

3|2015

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Creolizing as the Transdisciplinary Alternative to Intellectual Legitimacy on the Model of the “Normal Scientific” Community

Abstract

This article examines how the concept of *creolization*, that emerged to grasp the distinctly African New World of the Caribbean, offers especially useful resources for thinking through what can and should constitute alternative forms of intellectual legitimacy and scholarly progress in transdisciplinary pursuits. It does so by revisiting Thomas Kuhn’s suggestion in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* that cause and effect are often mistaken when determining which scholarly projects merit the designation as “science.” Suggesting that transdisciplinary scholarship fundamentally rejects most of the conditions that constitute normal scientific communities, it turns to the ways in which creole languages revealed the insufficiency of prior academic linguistic models by demonstrating that the multilingual, multiracial, and multinational region out of which they came was prototypical rather than exceptional. As with the languages themselves, the concept of creolization, when used by creative writers and social theorists alike, offered a more rigorous descriptive account of the outcomes of the larger transnational and transoceanic processes that ushered in European modernity. In ways that offer a guide to disciplines beyond the model of identitarian, sovereign territories, they drew on varieties of scholarly resources to understand how people without prior shared histories did not exist in impermeable bubbles but were remade in relation to one another. Finally, the piece asks whether the prefix “trans-,” shared in terms like transnationalism, transdisciplinarity, or transsexuality, should encourage us to consider whether the aim of calls for transdisciplinarity are for “trans” to be a temporary designation and episodic challenge or a permanent orientation.

Résumé

Cet article a pour objet central le concept de créolisation qui sert d’abord à distinguer le Nouveau Monde Africain des Caraïbes. Aujourd’hui, il s’avère très utile pour réfléchir à la transdisciplinarité ainsi qu’aux modes alternatifs de légitimation intellectuelle et de progrès scientifique qu’elle met en jeu. Notre point d’entrée est l’ouvrage *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Thomas Kuhn y explique que, lorsqu’il s’agit de déterminer les projets universitaires méritant d’être qualifiés de « scientifiques », on a tôt fait de confondre cause et effet. La recherche transdisciplinaire, quant à elle, rejette la plupart des caractéristiques des communautés scientifiques normalement constituées. Elle est en cela très proche des langues créoles qui ont mis au jour les insuffisances et les lacunes des langues jusque là établies. Portées par une zone géographico-culturelle à la pluralité identitaire fortement marquée—fût-elle linguistique, raciale ou nationale—, les langues créoles ne relèvent pas de l’exception mais sont en fait un modèle prototypique que le concept de créolisation peut également décliner. Sous la plume d’écrivains, d’artistes, de sociologues ou de politistes, la créolisation saisit en effet plus efficacement les phénomènes ressortissant aux échanges transnationaux et transocéaniques qui ont caractérisé la modernité européenne. A l’appui de plusieurs méthodologies universitaires, la créolisation se penche sur l’émergence d’une histoire commune à plusieurs peuples autonomes et pourtant interdépendants. Cette approche est en soi un dépassement du modèle identitariste et territorialiste des disciplines, une transdisciplinarité au sujet de laquelle il reste à décider si le passage et l’altération auxquels le préfixe « trans- » renvoie (comme dans « transnationalisme » ou « transsexualité ») désigne l’état transitoire de la remise en cause ou une orientation de recherche plus profonde et durable.

Références électroniques

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Creolizing as the Transdisciplinary Alternative to Intellectual Legitimacy on the Model of the “Normal Scientific” Community

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Introduction

When I offered a dissertation proposal writing course for the first time last fall, we began by reading and discussing what many of my colleagues and I considered outstanding recent works authored by graduates of our Ph.D. program. What surprised the students most was that all six of the documents were exemplary—they introduced an important question or problem in novel terms; they contextualized it in relevant scholarly research that was concisely explained; they made readers want to understand more—and that they were considerably different. One had almost a hundred citations though it was less than fifty pages long, while another had only four. The others, who fell somewhere in between, had clearly used very different criteria for determining what needed to be included. Additionally, while all were highly readable, their prose styles and modes of argumentation were quite varied. And all were examples of proposals written within the same, admittedly rather diffuse, field of political science. What were the students to make of these, as models, given their profound diversity? Surely the point of models was to narrow the field, offering a singular and straightforward guide.

This led immediately to the more complex question of audience, or for whom we write and to whom we are accountable. For some writers, their responsibility as scholarly authors is to show that they have literally read—or are at least become aware of—everything written on their subject matter. To be learned and erudite is to be comprehensive, or actually exhaustive. For others, the aim is to demonstrate their selectivity. In principle they know of everything written on the subject, but they only explicitly engage and would thereby only point others toward what is most worthy of citation and commentary. And then there is the range of positions in between, each suggesting a different conception of a scholarly writer’s role.

However, even here, there is considerable variety regarding who or what constitutes “everyone” or “everything.” For what these choices also reveal is the writer’s own conception of who and what is relevant to the questions at hand. For some, relevance is determined professionally, e.g. they publish nothing that does not name the most powerful members of the field, those who often also occupy coveted positions in prestigious educational institutions that the author would, one day, like to join. For others, the relevant are those whom everyone else writing in a determined area also cites, since what is being demonstrated is a particular form of field competency that constitutes membership and performs belonging. For others still, the preference is of a radically different, even opposed nature. It is to mention and discuss scholars who they consider otherwise to be understudied, either by virtue of their professional location (at a small and/or underfunded college or community college in the global north or south), the lack of accessibility to their published work (either because it is not published in English or French or by a press with limited distribution), or their occupying a discipline that is not considered sufficiently adjacent to be an indispensable part of field literacy (one can ignore it with impunity). And then, again, there is a range of ways that individuals combine these approaches.

How one navigates these various alternative choices is fraught, especially when some standards of legitimacy and authority dominate over others. In the field of Political Science, as is true of the vast majority of social sciences, the terrain is always overshadowed by the ever elusive specter of “being

scientific” with concerns about the relationship of scholarly findings to the project of democracy coming as a distant second.¹

On the often-confused pursuit of the former mode of legitimation, it is worth revisiting the under-discussed concluding chapter of Thomas Kuhn’s otherwise widely studied *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. After asking why estimations of progress were monopolized by activities that we readily call scientific, he reversed the terms to offer that “To a very great extent the term ‘science’ is reserved for fields that . . . progress in obvious ways” (2012: 159). He continued:

Can a definition tell a man whether he is a scientist or not? . . . if precedent from the natural sciences serves, [the question] will cease to be a source of concern not when a definition is found, but when the groups that now doubt their own status achieve consensus about their past and present accomplishments. It may, for example, be significant that economists argue less about whether their field is a science than do practitioners of some other fields of social science. Is that because economists know what science is? Or is it rather economics about which they agree? (2012: 160).

He explains, drawing on the example of painting, that we have mistaken as effects what we should understand as causes. In other words, we see as scientific those fields where there is consensus about the nature and meaning of their own progress. These are fields in which practitioners, in working from a single paradigm “or from a closely related set” (2012: 161), understand a creative success as one that is clearly recognized as an addition to the collective achievement of the group. This is the case when there is an absence of competing schools that disagree about the aims and standards of their shared field and is therefore considerably easier to achieve in non-revolutionary periods (or ones when fundamental tenets of the discipline are not at issue) and in communities heavily insulated from “demands of the laity and everyday life” (163). Kuhn continues,

Just because he is working only for an audience of colleagues, an audience that shares his own values and beliefs, the scientist can take a single set of standards for granted. He need not worry about what some other group or school will think and can therefore dispose of one problem and get on to the next more quickly than those who work for a more heterodox group. Even more important, the insulation of the scientific community from society permits the individual scientist to concentrate his attention upon problems that he has good reason to believe he will be able to solve. Unlike the engineer, and many doctors, and most theologians, the scientist need not choose problems because they urgently need solution and without regard for the tools available to solve them. In this respect, also, the contrast between natural scientists and many social scientists proves instructive. The latter often tend, as the former almost never do, to defend their choice of a research problem . . . chiefly in terms of the social importance of achieving a solution. Which group would one then expect to solve problems at a more rapid rate (2012: 163–164)?

When describing how members of such communities envision their role, audience, and the nature of accountability, Kuhn emphasizes: to be a member of a professional scientific group, one’s focus must be on questions about the behavior of nature; the issues must be ones of detail; the adequacy of a given solution is not determined individually but by its acceptability to a larger group of similarly trained peers who, as “a uniquely competent professional group . . . [are] the sole possessors of the rules of the game or of some equivalent basis for unequivocal judgments” (2012: 167).

¹ On the varied ways in which political scientists have essayed to combine the imperatives to be scientific with advancing the project of democracy, see David Ricci’s *The Tragedy of Political Science: Politics, Scholarship, and Democracy*, New Haven, CT, Yale UP, 1987. Although some political scientists treat the question of how to be scientific as either resolved or a dead end, for others this is a still vital, ongoing debate.

For students, as the ones in my seminar, seeking to become professional political scientists, the pressures are immense to find and join one such already existing scholarly community. Within it, a contribution would consist of identifying a gap or seeming contradiction or existing puzzle within an already roughly defined intellectual agenda, and addressing it by use of a recognized set of methods and literatures. However, as is far less the case in economics as practiced in the United States,² even though there are normal scientific communities with clear understandings of what would count as progress in their research trajectories within political science, there are also competing schools that continue to ask very fundamental questions about what in the world beyond the academy our work should achieve.

It is with this spirit in mind that I have begun by revisiting Kuhn. *Transdisciplinarity*, as explored in what follows, fundamentally rejects most of the conditions that constitute normal scientific communities. More specifically, in distinguishing itself from inter- or multidisciplinary work (one of which would connect members of unchanged communities of normal scientists around shared interests and the other which would collect normal scientific communities temporarily to converge in conversation), transdisciplinarity suggests a fundamentally different, actually opposed conception of the nature of disciplines, the role of the scholar, and the nature of intellectual accountability.

Alternatives to the Ideal of Normal Scientific Communities

Once we make the sociological turn charted by Kuhn, we can also explore alternative ways that scholarly communities and pursuits can be understood. In particular, we can observe how the ways in which we conceptualize the meaning of culture and symbolic life overdetermine how we envisage what it is to be intellectually disciplined. To do this, I consider how the concept of creolization, which emerged to understand the distinctly African and New World character of the Caribbean, offers an especially useful guide for rethinking intellectual accountability in the twenty-first century.

Eighteenth-century Herderian ways of envisioning nations, people, languages, and culture, even if always simplifying idealizations, are still very much alive, shaping the ways in which people identify with their disciplines and conceive of field mastery. In these a single nation, language, and people were thought to be neatly aligned, suggesting that projects like those of the nation-state could be coherent and sustainable. The disciplinary counterpart to this model would suggest that what one does and does not study, reads and ignores, and is and is not answerable to, can be clearly explained by designating one's disciplinary training. The confrontation of this way of conceiving of nation, people, and culture with late 19th-century scholars of creole language remains illuminating.

After all, the system of mapping the descent of languages into family trees as practiced by the neo-grammarians of Leipzig simply could not explain how Latin had developed into multiple, distinct European tongues (Chaudenson 2000, 14; Meijer and Muysken 1977, 27). Aiming to determine how substratum languages contributed to the specific ways in which target languages were spoken, even in mastery—one could think here, for instance, of the English spoken in Scotland, on the one hand, and Puerto Rico, on the other; or the range of English spoken in contemporary South Africa—Lucien Adams suggested that just as creole languages were non-European languages with European lexical items, Romance languages had combined a Latin lexifier with a variety of substratal vernaculars spoken throughout Europe. Similarly, Hugo Schuchardt, who first studied Basque and the Mediterranean *lingua franca*, *sabir*, spoken in North Africa until eradicated by French, turned to pidgins and creoles as his prototypical examples, insisting that these discredited the adequacy of

² On this point, consider the introduction to Thomas Picketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, New York, Belknap Press, 2014. Thomas Picketty describes the need to leave the United States where Economics was reified as a science to do the discipline-spanning work that would enable him to grapple with the current nature of the global economy.

prevailing classificatory schemes that restricted each language to one unique genetic originating point.³ Creole languages and, he implied, perhaps most others, could combine multiple lexifiers and substrates in relations that needed to be illuminated rather than obscured when delineating such genealogies. Following in this tradition are the French and Congolese sociolinguists Robert Chaudenson (2001) and Salikoko Mufwene (1998) who argue that creoles pose and illuminate the hardest of linguistic questions, those that should be the concern to all students of language since they push to their logical conclusion evolutionary tendencies observable in all tongues (Chaudenson 1989). In other words, the processes at work in the development of creole and noncreole languages are not structurally different. Instead regular processes of both, in the case of creole languages, are radically quickened due to “greater ecology-prompted restructuring than in less heterogeneous and more focused settings of languages transmission” (Mufwene 1998, 7).

This sociohistorical approach therefore traces Francophone creole language emergence to specific conditions and periods of contact that prompted the transmission of restructured linguistic elements. The first of these was a period that, following initial sporadic intracommunal contact, brought relatively homogenous, rural, primarily poor French working for companies and landlords who spoke nonstandard varieties of French with mainly very young slaves who were integrated into such homes in a deliberate project of deculturation. This quickly produced a mulatto population that largely spoke French or approximations of it (which combined a nonstandard French lexifier with their own substratal tongues). With the extension of agricultural industry and intensified reliance on slave labor, newly arrived Africans came to form a majority. They were largely segregated as field laborers with limited direct exposure to Europeans and the languages they spoke (here called *acrolects*), and their contact was mediated by mulattos, who were both local and seasoned slaves, and their language (called a *mesolect*). Within slave communities the mulatto approximations of the French of their masters (often also family members) were approximated in a process called *basilectalization* through which core features of their *mesolect* combined with additional substratal languages that were themselves mixed. As creole slaves were radically outnumbered, the language was further reconstructed creating a more complex linguistic continuum between the standard nonstandard French lexifier and various creole forms. Linguists of this camp, especially Chaudenson and Mufwene, insist against prevailing orthodoxies, that while *basilectal* forms are assumed to be the oldest, the opposite is true: creoles are initially closer to their lexifiers; distance in fact grows with social conditions of greater separation or isolation marked by and associated with autonomized elaboration.

Chaudenson and Mufwene emphasize a few additional points key for refining analogies that we will draw between creolizing of languages and of disciplinary forms: First is that while creole language situations offered exceptionally good conditions for observation and study (as relatively closed settings undergoing recent change with dates, demographic, economic, and social dimensions that can largely be determined), the models they suggest can be used to explore other symbolic domains by similarly emphasizing their particular sociohistorical features. In none of these does one see a simple or harmonious mix of elements of coexisting prior systems. But in more than any other, the domain of language in colonial societies is defined by a centripetal force of the dominating group. Although, even in this account, language development is multidirectional, it is less so than with music and dance, the production of food and homes, religion, or medicine.

Still, on the question of language, what is frequently overlooked when creoles are described as the fruit of abnormal processes of transmission is that no native or fluent speaker entirely or completely possesses or acquires a language. Outside of scholastic systems, it is relevant communicative needs and one’s social environment that determine the aspects of a language that one learns. One is not introduced to the system of language in its entirety but to vocabulary and partial

³ Primarily a language of commerce and diplomacy (and also spoken by pirates, slaves and renegades) used across the Mediterranean Basin between the 11th and 19th centuries, this *lingua franca*, *sabir*, combined Northern Italian and Occitano-Romance linguistic elements with those from Spanish and Portuguese, Berber, Turkish, French, Greek and Arabic. With the ascendancy of France in the region, the influence of its speech and that of North Africa became more pronounced as those of Iberia and Italy declined. For more, see Guus Meijer and Pieter Muysken, “On the Beginning of Pidgin and Creole Studies: Schuchardt and Hesseling,” *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics*, ed. Albert Valdman, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1977, p. 21-45.

rules over which, through trial and error, one develops competence. One's aim is rarely either to create or master a language but instead to use it either to enable or perhaps obfuscate processes of communication (Mufwene 1998, 5). In addition, it is misleading although frequent when studying linguistic development to focus on converging communities when in fact contact, negotiation, and innovation usually took place in individual encounters that collectively produced language (not entirely unlike the ways in which individual acts of reproduction affect the larger species) (Mufwene 1998, 6). Finally, degrees of restructuring, including repetition and codification of imperfect replications, or simply errors, are a feature of all spontaneous language transmission, even within communities of native speakers. What distinguish creole languages are more frequent imperfect feature replication (due primarily to limited contact with speakers of the superstrate language) and more rapid and extensive restructuring than in communities that are monolingual.

This story about the insufficiency of prior linguistic models revealed by the creole examples can extend well beyond them, suggesting that the seemingly exceptional nature of the Caribbean situation and example is prototypical in important and illuminating ways. A multilinguistic, multiracial, and multinational region formed through transnational and transoceanic processes that ushered in European modernity, concepts from it are surely more useful to our present than those tied to nationalistic projects that denied and disavowed the actual imperial geographies that, spanning metropole and colonies, fundamentally shaped them.

Certainly, as is evident in the créolité writings of Martinican Édouard Glissant (2008), Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant (1990) and studies of creolization by Cuban Antonio Benítez Rojo (1997) and Jamaican Kamau Braithwaite (1971), creolization offers a more rigorous descriptive account of what transpires as very unequal groups collided in plantation societies where people without prior shared histories did not exist in impermeable bubbles but were remade in relation to one another. All (including those actually indigenous to the place) were radically resituated in an intensified moment of rupture and recreation that previously separated genealogies would never have anticipated. People continued to be what they had been by becoming fundamentally different in relations of borrowing, imitation, indebtedness and rejection that belied ideological commitments that suggested that people, cultures, nations and languages could resist being altered by their surrounding circumstances. In other words, as critical linguists used the seeming peculiarity of creoles and what transpired with Caribbean speech to understand the development of languages more generally, many Caribbean creative writers and social theorists used the concept of creolization to capture the distinctive lens that their political, existential situation disclosed about human culture. What I suggest in the remaining pages here is that this Caribbean concept also implies a particularly fruitful orientation to disciplinary and scholarly frameworks as we move further into the twenty-first century.

For example, a common response to the fundamental 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 are aggregated in the hope that together the discrete pieces amount to a complete picture that, if not comprehensive, is at least less partial. Parties to such endeavors are understood to contribute most if they authentically represent each of their respective traditions. Even in these instances, those skeptical about such initiatives frequently see ensuing intellectual mixtures only in terms of dilution or corruption. The products appear illicit, muddying otherwise clear borders and territories in ways that threaten disciplinary distinctiveness and sovereignty. Preferable in times framed as those of scarcity such as our own is to develop the most specialized of masteries, shoring up the necessity of this particular area of study and the indispensability of these specific (decreolized) practitioners, hiding actual origins of cross-pollination and shared originating sources that later combined in divergent ways.

Creolization 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, keeping the converging pieces unchanged.

To creolize 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 creolization cannot and does not prioritize "cultural maintenance" or "cultural preservation," if used as an approach to scholarship, its aim is instead guided by another telos: that of contributing to the construction of an inhabitable social world or one in which people can live together as human beings on terms that are neither degrading nor dehumanizing. 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. 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 totalizing and repressive nature of any collective aspirations. In these, fears about the failures of collective political identities to sufficiently exhaust the full complexity of all aspects of those who might gravitate toward them is turned into a complete impasse whereby the always limited nature of any specific, historical political form of membership is treated as reason not to pursue shared group identification at all. The difficulty with this position is its narrow academicism. After all, there is no politics without the mobilization of generalizing identities and political successes often lead to the emergence of forms of identity that did not exist and could not have been anticipated fully before. This suggests that the response to the post-structuralism criticism of reductionistic identity is to take heed of the always imperfect forging of political identity for the sake of doing better, rather than being defeated before one has even begun. However, this response that I am advocating should be associated more with creolization and creolizing than with the creolité and hybridity movements since creolité writers often prize particular moments of mixture over and against what would otherwise remain an ongoing, open-ended process of emergence and can do so in ways that problematically frame the movement away from both European whiteness *and* African and urban blackness as a teleological ideal. Writers pushing for *hybridity* often end up further fixing the identities that the hybrid individual supposedly uniquely navigates often in efforts to single out their own "post-colonial" generation by emphasizing, frequently in ahistorical and anachronistic terms, the failings of anti-colonial political activity.

The field-defining texts of Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, Queer Studies, and Women's Studies all exemplify this creolizing character. Aiming to capture what previously existing forms of academic scholarship excluded as worthy of study, most of their practitioners refused to pursue a single avenue into or dimension of reality. Even if they knew that they could not capture all of its inexhaustible dimensions, this was no reason not to try. It is no accident that these fields emerged out of social and political movements that charged that the constitution and reproduction of normal scientific communities relied on radically narrowing the kinds of knowledge that were treated as legitimate, assuring that only a very partial set of people could function as the arbiters of credibility and authoritativeness, and that while scholars did still have a distinctive role to play, this would be far better understood if they remained also answerable to the many communities beyond the academy. In short, many insisted that "rigor" so delinked intellectual work from larger, complex processes and terrains, that it made it inevitable that most academic communities would be organically linked to preserving systemic inequalities rather than identifying and fighting with others to eradicate them.

It is particularly ironic that these civil rights movements and their scholarly children are often charged with identitarianism, or with being tied reductionistically to a monolithic account of experience that fails to see linkages across diverse forms of identity and the multiple ways in which each and their relationship to one another might be interpreted and understood. In fact, the aim of turning disciplines that are contingent slices of reality reflective of the idiosyncratic aims of particular communities into sovereign territories to which one gains entrance through developing a mastery defined by a small, expert group, is far more identitarian. Fundamentally opposed to considering

problems and relations that would necessitate working beyond one's field as currently designated, this brand of practitioner assiduously avoids reconsidering the historical developments that led to its current, fragile configuration.

A Seeming Detour: Some "Trans-" Meditations

The prefix "trans-" has especially marked the vocabulary of the start of the twenty-first century, whether in references to transnationalism, transdisciplinarity, or transsexuality. In many instances, the prefix expresses the sense that the processes that determine the conditions of our lives have outgrown the institutions that are supposed to control them and that our efforts to understand our circumstances should keep pace with such transformations. In other words, "trans-" bespeaks efforts to create fresh alternatives in the face of the ongoing, very real life of what is largely outmoded.

The discourses of trans-gender and trans-sexuality have a similar character in acknowledging the remarkable salience of bodies that don't seem properly to fit or express that which the trans person feels him- or herself to be. The negotiating of what is insufficient takes a range of forms: in one, the aim is to align outward forms with personal modes of identification where the latter is thought to be more significantly unchanging and unchangeable than the physical body itself. In these instances, the aim is for "trans" to be a temporary designation until the correct alignment is achieved, in which case the existing categories of sex and gender are adequate. In other cases, "trans" is a permanent condition, drawing attention instead to the ways in which existing categories do not and cannot fully exhaust how people meaningfully live gender and sex. Why do I broach this?

For starters, the seemingly distinctive, separate terms to which the prefix "trans" can be affixed may actually express important shared dimensions of our current realities. Second, the different ways that "trans" is negotiated by transitioning men and women are illuminating for questions of transdisciplinarity. For some "trans" is an intellectual stage or moment in the reshuffling of the division of intellectual labor, a temporary condition until we return to settled questions, aims, and constitutions of scholarly communities. It is the moments surrounding episodic challenges that interrupt business as usual. For others, genuine rigor requires the resistance to such resettling or in Kuhn's terms, the deliberate continuation of the revolutionary moment where everything is open to reconsideration. Just as the permanently trans person, those who engage in this form of transdisciplinary work do not devote their considerable skill and energy to mastering what it is to join (rather than change or transform) existing scholarly communities.

At the same time, while this puts the question of what constitutes an achievement and progress squarely on the table for debate, I would not argue that "progress" cannot have meaning for those who embrace "trans" as a permanent orientation. The collectivity to which one might contribute is rather different from that of the normal scientific community since, in spanning scholarly circles and academic and non-academic intellectual domains, one might in fact be aiming to call it into being. And this would be achieved through advancing concepts, ideas, and arguments that enable dimensions of reality that were previously invisible or unarticulated to take on less inchoate form.

By Way of Conclusion

Scholarly communities committed to thinking with conceptions of creolization and of indigeneity have tended to be fundamentally opposed to one another. After all, what sets the conditions for creolization has, historically, been the genocide of indigenous communities followed by the systematic displacement of survivors by plantations manned by enslaved Africans. "Creolization,"

for its part, is associated with the celebration of an anti-essentialism that appears crude and callous to those with life worlds that others have sought to eradicate. After all, creolization does describe how distinctive genealogies, newly indigenous to a place arose out of the radical and intensified interchange of symbols and practices that constitute the encounters among displaced people neither rooted in their new location nor able to identify with great civilizations elsewhere.

There are certainly moments in which creolization is avoided because it seems only to amount to embracing assimilation into a colonizing culture. In such instances, mixing appears as dilution or becoming less oneself by becoming more like a group that is fundamentally hostile to you and your own community's collective thriving or even survival. The difficulty with this position is that new world cultures and any of those that emerged out of colonization and enslavement are already inescapably creolized. There *are* distinctive decreolizing pressures placed on most indigenous communities: they are asked, as a condition of recognition and respect, to exemplify unadulterated purity; to be a window into a lost and uncorrupted world; to offer a refuge or "otherwhere" from the neo-imperial logics of the present. At the same time, the survival of indigenous communities in settler societies of the Atlantic and Pacific has required that they become (and now are) among the most racially mixed of any living communities.

And the adoption and altering of elements of a colonial culture does not always constitute compromise. Recall that the French government was far less threatened by the Négritude writings of Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire than it was by instances of Algerians animatedly speaking French to one another, using the language they supposedly could not learn, to combine to oust the settlers. Suddenly, a creolized *lingua franca* (that combined the French lexifier with the full range of North African substrates), a framework introduced to colonize, was used to interrupt and throw off its forms. Négritude, at least in some versions, is, in many ways, much more compatible with a multicultural than a creolizing model. In it, each community's "culture" is a territory with fortified boundaries, in the case of the colonized, a sanctuary into which one retreats, even if in petrified and zombified form, having conceded at least temporarily that the public terrain of politics is that of the settler.⁴

At the same time, I must emphasize that the meaningful formulation of the concept of creolization emerged to make sense of the dreaded peculiarity of the Caribbean. It aimed to name new genealogical trajectories unanticipated as people believed they could leave one world and radically disrupt another while remaining unchanged. Instead they continued to be what they were through becoming something radically new. Creolization was not anyone's express end or purpose, but instead what transpired when those processes, rules, and norms that would have stopped it were absent or ill-formed.

What does that mean for this discussion?

First, normal scientific communities purify and narrow who and what is relevant to them by creating incentivized rules and safeguards to nurture settled rules and procedures that can be relied upon to be predictable. This often follows upon a revolutionary upsurge that is then routinized and elaborated upon, staking out a clear pathway to what will constitute collective development and progress. From this vantage point, creolized intellectual products, methods, aims, and communities would be largely incomprehensible and illegible. Seeing the absence of predetermined rules for engagement as a necessary condition, who and what is relevant and how and why, remains a necessarily open consideration. This does not mean that creolized communities do not or cannot take on degrees of stability and standardization. It is simply that their self-identities as creolized, even when politically retrograde, especially in contrast with other more hegemonic models, bring the constitution of their undergirding norms to the fore. But they also suggest something that is perhaps more dangerous: that creolization would be the norm if it weren't for the violent policing that keeps it

⁴ This is not to diminish the significance of the Négritude writings of Césaire and Senghor, both of whom associated a strong sense of Africanness/Blackness with an internationalism that, in stressing African diasporic cultures, countered the narrower nationalism of many Eurocentric models. For an account of the movement's complexity, see Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Léopold Sédar Senghor, L'art africain comme philosophie*, Paris, Reveneue Editions, 2007.

from emerging. This does not mean that creolization is everywhere—though it is very widespread—but that there are profound commitments that prevent it from being the outcome of human processes, especially authoritative intellectual endeavor, that would otherwise lead in its direction.

Creolization is not without limits: the process itself cannot and does not determine who and what are present as potential contributing dimensions. And, as what I have already said hopefully makes emphatically clear, it is not an equal process or one that comes out of ideal circumstances. The argument and claims are rather different: if we assume heterogeneity and radical difference as a basic human condition and not a set of layers or hindrances that we can peel away to get at meaningful commonality, we need models for how we articulate who and what we are in and through others. Or put slightly differently, we need a philosophical anthropology that is not the misleading fantasy of imperial dimensions of European Enlightenment. It needs to be one in which other people are not only an obstacle to our otherwise unchecked liberty and capacity to reason and where we understand the workings of rationality as fundamentally suffused by our social roles and relations (Sesanker 2015). The irredeemably complex model offered by the Caribbean should be our guide for how to think within and beyond intellectual and political models that are still very much with us, even if only as ruins.

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