



Creolisation as a Recipe for Conviviality

Thomas Hylland Eriksen

What on earth is happening to the world's cultural variation in this over-heated era? It already seems an eternity ago that Joseph Conrad's Kurtz found his dark and unfathomable Africa following a dangerous and strenuous journey across sea and land, and it feels about as long ago that Hemingway demonstrated his true machismo by going on a safari to East Africa. Today, housewives from Clapham go on safari to East Africa, and the great-grandchildren of Conrad's Africans fly Ethiopian to New York to present their economic problems to the United Nations. At least some of them do.

Superficially, it may seem as though most of the significant cultural differences my generation grew up with are all but gone; that we all become increasingly similar as indigenous peoples and former tribal peoples worldwide are drawn into formal schooling and wage work, are forced to obtain identity papers and spend their small surplus on phonocards and sneakers. A profound *Entzäuberung*, to use Max Weber's expression, seems to permeate the world, which no longer conceals dark and fascinating secrets. The white spots on the map are gone. *Tristes tropiques*: the formerly pure and

T. H. Eriksen (✉)

Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
e-mail: t.h.eriksen@sai.uio.no

© The Author(s) 2020

O. Hemer et al. (eds.), *Conviviality at the Crossroads*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28979-9_3

uncontaminated *Naturvölker*, semi-naked savages, have lost their innocence and swapped the bamboo flute for a smartphone, and the tropics have become a dilapidated backyard of the rich world.

According to this interpretation of our time, which is by no means uncommon, ‘exotic places’ no longer exist; there are no longer peoples who are untouched by the white man, capitalism and mass consumption. Ostensibly exotic travel destinations are industrial products whose exotic character is carefully manufactured, where the cultural attractions are people who are paid by the tour operators to dress in old-fashioned clothes and perform traditional dances. One of cultural relativism’s brave defenders, Clifford Geertz, expresses it thus in an essay from the mid-1980s: cultural differences ‘will doubtless remain - the French will never eat salted butter. But the good old days of widow burning and cannibalism are gone forever’ (Geertz 1986: 105).

CELEBRATING IMPURITY

A different interpretation of the cultural processes characteristic of the world today, would, rather than emphasising or even parodying commercialisation and homogenisation, instead look towards the many new cultural forms emerging at this time, brought about by the encounters, mixing, flows and paradoxes engendered by increased mobility, the spread of consumerism and, not least, instantaneous electronic communication. These processes create frictions, but also serve to forge new ties of mutual understanding and solidarity. Yet in order to overcome the fear of the other, she/he must be reconceptualised as a member of a shared humanity. A social ontology whereby difference is not a threat needs to replace ontologies assuming that sameness is a prerequisite for sharing. I therefore turn to elucidating such an alternative, taking my point of departure in the mainly Caribbean notion of the creole and eventually its European relative, superdiversity.

In academia, the preoccupation with cultural flows and mixing was to a great extent a fin-de-siècle trend, peaking in the 1990s with Homi Bhabha and third cultures, Arjun Appadurai’s ethno- and technoscapes, Ulf Hannerz’ encompassing concept of cultural creolisation, James Clifford’s predicaments of culture, Stuart Hall and the voluminous cultural studies literature on hybridity (Bhabha 1994; Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1987; Clifford 1988; Hall 1992). The early 1990s saw the destabilisation of geographic and spatial boundaries through large-scale political changes

and technological innovations—the end of the Cold War and of apartheid, neoliberal deregulation, the spread of mobile phones and the Internet—and at the time, the creole societies of the New World were seen as important sites for the exploration of social and cultural dynamics in an era of accelerated transnational traffic in signs, things and people. It was also in this period that one of the most important books in the tradition of British Cultural Studies, namely Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (Gilroy 1993), was published, a book that may be read retrospectively as a bittersweet celebration of creolisation.

The mixed cultures *par excellence* are those of the Caribbean and their cousins in the Indian Ocean. For years, they were held in low esteem by anthropologists—they were created by miscegenation and contamination, they had evolved under the bright floodlights of modernity, and were deemed mundane and unexciting under the strongly, if understated, exoticising gaze of anthropology. At the height of the double wave of post-colonial and postmodern sensibilities, from the publication of *Orientalism* (Said 1978) until the dust began to settle after the reflexive and deconstructive tour-de-force *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), the Caribbean was briefly accorded a place in the sun, offering, as it did, a kind of cultural configuration that seemed to suit the new sensibilities well. But the Caribbean was also a key site for the development of a global, historical anthropology, given its enormously important role in the growth of the modern world. To mention but one prominent example, the late Sidney Mintz’s research in three of the major language areas—the Spanish, the English and the French—is well known (Mintz 2010), not least for Mintz’s insistence that what defined Creoledom was not cultural mixing as such, but the fundamental changes in social organisation resulting from uprootedness and displacement from subsistence communities to plantation societies (Mintz 1998). Mintz’s book with Richard Price, *The Birth of Afro-American Culture* (Mintz and Price 1992 [1976]), argued against the previously common view, defended by the influential American cultural anthropologist Melville Herskovits (1941), that African retentions, or perhaps ‘survivals’, delineated and to no small extent defined Caribbean culture. Mintz and Price emphasised invention and creativity, resulting from the admittedly enforced confluence of diverse sources, highlighting the newness of creole culture and society (see also Eriksen 2003, 2019a, on which this section is partly based). Building on the comparative historical anthropology from Eric Wolf and Mintz, but enriching it with critical discourse analysis and a postcolonial approach, Michel-Rolph Trouillot

(1995) soon added new layers to the already vibrant discourse on power, cultural creativity and mixing with the Caribbean as a focal point. And there were others.¹ From having been a poor man's alternative to fieldwork in a truly exotic location, the region was suddenly fashionable. Ulf Hannerz himself did a stint of fieldwork in the Caribbean, publishing his findings in *Caymanian Politics* (Hannerz 1974). There was something about the Caribbean that seemed, towards the end of the twentieth century, to encapsulate, condense and highlight central features of a globalising world, providing productive templates for thinking about flows, boundaries, power, individualism and cultural creativity elsewhere—and I would add, from a normative perspective, forms of life where a shared identity was not based on similarity, but on complementarity and the basic implications of living in the same place.

The Caribbean and creole societies in general have more recently faded away from the attention of mainstream anthropology. Yet, it can and should be argued that at this particular juncture in history, it may be worthwhile to revisit the creole societies. Apart from its intrinsic intellectual interest, there are strong moral and political reasons for reviving interest in the creole world. At a time when nativism and divisive identity politics threaten people's autonomy and well-being across the planet, from autochthonism in Africa to militant Islamism in the Middle East and xenophobic ethnonationalism in Europe, an ontology of social being which does not privilege boundaries and origins over connectedness and impurity is deserving of sustained and systematic attention, as was recently argued in Cohen and Sheringham's (2016) anthropological travelogue about creolisation as a way of living together.

Cultural creolisation is a concept based on an analogy from linguistics. This discipline in turn took the term from a particular aspect of colonialism, namely the uprooting and displacement of large numbers of people in the plantation economies of certain colonies, such as Louisiana, Jamaica, Trinidad, Réunion and Mauritius. Both in the Caribbean basin and in the Indian Ocean, certain (or all) groups who contributed to this economy during slavery were described as creoles. Originally, a *criollo* meant a European (normally a Spaniard) born in the New World (as opposed to *peninsulares*); today, a similar usage is current in La Réunion, where everybody born in the island, regardless of skin colour, is seen as *créole*, as opposed to the *zoréoles* who were born in metropolitan France. In Trinidad, the term creole is sometimes used to designate all Trinidadians except those of Asian

origin. In Suriname, a creole is a person of African origin, while in neighbouring French Guyana a creole is someone who has adopted a European way of life. In spite of the differences, there are resemblances between the various conceptualisations of the creole. Creoles are uprooted, they belong to the New World, and are contrasted with that which is old, deep and rooted.

WHAT IS AND WHAT ISN'T CREOLE

A question often raised by people unfamiliar with the varying uses of the term is: 'What is *really* a creole?' They may have encountered the term in connection with food or architecture from Louisiana, languages in the Caribbean or people in the Indian Ocean. The standard response is that whereas vernacular uses of the term creole vary, there exist definitions of creole languages in linguistics and of cultural creolisation in anthropology. There are nevertheless similarities, although there is no one-to-one relationship, between the ethnic groups described locally (emically) as creoles in particular societies, and the phenomena classified as creole or creolised in the academic literature.

A wider usage of the term creolisation, using it as a comparative concept rather than a localised and historically delineated one, was proposed by Ulf Hannerz in his seminal 1987 article 'The world in creolisation'. Uninterested in unadulterated authenticity, Hannerz was attracted to 'the cultures on display in market places, shanty towns, beer halls, night clubs, missionary book stores, railway waiting rooms, boarding schools, newspapers and television stations' (Hannerz 1987: 546). The use of the creolisation analogy in anthropology nevertheless leads to some conceptual difficulties that it shares with creole linguistics, as well as raising even trickier issues regarding the possibility to describe cultural worlds as enduring entities. If culture is never stable or homogeneous, this counter-argument goes, then everything creolises, and the concept is worthless. To this view, one may retort that not everything flows, mixes and leads to innovation, and certainly not at the same speed or with the same consequences. In any case, cultural creolisation must be seen as a matter of degree if it is to be used as a comparative concept, as advocated by Hannerz.

With creole *societies*, similar issues may arise. Just as the social category of the creole has porous and negotiable boundaries, the category of the creole society eschews an unequivocal delineation, confirming Nietzsche's maxim to the effect that only concepts with no history could be defined accurately.

Perhaps we can do no better than invoke Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblances. Moreover, as noted by Virginia Dominguez in her historical study of creole society in Louisiana (Dominguez 1993), the term creole 'acquired diverse meanings' over the years—as it did elsewhere. However, there is a case for retaining a concept along the lines of the Black Atlantic as envisioned by Paul Gilroy—and I would add the smaller universe of the Black Indian Ocean.

Notwithstanding the extension of the term to include ethnically complex cities in Indonesia (Knörr 2014), Pacific islands (Willis 2002), contemporary cities in Western Europe (Cohen and Sheringham 2016; Eriksen 2019c) and urban culture in the Solomon Islands (Jourdan 2018), the semantic core of the concept of the creole society is arguably to be found in post-slavery societies from Louisiana to Brazil, from Curaçao to the Seychelles. Nigel Bolland (1998) states simply that 'the term "Creole", referring to people and cultures, means something or somebody derived from the Old World but developed in the New' (Bolland 1998: 1), but it needs to be narrowed further to be genuinely useful. A crucial aspect is the loss of original political and social organisation and the need to reinvent even some of the most basic social relations owing to enforced displacement, brutal oppression and social fragmentation. By this token, ironically, the first peoples designated as creoles, or *criollos*, fail to meet the requirements, namely Europeans born in Nueva España, about whom the term was used as early as the mid-sixteenth century. As noted by Stephan Palmié (2007: 68), *criollo* does not today denote mixing or displacement, but local identity, as in *comida criolla*, local style cooking. And as pointed out by Charles Stewart (2007: 5), echoing Nietzsche's insight, 'the term "creole" has itself creolised, which is what happens to all productive words with long histories'.

A creole society, in my understanding, is based wholly or partly on the mass displacement of people who were, often involuntarily, uprooted from their original home, shedding the main features of their social and political organisations on the way, brought into sustained contact with people from other linguistic and cultural areas and obliged to develop, in creative and improvisational ways, new social and cultural forms in the new land, drawing simultaneously on traditions from their respective places of origin and on impulses resulting from the encounter. It can be argued that this delineation of the creole society fits well with some of the super-diverse cities in contemporary Europe, which I will pay a visit later.

The quintessential creole societies share important historical features; syncretic religion was often developed, as well as creole languages, genealogies tend to be cognatic and shallow, and—most importantly—society had to be reconstructed from scratch upon arrival. The descendants of Indian indentured labourers in such societies as Trinidad and Mauritius were not creoles according to these criteria, and significantly did not develop creole languages, but instead became bilingual in Bhojpuri and the local French- or English-based creole. Although uprooted and displaced, Indian migrants could arrive as couples or even families and were able to reconstruct Indian villages in their new land, reproducing their systems of kinship and inheritance, religious practices and value systems—far from unchanged, yet representing a continuity that was unavailable to the slaves and their descendants. The latter were thrust into modernity before virtually anyone else, beginning just after the conquest and soon developing into a large-scale business in the next centuries, producing newness not by choice but by necessity, becoming individuals, in the Dumontian sense (Dumont 1992), on the proto-factory that was the plantation.

Key concepts for any examination of creole society are, accordingly, *displacement* and *invention*. Indeed, the word *crioulo* signified newness right from the beginning, referring as it did to a Portuguese born in the Cape Verde Islands (Lobban 1998), incidentally the first major hub for the transatlantic slave trade, later extended to include any European born in the New World and thus liberated, or alienated, from the thick webs of kinship and tradition. The miracle of creolisation, to use Trouillot's (1998) expression, consists in the extraordinary cultural creativity, ranging from music and language to religion and food, which almost inexplicably grew out of a centuries-long history of unspeakable suffering and oppression. Every creole society has its culinary specialties with multiple origins, often European, African and Asian at once; every creole society has its version of the blues, a musical style giving a poetic form to longing and deprivation; and every creole society has its local discourse over identity, the past versus the future, openness versus closure.

The creole social identity is typically flexible. In Mauritius, the census category of 'General Population' was in its time defined as including 'every person who does not appear, from his way of life, to belong to one or other of those three communities', referring to the Hindus, the Muslim and the Chinese. Apart from the small white, Franco-Mauritian minority, they are by popular consent considered creoles. While in Trinidad, anyone who does not identify as Indian can be considered a Creole, Mauritians with mixed

Indian origin may, ‘depending on their way of life’, see themselves and be seen by others as being Creoles (see also Eriksen 2007).

The creole identity does not sit easily with the concept of boundaries which has been a staple in anthropological studies of social identity since Barth (1969, see also Eriksen 2019b), until it began to be unravelled through the increasing use of concepts such as creolisation and hybridity, which helped making the instability, negotiations and destabilisation of boundaries legible. It is an open identity, a residual category, difficult to fit into models of plural societies consisting of a finite number of named ethnic or religious groups, although this has been tried by governments and scholars alike, with limited success, in places like Mauritius.

Creoledom is sprawling and internally diverse, but owing to the shared history and, in most cases, shared contemporary situation of political and economic vulnerability due to small scale, some broad societal themes recur and reverberate throughout the Creole world. One is the relationship to Africa and the African heritage. Just as the question of the ‘African substratum’ has been vigorously discussed among linguists writing about creole languages—which have been described as idioms with ‘a European vocabulary and an African grammar’ (Chaudenson 2010)—so is the question of African roots an issue which is persistently being addressed by Creole intellectuals, with a bearing on both inequality and difference.

Celebrated by that uniquely Creole religious movement, Rastafarianism, and romanticised by an earlier generation of Francophone Creole intellectuals, the founders of the *négritude* movement, Africanness is almost obliterated in the more recent *créolité* movement with its point of gravity in Martinique, originating in Édouard Glissant’s work and developed further by Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau in their programmatic *Éloge de la créolité* (Glissant 1981; Bernabé et al. 1989, see also Hemer forthcoming). Whereas the older *négritude* movement led by Léopold Sedar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and others invoked radical cultural difference—*L’émotion est nègre, comme la raison est hellène*, as Senghor phrased it (1939: 295), and while Marcus Garvey advocated a return to Africa and Rastamen mythologised Ethiopia while dismissing white culture as the epicentre of Babylon, the authors of *Éloge de la créolité* emphasised the present, not the past; enrichment rather than oppression, creativity instead of dependency. If *négritude* is an ideology of cultural difference and Rastafarianism a movement celebrating uniqueness while condemning historical oppression, *créolité* is surprisingly free of the hierarchies of colour and class, instead emphasising newness, mixing and openness as universal

human virtues. In the eyes of its critics, this makes it politically toothless—a cultural product ‘along the lines of the United Colors of Benetton’ (Price and Price 1997: 27)—while its defenders would argue that *créolité* is a way forward beyond postcolonial inferiority complexes, victimhood and mental colonisation.

The *créolité* movement, with its emphasis on newness and creation, has a cheerful and worriless air about it which stands in stark contrast to the postcolonial dilemmas to which it must be related, not least with reference to the legacy of Fanon, later developed in Paul Gilroy’s empirical work, developing the dilemma of ‘double consciousness’ (Gilroy 1993), a concept originally coined by W. E. B. DuBois, later writing about conviviality in ways that have inspired the present volume in a decisive way (Gilroy 2004); but it also represents a rupture with the past, a presentism and a post-racial egalitarianism which was bound to resonate with cosmopolitan sensibilities elsewhere. There seemed to be no identity politics based on boundary-maintenance, no missionary religion of conversion and blind adherence, no single recipe for living in the world of the *créolistes*. Mixing, diversity and cultural openness were the order of the day.

As I write these lines, the Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi has just been re-elected as prime minister of India; Jair Bolsonaro has opened up new parts of the Amazon for logging and livestock raising, at the detriment not only of the ecosystem, but also of traditional livelihoods and indigenous people; a die-hard Brexiteer has recently become the new prime minister of the UK, and a jihadist bomb wounds a dozen random bypassers in Lyon. Conviviality and the accompanying relaxed attitude towards diversity seem to be losing. At the same time, creole sensibilities, attitudes and forms of life are thriving in many parts of the world, not least in the very societies mentioned. India has always been a subcontinent based on difference rather than similarity, a region where diversity is seen as a resource rather than a shortcoming, where difference denotes complementarity rather than an insurmountable gulf. Britain, a mongrel, hybrid creature from the beginning, has for centuries been a crossroads happily absorbing outside influences, often re-exporting them after reshaping them. France has, since the 1789 revolution, represented republican values and citizenship as opposed to rooted ethnic identities, while Brazil was the cradle of the perhaps first theoretical analysis of cultural hybridity as an asset rather than an aberration, in Gilberto Freyre’s celebration of cultural impurity (Freyre 1933). The cultural resources on which a creole social ontology depend are, in other words, abundantly available, even in some of the societies where the

winds currently seem to be blowing from the opposite direction. And I still haven't even mentioned the United States.

EXCURSUS ON SUPER-DIVERSITY AS CREOLISATION'S OFFSPRING

Pondering the implications of increased international migration into many of the cities of the world, the anthropologist Steven Vertovec coined the term *super-diversity* some years ago (Vertovec 2007). He describes the current situation as a *diversification of diversity*. Whereas, in the post-war decades, diversity in many cities could credibly be described by using conventional classifying devices, it had by now exploded and bifurcated in so many directions as to turn contemporary cities into statisticians' nightmares and anthropologists' wet dreams. The term designates a new social pattern, where migrant mobility and cultural streams have accelerated and changed in character. Whereas people formerly came from a few places and went to a few places, Vertovec says, they now come from many places and go to many places. More than 300 languages are currently spoken in London, Vertovec points out, but as he has stressed time and again (e.g. Vertovec 2017), super-diversity is not merely about the proliferation of ethnic and cultural minorities. It also denotes the diversification of all kinds of identification. The people who live in a city like London might be refugees, EU labour migrants, the children of migrants from the colonies (such as the Windrush generation), or the beneficiaries of family reunification; they may also be students who stayed on after graduating, tourists who somehow forgot to leave after their visa expired, au-pairs from the Philippines or adventure-seekers from Denmark.

The 'diversification of diversity' described by Vertovec, Jan Blommaert (2013) and others suggests a situation where it cannot be taken for granted how people identify and on what grounds they define their social identity.

Gerd Baumann's (1996) study of Southall in south-west London was an early expression of the perspective later developed into the study of super-diversity. Notwithstanding the fascinating ethnographic details on everything from drinking habits to marriage practices, the main theoretical contribution of Baumann's *Contesting Culture* is his identification of two kinds of discourses about social identities: the *dominant* discourse and the *demotic* (popular) discourse. The dominant discourse, reproduced chiefly through the media and in the public sector, tends to equate ethnicity (often vaguely defined) with community and culture; one ethnic group comprises

a community with a shared culture. Since dominant notions of ‘communities’ can be based on either language, religion or origin, any individual can belong to several communities, for example, a Gujerati one uniting Hindus and Muslims, a Muslim one uniting people of any linguistic or regional origin, and a subcontinental one uniting Indians and Pakistanis. Be this as it may, Baumann’s ethnography shows that the demotic discourse is more flexible and complex, that it recognises the situational and multi-faceted character of individual identification and contests some of the terms in which the dominant discourse is framed: alternative identifications such as blackness (which may or may not include Asians), feminism, socialism, interfaith networks and multiculturalist ideologies of tolerance contribute to softening the ethnic boundaries, creating ‘frontier zones’ instead.

In spite of the lack of fit between the dominant discourse and popular representations, which is confirmed in the lack of a simple fit between class and ethnicity, many Southallians continue to reproduce the dominant discourse in certain situations. This could be seen as a simple effect of elite influence, but it is probably more accurate to say that since resources flow through ethnic or religious channels as defined by the authorities, people have no choice but to present their claims in ethnic or religious terms: ‘The dominant discourse represents the hegemonic language within which Southallians must explain themselves and legitimate their claims’ (Baumann 1996: 192). What Baumann shows is that the classificatory system characteristic of the modern, liberal state encourages the social construction of ostensibly stable, reified, ethnic or religious *communities* (he himself italicises this word throughout the book, as if it were a problematic and untranslatable ‘native concept’). It is by virtue of their ethnic identity that minorities are discriminated against, but it is also chiefly through that identity that they can claim rights. They have no option other than classifying themselves as members of bounded groups, even if the facts on the ground indicate that they belong to lots of partly overlapping groups.

In a later study from Hackney in London by Susanne Wessendorf (2014), the super-diversity of this area often entails the creation of shifting public arenas and foci of group identification which are based not on ethnic or religious origins but on shared interests or activities. Whether this kind of fluid identification is sufficient to create a sense of belonging is an empirical question, of relevance not only to researchers but also to policymakers, civil servants and—primarily—the residents of these complex, often fluid residential areas. Issues typically taken up by politicians concern conditions for the integration of diverse populations into a shared

urban fabric, while residents are concerned with the challenges of everyday life. The contrast between Wessendorf's Hackney and Baumann's Southall, divided not only by most of London but also by twenty years, shows a transition from complex diversity to super-diversity. Hackney contains far more nationalities than Southall—among other things, EU labour migrants live there—and a broader range of identity constructions. Group membership is less important in Wessendorf's analysis, and many of the residents have such mixed origins that their allegiance to the place is more significant than their provenance, which resembles rhizomes more than roots.

Wessendorf's Hackney comes across as a thoroughly creolised place, and interestingly, Paul Gilroy often mentions certain parts of London as exemplars in his depiction of conviviality as a mode of interaction following the loss of empire and formerly hegemonic assumptions about cultural and ethnic hierarchies. At the same time, one striking commonality between Southall in the early 1990s and Hackney in the early 2010s is the continued importance of the public/private boundary. Conviviality across ethnic and cultural differences is the norm in the public sphere, whereas informal social networks continue to follow these lines; less so in Hackney than in Southall, but religion, language and ethnicity continue to function as organising principles at the micro-level of social organisation.

There are echoes of the classic models of the plural society, described by Furnivall (1948) for south-east Asia and Smith (1965) for the West Indies, in this configuration: the discrete groups meet in the market place, but remain separate in other domains. There are nevertheless important differences. Notably, there is no ethnic division of labour, there are many institutions apart from the market where people intermingle, from schools to civil society associations, and in the case of Hackney, intermarriage is widespread. Public life in Hackney thus comes across as an instance of what Josephides and Hall (2014) speak of as everyday cosmopolitanism, fuelled by conviviality and founded in shared interests that are based on place rather than kinship. It satisfies the main criteria of creoledom I have suggested earlier, notably those of displacement, mixing and the need to create a society for which there is no pre-existing template.

In a remarkable forthcoming book *Contaminations & Ethnographic Fictions: Southern Crossings* (with chapter titles like 'Bengaluru boogie'), Oscar Hemer (forthcoming; see also Chapter 13 in this book) discusses creolisation and other forms of identity contamination from the perspectives I have outlined, but he adds a feature which may be disturbing to some readers, but which pushes the creolisation paradigm a step further. The

book has an unnamed protagonist who resembles the author most of the time, but who changes his or her (or ‘hir’) gender en route, preferring the pronoun ‘ze’ as a way of denoting something indeterminate. Although he does not engage with the super-diversity literature, Hemer thereby adds a hitherto untheorised dimension to it. In Mauritius, a country proud of its tolerance for cultural diversity, anti-gay tendencies have recently surfaced, leading to public controversy and debate over the nature and scope of diversity. As many of my Mauritian friends and I agree, openness to diversity is not necessarily about multiculturalism or ethnic variation, but a set of values, or—as I would put it—a social ontology. Living with difference presupposes a convivial attitude towards not only Hindus, Jews, Christians, Muslims, New Age spiritualists and atheists, but also towards other aspects of personhood.

After this long excursus into urban Europe, super-diversity and the destabilisation of *all* aspects of human identity, we shall return to the creole worlds of the Indian Ocean, exploring briefly some of the implications of creoleness for social theory and the art of living with difference.

CREOLE LESSONS FROM THE INDIAN OCEAN

The openness of creole cultural worlds, famously characterised by borrowing, mixing and a general disdain for purity and roots, has often been commented upon. As early as 1963, V. S. Naipaul wrote about the way in which men in Port of Spain, Trinidad, upon leaving the cinema after watching *Casablanca*, walked exactly like Humphrey Bogart. Soon afterwards, Naipaul would write, in a less humorous mode, about the mimic men of the Caribbean (Naipaul 1963, 1967).

My own entry into the creole world took place in 1986, as I was carrying out fieldwork in Mauritius (see Eriksen 2019b, on which this section is based, for a full account). I was immediately struck by the discrepancy between social categorisations and cultural flows: in this multi-ethnic island-state, cultural meaning travelled easily, zigzagging from ethnic group to ethnic group, while social boundaries remained relatively fixed (Eriksen 1988). I had half expected to encounter a series of postmodern, reflexive and ironic identities in this place where four major religions meet, more than fifteen ancestral languages are revered and the inhabitants have origins in all three continents of the Old World. Instead, what met me was a concern bordering on an obsession with social classification and sub-classification, where Mauritians consistently read and interpreted social life

and politics through an ethnic lens. At the same time, cultural meaning, practices and values flowed and mixed, and whether they were Hindu or Creole, Franco-Mauritian or Sino-Mauritian, people were integrated into the same educational, occupational and media worlds. Only later would I obtain a vocabulary for talking about this discrepancy whereby group boundaries appeared to be fixed and crisp, while symbolic meaning was fluid—groups were discontinuous, while meaning was continuous, groups were bounded in a digital way whereas meaning was distributed in an analogue way. Fredrik Barth's brash admonition to neglect 'the cultural stuff' while studying ethnic relations (Barth 1969) did not help. Only later did it occur to me that my work in Mauritius had all been about boundaries and non-boundaries. I had studied networks, interethnic relations, attempts to lift identification from the communal to the republican level, stereotypes, genealogies and marriage patterns, and it was all about the reproduction, subversion, relativity, destabilisation and reinforcement of boundaries aimed to create order. Perhaps more than anything else, the material from Mauritius was about the relationship between the Creole and the non-Creole. Creoles, in the Mauritian context, are of African and Malagasy origin, while the non-Creoles are mainly of South Asian origin. The Creoles, somehow, didn't fit in; they did not come across as corporate groups with clear criteria for membership and crisp boundaries.

Mauritius, an island-state in the Indian Ocean with no indigenous population, is one of the most self-consciously multiculturalist societies in the world (Eriksen 1998). Its population came from various parts of India, continental Africa and Madagascar, China and France, and the official ideology unanimously presents ethnic and cultural diversity as a positive quality of Mauritian society. 'We are the tomato of the Indian Ocean', a publicity stunt once had it; 'we go with everything'. At major public ceremonies, it is the rule rather than the exception that several cultural traditions are presented through song and dance numbers, recitals of poetry or similar. Hindu, Catholic, Muslim and Buddhist religious holidays are acknowledged, and Mauritians sometimes talk of their society as *une société arc-en-ciel*, a rainbow society.

In spite of the admirable spirit of compromise and mutual recognition pervading Mauritian society, it easily lends itself to exemplifying three contradictions, or paradoxes, that I would like to call attention to, all of which have a bearing on boundaries through the relationship between the symbolic and the social, and show how the Creole identity sits uneasily with the 'ethnic groups and boundaries' paradigm.

First, multiculturalism in the public sphere, which I here take to mean the active encouragement of expressions of cultural diversity, does not necessarily encourage mixing and impurity. The celebration of cultural diversity often conflicts with individual liberties, notably the freedom not to belong to an ethnic community or to mix influences from different cultural streams. The Mauritian ideology can thus, slightly facetiously, be described as apartheid with a friendly face. Of course, there are other voices or alternative scripts, which challenge the rainbow society by mixing the colours. A much-loved popular musical group called *Grup Latanier* was formed by the Indo-Mauritian brothers Ram Joganah and Nitish Joganah in the heady time of cultural radicalism around 1980 and has been active since then. The group mostly play séga songs, a genre associated with the Creoles, but often incorporate Indian instruments such as tablas, performing engaged songs based on a class analysis rather than a perspective of Mauritian society as being mainly ethnically diverse.

There are, moreover, many Mauritians who deny the validity of ethnic categorisations. They see culture as a shared resource, something belonging to humanity and not to be monopolised by communities or interest groups. Indeed, an old friend of the Joganah brothers, namely, the linguist, playwright and poet Dev Virahsawmy (b. 1942), in his youth argued in favour of mixing (or creolising) the religious practices in Mauritius in order to strengthen the sense of community and unity (Eriksen 1988). This did not go down well in the wider public. Years later, commenting on another, related matter, the then Archbishop of the Mascareignes, Mgr Jean Margéot, pronounced that ‘we should keep the colours of the rainbow distinct for it to remain beautiful’, signalling support for multicultural coexistence but not for its transformation into generalised creolité.

The metaphor of the fruit salad is also sometimes used in describing Mauritius in positive terms. In practice, this entails that intermarriage is not encouraged in public or by politicians. While cultural mixing is often uncontroversial—even if what is usually celebrated is the purity of ethnic cultural expressions—intermarriage, which threatens to break up the very structure of the multi-ethnic society, is not. Few parents are particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of their son or daughter marrying someone from another community (Creoles often are an exception here). Intermarriage does take place not infrequently in Mauritius, and it can naturally work well for all parties, including the in-laws, but it is not part of the Mauritian social contract, where your community membership to no small extent defines who you are. Interestingly, the children of mixed marriages

are often categorised as Creoles, even if neither of their parents identified as one. For example, the daughter of a Hindu father and a Chinese mother might be considered by others, and consider themselves, as Creole.

The creole social identity is typically flexible, and Creoles are not an ethnic group like the others. In Mauritius, the census category of ‘General Population’ was in its time defined as including ‘every person who does not appear, from his way of life, to belong to one or other of those three communities’—the Hindu, Muslim and Chinese. Apart from the small white, Franco-Mauritian minority, they are often considered creoles. While in Trinidad, anyone who does not identify as Indian can be considered a Creole, Mauritians with mixed Indian origin may, ‘depending on their way of life’, see themselves and be seen by others as being Creoles (see also Eriksen 2007).

Creole identities do not sit easily with the concept of boundaries which has been a staple in anthropological studies of social identity since Barth (1969), until it began to be unravelled through the increasing use of concepts such as creolisation and hybridity, which helped making the instability, negotiations and destabilisation of boundaries legible. It is an open identity, a residual category, difficult to fit into models of plural societies and bounded ethnic groups, although this has been tried by governments and scholars alike, with limited success, in places like Mauritius.

Identity politics, including nationalism, communalism, populism and Islamism, can be a reaction to creolisation and the blurring of boundaries, or it can mirror another group’s identity politics. The identity politics of the state is frequently one of control and cohesion, while that of minorities is often a reaction against perceived exclusion. The rise of militant Islamism and right-wing nativism must at least partly be understood against this backdrop: both are ideologies of the disgruntled, the marginalised, the ostensible losers of globalisation. In order to come to terms with the rise of virulent identity politics in Europe and elsewhere, therefore, it is necessary to understand not only their cultural and political expressions, but its social roots in inequality and disenfranchisement. Creolisation offers a minimal recipe for living together in a diverse, shifting, unpredictable world, and it is a viable template for conviviality. Yet it does not solve the problems of inequality, perceived or real, giving rise to militant identity politics.

In other words, creolisation can be a solution to many of the practical boundary problems arising in a world with increased mobility, mixing both through cultural flows and procreation, and more intensive intergroup

encounters, but it does not solve every problem. An attitude based on creolisation as an ideal strives to make origins irrelevant and rejects intergroup boundaries, but understates, or diverts attention from, class and existing ethnic or racial hierarchies. This, among other things, is why widespread cultural mixing is rejected by so many people in the world today; it dilutes their corporate symbolic capital, just as clan exogamy might in kinship-based societies. But there is another reason as well, namely that continuity with the past is often existentially important to human well-being, and it can only be achieved by tracing your lifeworld back in time. In this overheated world of mobility, withdrawals, frictions and cultural symbiosis, therefore, concerns with roots and traditions are the powerful (and sometimes dangerous) dialectical negation of precisely these processes. A normative version of this argument, trying to keep the politics out of identity, as it were, is made by Claudio Magris (1989) in his evocative and appropriately meandering essay on the cultural and political history of the Danube, where he points out that a fascist is not someone who has intimate friends, who loves his *Heimat*, the local folk music, his country's nineteenth-century romantic poets and so on, but someone who is incapable of seeing others, who love *their* home village, folk music and so on, as equals. In this way, we may see the entire cultural production of humanity as a common good, but not one which is available to everyone at any time. Cultural meaning tends to be caught up by, and entangled with, social processes involving power, boundaries, hierarchies and indeed existential issues to do with personal identity. This is why Creoles often are faced with no pragmatically feasible alternative to reinventing themselves as an ethnic group. Social identity always has a political dimension and an existential or affective one. The alternative to portraying oneself as an ethnic group is to insist that human beings have boots and not roots or to show that the rootedness of people in the past tends to take a rhizomatic form, just as the case is with those uprooted, mixed, hybrid peoples typically spoken of as creoles. In this world, we are all creoles, and embracing the rhizomatic contaminations of our past and present may serve as an antidote to divisive politics of identity. In any case, there is little doubt that the major ideological divide in today's world can be drawn between rootedness and mobility, purity and mixing—or, indeed, ethnic identity and creole identity.

NOTE

1. See Stewart (2007) and Cohen and Toninato (2009) for overviews of approaches to social and cultural creolisation, Knörr and Trajano Filho (2018) for a comparison between linguistic and cultural creolisation.

REFERENCES

- Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Barth, F. 1969. "Introduction." In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, edited by F. Barth, 9–37. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Baumann, G. 1996. *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bernabé, J., P. Chamoiseau, and R. Confiant. 1989. *Éloge de la créolité*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Blommaert, J. 2013. *Ethnography, Superdiversity and Linguistic Landscapes: Chronicles of Complexity*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Bolland, O. N. 1998. "Creolisation and Creole Societies: A Cultural Nationalist View of Caribbean Social History." *Caribbean Quarterly* 44 (1/2): 1–32.
- Chaudenson, R. 2010. *La genèse des créoles de l'océan Indien*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Clifford, J. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Clifford, J., and G. Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cohen, R., and O. Sheringham. 2016. *Encountering Difference*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cohen, R., and P. Toninato, eds. 2009. *The Creolization Reader*. Abington, PA: Routledge.
- Dominguez, V. 1993. *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Dumont, L. 1992. *Essays on Individualism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eriksen, T. H. 1988. Communicating Cultural Identity and Difference: Ethnicity and Nationalism in Mauritius. Occasional Papers No. 16. Oslo: Department of Social Anthropology.
- Eriksen, T. H. 1998. Common Denominators: Ethnicity and the Politics of Compromise in Mauritius. Oxford: Berg.
- Eriksen, T. H. 2003. "Creolisation and Creativity." *Global Networks* 3 (3): 223–237.

- Eriksen, T. H. 2007. "Creolization in Anthropological Theory and in Mauritius." In *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, edited by C. Stewart, 153–177. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Eriksen, T. H. 2019a. "Between Inequality and Difference: The Creole World in the Twenty-First Century." *Global Networks* 19 (1): 3–20.
- Eriksen, T. H. 2019b. "Beyond a Boundary: Flows and Mixing in the Creole World." In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years*, edited by T. H. Eriksen and M. Jakoubek, 133–151. London: Routledge.
- Eriksen, T. H. 2019c. "The Tragedy of the Cultural Commons: Cultural Crossroads and the Paradoxes of Identity." In *The Handbook of Diasporas, Media, and Culture*, edited by J. Retis and R. Tsagarousianou, 49–61. New York: Wiley.
- Freyre, G. 1946 [1933]. *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization* (Casa Grande & Senzala). New York: Knopf.
- Furnivall, J. S. 1948. *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geertz, C. 1986. "The Uses of Diversity." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 25 (1): 105–123.
- Gilroy, P. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gilroy, P. 2004. *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* London: Routledge.
- Glissant, E. 1981. *Le discours antillais*. Paris: Seuil.
- Hall, S. 1992. "The Question of Cultural Identity." In *Modernity and Its Futures*, edited by S. Hall, D. Held, and A. McGrew, 274–316. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hannerz, U. 1974. *Caymanian Politics: Structure and Style in a Changing Island Society*. Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology, 1. Stockholm: Department of Social Anthropology.
- Hannerz, U. 1987. "The World in Creolization." *Africa* 57 (4): 546–559.
- Hemer, O. Forthcoming. *Contaminations & Ethnographic Fictions: Southern Crossings*. Houndmills and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Herskovits, M. 1941. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Josephides, L., and A. Hall, eds. 2014. *We the Cosmopolitans: Moral and Existential Conditions of Being Human*. Oxford: Berghahn.
- Jourdan, C. 2018. "The Shades of Legitimacy of Solomon Islands Pijin." In *Creolization and Pidginization in Contexts of Postcolonial Diversity*, edited by J. Knörr and W. Trajano Filho, 78–95. Leiden: Brill.
- Knörr, J. 2014. *Creole Identity in Postcolonial Indonesia*. Oxford: Berghahn.
- Knörr, J., and W. Trajano Filho, eds. 2018. *Creolization and Pidginization in Contexts of Postcolonial Diversity*. Leiden: Brill.
- Lobban, R. A. 1998. *Cape Verde: Crioulo Colony to Independent Nation*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Magris, C. 1989. *Danube*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

- Mintz, S. W. 1998. "The Localization of Anthropological Practice: From Area Studies to Transnationalism." *Critique of Anthropology* 18 (2): 117–133.
- Mintz, S. W. 2010. *Three Ancient Colonies: Themes and Variations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mintz, S. W., and R. Price. 1992 [1976]. *The Birth of African-American Culture*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Naipaul, V. S. 1963. *The Middle Passage*. London: Andre Deutsch.
- Naipaul, V. S. 1967. *The Mimic Men*. London: Andre Deutsch.
- Palmié, S. 2007. "The 'C-Word' Again: From Colonial to Postcolonial Semantics." In *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, edited by C. Stewart, 66–83. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Price, R., and S. Price. 1997. "Shadowboxing in the Mangrove." *Cultural Anthropology* 12 (1): 3–36.
- Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.
- Senghor, L. S. 1939. "Ce que l'homme noir apporte." In *L'homme de couleur*, edited by S.E le Cardinal Verdier et al., 291–313. Paris: Plon.
- Smith, M. G. 1965. *The Plural Society of the British West Indies*. London: Sangster's.
- Stewart, C., ed. 2007. *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Trouillot, M.-R. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Trouillot, M.-R. 1998. "Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context." *Plantation Society in the Americas* 5 (1): 8–28.
- Vertovec, S. 2007. "Super-Diversity and Its Implications." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30 (6): 1024–1054.
- Vertovec, S. 2017. "Talking Around Super-Diversity." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42 (1): 125–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1406128>.
- Wessendorf, S. 2014. *Commonplace Diversity: Social Relations in a Super-Diverse Context*. London: Palgrave.
- Willis, D., ed. 2002. *The Age of Creolization in the Pacific: In Search of Emerging Cultures and Shared Values in the Japan-America Borderlands*. Hiroshima: Keisuisha.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

