



Creolising Political Identity and Social Scientific Method

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Abstract

Both nurturing and giving institutional expression to a solidarity of diverse people and scholarly communities on the African continent and its transnational diaspora, CODESRIA has embodied the imperative of continuing the unfinished work of building a world that is no longer colonial. But which methods are best suited to such decolonizing work? In what follows, I suggest that the concept of creolization, that emerged to grasp the distinctly African world of the Caribbean, remains an especially useful resource, especially if rearticulated and qualified in the ways for which I advocate.

Resumé

À la fois attentionné et donnant une expression institutionnelle à une solidarité de diverses personnes et communautés académiques sur le continent africain et sa diaspora transnationale, le CODESRIA a incarné l'impératif de poursuivre le travail inachevé de la construction d'un monde qui n'est plus colonial. Cependant, quelles sont les méthodes les mieux adaptées à un tel travail de décolonisation ? Dans ce qui suit, je suggère que le concept de *créolisation*, qui a émergé pour saisir le monde distinctement africain des Caraïbes, reste une ressource particulièrement utile, surtout si reformulé et qualifié au sens dans lequel je préconise.

When accepting the 2013 Latin American and Caribbean Regional Integration Award, the Executive Secretary, Dr. Ebrima Sall, emphasised the special poignancy of receiving the recognition just as CODESRIA celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Stressing that the project of political independence in continental Africa and the Global South was also necessarily an epistemic undertaking, Sall explained that decolonising both what we know and how our knowledge is generated must involve critically considering the linguistic and disciplinary boundaries that have

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organised the colonised (and neo-colonial) world and how it is studied.¹ This is precisely a mission shared by the Caribbean Philosophical Association (CPA) that organised its work around the bold aim of ‘shifting the geography of reason’. In challenging the estimations of the people and circumstances from which historic thought could and can emerge, CPA refused to continue to divide up the Caribbean as Europe (and most subsequent regional and US.-based scholarly groups) did. From the outset, it therefore operated in multiple languages and insisted that theoretical work is necessarily transdisciplinary. Put slightly differently, the CPA treated the contours of the intellectual domain as an open rather than closed question. Lastly, even if imperfectly, the organisation has made a project of being humanistic. Inspired by the jazz communities of northeastern US cities that cultivated relations that produced classic recordings featuring men in their teens and early twenties, CPA sought also to be a community within which extraordinary young male and female talent was identified and nourished as part of the larger project of articulating ideas rooted in reflection of what it is to occupy the modern world as black. These reflections did not only aim at description but also at contributing to the generation of concepts and aspirations that could guide the shaping of a future that we might enthusiastically inhabit. Similar commitments inform the global liberatory pan-Africanism for which CODESRIA so importantly stands. Both nurturing and giving institutional expression to a solidarity of diverse people and scholarly communities on the African continent and in its diaspora, CODESRIA has embodied the imperative of continuing the unfinished work of building a world that is no longer colonial. But how are such heterogeneous African diasporic intellectuals to collaborate? Which methods are best suited to such decolonizing work? In what follows, I suggest that a concept that emerged to grasp the distinct nature of African diasporic world of the Caribbean remains an especially useful resource, especially if rearticulated and qualified in the ways for which I advocate below.

Defining Creolisation

While the first written use of the word ‘creole’ dates back to the 1500s to name people of mixed blood (Chaudenson 2001:87), *creolisation* emerged in its descriptive mode in the nineteenth century to explain what were seen as unique and aberrational symbolic forms borne of plantation societies primarily in the New World, but also within comparable situations on the coasts of Africa and Asia where trading outposts similarly brought enslaved Africans in contact with Europeans in lands either without

indigenous populations or nearly cleared of them through genocide. In all such instances, previously unconnected people – a colonial class, slaves, dwindling indigenous populations, and subsequent waves of (usually indentured) labourers – whose mutual recognition was unprecedented, were thrown together in violently unequal relations, threatening any and all existing orders of collective meaning.

Out of these sudden ruptures, new perspectives, based largely in reinvention, resituating, and mistranslation began to take shape (Buck-Morss 2009). What distinguished creolisation from other more familiar and ongoing forms of cultural mixture were the radical and intensified nature of the interchange of symbols and practices that constituted the encounters among displaced groups of individuals who were neither rooted in their new location nor able meaningfully to identify with great civilizations elsewhere (Eriksen 2007:155). Rather than a spread of coexisting parallel direct transplants, though these did also remain, new combinations of once disparate meaning took on degrees of stability and standardisation, charting a distinctive genealogy newly indigenous to the place.

Against the grain of once conventional scholarly wisdom, the cultural forms and meanings were neither evidence of Africans stripped of their culture and singularly acculturated into European ways of acting, nor of Africans enveloped in ossified, if pure, remnants and retentions from the mother continent. Instead, in the midst of extreme brutality those who unequally occupied such societies did not remain sealed off from each other but lived within relations marked by mundane dependency and antagonism, by intimate and complex interpenetration (Gilroy 1993: 48-49) that belied the project to create more Manichean worlds. In these relations of proximity, older habits, customs, and forms of meaning-making were not only retained or rejected; they were resignified in an ‘embattled creativity’ (Mintz 1998:119) that, in the language of Stuart Hall, enables us to envision how ‘the colonized [also produced] the colonizer’ (1996:6).

In most descriptive social scientific work, creolisation is used retrospectively to capture a *fait accompli*. Indeed, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot observed, ‘the long-term impact of cultural imports is often proportional to the capacity to forget that they were once acquired or imposed’ (Trouillot 2003:34).

So creolisation names the uniqueness of Jamaican Patois or Haitian Creole; the music one hears throughout the Caribbean or the Cajun food now local to Louisiana.

In each are evident the full range of contributing sources which, given prior political histories would not have been expected to converge, that in their combination represent both continuity and something radically new.

Among their noteworthy features are:

1. Elements that are brought together are not translated back into the language or symbolic framework of the one who does the borrowing. They are instead incorporated. One tries in vain, for example, to find an English equivalent for the Jamaican word *ratid*; one simply learns how to use it. Such acts of incorporation often involve the transculturation that Michaelle Browers (2008) and Mary Louise Pratt (1992) have correctly suggested we need not lament. In other words, an idea, linguistic form, or ingredient with one origin may willfully be resituated with meaningful implications. This is why Raquel Romberg, for instance, has urged theorists of creolisation to rethink the neat distinction between creativity and imitation since at the core of Caribbean creolised practices is 'the strategic unauthorized appropriation of symbols of power against their initial purpose' (2002:1) or, as Michel de Certeau has suggested, employing hegemonic forms of culture for ends foreign or antagonistic to them (1984:xiii).
2. One can, even within what has emerged as a new form in its own right, trace the contributory origins (themselves often highly syncretised) of elements that now converge. This is precisely why many listeners find Haitian Creole so remarkable: audible are not only sounds they associate with France but those of the Niger-Congo region; they hear each of these discretely enough to name them separately and the distinctness that is their combination. The conditions of the creolised product will eventually be forgotten, as Trouillothas emphasised, but within environments characterised by valuing or making creolisation central to their self-identities, one witnesses a greater awareness of the permeable and forged nature of all symbolic forms. Patterns of mixture are therefore valuable mirrors into relations that structure a given society and its availability or lack of access to social, economic, and political upward mobility: A particular group that is still relatively marginal to the national political community may significantly mark another domain, such as that of food or music. While one does not want to diminish the significance of any of these spheres – indeed turning to the full range of them is thoroughly consistent with the prescription that we do not assume in advance to know the sectors of life worlds within which the philosophical insights of specific communities were most richly developed – a legacy of the colonial world is the relative comfort of many whites with black and brown contributions to the aesthetic and emotive as opposed to more explicitly discursive political and intellectual areas. In this sense, a group may have significantly contributed to the symbolic life of a given community without possessing the equivalent power to define its guiding ultimate aims. Or, as with Victor Turner's category of the

liminal (1995 [1963]), may be used to inform the defining contours of hegemonic self-understandings without being able to direct how they are mobilised.²

3. As should be evident from the prior point, framing instances as those of creolisation requires a particular approach to the study of the past. Frequently, creolisation describes forms that have become relatively stable, even ossified, especially in those circumstances in which their marketability is linked to their branding and commodification as creole. The larger point, however, is that the expectations with which we approach prior historical moments are significantly shaped by how we conceive of symbolic life and its relationship to patterns of human movement. Particularly creolised forms can therefore themselves, if we are willing to grapple with them, belie ways of narrating the past that impose on them a *de facto* purity. The history of radical antislavery organisations and of the Haitian Revolution offer a good example: both were thoroughly transnational, with half of the slaves who fought in Haiti born in Africa; leaders and replenishing waves of new slaves coming in from other Caribbean islands; abolitionists of various allegiances entering from various elsewhere, including the United States and Europe. In a context in which most who laboured and fought and led were illiterate, their *lingua franca* was Creole (Fischer 2006:371-373).
4. Creolisation does suggest an intensity of interaction, a much more than casual cohabitation of social and political worlds, opportunities for which are typically furnished by fresh bouts of voluntary or coerced migration. However, situations that render creolisation likely may also be due to changes that do not involve crossing dramatic geographical distances but that are also described in spatial terms. For example, the movement of cultural or religious outsiders up or down the class ladder may lead to individuals among them more consistently or intensely interacting with members of communities with whom their previous relations had been at best distant. Their sudden proximity then raises anew very old questions of what in the lives of others to incorporate, mimic, or reject. The flipside of this is also important: often what are considered the most authentic forms of a creolised language are those that have sedimented precisely because the encounters of people that initially produced them have significantly dwindled due to more extensive racial segregation and isolation as a result of changed social norms or economic mandates or through the abandonment of efforts to assure that benefits distributed by local, national, or regional governments are equitably dispersed.

But perhaps most significantly, unlike the multitude of other forms of cultural mixture, creolisation has referred very explicitly to *illicit blendings* (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant 1990) or to those that contradicted and betrayed the project of forging a Manichean racial order amidst the heavily mixed and transnational plantation societies of the New Worlds on both sides of the Atlantic. In particular, unlike other instances of cultural mixing, in which it is assumed that members of particular cultures will take an idea derived from elsewhere and make it local in an ongoing process of give and take, what is unique about what is now termed creolisation is that it refers to instances of such symbolic creativity among communities that included those thought incapable of it. Racialised logics forged in European modernity suggested a necessary relationship between one's blood as evident in one's phenotype and one's relative ability to be the source and custodian of culture, civilisation, and language. Cultural mixing described the interactions of those on comparable rungs. By contrast, what came later to be called creolisation described what at the time of their development were seen less as new syntheses than as unilateral corruption or erosion of forms of cultural life that necessarily originated elsewhere.

One example can illustrate this point succinctly: Guus Meijer and Pieter Muysken (1977) explain that European languages were thought to contain morphological distinctions and syntactic categories that supposedly simple black and brown people could not emulate. If, as nineteenth-century linguistic hybridology claimed, different races belong to varied evolutionary stages, with contact, their linguistic templates cross-fertilised at the lowest common denominator of structural complexity with the more primitive grammar of lower race speakers imposing an upper bound or limit (DeGraff 2003:295). It was, wrote Pierre Larousse in the *Grand Dictionnaire* of 1869, this stripping of linguistic sophistication that created creoles. He offered this definition: 'The creole language, in our colonies, in Louisiana and Haiti, is a corrupted French in which several Spanish and gallanized words are mixed. The language, often unintelligible in the mouth of an old African, is extremely sweet in the mouth of white creole speakers' (cited in Meijer and Muysken 1977:22). Pieter A.M. Seurenmore recently argued that Creole grammars lacked the 'more sophisticated features of languages backed by a rich and extended cultural past and a large, well-organized literature society' (1998:292-93). Others still described Haitian Creole simply as 'French back in infancy' (DeGraff 2003:392).

If the concept of creolisation was developed to illuminate processes seemingly peculiar to and perhaps most pronounced in the Caribbean of Europe's early modernity, creolising practices are also in evidence

beyond it. At the same time, these approaches to or ways of engaging with (often hostile and unequal) difference have historically been noticed most precisely when they inspire dread or bemusement for combining previously distinctive genealogies.³ In these instances of mergings provoking misgivings, those who understood themselves through terms of distance and separation encounter evidence of their mutual constitution near impossible to ignore. It is this disturbing aspect that in fact drew attention to phenomena that while widespread, especially within any empire of major geographic proportions, could otherwise go unnoticed. In appearing where they were not supposed to, creolised forms exemplified and therefore pointed to key features of how human worlds are often forged. Still, the most vital instances of creolisation emerge when they are not the aim; when instead groups located differently together try to forge more viable collectivities that necessitate contesting existing symbols in ways that produce newer ones. In other words, creolisation is progressive not when we are deliberately rejecting being straitjacketed by any and all existing practices or when we seek novelty as proof of our capacity to create. It is the logical conclusion when we are not constrained by the misleading commitments that would frame a resulting creolised form as a problematic betrayal.

The Creolising of Political Identity

In the Caribbean independence era, there were many efforts deliberately to craft a national identity that emphasised the multiple origins of emergent citizens (Bolland 2006:2). With no singular primordial nation to which the emergent state could refer, recognising the pluralistic culture that had become local could endanger no original purity. Still, these projects have been attacked as severely limited. Many brands of creole cultural nationalism were seen to enshrine only one form of hybridity, usually the kind of nationalist leaders at the forefront of efforts to oust white foreigners. Instead of an ongoing process of creolisation, one ossified instantiation was privileged to the exclusion of others in ways that cultivated antipathy toward people who failed to exemplify such mixture. Percy Hintzen (2006:29) has argued that the distinction between creole and non-creole hid commonalities in racist social practices that might otherwise have been the basis for political organising. For Mervyn Alleyne (2003:41), 'creole' was still colour inflected, marking a distinction between non-local whites and less mixed Africans. These criticisms are also heavily associated with East Indian Caribbean writers (Puri 2004; Khan 2006) and those indigenous to the region (Segal 1993) who, re-

spectively, have asked whether one can arrive too late or be present too early in creolisation processes – whether one can remain outside of that which converges whether as a permanently unmixable Eastern person or as what was eradicated lest the newly indigenous can emerge.

More common at present than valorising creolisation are projects of decreolisation or those through which efforts are made to purify cultures of what are seen as external and contaminating influences. Earlier examples of this phenomenon are efforts to stave off the Anglicising of the French language. There are certainly moments in which creolisation is avoided because it seems only to amount to embracing assimilation into a colonising culture. This is a position advanced by several leading US Afrocentrists for whom creolisation is to be further polluted by an already ubiquitous and dehumanising Eurocentrism. The difficulty with this position is that New World Africa cultures, even in their most strongly black nationalist and Africa – affirming and – engaging varieties, are already inescapably creolised – communicated in and in resistant response to English or Portuguese or Dutch or French.

One could argue in the case of the former set of objections that what is being challenged is not the process of creolisation as much as the ways in which its discourses and practices were monopolised and hijacked by a creole elite that set themselves up as idealised hybrid exemplifications and gatekeepers in order to interrupt the living processes of creolisation that would have better reflected the full range of the relevant societies. In so doing, they are much like the national bourgeoisie that Fanon so scathingly criticised that remained locked in a self-serving xenophobic nationalism rather than setting conditions to express and nurture a national consciousness that would have had to be radically redistributive. In these instances, creolisation is not unlike the heavily prescriptive ideal of ‘colorblindness’ in the United States and ‘mestizaje’ in much of the Latin Caribbean. In both, a normative project is made of not seeing the very lines of difference crucial to diagnosing the historical and ongoing unequal distribution of life opportunities through vastly opposed estimations of the value of different human communities. There is no doubt that in these circumstances, the language of creolisation could be used to pursue highly conservative ends, with the implication that there is nothing intrinsically progressive in forms of mixture that emerge out of processes of creolisation unless in them is an ongoing commitment to an ever enlarged generality or ever improved articulation of that which the meaningful differences of those in a society have in common. Even then, there are forms of difference that cannot be reconciled. One cannot, for instance, find generality between those who

would bar entire groups of people from political life and the barred or those who would insist on arrangements in which the vast majority is immiserated to shore up further profits for some and the negatively implicated.

With the aim of distinguishing among the implications of disparate forms of creolisation, Vijay Prasad (2002), under the name of ‘polyculturalism’, explores when separate marginalised groups fight together. Though it is not their aim or purpose, these collective efforts produce practices, symbols and language that blend those previously thought to belong to discrete and often antagonistic groups and traditions in ways that foster and sustain alliances that those hostile to their potential fruit sought deliberately to block. It is in this sense that we might call Fanonian national consciousness ‘creolizing’, since all efforts to articulate that which is consented to and right for all would have to be creolised. The vitality of the products is striking since rather than funnelling intellectual, creative, political and moral energies into preserving existing identities that dictate appropriate behaviour and aims, polycultural or creolising processes pursue a world more befitting the range of people that occupy it, assuming that there are no complete, readymade existing blueprints of how this must look. What materializes is unlikely perfectly to mirror all of the various groups that might seek less constrained social and political conditions, but efforts in this direction introduce new repertoires and examples that might in turn be reworked and recast. But crucially, the creolising of practices, languages, and ideas is not the object in such moments. It is, however, the inevitable consequence of together diagnosing a shared world for the sake of generating more legitimate alternatives.

One could pause here to consider the very different reactions of the French government to the Négritude writings of Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire, on the one hand, and Fanon’s *A Dying Colonialism*, on the other. Négritude, in many ways, is much more compatible with a multicultural than a creolising model. Although critically engaging the mutual constitution of the designations ‘white’ and ‘black’, in it, each community or racial group’s ‘culture’ is a territory with fortified boundaries. In the case of the recently colonised, such life worlds (even if in petrified or zombified form) are a sanctuary into which one retreats, having conceded, at least temporarily, that the public terrain of politics is that of the settler. By contrast, Fanon captures how disturbed these same settlers were when they suddenly heard North Africans using ‘their French’, the language that the colonised supposedly *could not* learn, to converse animatedly with one another about the progress of anticolonial efforts. Suddenly, a creolised *lingua franca* (that combined the French lexifier with the full range of North African substrates) that could only have emerged in that precise way through the introduction of

colonisation was being used to interrupt and eradicate it. And indeed, in terms of the fate of books advancing these respective visions: it was Fanon's that was banned six months after it came to print.

In this sense, in defense of creolising projects in the Caribbean, while these may have fallen far short of the more profound ideal of independence as bringing a substantive end to colonial forms of life and value, what has emerged in their stead is certainly no better. Indeed, the ascendant logic of neoliberalism which encourages a branding of difference framed as cultural as carefully protected sites of exclusion, leverage, and potential enrichment in an increasingly scarce terrain has not proven any more effective at addressing racialised forms of radical inequality (Thomas 2004).

All efforts at forming new hegemonies, even those linked to creolising forms of struggle, will be faulty. Even then, what singles out creolisation for consideration is its disposition toward the nature of symbolic life. The concept emerged to illuminate processes of creating that which is local by paying attention to the ways in which what we call 'cultures' are tied to racial and class locations that are incoherent if delinked from their role in defining spectrums of opportunities and their denial. In other words, creolisation insists on the politicised nature of what is muted and in the more euphemistic and preferred language of 'diversity'. On the other hand, creolisation also offers a useful antidote to those who in the name of its protection would exaggerate cultural distinctiveness to the point of mutual untranslatability, in a trend much criticized by Kwasi Wiredu (1996) who emphasises that while contexts of meaning are fundamentally shaped by historical contingencies, within these are remarkably consistent struggles over power, authority, direction, and purpose.

Finally, creolisation need not (as it has in most social scientific research) always refer to what transpires in colonised settings or among the damned of the earth. Unanticipated trajectories in the development of ideas and practices can transpire wherever there is literal or metaphorical migration. Still, the insistence that creolisation not only involves distinctive syntheses, but those that would embody more meaningful approximations of the needs and hopes of the society at large implies an ongoing relation to those seeking progressive political transformation. Put slightly different, those who benefit from partial arrangements masked as benefitting all are more likely to oppose the appearance of more legitimate alternatives that clearly reveal previous claims to generality or representativeness as phony. As such, they are more likely to reject further creolising products as illicit, impure, or otherwise undesirable, opting instead for already existing and sedimented instantiations of mixture.

The Creolisation of Social Scientific Method

It is illuminating to distinguish creolisation from multiculturalism and hybridity, especially when we turn explicitly to questions of method because, *however unwittingly*, the way we conceptualise the meaning of culture and symbolic life decisively overdetermines how we envisage the disciplines from and through which we think.

A common response, for instance, to the significant challenges posed by heterogeneity to earlier aspirations to formulate universal theories has been to call for interdisciplinary or mixed-method research. These, at the level of method, mimic the politics and mode of multiculturalism: distinct disciplinary approaches, each with unique genealogies of commitment are aggregated in the hope that together the discrete pieces amount to a complete picture that, if not comprehensive, is at least less partial.⁴ Each party to such endeavours is understood to contribute most if it authentically represents each of their respective traditions. Those skeptical about such initiatives frequently see ensuing intellectual mixtures only in terms of dilution or corruption. The products appear illicit. Preferable in times framed as those of scarcity such as our own is to develop the most specialised of masteries, shoring up the necessity of this particular area of study and the indispensability of these specific (decreolised) practitioners.

Creolisation by contrast assumes that disciplines are the culmination of particular genealogies taken up to make sense of particular problems and circumstances. These will render specific elements of fairly sedimented practices especially relevant as others become less so. One is likely to find as well that dimensions of other disciplinary formations, those not typically employed, offer categories, foundational analogies, forms of evidence, and ideas that are highly illuminating. One will not, however, turn to these for the sake of being ecumenical or exemplifying inclusivity but, instead, because they offer magnifying routes into and through a dilemma that one otherwise would lack. Even then, one does not simply add these respective methods up – with the implication that one might say that the work is 10 per cent economic and 65 per cent sociological, etc.

To creolise social scientific and theoretical approaches then is to break with an identity-oriented understanding of disciplines and methods in which one and one's work can only emerge as meaningful by being isomorphic with pre-existing conceptions of what a scholarly designation would indicate one must do. Just as creolisation cannot and does not prioritise 'cultural maintenance' or 'cultural preservation', its aim, if used as an approach to scholarship, is instead guided by another *telos*: that of

contributing to the construction of an inhabitable social world. In so doing, one cannot but grapple with how to think among multiple registers in conversations that do not all partake of the same conventions. In treating our unavoidable epistemological limitations as sites of openness, we restore ourselves as value-giving subjects with meaning-making capacities, which in turn require engagement with the plurality of intellectual heritages or a teleologically open approach to the symbolic world (Cornell and Panfilio 2010; Gordon 2006). This is crucially also to reject being overtaken by post-structural suspicions of the inevitably totalising and repressive nature of any collective aspirations.

The creolising processes of New World plantation societies operated differently in distinct domains. As Robert Chaundenson (with Salikoko S. Mufwene) has described it, 'the centrifugal force' of the settler class was most pronounced in the linguistic terrain and in others most suffused with the oral and written word. It is precisely this uneven quality of creolisation and its legacies that informed Paget Henry's seminal *Caliban's Reason*: Henry observed that while creolisation was fully evident in Caribbean literature, folklore, music, and theatre, when one turned to Caribbean philosophy, the same process was skewed and incomplete. In this 'most quintessentially rational area of inquiry and work' (2000:70), the ongoing presumed authority of Europe continued. In response, Henry argued, intellectuals needed to undertake a project of re-enfranchising African and Afro-Caribbean philosophies, recentring long-concealed areas of the imagination and re-establishing their ability to accumulate authority. Rejecting 'negative evaluations that block African and European elements from creatively coming together' (2000:88), creolisation, in this context, involved the act of deliberately indigenising theoretical endeavours, of drawing on local resources of reason and reflection to illuminate local aspirations and assuming that the fruit of these particular endeavours could, as had proved true of their European counterparts, be valuable in themselves and to projects elsewhere.⁵

Creolisation, after all, offers a model of how it is that people have constructed collective worlds out of necessity. It is not through tiny unassociated parts coexisting in mutual hostility but by recognising, exploring, and enunciating complex interdependencies in ways that transcode and incorporate so that each is understood in and through the terms of the other mirroring the processes through which conditions of mutual intelligibility and sociality emerge. In this sense, a creolised method for political life and for social science is one that aims in its guiding assumption to treat symbolic worlds, 'culture', as Sigmund Freud argued

in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, as the efforts of human beings to forge domains that mirror their values and their selves within an otherwise indifferent or inhospitable natural world.

One could similarly say that politics and social scientific investigations of it are centuries-long endeavours to fashion a province guided by a set of rules and shared practices distinctive from those of the market and of war. In the audacious imagination of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, we seek in politics to set conditions for our collective thriving. In such endeavour, we become something other than what we are when merely duplicated and multiplied as discrete individuals, an indivisible part of the qualitatively different category of political generality, a citizenry, or a sovereign people. As with creolisation, in this formulation, we are distinguished as individuals in and through our combination with others into something continuous and new. Rather than lost in a totality, generalities magnify the distinctiveness of their component parts.

By Way of Conclusion

CODESRIA was founded on the acknowledgment that genuine political independence demanded epistemological decolonisation as well. Part of this involves determining the aims and audience of one's intellectual labour – who and what is of value and to be prioritised. In the case of CODESRIA, this has meant work undertaken in the service of humanity that could be advanced by, and in turn accelerate, the unifying of a fragmented Africa. Such pan-African movement, that continues a long history of collective struggle against unfreedom, will of necessity be a creolised one. It is in that spirit that I offer this outline of a concept borne of efforts to make sense of the tenaciously innovative spirit of members of the African diaspora to equip us both intellectually and politically with orientations that can enable us to break genuinely new ground.

Notes

1. For the complete transcript, visit http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/Award_Acceptance_Speech_Santiago_Chile_Thursday_3_October_2013_Autosaved_.pdf
2. For further discussion of liminality, see Asmarom Legesse (1973).
3. A good recent example of this is when the recent riots in London were blamed on the (omni)presence in the city of Jamaican patois.

4. A common response to the Eurocentrism of much work on political thought has been to call for comparative work. Although this has created some professional room to enlarge what we might seriously study and has been applauded by non-theorists looking to make their universities more international and global, there are many problems at the core of this enterprise. Among them are the ongoing focus on Arab, Indian, and northeast Asian thought to the almost complete exclusion of theory emerging from Native or Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa. In an approach that still needs the 'near' and 'far' and 'here' and 'there', thought from the African and Latin diasporas appears both insufficiently similar and inadequately different, as a relative rather than genuinely comparative term. Put slightly differently, much of this research has duplicated rather than illuminating the specificity of what Walter Dignolo has called 'the colonial difference', or the lines that divide metropolitan Being from peripheral non-Being. The work of George Ciccariello-Maher and Katherine Gordy are important exceptions to these more general trends in comparative political theory.
5. Although I have explored Frantz Fanon's work as that which creolises the central problems explored by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, another rich example of creolisation are in the writings of the early 20th century Peruvian socialist journalist and political thinker, José Carlos Mariátegui.

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