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2021

## The (French) Creole Turn?

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### Recommended Citation

Gosnell, Jonathan, "The (French) Creole Turn?" (2021). French Studies: Faculty Publications, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

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## “The (French) Creole Turn?”

*“No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points ...”* (Said 1993, 336)

What is creolization, or more accurately what are creolizations? They are linguistic, cultural, political, social, economic. Noun and adjective forms refer to objects, people and ideas that are native, authentic, even superior. Creole can be read as a sequence of signs, symbols, notes, a language of communication. The *Dictionary of Louisiana French* edited by Albert Valdman offers at least seven different definitions, representing the Cajun, Creole and Native American populations and perspectives of South Louisiana that communicated in French (2009, 171). Since the Portuguese began to use the term in the sixteenth century, Creole has suggested a marriage of old and new, of elements of the *Vieux Continent* transformed in the so-called New World. Creolization constructs a bridge between peoples, places, cultures; cultural access leading to new original creations. It is unmoored, ever changing, and in this sense, it is distinct according to philosopher Édouard Glissant from the notion of “créolité” which is more fixed as a theory of scientific thought (Glissant, Diawara, Winks 2011, 7). We will return to this distinction later.

“La créolisation est imprévisible, elle ne saurait se figer, s’arrêter, s’inscrire dans des essences, dans des absolus identitaires” (Glissant 1997, 26). To be Creole is to be one and many simultaneously; it evokes a multiplicity of perspectives. The improvisational nature of creolization suggests its inherent musicality and ephemeral nature, expressed through voice,

instruments, styles, periods. Glissant believed jazz to be the musical embodiment of creolization, associating it explicitly with American cultural production (Munro, Britton 2012, 166). Creolization is necessarily transgressive, unsettling, fleeting even, although jazz recordings lastingly capture these sensations. An exemplary manifestation of creole identity can be located in traditional French music in Louisiana, in the melancholic voice and sound of Canray Fontenot on the fiddle or Nathan Abshire, a student of legendary Amédé Ardoin, singing a standard from the traditional French repertoire while playing the accordion. Joshua Clegg Caffery examines the creolized blues country tradition in rural Louisiana. “Although scholarship abounds on the creolized contemporary genres of Louisiana music” Caffery contends, “.... we know very little about the elements of those creolizations or how they fit into broader patterns of transatlantic cultural evolution and change” (2013, 2). Researchers are called to investigate.

Creolizations are of course particularly prolific in the colonial setting where peoples and cultures clashed. “La créolisation est la mise en contact de plusieurs cultures ou au moins de plusieurs éléments de cultures distinctes, dans un endroit du monde, avec pour résultante une donnée nouvelle, totalement imprévisible par rapport à la somme ou à la simple synthèse de ces éléments,” wrote Glissant (1997, 37). “As a cultural identity, ‘Creole’ seems to be definable only as a shifting set of differential terms which depend upon the particular context: French-versus English -speaking, mixed race versus either black or white, culturally as opposed to biologically defined racial identity” claim Martin Munro and Celia Britton, editors of *American Creoles* (2012, 5). They seem to suggest that inherently *French* creolizations are distinct from American forms. Thomas Bender noted the important role that Atlantic or American Creoles, a seeming contradiction in terms, played in global transactions historically. “These American

cultural brokers, like Africans, had to be linguistically agile, culturally adaptable, with a head for business and a cosmopolitan understanding of markets and goods” (2006, 49).

Scholars have recently remarked a (re)worlding of France, public recognition of a singular country profoundly shaped by global exchange, or creolization. One might think this a revolutionary notion given the longstanding political establishment in Paris, one staunchly *républicain*, from both left and right worldviews. Yet it is far from altogether new. Global currents within France are nothing out of the ordinary to specialists who have been studying trans- or international influences in the modern French nation from its origins. More than twenty years ago, historians Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler contended that “the ‘nation-state’ has become too centered in conceptions of European history since the late eighteenth century and ‘Empire’ not centered enough” (1997, 22). Today, much ado has been made of a 2017 non-nationalist rewriting of the history of the French nation, *Histoire mondiale de la France*, entitled *France in the World: A New Global History* in its 2019 English translation. *Histoire mondiale de la France* became an immediate bestseller in France and the later translation edited by Stéphane Gerson has attained similar accolades in academia and the press, if not sales.

French editor Patrick Boucheron and his team of purposefully assembled specialists write deliberately against the grain, against the republican ethos that shaped so much of contemporary cultural production in the Hexagon since 1789. They intended to produce a manuscript quickly in an effort to address underlying causes of the terrorist attacks carried out in Paris in 2015. The publication represented an internationalist response to rising nationalism in Europe, a conscious effort not to retreat from the world but rather to underscore the French nation’s place within it. The book described France not as a fixed or static entity but rather a continually evolving

project. Boucheron chose as introduction a statement from a Jules Michelet text, *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* (1831) which asserts, chauvinistically, that it could *only* take an entire world to create a country such as France.

I would like to suggest that a 21<sup>st</sup>-century reconsideration of this relationship indicates that something perhaps less chauvinistic may be afoot in France and other places, a belated and more pronounced acknowledgment of France's worldliness, its *bouillonnement de cultures*, of long extant but obscured creolizations within its borders. This recognition may provide a palliative as the country grapples for a sense of unity in an increasingly fragmented environment. For creolization is of France and the world; it invites one into a "France-monde," it recognizes the world in order to further understand the development of French cultural influence, its global *rayonnement*. The French set out to explore and conquer the world, albeit later and more hesitantly than some colonial powers, but nonetheless it is only fitting that the world increasingly become visible within *la Métropole*. While kings, presidents, political spokespersons, cultural ambassadors, poets and other prophets have long articulated French contributions to the world, the scholarly community is still, it seems, processing the idea that the world has had something quite substantial to convey of the complexities that make up "exceptional" and linear nations like modern France, and the United States for that manner as well. They are less so than one might think, more the product of global stimuli. The re-reading and re-writing of the "French" and "American" nations continue. This article suggests that in-depth study of contemporary French and Francophone cultures elucidates pervasive contact with the world. The study begins with some overarching analysis before moving on to more concrete examples of creolization.

It is notable that after *littérature-monde* and *culture-monde*, two of many such ideas that researchers have been interrogating in recent years, a group - a third of whom are women, and

including many young historians, social scientists and literary scholars, only a very small number of whom might be identified as Anglo-American - announced the arrival of an *histoire-monde* in French. This suggests that the “national” literatures, cultures and histories of constructs like France are shaped by widespread intervention in many different parts of the globe. And resultingly, “national” strictly speaking extends far beyond the physical and artificial borders that constitute the modern state, into the global stratosphere. Processes such as these follow in the footsteps of Édouard Glissant and his theory of the *Tout-Monde*, a fundamentally unstable transnational phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> “J’appelle *Chaos-monde* le choc actuel de tant de cultures qui s’embrasent, se repoussent, subsistent pourtant, s’endorment ou se transforment, lentement ou à vitesse foudroyante...” stated Glissant in *Traité du Tout-Monde*, “... ces éclats, ces éclatements dont nous n’avons pas commencé de saisir le principe ni l’économie et dont nous ne pouvons pas prévoir l’emportement. Le Tout-Monde, qui est totalisant, n’est pas (pour nous) total” (1997, 22). The worlds as we experience them are, rather, splintered. Glissant added that it is the *Poétique de la Relation* that allows one to better comprehend the contours of a perpetually evolving yet interconnected *Chaos-monde* (1997, 22).

France and other imperial powers have intensified global cultural diffusion by conducting national operations at great distances from home. Critical work has shown why France projected herself and culture out into an unsuspecting world. One justification for Empire and for French presence in many different parts of the globe was that France offered a supposedly universal expression of civilization to all for assimilation. As an Empire of Liberty, a Civilizing Mission, *Marianne* represented a global manifestation of France’s republican ideology and generosity. The same could be said about American Empire and rapid expansion into the West. Empire is at the heart of the French and American national projects of forward, “progressive” movement,

efforts that appropriated vast tracts of land into the national body and subjugated indigenous as well as enslaved populations. The distinct story of France in the Americas, at its core, traces ambiguous and often uneasy creolizations that coalesced over time.

The Enlightenment in France led predictably and inevitably to Revolution and hence to the establishment of freedoms that could be applied theoretically (and forcibly) to all. The historical record indicates that things were not all that they seemed to individuals who were both *colonialist* and *republican*, ideologies that might seem mutually exclusive to some but that were fully legitimate to others. Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, in *Discours sur le colonialisme* asserted that universalism taken to its logical extreme led to the Final Solution and the slaughter of “lesser” by “superior” Man (1989, 13-20). An anti-capitalist humanist, Césaire linked *colonisation, deshumanisation, chosification, and extermination* in sequential order. This is not the only possible outcome of the imperial project. The Haitian Revolution provided a telling example of global exchange and the creation of thoroughly creolized people and ideas in the Americas. Toussaint Louverture, well-schooled in the rhetoric of the revolution, led insurgents in Saint-Domingue to the establishment of the first Black Republic in 1804. This example demonstrates that creolizations can constitute new (bloody) beginnings as well as endings. Thomas Bender acknowledged the particular significance of the Haitian Revolution, one of the most violent and evocative of French creolizations. “The Haitians thus forced a practical universality onto the universalist rhetoric of the French Revolution, expanding the meaning of the French claims, and making their own revolution the most radical of all” (2006, 96).

Charles Forsdick and Jennifer Yee have argued persuasively that the postcoloniality of the French Nineteenth Century requires further *international* study, and Saint-Domingue or Haiti is at the center of this movement. The 2018 special issue of *French Studies* that they edit “ ...

stressed the continued pertinence of a postcolonial approach, especially in the context of an increasing ‘globalization’ of French literary history. Nineteenth-century literature, too, must be read in the light of *littérature-monde ...*” (174). If one were to further “postcolonialize” the nineteenth century, investigating cultural objects, authors, particular areas, media discourse and literary texts among other things, the result would most certainly be more worldly, creolized knowledge. It would be transnational, intercultural, interdisciplinary, multilingual, and perhaps even truly popular, representative of not just elite socio-economic groups.

Historian Tyler Stovall’s 2015 school textbook makes the case for a *Transnational France*: “Republican universalism emphasized the global influence of French culture and identity, but that culture was equally a product of global interventions” (474). While problematic, this notion of republican universalism has played a decisive role in the making of modern France, the author contends. So-called “universal” reform, however, such as suffrage in 1848 in France, applied only to a fraction of the population, excluding groups like women. Françoise Vergès contends that “pour les féminismes de politique décoloniale en France, l’analyse de la colonialité républicaine française reste centrale. C’est une colonialité qui a en héritage le partage du monde que l’Europe a tracé au XVIe siècle et qu’elle n’a eu de cesse de réaffirmer en utilisant le glaive, la plume, la foi, le fouet, la torture, la menace, la loi, le texte, la peinture puis la philosophie et le cinéma” (2019, 28). French “colonialité” has resulted in the need for continued study to acknowledge invisible social groups such as working women of color.

As Boucheron stipulates in the introduction to *Histoire*, “... on lira ici une histoire mondiale de la France et non pas une histoire de la France mondiale: nous n’avons nulle intention de suivre l’expansion au long cours d’une France mondialisée pour exalter l’essor glorieux d’une nation vouée à l’universel, pas plus que nous souhaitons chanter les louanges des



métissages heureux et des circulations fécondantes” (2017, 13). Both editor and contributors have other fish to fry, so to speak. One should note here that creolizations have become politicized to the extent that we are consumed today with either celebrating, denouncing or even ignoring them instead of simply acknowledging their existence. It should be obvious but perhaps it is worth repeating that creolizations simply *are* beyond whatever we happen to make of them at any particular point in time. While the “new” global history calls attention to ancient as well as very recent developments that have served to give shape to an intercultural and postcolonial France, it underlines that transformation has been particularly prevalent in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Contemporary moments of transformation have inspired a reexamination of France’s creolized past and present.

A great deal of critical writing emerged in the aftermath of the 2005 riots in the suburbs of Paris, as intellectuals questioned long accepted national myths. Many in the historical community rejected politicized efforts at the time to encourage more “positive” interpretations of the colonial past in North Africa. The National Museum on the History of Immigration (2007) affirmed that cultural contact and mixing (i.e. creolization) were in fact at the core of the French republican project (Gerson 2019, xxv). “By approaching the subject from the open sea (so to speak), by catching the élan of a historiography driven by strong, fresh winds, it [*France in the world*] seeks to *recover the diversity of France*,” (my emphasis) states Gerson (2019, xxxii). To recover diversity of course suggests that it has been lost, which begs the question, by whom, when, why? Study of France’s creolized roots may prove useful in the current search for answers. George Floyd’s killing in May 2020 pushed Black Lives Matter activists into the streets in France and produced a heightened desire to interrogate the taboo subject of race in French society (Onishi 14 July 2020). The 1619 Project launched by the *New York Times* attempts to

demonstrate the extent to which African enslavement and settlement in the Americas, dating back 400 years, has permanently creolized contemporary American cultures (Hannah-Jones, Stewart, 2019).

The suggestive use of *ouverture* (Boucheron 2017, 7) and *overture* (Gerson 2019, xxxi) at the outset to readers on either side of the Atlantic Ocean foretells novel approaches. These terms reflect, respectively, distinct French-American perspectives ranging from a general sense of openness to evolution and acknowledged realities, to the prologue of a distinctly French symphony of competing and complementary peoples, traditions, ideas. They signal the beginning of increasingly creolized tomorrows. Writing that is both *ouverture* and *overture* is most certainly creolized in theory and form, moreover, conceived strategically as jargon-free, placing authors in the public square, where French intellectuals long lingered, inviting inquiry and investigation within and without the Ivory Tower. Might a newly acknowledged creolization in the French-speaking world be of service, if only to promote awareness of varied French influences far beyond Paris (peripheries long labeled a *désert*)? Can one speak of a Creole Turn today, following earlier Francophone and Postcolonial Turns in French Studies, affording scholars new vantage points from which to address subjects and offer new interpretations?<sup>2</sup>

The publication of French and English-language reflections on Global France take inspiration from Thomas Bender's *A Nation Among Nations. America's place in World History*. Bender suggested that we replace the nationalist narrative that so clearly marked the historiography of the American revolutionary trajectory with an oceanic perspective. It is an imperative in fact to understanding the larger forces that have given shape to the American experiment, he argues. The worldwide exchanges that influenced their national narratives go beyond the Atlantic world that lay between them. Oceanic thinking places each nation in

relation to forces, currents, shifts taking place simultaneously in other parts, in Africa and Asia notably. The French Indian and Pacific represent intriguing sites of ongoing critical inquiry. The Mediterranean basin is an ancient and paradigmatic site of creolizations, as noted by the editors of *French Mediterraneans*. Patricia Lorcin and Todd Shepard contend that “Mediterranean perspectives ... reposition current arguments that modern French history must be understood as transnational and imperial” (2016, 1). According to Édouard Glissant, “La pensée archipélique convient à l’allure de nos mondes. Elle en emprunte l’ambigu, le fragile, le dérivé” (1997, 31). Archipelagic thought helps to explain common creolizations on distant shores.

Québécois scholar Gérard Bouchard asks if the nation as it has traditionally been defined will have prolonged bearing today, in the twenty-first century, in the globalized, interconnected era of new technologies and transnational commerce, travel and exchange (and contamination) that have rapidly transformed the globe (2019, 8). Influential new nations like South Korea have emerged through savvy manipulation of global trends and commerce (Hong 2014, 98). It is curious that archipelagic thought has even entered into cultural channels being explored in landlocked francophone nations such as Switzerland (Kuntz 2013, 15).<sup>3</sup> “If we can begin to think about American history as a local instance of a general history, as one history among others,” writes Bender, “not only will historical knowledge be improved, but the cultural foundations of a *needed* (my emphasis) cosmopolitanism will be enhanced” (2006, 14). Bender may have had more of an invested agenda than Boucheron in calling attention to a not only extant but necessary creolization and worldliness.

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It is certainly not surprising that creolizations are prevalent in the French world, although they are not exclusive to the region. This has something to do with the particularities of

traditional French democratic Catholic cultures and early modern French perspectives on race and the relationships permissible between them (the *Code Noir* being a case in point). Oddly, yet quite logically within the historical context, creolizations remain obscure in metropolitan France; they are both everywhere and nowhere. Might attention to creolization allow the French to recognize difference, recognize more fully the world, not just in former colonies but within France itself, in the *banlieues* for instance? The French have long been unwilling to recognize socio-economic and cultural ghettos in enclaves on the outskirts of French cities (ghettos being a racialized American phenomenon). This blind spot is curious for the French ghetto historically has not been restricted to any particular ethnicity or religion but has been made up of various disenfranchised groups at different times. This is quite visible in the recent French film *Les Misérables* in which a motley crew of police officers and immigrant youth clash in the suburban housing projects, another in a long line of *banlieue* films dating back to the 1990s (Nossiter 6 December 2019). As a nineteenth-century novel, twentieth-century Broadway musical, and twenty-first century docudrama, *Les Misérables* reminds that while it is indeed important to examine the external forces that have shaped the French (and American) nation, we must also look at its fragile and volatile urban interior where they have been warehoused. Otherwise according to journalist Chris Hayes, geographically and racially defined colonies, fester within the American nation, threatening the republic itself (2017, 30-35). Fear of creating rival nations with the predominant French nation has long been a part of the reason (or excuse) not to recognize cultural difference.

Among scholars faced with understanding a French crisis, there is perhaps more willingness and indeed urgency to see exclusion, marginality as well as color now (*overture* and *overture*) instead of feigning blindness. This despite the fact that difference still cannot be

recorded legally in France, making the work of researchers all the more difficult. It has been the project of Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Françoise Vergès and others, to recognize, nonetheless, the colonial, the foreign, the myriad global experiences located within France, or *La République coloniale*. This watershed publication led subsequently to many related studies of colonial, postcolonial, overseas and transnational France in the U.S. and Canada, the U.K. and France among other places. It might indeed take a collective effort, a world in order to recognize the different components that make up France!

French President Emmanuel Macron stated publicly in 2019 during the 75th anniversary of the allied invasion of Provence in August 1944, that France is other, worldly, and expressly African. “La France a une part d’Afrique en elle... Sur ce sol de Provence, cette part fut celle du sang versé. Nous devons être fiers et ne jamais l’oublier” (Faye 15 août 2019). Few of the famously and mythically brazen *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* (who were also *Algérien* and *Vietnamien*) have been sufficiently acknowledged for their military service during both world wars of the twentieth century. We are still untangling the colonial rhetoric of Frenchness proclaimed in wartime, without delivery on the promise of citizenship rights to colonial soldiers. 70% of the troops that fought to drive the Germans out of the South of France were from the French colonies. “C’est Nous les Africains” is more than a colonialist musical refrain; it is a part of the historical record of the French Resistance. It speaks to realities that have long been ignored.

*L’Amérique française*, a subject of personal scholarly interest, is very much a product of such creolization, of improvisation even, yet as a whole, Édouard Glissant was not convinced of America’s creolized state. “Pays de multiculturalisme, les États-Unis ne sont pas un pays de créolisation, *pas encore* (my emphasis),” the theorist wrote (39). The Balkanization of cultural and ethnic groups in the United States presumably impeded real creolization. One wonders if

Glissant, now departed, had an inkling about a future American evolution. We have seen that while creolization as a concept or process might be considered unstable, it is also an idealized state. It is difficult to imagine Frenchness in North America without violent yet enduring and culturally vital exchange. Cécile Vidal's *Louisiana at the Crossroads* underscores the most creolized of French experiences in the United States. Africa, Europe and Indigenous traditions come together here more substantially than in other places in North America; slaves, free French people of color, French émigrés, indigenous populations all collided in this contested space. J. Michael Dash detected a creolizing salve in *The Other America: "A New World Perspective is not the product of a polarizing, exclusivist politics or an attempt to create a new cultural enclave, but rather concerns itself with establishing new connections, not only among the islands of the [Caribbean] archipelago but also exploring the region in terms of the Césairean image of that frail, delicate umbilical cord that holds the Americas together"* (1998, 3).

The late French Cajun folklorist Richard Guidry stated that all indigenous and immigrant groups in the Gulf region, as well as their descendants, were Creoles due to common experiences and shared cultural expressions. Isolation and extreme poverty marked all populations within French Louisiana, and produced a predominantly oral set of traditions. Often lacking a formal education, French Creoles in South Louisiana spoke or sang Cajun French and Cajuns sometimes conversed in Louisiana Creole in the bayous and on the prairies, even if many were unable to write it. African and Native American populations intermingled extensively, prompting efforts to reduce contact, for creolization could be dangerous to the status quo. Deported Acadian migrants mimicked indigenous words, agriculture, foodways, travel and war in order to survive following their arrival in Louisiana after the *Grand Dérangement* of 1755. The Houma Nation

as well as other First Nations continue to be native French speakers, asserts historian Carl Brasseaux, a lasting sign of linguistic creolization.

The poetic vein is particularly strong within French diasporic populations, giving voice to marginalized experiences in the Gulf South. Debbie Clifton records verse in Louisiana Creole, adapting an oral medium to written form, as does Kirby Jambon, a Cajun poet recognized by the *Académie Française*. They are just two representatives of generations of French poets who transmit creolized cultures. “On est tous dans le même bateau,” writes Jambon in his first book of poems *L'École Gombo*, “soit les navires de déportation, d’exploration ou d’esclavage. On a tous passé à travers. On le fait aeteur. On le ferait encore...” (2006, 147-149). A common trajectory of course did not prevent a cultural divide from forming between Louisiana Cajuns and Creoles. We witness tensions even among Acadian or Cajun groups in the monologues written by Richard Guidry. A Cajun/Acadian who put on airs of superiority might be accused of being Creole, “... eune de ces Créoles d’au ras d’la Ville qui voulont pas qu’ça souaye dit qu’i’ sont Cadjins” (1982, 2-3). Such notions, even derogatory, relay the echo of urbane and elite creole culture of nineteenth-century New Orleans. Historically, it is interesting to note that black populations in the Americas borrowed and adapted the term creole from white groups (who were not happy about it). And Black Creoles set themselves apart from enslaved populations after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1865. Fast forward one hundred years and the Civil Rights movement erased some Black Creole distinctions. French Creole carried less cultural capital in an era of Anglo Black Power (Brasseaux, Fontenot, Oubre 1994, 124-5). It is noteworthy that creolization tends to break down barriers in some areas while also creating new ones. Creoles historically occupying the middle ground promoted communication and community, and all the while constituted French distinction to some degree in North America.

“Créolité” provides an important and distinct framework for understanding the French experiences of the Americas. As we have seen, Glissant acknowledged its singularity. “La Créolité est une annihilation de la fausse universalité, du monolinguisme et de la pureté,” write Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, authors of *Éloge de la créolité* (1989, 28). They see “Créolité,” heterogenous and inclusive, as something distinct from “américanité” which they find more homogeneous and exclusive (28-30). As members of the African diaspora in the French Antilles, the authors assert a regionally specific identity: “nous nous déclarons Créoles” (14). They do not reject Africanness, but see it rather as a point of departure (17-8). Others later adopted “Créolité” as a theory to explain the French *métissages* of the last few centuries in the Americas and elsewhere. There are captivating parallels as well as tensions between American and Creole identities to consider. Notions of “créolité” and “américanité” connect in some ways Quebec to the North with the South of the American continent, or the North of the Caribbean. Quebecers occupy a kind of creolized middle ground between old and new worlds. Thomas Bender wrote that “an essential part of American national identity is based on difference, on a tendency to define America as distinct from, even separate from, all that is foreign, whether Europe or those of the world Americans unself-consciously called ‘uncivilized’ or ‘savage’” (2006, 182). Yet, *American Créoles*, in their transnational displacement and commercial exchanges, effectively erased these distinctions.

For some elites in modern Quebec, a danger lay in the recognition of a pervasive American identity because “américanité” led inevitably to Americanization and to the loss of Frenchness. *Américanité* without Americanization was impossible, stated Joseph-Yvon Thériault in his *Critique de l’Américanité* (2002, 29). The Québécois intelligentsia may still debate not only the characteristics but the very existence of a “francophonie de type



américain” decades after discussion began (Lamonde, Bouchard 1995, 11). Even some critics of the notion such as Thériault admit its accuracy nonetheless in describing the French population of the New World. Bouchard referred to the French family of North America as an amalgamation, creolized certainly, but only to a certain extent. He saw much homogeneity and little evidence of large-scale inclusion of indigenous (or enslaved) cultures in the North America, particularly in comparison to Latin America (2000, 68, 90-1). The ideal of *la Survivance*, the preservation of French language, traditions and faith, long prevented any open acknowledgment, acceptance or encouragement of creolizations, for they were strictly taboo. Bouchard noted the unique features of Frenchness in the Americas, marked by not just one but two successive imperial overlords, France followed by Britain. He identified rupture and continuity as equally important parts of the French American experiment (174). France, and Europe, harbingers of Enlightenment, Revolution and modernity, have long been *the* cultural source of reference for elites. America by contrast could only be a derivative, its youth, its improvisation a weakness, a default. Bouchard noted that “plusieurs parmi les lettrés réprouvaient cette libre fréquentation de l’Amérique, ce tutoiement du Nouveau Monde. Ceux-là voyaient dans l’américanité non pas le terreau d’une culture originale, mais les eaux troubles d’une contamination” (152). For the elders preaching the gospel of *la Survivance*, intimate American contact was to be avoided.

In *Québécois et Américains*, Yvan Lamonde and Gérard Bouchard summarized a half-century of on-going debate: “... par américanité, on entend donc ici les nouvelles formes culturelles qui se sont mises en place depuis le XVIIe siècle à la suite des transferts migratoires de l’Europe vers les Amériques et reflètent la somme des ruptures, des processus de différenciation (par invention, adaptation) et des projets de recommencement collectif caractéristiques de plusieurs collectivités neuves” (1995, 8). Newer models of *américanité* must

surely be less European or white, less Christian, more representative of both historic and contemporary migrations and mixing? They should necessarily be inclusive, for instance, of Caribbean migrations toward the United States and Canada. Can one disentangle *américanité* from the overall or more general process of Americanization? The two are certainly not synonymous. Different readings of America might also be identified through better understanding of pervasive “métissages” with First Nations too long ignored in Canada. Has the umbilical cord with France and Europe been cut? Must it? Is a reexamination of *Américanité* necessary, as the cited researchers have stated? Québécois scholars have noted the trend toward the study of cultural “mestizaje” in Mexico, Colombia or other American locales. While we know full well that the transnationalization or postcolonialization of the United States and other nations is underway, there is a need for further study of American Creoles. Many *Québécois* probably still don’t identify easily as Americans per se as this label remains closely associated with the United States. Jocelyn Letourneau evoked a notion of “post-américanité” in Theriault’s *Critique* two decades ago (2002, 214) and continues to analyze *La Condition québécoise* today (2020). Readers can refer to *Francophonies Nord-Américaines* for contemporary perspectives on on-going research (Martineau, Boudreau, Frenette, Gadet 2018).

One might think that twenty-first century *Américanité* would not only be more acknowledged today but also that it would not replicate Franco-French debates, that it might be less susceptible to metropolitan French particularities. Yet Québécois cultural elites fall into the same impasse, interestingly, as traditional republican French of continental France, that is to say they find themselves confronted with the impossibility of being both simultaneously French and other (American in the New World context). The one could only, inevitably, lead to the downfall of the other according to scholars. Franco-Americans however, especially second and

successive generations, have not been as affected by this existential problem. As native-born Americans growing up (partially in French) in French-Canadian neighborhoods in industrial New England, they assertively occupied this ambiguous space, oscillating between American and “French,” as defined on the American continent. The term “Franco-American” first appeared at the end of the nineteenth century and people have identified more as Franco than American at different times (Brault 1986, 68). “Francos” defended their right to be both while also shifting to an increasingly Americanized cultural state over the twentieth century.

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Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant described American identity specifically as “... l’adaptation progressive de populations du monde occidental aux réalités naturelles du monde qu’elles baptisèrent nouveau” (1989, 30). This does not seem so very different from creolized identities. While some consider Creole to be a label emphasizing unique qualities, despite the linkages established, contemporary notions of Americanness convey a typical or indistinguishable quality. A lingering social, cultural and geographic stratification of the French of Louisiana maintained differences, yet slow, steady modernization also provided another framework for understanding cultural amalgamation, which, again, threatened this distinction. Ryan Brasseaux identifies a state of Americanization rather than the typical French Creole and Cajun singularity in the musical traditions of South Louisiana. Increasingly accessible technology - jukeboxes, cars, motorways and mass media - all helped bring traditional French music into the American mainstream (2009, 124).

We know that Cajuns and Creoles quietly but persistently resisted the dominance of Protestant, Anglo America thereby asserting their existence. “Nearly 10,000 Saint-Domingue refugees left Cuba and landed on the shores of New Orleans in 1809,” prolonging French cultural

influence (creolization) in the Louisiana Territory after the Purchase (Munro and Britton 2012, 61). A compelling definition of a Louisiana Cajun is someone who knows how to get by, whatever the situation, for the hard times were hard, as were the good times quite often, for “American Creoles” as a whole. Creolization and catastrophe often coincide, for instance, following the great flood of the Mississippi River in 1927 that sent black diasporas throughout the northern and western United States. This upheaval, studied in detail by John M. Barry is one of the more obscure factors of an important American migration story, explored more recently by Isabel Wilkerson. Our contemporary fascination with hurricanes and other climate-related occurrences should not overshadow the power of the Mississippi River almost a century ago. Creolization and resurrection are lively subjects of study in a post-Katrina New Orleans, as is the consumption of catastrophe (Recuber 2018). Creolizations have been and may continue to be more probable in the midst of generational events. At what other moments are individuals, groups and societies open to exchange? Might free time and vacation foster or encourage contact as much as the daily rituals of life and labor? Beyond food and music, could the practice of other leisurely or sporting activities demonstrate lesser known but pertinent creolizations?<sup>4</sup>

Today creolizations are moving at warp-speed across the globe and its virtual canvass, the Internet. The Web is the site of considerable cultural mixing, producing nation-specific *métissages*. Creolizations know no borders, no geographic, linguistic, religious, racial or ethnic boundaries. Édouard Glissant found that the African diasporic experience particularly tended to produce contact and creolization. Displaced African groups know perhaps more than most through the experience of the Middle Passage that they were both one and many, African and other. They could be no less so if they hoped to maintain any cultural connection to the lost continent. The late Glissant wrote, “The Africans in the New World - African Americans, but

also Antilleans, Brazilians, etc. - escaped the abyss and carry within them the abyss's dimension. And I think the abyss's dimension is not, contrary to what one might believe, the dimension of Unity, but rather the dimension of Multiplicity" (Glissant, Diawara, Winks 2011, 5). Some call these diasporic descendants and cultural agents roaming every continent "Afropolitans."

Lauren Michele Jackson, author of *White Negroes*, discusses "... the astounding similarities across time and space, brought all the closer by twentieth- and twenty-first-century migration (West Africa to Europe, The West Indies to Canada, West Africa to the Caribbean to Europe, American South to North, American South to West, West Indies to American North, the Caribbean to South Florida, South America to South Florida, Central America to the South ...), brought closer still by an online sense of diaspora" (2019, 92-3). One could add still other significant movements of people to this list, contributing to the making of White Negroes or American Creoles. "Their mixing and merging is evidence of a human touch, a glimpse of a more improvisational moment. A black moment," writes Jackson (95). She underscores "... the blackness of the web" (101). A conversation about creolization today would probably be impossible without addressing the murky waters of cultural appropriation across nations, races, and periods, as Jackson does. Cultural critic Kwame Anthony Appiah asks readers in *The Lies That Bind. Rethinking Identity* to resist wholesale rejection of cultural appropriation for cultures have been cross-fertilizing for centuries (2018, 208). By their very nature, creolizations are inclusive, open and opportunistic; meanings vary over time and shift from country to country and population to population. Such intercultural iterations continually shed old skins and take on new ones, with no end in sight.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *Tout-Monde* is translated as *Whole-World* in The Glissant Translation Project underway at Liverpool University Press (2020).

<sup>2</sup> See for instance the book edited by Alec Hargreaves et al., *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-Monde* (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Journalist and author Joëlle Kuntz refers to Glissant and oceanic thinking in her study of global Swiss networks of dependence.

<sup>4</sup> I am currently researching cultures of work and play in creolized communities in Franco-America.

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