *et seq.*), who alludes to this episode, argues that the debate around Tiger Woods’s statement and other forms of recognition of mixture still often continues to use predictable racial categories, thereby falling into the trap of hypodescent. Indeed, it is notable that US discourse still centers on ‘bi-racialism’ and the ‘multi-racial’ experience, rather than the superseding categories of ‘non-racialism’, used in post-apartheid South Africa, and multiculturalism, hybridity and creolization, used there and elsewhere. While Spencer (2004) is correct in suggesting this is a real limitation to exploring the complexity of emerging identities in the USA, he cites (2004:360) a number of authors, including Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002), who are developing racially-neutral categories like ‘border’, ‘protean’, ‘transcendent’ and ‘traditional’ identities. Again, Spencer (2004:374) is somewhat scornful of the discovery in popular magazines of the new levels of biracialism in the USA, which accept current race labels as valid (*Time* and *Newsweek* both carried covered this issue at length). He argues that if one were historically informed ‘there are at least 30 million people of [mixed] African, Native American and European ancestry in the United States’. However historically valid such statements may be, self-ascription remains a vital datum. In this respect it is notable

that census data shows a quadrupling of children in self-identified ‘interracial’ families over the period 1970 to 1990 (from less than 500,000 to about 2 million). It also is significant that when given the chance to respond to a question about multiple origins in the 2000 Census (for the first time), 6.8 million Americans availed themselves of this opportunity (Table 1).

The US figures thus show that though *Blue Mink*’s ‘lovin machine’ has barely got into its stride, in recent years the number of people who identify themselves as of mixed origins is increasing substantially. This is merely an indicator and prelude to the possible emergence of new forms of creolization that may shape attitudes and social behavior. As I argue below, the Creole culture centered in New Orleans has both been challenged and grown new roots in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

**Table 1 US population by number of races reported, 2000**

<i>No of races</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% of total population</i>	<i>% of population (2 or more races)</i>
Total population	281,421,906	100.0	–
One race	274,595,678	97.6	–
Two or more races	6,826,228	2.4	100
Two races	6,386,075	2.3	93.3
Three races	410,285	0.1	6.0
Four races	38,408	–	0.6
Fives races	8,637	–	0.1
Six races	823	–	–

*Source:* US Census Bureau, 2003. *Census 2000*. Redistricting data (Public Law 94-171). Summary file. Table PL1,

### **Creolization as an intellectual movement**

In my introduction I alluded to the soft but pervasive sounds of diversity, complexity and hybridity, a subtle shift towards a new positive valorization of creolization. We have seen how this process has emerged and differed in three large societies – Brazil, South Africa and the USA. However, much of the supporting theorization and defense of creolization have occurred elsewhere. First, I discuss the development of a movement for Creolité in francophone Caribbean, a relatively small setting, but one which nonetheless has global implications and resonances. Second, I consider the celebration of hybridity, or at least its recognition, by two eminent post-colonial writers, Salmon Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul. (There are others, of course, but I refer here to two prominent examples.) Third, I refer to the increasing recognition of mixed identity categories among official statisticians and the call for the end of ‘raciology’ by certain academics and intellectuals.

### *Creolité not Négritude*

As I have indicated, self-hatred was one of the targets of early expressions of black pride and identity politics. It was at the heart of the Garveyite movement who wanted black Americans to think of themselves as Africans. It also suffused the idea of Négritude, developed by the Caribbean and Senegalese intellectuals, Césaire, Damas and Senghor. As in the USA, the fear of the rejection of mixture seemed to underlie some of the

Caribbean understandings of their own identities. Take the views of Franz Fanon, himself born in Martinique of mixed origin and highly sensitive to the possibility of dismissal of 'West Indians' by Africans. When this happened, Fanon (1970:35–6) claimed, 'he [the West Indian] suffered despair. Haunted by impurity, overwhelmed by sin, riddled by guilt, he was prey to the tragedy of being neither white nor Negro'.

Fanon's insights were based on his background in the Caribbean and experience in Africa, and probably also carry some autobiographical imprint. While Fanon's diagnosis was accurate, it was left to others in the Caribbean to develop a fully-formed alternative to the fear of rejection by those who claimed purer racial origins. Logically, this had to commence, as Burton noted (1995:141) with an attack on Négritude:

Négritude may invert a stereotypical European definition of blackness and black culture, divesting it of its overly 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 Indians 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.

As Burton (1995 *passim*) comments, the appeals of Négritude in the context of the Caribbean were simply not convincing after three centuries of social and physical creolization. Créolité, a cultural and political movement articulated by a number of Caribbean intellectuals, became an explicit alternative. The proponents of Créolité are at pains to include all resident groups – African, European, Indian, Chinese and Lebanese. The founders of the movement, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant (1989), produced a compelling manifesto of the movement, arguing (cited Burton 1995:152) that:

In multiracial societies, such as ours, it is urgent that we abandon the habitual raciological distinctions and that we resume the custom of designating the people of our country by the one term that, whatever their complexion, behoves them: Creole. Socio-economic relations within our society must henceforth be conducted under the seal of a shared creolity [Créolité] without that obliterating in any way whatsoever class relations and conflicts.

Through such intellectual movements, creolization has escaped its colonial cage, a development that was signaled earlier in the work of the Martinican writer and cultural theorist, Edouard Glissant. Glissant was strongly committed to the idea of creolization emanating from the situation of displaced African slaves having to rebuild their lives in new settings and therefore had some differences with the relaxed recognition of diversity promoted by his fellow-islanders. However, he too (Glissant cited Stoddard and Cornwall 1999:349) saw the wider implications of creolization suggesting that 'Perhaps creolization is becoming one of our present day goals', not just 'on behalf of the America but of the entire world'. Further Glissant (in Stoddard and Cornwall: 1999:349) asked whether we should favor 'An identity that would not be the projection of a unique and sectarian root, but of what we call a rhizome, a root with a multiplicity of extensions in all direction? Not killing what is around it, as a unique root would, but establishing communication and relation?'

The universal virtues of Créolité as a form of cultural politics and creolization as a sociological category now become apparent. They allow us to include all population groups, including later migrant arrivals in addition to the original trichotomy (the colonial, Creole and indigene). They allow us also to escape the political cage and unscientific trap of racial, phenotypical and biological categorizations, thereby avoiding such expressions as colored, half-caste, mixed race, mixed-blood, mestizo, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, *gens de couleur*, half-breed, zambo, griffe and many other descriptions that are even less flattering like baster (South Africa), dougla/h (Trinidad), mud-people (used by the Ku Klux Klan) or ox-head (southern China).

*Rushdie and Naipaul: prophets of the impure*

The celebration of hybridity and mongrelism, together with a distrust of traditional and ascribed social identities, was Salman Rushdie's self-assigned task in much of his work, notably in *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Although the professed grounds for the *fatwa* directed at Rushdie after the publication of the book cantered on a number of specific religious objections, the more general offence caused by the book amongst some Muslims was its explicit attack on authenticity, on singular and monochromatic identities, and on the ideas of a single Truth and a Pure way. As Rushdie (1991:394) himself says of *The Satanic Verses*:

Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with different cultures will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrate hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it.

While Rushdie is optimistic about the impure and indeed celebrates it, as Eriksen (2003:226) suggests, a more complex reading of mixed identities is provided by the Trinidadian-born V. S. Naipaul:

Shocked by India, alienated by England, aloof from the Caribbean, Naipaul became a writer about torn identities. Several of his mature, largely tragic novels, from *The Mimic Men* (1967) and *In a Free State* (1971) to *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *Half a Life* (2001), are about men (and a few women) who try to be something that they are not, usually because they can see no alternative. It is the dark, unprivileged side of Rushdie's brave new world.

There is a tragic quality to Naipaul's impossible search for belonging and rootedness but, as Eriksen (2003:226) argues, despite his own pronouncements, which remain sardonic and gloomy, 'it can also be said that the tragic grandeur of Naipaul's best books confirm an assumption, which he himself might reject, that exile and cultural hybridity are creative forces'. His poignant novel, which may also be his best, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) is said to be based on his father. Biswas emerges as a sympathetic character, despite the author's mockery of Biswas's pathetic mimicry of European ways.

### *Statisticians and intellectuals in the UK and USA*

As I suggested earlier, the categories ‘mixed race’ and ‘mixed heritage’ are increasingly recognized in census categories in the USA as numbers of citizens refuse to locate themselves in the rigid categories imposed in previous censuses. In the case of the UK the public debate about ‘multiculturalism’ as a way of understanding diversity in the UK, led by the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips (*The Times* 3 April 2004). He espoused a belief that the cultural segments comprising British society are no longer stable and that nothing should be done to make them more rigid. Although there is no unanimity on this question among academics, there has long been unease about how commonly deployed ethnic categories are being decomposed under the force of new patterns of social interaction, new sources of migrants and radical ‘refusals’ by people of mixed heritage to identify themselves using particular ethnic labels. The augmentation of visible minorities (African, Indian, Bangladeshi and black Caribbean) by other Asian and European migration has generated a much more complex understanding of the nature of British identity. The UK 2001 census allowed the box ‘mixed’ to be selected for the first time, which partly accounts for the proportion of minority ethnic groups moving from 6 to 9 per cent of the population (UK National Statistics 2003).

Beyond such data about the rising levels of population mixture is a much more telling argument, namely that at the level of popular discourse and practices, purity and authenticity have often been displaced by a suspicion of traditional and ascribed social identities among a significant UK minority. Even some of the historically ‘white’ UK population is also beginning to reconstitute itself as ‘mixed’ or ‘post-race’ (Ali 2003; Song 2003). Again, a number of writers and intellectuals have called for the end of racial categorization in social science in favor of more complex and overlapping social categories. Here are just three examples:

- For Stuart Hall (1992) complexity is found by defining ‘new ethnicities’. As he puts it (1992:257) ‘If the black subject and black experience are not stabilized by Nature or by some other essential guarantee, then it must be the case that they are constructed historically, culturally, politically – and the concept which refers to this is “ethnicity”’.
- For Paul Gilroy (2000:339) ‘To comprehend the history of blackness’ appeals to the future and how that history may contribute to the cultural dynamism and moral confidence of a cosmopolitan and hospitable Europe, we need to appreciate ... phases in the process of dissent from raciology’.
- For Homi Bhabha (1990:210) a dynamic ‘third space’ emerges which both emerges from two original moments and recognizes that those moments are themselves unstable. Thus ‘the act of cultural translation ...denies the essentialism of a prior given or original culture’ and allow us to see that ‘all forms of culture are in a continuous process of hybridity’.

### **Affirming mixed identities**

I have sought to establish the heuristic potential of the expressions Creole and creolization used as sociological and cultural terms. While it is true to assert that creolization had its *locus classicus* in the context of colonial settlement, imported black labor and often a plantation and island setting, by indicating that there are other pathways

for creolization I want to signify the potentially universal applicability of the term. To be a Creole is no longer a mimetic, derivative stance. Rather it describes a position interposed between two or more cultures, selectively appropriating some elements, rejecting others, and creating new possibilities that transgress and supersede parent cultures, which themselves are increasingly recognized as fluid. If this is indeed happening on a significant scale we need to recast much traditional social theory concerning race and ethnic relations, multiculturalism, nation-state formation and the like – for we can no longer assume the stability and continuing force of the ethnic segments that supposedly make up nation-states. Likewise, we cannot assume that the nation in international relations has a continuously uniform character. Accepting the force of hybridity and creolization is also to accept that humankind is refashioning the basic building blocks of organized cultures and societies in a fundamental and wide-ranging way.

Mobile, transnational groups are themselves undergoing what has been described as ‘everyday cosmopolitanism’, while dominant, formerly monochromatic, cultures have themselves become criss-crossed and sometimes deeply subverted by hybridization and creolization. It is this last quality that lends credence to the notion, advanced by the Swedish social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1987) that we live in ‘creolizing world’. In his discussion of the global ecumene, Hannerz (1992:217–63) argues that cultures are no longer as bounded or autonomous as they once were and that complex and asymmetrical flows have reshaped cultures which, given existing forms and meanings of culture are not likely to result in global homogenization. He is clear that ‘emerging hybridized webs of meaning’ (1992:264) are neither spurious nor inauthentic cultures. While these Creole cultures may be relatively unformed, because they are recent, they can and do take on a complex character, often because the periphery is stronger than it may appear. As Hannerz (1992:265–6) maintains:

Creolization also increasingly allows the periphery to talk back. As it creates a greater affinity between the cultures of the center and the periphery, and as the latter increasingly uses the same organizational forms and the same technology as the center ...some of its new cultural commodities become increasingly attractive on a global market. Third World music of a creolized kind becomes world music ...Creolization thought is open-ended; the tendencies towards maturation and saturation are understood as quite possibly going on side by side, or interleaving.

The creolization of the world in the sense described by Hannerz and other writers cited earlier has provided a space for many people to create a new sense of home, a locus to express their uniqueness in the face of cultural fundamentalisms and imperialism. Behind the strident assertions of nationalism, ‘old ethnicities’ and religious certainties is an increasing volume of cultural interactions, interconnections and interdependencies and a challenge to the solidity of ethnic and racial categories. These are the soft sounds of fugitive power, but you may need to have your ear cocked to the ground, or your finger on the pulse, if you are to fully hear them and discern their influence.

### **Social constructionist critiques of diaspora**

I suggested that creolization and diaspora are, at first sight, divergent forms of cultural politics, with different sensibilities and different trajectories. However, two of the major

building blocks defining diaspora, namely ‘homeland’ and ‘ethnic community’, have gradually been decomposed under the weight of social constructionist critiques.<sup>2</sup> With apologies for returning to an earlier debate, this statement needs some background explanation.

One of the most influential statements marking the beginning of contemporary diaspora studies was Safran’s (1991) article in the opening issue of the then new journal, *Diaspora*. Safran was strongly influenced by the underlying paradigmatic case of the Jewish diaspora, but correctly perceived that many other ethnic groups were experiencing analogous circumstances due to the difficult circumstances surrounding their departure from their places of origin and their limited acceptance in their places of settlement. Arguably however, the Jewish experience continued to influence his view of the vital importance of ‘homeland’ in defining one of the essential characteristics of diaspora. Members of a diaspora retained a collective memory of ‘their original homeland’, they idealized their ‘ancestral home’, they were committed to the restoration of ‘the original homeland’ and continued in various ways to ‘relate to that homeland’ (Safran 1991:83–4). While recognizing his path-breaking contribution, I was concerned at Safran’s overemphasis on ‘homeland’ and, in my extended list of a diaspora’s common features, added ‘the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host societies with a tolerance for pluralism’ (Cohen 1997:23, 26).

While the decoupling of diaspora from homeland was merely one option among several in my 1997 book, this rupture had taken a more insistent turn in Brah (1996:180), who dethroned the foundational idea of a homeland, arguing that ‘the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire, which is not the same thing as a desire for “homeland”’. So, homeland had become a homing desire and soon home itself became transmuted into an essentially placeless, though admittedly lyrical, space. As Brah (1996:192) explains:

Where is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day ...all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations.

Through this and similar interventions, ‘home’ became more and more generously interpreted to mean the place of origin, or the place of settlement, or a local, national or transnational place, or an imagined virtual community (linked, for example, through the internet), or a matrix of known experiences and intimate social relations (thus conforming to the popular expression that ‘home is where the heart is’).

Anthias (1998:577) upped the stakes further by criticizing a number of scholars (this writer included) for using what she described as ‘absolutist notions of “origin” and “true belonging”’. For her, diasporic discourse showed insufficient attention to internal divisions with ethnic communities or to the possibilities of selective cultural negotiations between communities:

...the lack of attention given to transethnic solidarities, such as those against racism, of class, of gender, of social movements, is deeply worrying from the

perspective of the development of multiculturalism, and more inclusive notions of belonging. For a discourse of antiracism and social mobilization of a transethnic (as opposed to a transnational) character, cannot be easily accommodated, within the discourse of the diaspora, where it retains its dependence on 'homeland' and 'origin', however configured (Anthias 1998:577).

Two years later Soysal (2000:1–2) amplified the charge. Despite the fact that notions of diaspora were 'venerated', they inappropriately 'privileg[ed] the nation-state model and nationally-defined formations when conversing about a global process such as immigration'. Post-war developments, Soysal (2000:2–3), maintained:

... render diaspora untenable as an analytical and normative category, and direct our discussion to new formations of membership, claims-making and belonging – which either remain invisible to the conventional conceptions of diaspora, or are frequently deemed insignificant in the face of its normative weight ... In this [erroneous] formulation, the primary orientation and attachment of diasporic populations is to their homelands and cultures; and their claims and citizenship practices arise from this home-bound ethnic-based orientation.

After her initial critique of diaspora, Soysal (2000:4–13) attended to her case of European citizenship, but she returned with a vengeance to her dislike of the concept of diaspora in a postscript, maintaining (2000:13) that the idea 'suspends immigrant experience between host and home countries, native and foreign lands, home-bound desires and losses – thus obscuring the new topography and practices of citizenship, which are multi-connected, multi-referential and postnational'.

It is doubtful whether the full weight of these critiques can be sustained in any close reading of work of the authors cited, but this is not the point. The crucial effect of these and similar appraisals of existing notions of diaspora was to force a larger and larger wedge between 'diaspora' on the one hand, and 'homeland', 'place' and 'ethnic community' on the other. Clearly for some authors – of whom Anthias and Soysal are good representatives – diaspora was irredeemably flawed. It simply could not do what they wanted – in Anthias's case, it could not produce a platform for a transethnic, gender-sensitive, anti-racist movement while, in Soysal's case, it could not provide a means of understanding post-national citizenship in Europe.

### **'Diaspora', your flexible friend**

Perhaps the simplest response to such critiques of diaspora would be to regard them as misplaced, as they reflect political agendas that have little to do with the history and meaning of the term, or the phenomena it sought to, and continues to, explain. As far as I can discern, the diaspora theorists cited made no claim to explain all forms of international migration, did not see their task as creating a progressive anti-racist movement (desirable as that may be), and did not seek to describe patterns of sociality unrelated to some degree of prior kinship. Unlike fossil fuels, there is no worldwide shortage of concepts and if diaspora does not work for any one purpose, my first impulse is to ask why other, more appropriate, concepts (like multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, interculturality, hybridity or, perhaps, creolization) cannot be deployed instead?

However, this would be too cantankerous a reaction and we are, in any case, locked into a paradox. Diaspora has become so 'venerated' (Soysal's expression), so

fashionable, so ‘highly-favored’ (Chariandy 2006) so ‘hip’ and so ‘in’ (Sökefeld 2006) that, like Procrustes, ‘diasporists’ have had to stretch short people, or cut off the limbs of long people, so they can fit them all into the proverbial iron bed. Pioneering scholars like Tölölyan (2005:138–9), who more or less constructed the field of diaspora studies, thus found themselves in a dilemma:

Diasporists shaped by globalizing discourse describe genuine erosions of the link between a bounded place and a people, diagnose it as irresistible, and quickly affirm its contribution to a pluralistic, multicultural, hybrid world of which they approve. Diasporists like myself, who want to argue that attachment to place was indispensable to diasporic life and thought until very recently, and that despite its erosion it remains important today, must tread carefully in order to avoid the charge that we are either imitating discredited nationalist rhetoric about the link between land, people, and culture, or that we remain naïve about the global spaces that have opened up in the past several decades.

Fortunately, diaspora seems much more of a flexible friend than Procrustes’s guests proved. By way of illustration, let me provide three examples from recent work by Safran, Sökefeld and Chariandy.

#### *Dezionization*

The first example of a more flexible use of conventional diasporic theory is by an established scholar of diasporas, Safran, whose work on the necessity of homeland has already been cited. Partly on the basis of recent attitudinal surveys, Safran now argues (2005:193–208) that in the case of Israel on the one hand, and European and American Jews on the other, the links between hostlands and homeland are becoming more tenuous. Those in the Jewish diaspora experiencing a process of ‘dezionization’ include groups he designates as secularists, socialists, potential investors in Israel, non-orthodox believers, enlightened Western Jews, left-wing ideologues, academics and others disillusioned with the expressions of Israeli state power. The other side of the coin is that (despite intermittent bursts of anti-Semitism) life in the diaspora is sufficiently attractive and sufficiently emotionally and physically secure not to prompt an invariable identification with Israel.

Intriguingly, proto-Zionists have also promoted summer camps when, in safe rural US settings, virtual *aliya* (migration ‘up’ to Israel) can take place, complete with Israeli flags, Hebrew lessons, religious rituals, imitations of life on a kibbutz and access to other attractive aspects of Israeli popular culture (Safran 2005:199–200). As Safran himself recognizes, the harder notion of homeland has now yielded to softer notions of a found home in the diaspora and to a virtual home in a summer camp – perhaps augmented by occasional visits to Israel rather than permanent settlement. I will add that the unexpected but considerable flow of Israelis to the USA and Europe (which attracts strong disapprobation by Zionists), has also fundamentally changed the relationship between homeland and hostlands (see Gold 2002).

#### *Diasporas and social movements*

My second example arises from the work of Sökefeld (2006) who, somewhat uncritically, accepts a number of the unsympathetic comments of the social constructionists, but

inverts their purpose. Instead of using intersubjectivity as a means for dethroning the concept of diaspora, he uses the same starting point for interrogating how diasporas can come into being and sustain themselves. He considers the formation of diasporas as 'a special case of ethnicity'. They are 'imagined transnational communities which unite segments of people that live in territorially separated locations'. Not all migrants will cohere into communities and not all migrant communities will imagine themselves as transnational, thus it is a fundamental error to allow the use of diaspora as a synonym for all migrants. A diasporic consciousness has, moreover, to be socially mobilized (i.e. constructed). A significant number of social actors need to accept their collective self-definition as a transnational community, organize to spread this perception and persuade others to participate in actions designed to cement their diasporic character and status.

Sökefeld then makes his most innovative theoretical intervention. While diasporas cannot simply be equated to social movements, there are sufficient parallels to use the social movement literature to gather insights on the formation of diasporas. In particular, diasporas need: (a) *opportunity structures* like an enhanced means of communication and a permissive legal and political environment; (b) *mobilizing practices* like neighborhood associations, demonstrations and fund-raising events; and (c) *frames* that allude to an idea of roots or the importance of memory in history, ideas which feed into the collective imagination of the group concerned. In other words, Sökefeld moves away from assigning particular attributes to particular ethnic groups and instead asks questions like: What events or developments propel a diasporic response? What agents undertake the dissemination of a diasporic discourse and foster a diasporic imaginary? What threats and opportunities unite people in transnational organization? Through these means, Sökefeld (2006) has injected a necessary dose of social science into debates that arguably have been too dominated by historians on the one hand and cultural studies theorists on the other.

### *Postcolonial diasporas*

My third and final example draws on the work of Chariandy (2006). Like some of the earlier critics cited, Chariandy has great expectations of the concept of diaspora, but unlike them, has not abandoned hope that it can be used to illuminate contemporary forms of progressive cultural politics. Although he recognizes that we are still 'struggling to develop adequate terms for the profound socio-cultural dislocations resulting from modern colonialism and nation building' he finds in diaspora the potential for showing how 'historically disenfranchised peoples have developed tactics to challenge their subordinate status'. Though initially assigning these aspirations to other scholars, it is clear that he too (2006 and personal correspondence) also sees a rosy future for diaspora studies:

In the past fifteen years, 'diaspora' has emerged as a highly favored term among scholars whom we might associate with contemporary postcolonial studies; and while there exists within the nebulous field of postcolonial studies no simple agreement on what diaspora is or does, scholars such as Paul Gilroy, Floya Anthias, Stuart Hall, Carole Boyce Davies, Rey Chow, Smaro Kamboureli, Diana Brydon, and Rinaldo Walcott all seem to share these hopes: that diaspora studies will help foreground the cultural practices of both forcefully exiled and voluntarily migrant peoples; that diaspora studies will help challenge certain calcified assumptions

about ethnic, racial, and above all, national belonging; and that diaspora studies will help forge new links between emergent critical methodologies and contemporary social justice movements.<sup>3</sup>

In Chariandy's progressive ambitions for postcolonial diaspora studies formerly designated 'third world' peoples can find some space to express their anti-nationalist, and radical political preferences and can even prefigure a utopian future. Yet he is sufficiently self-critical and dialectical to understand that the cosmopolitan voices of third-world intellectuals may be somewhat self-serving, and that 'the virtues of fluid and border-crossing identities are endorsed not only by radical scholars, but, sometimes, ever more earnestly, by the powers that be'. This last insight links the expression of a diasporic consciousness to the increased density and velocity of the circuits of capital (a process captured partly by the expression 'globalization'), without, however, suggesting that in some crude way diasporic intellectuals or communities are unwitting agents of capital.

As I have provided examples of the expanding use of the concept of diaspora we have seen how it can be adapted to at least some of the features hitherto captured by concepts of creolization and cosmopolitanism. Let us consider the work, or more accurately, *the implications of the work*, of Safran, Sökefeld and Chariandy in turn. If the Jewish diaspora is progressively becoming dezionized it is, by the same token, finding links, affinities and shared cultural and political associations in the hostlands. We could, of course, imagine pure enclave societies where diasporic groups were both dezionized *and* cut off from their surrounding communities. However, as is clear from Safran's comments about political participation and the growth of exogamy, many in the diaspora have adapted to a form of dual consciousness – poised between virtual Zionism and interculturality. For Sökefeld, diasporas have to be mobilized so, by inference, there are periods when they are not mobilized or perhaps circumstances when they became demobilized. In these two last cases forms of sociality with other communities are inevitable. Finally, for Chariandy a diasporic consciousness represents but one form of mobilization in a wider struggle to attain global social justice. Again the implication of crossover with other communities is clear and indeed he perhaps goes furthest in suggesting that diaspora can be made compatible with a cross-ethnic co-operative struggle by progressive forces and third world peoples of many different backgrounds.

While it is true that none of these three positions is an explicit endorsement of creolization (I do not think the word has issued from their word processors), they are all a long way from the idea that a diaspora is a single, endogamous, ethnic group with a fixed origin, a uniform history, a lifestyle cut off from their fellow citizens in their places of settlement and political aspirations wholly focused on their places of origin. Of course any such notion was a caricature invented by the social constructionists in the first place. However, the constructionists' barbs have been nonetheless been blunted by the apparently flexible character, rude good health and continuing heuristic value of the concept of diaspora.

### **A Creole diaspora: the oxymoronic case**

For much of this paper I have suggested that a diasporic consciousness as classically conceived is tendentially opposed to the process of creolization. However, as I prepared this paper I became more and more interested in what might be described as a Creole diaspora – an ostensibly oxymoronic category given my earlier arguments. However,

there are at least two cases where this seems to make some sense<sup>4</sup> and where (following Sökefeld's line of reasoning) there seems to be some mobilization of dispersed Creoles along diasporic lines:

*The Indian Ocean Creole diaspora*

My first case focuses on the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius (including its dependency Rodrigues), Réunion and the Seychelles. Mauritius is a Creole society *par excellence* insofar, as Vaughan (2005:2) explains, all its inhabitants are newcomers:

Without natives, the island's beginnings were necessarily the product of no one thing or people but of many, more or less foreign, more or less 'naturalized.' It has always been a Creole island. *Creole* is a notably slippery term, and its meaning in relation to Mauritius shifts historically, as we shall see. But here, by 'creole,' I simply mean that the island, without natives, has always been the product of multiple influences, multiple sources, which to differing degrees merge, take root, and 'naturalize' on this new soil.

As she later elaborates in her compelling account, Indo-Mauritians and Franco-Mauritians continued to retain a residual diasporic character, though the links with their homelands were attenuated by colonialism in the first case and the passing of the island to British control in the second. By contrast, those of African, Malagasy and other origins were generally fully creolized, while *all* Mauritians were able to establish a distinctive lifestyle, popular musical idiom and shared Creole language. What happens, however, when in the late twentieth century people from the named Indian islands start getting drawn into the global circuits of capital and labor mobility? A Creole identity is normally seen as an unstable, fluid and contingent. However, their consciousness had by this stage become sufficiently set, fixed and articulated so that the inhabitants of the identified Indian islands had become, in effect, a Creole nation or nation-in-formation (if not quite an indigenous people). It is thus not at all surprising to find websites in Australia and elsewhere calling on the loyalties of Indian island Creoles to mobilize for common social, cultural and political purposes. Here is one description by a Creole activist:

The Creole Diaspora of Australia is composed mainly of those coming from Mauritius, the Seychelles and Rodrigues. There could be a handful coming from Réunion Island or other Creole islands of the Pacific like Haiti and the West Indies [sic]. ...The Creoles in Australia through the years have kept strong ties with their motherland mainly because they still have relatives over there. It is also a fact that they have kept most of their traditions and culture as most of them came as adults. In view of this situation the children, even born in Australia, have naturally acquired most of the Creole way of life. The community-based activities like balls, fancy-fairs, sports, social gatherings, etc, have also helped to keep a strong support in this direction (Lamare 2006).

Even though Lamare is apparently under the impression that Haiti and the West Indies are in the Pacific, this has not inhibited him from making links with the International Creole Organization which promotes 'the unity of Creoles all over the world and for the promotion of the Creole language and culture' (Lamare 2006).

### *The New Orleans Creole diaspora*

My second example is much closer to where we now sit and arises from the forcible displacement of the Creole community in New Orleans as a result of hurricanes Rita and Katrina. Much of the community is unlikely to return given the adverse ecology of the city and the clear determination of the authorities to favor the high ground where the old tourist haunts and predominantly white society can be reconstituted. Although there has been a lively debate on the internet about whether the expressions ‘refugees’, ‘displacees’ or ‘evacees’ are appropriate descriptions of those forced to leave New Orleans (the first is particularly resented), the notion of a ‘Creole diaspora’ is increasingly being used to describe those dispersed to Houston (approximately 250,000 people) and to other areas of Louisiana like Baton Rouge and Cane River-Natchitoches and to other states. Saulny (2005) suggests about 30,000-60,000 of the people of New Orleans considered themselves Creoles excluding those who were strongly influenced by Creole cultural pursuits (like Creole food, music, architecture and the Mardi Gras). While the tone of many interviews are cast in tragic diasporic terms (stressing loss, exile, despair, suffering), the fate of those forced to leave New Orleans has also occasioned a strong degree of militancy from radical sympathizers. Here is one sample:

New Orleans and the Gulf belong to its people, the Creole Diaspora and the survivors, not to an ideology or market. So much of what they owned has been destroyed or is now being taken away. They are our brothers and sisters, and they are beseeching us, crying for our help. That is not easy, they are proud people. Let’s help them re-build the Big Easy and Gulf. Let’s help them re-claim their home and hope. As the Commander Robert Gould Shaw said in the movie Glory, ‘We fight for men and women whose poetry is not yet written.’ This is a good fight, a fight for the future. We all own this fight (Croft 2005).

### **Conclusion**

Can I be permitted to make an autobiographical intervention, which may clarify my position? For me, an interest in cosmopolitanism (see Vertovec and Cohen 2002) and creolization was alternative and parallel to my earlier interest in diasporas. I was not particularly swayed by the negative comments of some of the social constructionists about the limits of the concept of diaspora, as I had always thought that a diasporic identity was one among several possible outcomes for those seeking to define or redefine their self-conceptions, cultural identities or political trajectories in the face of the challenges arising from globalization and other rapid social changes. The five major possibilities are:

- A reaffirmation of felt (i.e. invented) primordial loyalties to *sub-national units* like tribe, ethnicity, language group, region or locality;
- a recasting of *supranational identities* like diasporas, world religions and world language groups (for example, francophonie);
- a revival of *nationalism*, particularly in the wake of the break-up of the Soviet Union, the fragmentation of the Balkans and the appeals to national solidarity after the terrorist incidents of recent years;
- a linking and blending with other groups through a process of *creolization*; and

- the development of a universal spirit that transcended any particularities and simply stressed the quality of being human, i.e. the *cosmopolitan* possibility.

Of course any notion that these were watertight logical alternatives was naïve, though I had to write this paper to see quite how naïve it was. Diaspora and creolization do tend in opposite directions, the one to a recovery of a past identity in reconstituting a transnational link, the other to a severance of past identities in the interests of establishing a new cultural and social identity. Having probed the contours and limits of a diasporic identity I was attracted the new challenge of examine ‘hybridized webs of meaning’ (Hannerz’s phrase) where people were drawn together by common aspirations and situations, which tended to reduce their transnational ethnic identities and diasporic links with home. I therefore found it somewhat of a surprise to find that diaspora was being used for situations and socialities for which creolization (or perhaps hybridity) seemed to be more fit-for-purpose.

In the course of writing this paper I have somewhat changed my mind and see that discussions of diaspora and creolization can to some degree become compatible. In particular, I have been influenced by the flexible use of the notion of diaspora which has rendered it valuable for considering intermediate and more ambiguous forms of social mobilization. Despite this, the two concepts cannot be used interchangeably. In some settings, creolization has, in effect, triumphed over diaspora. I alluded to the case of District Six in the Cape (Soudien 2001), referred to the virtually complete creolization of the Indian Ocean islands, and described the movement of Créolité in the francophone Caribbean (which has eclipsed the diasporic Négritude movement). In other settings, there are simultaneous processes of creolization and diasporization. The relative strength of each will turn on external variables and the extent of mobilization of the group concerned towards one or other trajectory. We can even imagine a situationalist logic where an oscillation between creolization and diaspora occurs according to context. Finally, have shown that despite an initial incredulity at this possibility, Creoles seemingly can themselves form diasporas. ‘Creolistas’ and ‘diasporists’ also probably share something less tangible and more idealistic. They probably both believe that global justice requires that people’s languages, religions, attitudes, behavior and social conventions are respected and given space to develop. Where there is no self-expression, we have only a poverty of creativity and of the imagination. Expanded uses of diaspora, and certainly creolization, demonstrate that people thrive not by getting stuck in fixed quasi-racial identities, but at the nodes and connection points where new ideas and original inventiveness are developed. As Derek Walcott famously declared, ‘No nation, but the imagination’.

### Note

1. I do not want to get too diverted into a rather local debate, but I need to qualify this celebration of the possibilities of a superseding form of creolization. It is not the case that Mandela himself, the architect of popular post-apartheid ideology, ever advocated creolization. He preferred the language of a ‘rainbow nation’ marked by respect for difference and equality of regard for all ‘peoples’. Placing a reconstituted creolized identity at the foundation of the new South Africa would have been threatening to some (by no means all) African groups that retained strong ethnic identities (for example, the

Zulu Inkatha movement) and perhaps also to some whites. The African National Congress needed to keep both on board to ensure a minimum of violence.

2. I have used the expression 'social constructionist' to signify a mode of reasoning, closely associated with post-modernism, which suggests that reality is determined by social interaction (or intersubjectivity), rather than by objectivity (a natural or material world) or by subjectivity (individual perceptions).

3. I have yet to examine the writing of all the authors mentioned by Chariandy but, as indicated earlier, I disagree with his portrayal of Floya Anthias who does not, it seems clear to me, share his hopes for the libratory possibilities of the concept of diaspora.

4. The Cape Verde islands, Sierra Leone (and other places – the Caribbean archipelago?) may also be seen as having generated Creole diasporas, but space forbids extending my already too long paper even further.

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### **Author biography**

**Robin Cohen** is ESRC Professorial Research Fellow and Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick. He has held full-time appointments at the Universities of Ibadan, Birmingham, Cape Town and the West Indies and sessional appointments at Stanford, Toronto and Berkeley. His books include: *Endgame in South Africa?* (1986), *The new helots: migrants in the international division of labour* (1987, 1993, 2003), *Contested domains: debates in international labour studies* (1991), *Frontiers of identity* (1994), *Global diasporas: an introduction* (1997, 1999, 2001, 2004) *Global sociology* (co-author, 2000, 2001 rev. 2007) and *Migration and its enemies* (2006). He has written, edited or co-edited 20 further volumes. His major works have been translated into Danish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Portuguese and Spanish. He has recently commenced a three-year research program on creolization, some results of which will shortly be posted at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/cscs/>.

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