

Creolization and Cultural Transmission in a Multicultural Society

*Belize as Case Study: Creoles, Garifuna,
Mestizo, Maya, and Others*

by David Blake Willis

The eight-seater bush airplane I was riding landed roughly on a bumpy airstrip hacked out of a mangrove swamp. Placencia, my destination, at the end of a peninsula. At the end of the world. At the beginning of the world. The New World. I glanced around, shook the dust off my clothes, and reached for my luggage . . .

Belize at the end of May 1999. A land of wild natural wonders, the second-longest barrier reef in the world, the jungles of the Yucatan, ancient ruins showing the long tenure of human societies. A land of laid-back people whose cool, distant demeanor melts in a minute if the traveler shows the least bit of curiosity about them and their lives. A land of hybrids, of cosmopolitans before we knew the word, of the *criollo*. A land of creation, a land of multiple Others.

At the end of the 20th Century, I had thought, what better place to experience transnational and transcultural communities than Belize.¹⁾ A small, English-speaking country located on the Caribbean side of the Yucatan Peninsula, surrounded by Mayan and Spanish-speaking nations, Belize was founded as a society and as a nation by a melange of peoples: remnant Mayan villagers, English pirates, African indentured laborers, assorted fortune-seekers. Belize gives us, too, one of

the most vibrant and dynamic examples in the world of *Creolization*, of *mestizaje*, of the melding of cultures and peoples in what is likely the direction our world is headed.

Belize has a colorful, kaleidoscopic history and society, while its multicultural society offers original and penetrating answers to those serious questions the rest of the world is asking about living with those who are “not like us.” How have the people of Belize answered questions of diversity and difference?

Home to numerous communities, Belize is very much dominated by mixture: Creole, Mestizo, and Garifuna cultures. The first of these communities was made very powerful by their economic and political clout, the second by their numbers, and the last by their cultural, musical, and educational influences throughout Belizean society. A division of economic roles, cultural impacts, and political directions exists in Belize between the Creoles, the Mestizos, and the Black Caribs, another name for the Garifuna.

In this paper I would like to further contribute to our understanding of the phenomena of cultural transmission by looking at the cultures of Belize. By examining those intensely important processes of horizontal and vertical cultural transformation in this small Caribbean nation during an era of intense economic and revolutionary change, I hope to portray these cultures as purveyors and inventors of new/old cultural traditions.

Belize: A Multicultural Kaleidoscope

Belize is the location of the earliest Mayan settlements in the Yucatan Peninsula, as shown by glyph translations and diggings found in the Orange Walk District that date back as far as 2000 B.C. Surrounded by Spanish and Mayan-speaking countries (notably the

Yucatec countries of Guatemala and Mexico), Belize is, surprisingly, very much a part of the English-speaking Caribbean.

Formed through Creolization, the mixing of peoples and cultures from Africa, the Americas, and Europe (even sometimes Asia), Belize in the past two hundred years is a remarkable example of a world in the process of becoming, a phenomenon now spread all over the globe. The heart of this process is Creolization. Although Creolization has blurred racial and class boundaries, it has also always reflected unequal power relationships. Not surprisingly, the origins of Creolization have been tied to unequal, gendered, and racial sexual relations (often, but not always, between male slave masters and female slaves).

With a population of 249,183, Belize is a relatively small country. Its population is divided as follows: 44% Mestizo, 30% Creole, 11% Maya, 7% Garifuna and Others. Languages spoken include English, Creole (English Creole), Spanish, various forms of Maya, and Garífuna. The religious breakdown is 60% Catholic, 30% Protestant, and various other indigenous and imported religions.

The range of ethnic groups making Belize so ethnically diverse is of historically complex origins. Creoles, who have the most political and cultural power and live in the major urban settlements and certain outlying communities, are of mixed African slave (many from Jamaica) and European (mostly English 'Baymen') heritage. Two thirds of the Creole population live in Belize City. Their major rivals are Mestizos, those people of a mixed heritage from Spanish colonists and Mayan peoples.

The Mestizos are found in the northern and western parts of the country, many of them remnants of the so-called Caste Wars of the 19th Century, when the Maya of the Mexican Yucatan revolted against their *Ladino* (Mestizo) overlords, driving them across the border into Belize. Other ethnic groups include the Garifuna or Garinagu (also

called Black Caribs) in coastal settlements, the K'ekchi and Mopan Maya in the south and west, and large numbers of recent Spanish-speaking immigrants from other parts of Central America used as cheap labor in the countryside, especially on large banana and other plantations.

Belize also has significant populations of Americans, English, Mennonites, Lebanese, Chinese, and Eastern Indians. Racial harmony and religious tolerance are widespread, resulting in a bewildering blending of these different elements. The Creole and the Maya, it might be added, have managed to create remarkably similar and equally sensitive eco-tourism programs for foreign visitors that are excellent models for rural people in other developing countries.

The Garifuna deserve special mention here.²⁾ Originally mixtures of various Caribbean peoples, especially Caribs and Arawaks with runaway slaves on St. Vincent and adjacent islands in the eastern Caribbean, the Garifuna are one of the first modern 'imagined communities.' Fiercely proud of their traditions and language, the Garifuna dared to imagine themselves as a new culture when the English and other Europeans were busy destroying and modifying numerous proto-American cultures. The potential of these Black Caribs to destabilize the Caribbean, like Toussaint D'Ouverture in Haiti though on a smaller scale, made white Europeans like the English very nervous, resulting in persecution and military defeat, followed by their diasporization to the western part of the Caribbean.

First locating in the Bay Islands off Honduras, where there continue to be Garifuna communities, political events in Honduras resulted in further diasporization. Drifting to Belize from the Bay Islands of Honduras on 19th November, 1802, because of persecution (and siding with the wrong faction in Honduran power struggles), the Garifuna can be seen even today genetically and culturally as the in-

termingling of African slaves, Carib and Arawak Indians, and others. African blood dominates, but Carib/Arawak vocabulary remains very much alive in the spoken language. Mostly found in the south of Belize, the Garifuna are the main population in the towns of Punta Gorda and Dangriga. The villages of Seine Bighte (where I conducted my research), Hopkins, Georgetown, and Barranco are also significant cultural and population centers. Some Garifuna can also be found in Belize City and Belmopan because of their strong presence in the field of education, their linguistic skills, and their out-migration to the United States (especially to Los Angeles, New Orleans, and New York).

Understanding Roots: Creoles, Garifuna, Mestizo, Maya, and Others

The Creole culture, or, more properly, *cultures* of Belize, have a long and complex history. The Others in the title of this paper, along with the Creoles, Mestizo, and Garifuna, are in fact all hybrid peoples, creolized communities who accept and are proud of their mixed ancestry and heritage. What I am exploring in this paper are some aspects of a very complex phenomenon, a phenomenon which will dominate our thinking about human communities in the 21st century. Much as the nation-state defined the 20th century, so too will imagined hybrid communities dominate the 21st century. We have already begun this process of *cultural transmission as multiple transmissions*.

The word Creole is itself in its origins a word describing *creation*, the creation of new life, the melding of peoples. Originally used to describe White Spanish people born in the New World, this meaning of Creole was very quickly superseded as the term came to more directly describe those mixed-blood children of black and white and native.

Later, of course, the word comes to describe a wide range of phenomena, of the mixing of languages, and then cultures, in ways that were, at least initially, always relegated to second-class status. Partly for economic and class reasons, partly for their power, their bold, unleashed version of the world, of a world that was not yet ready for this series of broad-brush strokes of dramatic changes in humanity, the Creoles were hidden and spoken of in soft tones, in whispers always bordering on the erotic. There was a need on the part of the White Europeans to contain, to control, to make obedient and submissive, phenomena like this of powerful creation.

Similarly, though in perhaps even more hushed tones, the mixtures of Maya, Spanish, and others produced the Mestizo, another powerful Creolization which has often privileged the mixed over the native in Central America. This, of course, is a misunderstanding of the power of mixture, though it is always and above all else this new creation in the midst of the old and their old traditions which defines these creolizations or *mestizaje*. Either word will suffice, but here we prefer the power attached to phenomena of *creation*.

These mixtures are part of a world-wide blossoming of *Créolité*, of the multiple literal and literary worlds of Caribbean writers and intellectuals like Derek Walcott, Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé, and Raphaël Confiant. Of the experience of people who are neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians. Yet, all of the above. In order to understand these peoples, their cultures and their unique contributions to world society today, we need to start first with the past and the complex reasons why Belize is one of the most multicultural of all nations in our world today.

Creole in the Belize context describes Belizeans of African/Euro-pean heritage whose ancestors came to what was then British Honduras as slaves, indentured servants, pirates, and entrepreneurs. They

form the largest single ethnic group in this tiny Central American country. With tourism becoming Belize's largest industry, many Creole people in outlying areas have been brought into the global cultural economy, Mestizos less so as they often remain attached to the soil, which accounts for the lesser degree of emphasis about them in this paper.

Dominant characteristics in the Creole community that calls itself by that name in Belize include their own portrayal of themselves as a mix of White and Black, in that order. They are very proud of their mixed background but view themselves very much as a product of European cultures and (deracinated) Africans. Many Belizean Creoles living in North America for the first time are shocked to discover that they, too, are Black and are seen as African-American. But the ethnicity/race paradigm alone only goes so far in describing these Creoles, who are themselves the faces of a revolutionary change all over the world as we have all become increasingly *creolized*.

The Garifuna, by contrast, are very proud of their African ancestry and its amalgamation with Carib and Arawak Indians. As the descendants of runaway slaves and Carib/Arawak peoples also escaping the European onslaught, these free people knew and valued their roots more than Creole peoples. Their language and music, especially their story-telling, their great respect for education, their drumming, and their punta music, speak highly of a strong identity, an identity rooted in a fierce and challenging past. And they, too, are really, in the end, Creole. As Palacio has noted, *"In short, Garifuna configuration can contribute much to our understanding of creolization in a region where it remains a primary concept of social structure and organization."*³⁾

Now we see important changes taking place. In the village of Placencia, where I also spent research time, the traditional fear and deri-

sion which the Creoles have had of the Garifuna community of Seine Bighte just five kilometers away, has been replaced by a mutual respect and exchange of peoples during festival times and weekend parties.

While a Garifuna person would not have been caught dead in Placencia village after dark even as recently as ten years ago, today there are Garifuna people working and playing in Placencia at all hours of the day and night. Part of the change in this traditional status system is very likely the influx of outsiders, including Whites who have come from the U.S. and elsewhere looking for recreational and retirement opportunities, as well as the Mayan Indians, Jamaicans, and Creole Mexicans (a mixture themselves of Spanish Whites and Mayan Indians) who have accompanied this influx of money and the creation of new jobs.

Still, the traditional lines of cultures are being preserved by the smaller number of intermarriages that involve Garifuna. There are more and more Creoles attached to or married to Whites, but fewer Garifuna married to others. Instead, Garifuna tend to marry within their community or when, as many do, they migrate to the United States, where they find like-minds among other Caribbean people or African-Americans. An interesting and important sidelight to this flow of migration is the widely-held view that Garifuna adjust much better to society in America or Britain than do Creoles, mainly because the latter in their own country view themselves as (nearly) White and above their (Black) compatriots, the Garifuna.⁴⁾

The Garifuna and the Creoles in Belize are good examples of what Stuart Hall means when he says that the idea of diaspora means 'places' where new hybrid or syncretic identities as well as multicultural spaces exist. *"Diaspora does not refer to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred*

homeland to which they must return at all costs. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew through transformation and differences."⁵⁾

Hybrids, Creoles, Half-Breeds, and the 'process of creolization' have all been regarded until now as marginal to the processes of change and transformation. We now know, however, that they are at the center of these changes and transformations, so deeply intertwined are they with the phenomena of connections.

Belize and the Phenomena of Connections

Belize forces us to shift our gaze towards the Creolizations reflected throughout Belizean society, historical phenomena of connections which exist in multiple manifestations. Creolization is thus a key intellectual tool for analyzing the interchange that has occurred between the peoples of the Americas, Africa, and Europe. This is *not* westernization or americanization or some other form of global homogenizing and assimilation. Instead, it is the context of perpetual *border thinking*, between what the Creole philosopher Edouard Glissant has called globalization and 'mondialization,' between global designs and local histories.⁶⁾

There is a great need to connect with the powerful scholarship of today in these active Borderlands.⁷⁾ The transformation of peripheries to centers and centers to peripheries, in other words the idea of the margins of societies becoming the signposts for what is next, is becoming apparent. Marginality is now seen as conveying power and originality, as helping societies to move forward. The margins are becoming the centers, but how and why are these transactions taking place?

Traditional "modern" visions of the way the world was evolving saw the future as either continued development of increasingly so-

phisticated nation-states or as those nation-states giving way to a 'world community.' Both views seem simplistic and hopelessly naive when confronted with the facts of ethnic, regional and interpersonal conflict. Instead of confirming a consolidation of nations or nation-states we find more and more discussion of either rootlessness, alienation or malaise on the one hand, or technological, transnationally consumer-oriented solutions on the other. Caught between are individuals, groups, and institutions bringing various repertoires to address this new global cultural economy, one characterized by complex, overlapping, and disjunctive cultural crossroads.

The rapid recovery and expansion of the world economy that followed World War II saw a development previously unknown in human history, the growth of *transnational cultures*. With important implications for the roles of institutions, economies, politics, and personal identity in cultural interaction, *transnational cultures* have had a dramatic impact on world relations. In all countries, *diasporic spaces* have emerged which highlight these communities, institutions, organizations, and individuals as cultural brokers, as go-betweens for these two powerful cultures.

What is different about the Belizean context is the way this *Creolization* has been enacted. Not at all assimilation in the classic sense, what is now happening is *a new shared culture, an emergent culture*, a culture whose core values include those of liberal democracy, human rights, and open, active communication. This new and broader context for shared culture as we find it in Belize is open-ended, eclectic, flexible, and mobile. It is also destabilizing, chaotic, disordered, and random. Dark sides exist in the context of *Creolization*, too, though in this chaos appears creation, the move to newness.

As Meehan and Miller have pointed out, "*Again and again, in recent decades, critical discussions have returned to the idea of*

Caribbean-ness as creolization. For Kamau Brathwaite, creolization refers to the “unplanned, unstructured, but osmotic relationship” that arises among various cultural traditions in a given island society (Contradictory Omens 6).⁸⁾ Meehan and Miller also note that Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphael Confiant define créolité as “the interactional or transactional aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history” (889). Creolization, as they and others see it, is “a process of historical accretion, and something one comes to understand through the work of historical recovery.”

Belize shows us the spectrum of the possible, *the Creolization Continuum*, which contains everything from an assimilationist Creolization on the one hand to structural Creolization at the center to a destabilizing, radical Creolization that subverts and reverses the current of social trajectories.⁹⁾

We are looking at a new shift, from hierarchy to democratization, in transnational/ transcultural spaces. From the clash between this worldness and the global, as Glissant has noted, we can extract the positive fact of “plural, multiplying, fragment identities” that are no longer perceived as a lack or a problem but as a “huge opening and a new opportunity of breaking open closed gates” in the ways we see cultures and nations.

Crossroads Creolizations

Creolization, as used in the work of Hannerz and others, is conceptualized as a continuous process whereby distinctive “packages” of cultural signification melt into new forms.¹⁰⁾ It is a particularly potent concept for understanding the processes of change for Belize and for the rest of the world. The making of Creolized transcultural societies

in contexts like Belize, reveals the creation of shared values and narratives of experiences which occur in concrete, day-to-day settings. These can be characterized as ***Crossroads Creolizations***.

This process has also been called ethnogenesis or hybridization,¹¹⁾ though I prefer the creative dynamism and passion associated with the term *Creolization*. The Russian literary theorist M. Bakhtin has called this cultural hybridization the fundamental condition of all forms of cultural innovation and exchange,¹²⁾ which in my conception here is the locus of *Creolization*. I am interested in moving beyond dichotomous, essentialized conceptions of hybridization, noting at the same time the importance of *Creolization* for multicultural identities and the politics of anti-racism.¹³⁾ The fragmentation and divisiveness of separately studying specific groups (here, the typical breaking up of the society into ethnic identities, often as ethnic opposites) decontextualizes and reinforces the 'uniqueness' or separateness of each subject studied as they are examined in isolation from larger social and economic forces. The big picture, as Ronald Takaki calls it, is missing.¹⁴⁾

A small country with a complex and sophisticated society, Belize reveals the big picture by encompassing and emphasizing not specific case studies of individuals, groups, or institutions but *the linkages, the processes, the ties to larger economic and social contexts*. Eriksen notes, too, that the anthropological use of the concept *Cultural Creolization* also closely approximates actual on-the-ground Mauritian usage.¹⁵⁾

The power of Creolization as cultural concept and transformative cultural process draws us to view the encounters of world cultures in a new, creative light. Creole culture and Creolization, originally associated with the distinctive mixtures and unique historical developments of the Afro-Caribbean can now be viewed as keys to larger,

more global processes. Belize is one of the pre-eminent examples for these cross-cultural encounters occurring between cultures. Following Wicker here, culture in the context of Creolization can be seen as *the ability to take meaningful intersubjective action*.¹⁶⁾

Reading the text of this Creolization, we note how signally important it is for our understanding of human beings and the changes in cultural environments experiencing rapid social change. Creolization deconstructs the notions of pure, singular cultures and their inevitable assumptions of superiority and their sanctioning of human rights violations. Through this concept of Creolization we come to understand cultures in new, more powerful, and more provocative ways.

Viewing culture as a static, monolithic, and homogeneous 'whole' simply makes no sense when seen from the perspective of Creolization since, as Wicker notes, Creole cultures *accent internal variation, diachronicity, and transitions*.¹⁷⁾ Cultural continuity is thus seen as trans-systemic, with the focus being on the interactions and activities of multiple cultures operating on the same stage, rather than on describing the rules and order of some mechanistic conception of a singular culture. Indeed, cultures are sustained and nurtured by this activity of Creolization. Instead of focusing on the structure of a culture, the behavior of discrete groups, and the supposed uniform rules governing their activities, we notice that *in Creole encounters the only rules are those of possible transformations and their many variations*.

Any cultural structure we see is thus actually the reflection of a large number of variations and transitions. What is for us visible culture is then really a kind of shadow or receding Doppler effect, whereby the real activity has already passed by. What we are witnessing is often the after-glows, the signatures, the echoes of passing cultural interactions. Creolization is an entirely new way of seeing cultures, not as complex wholes with signs and symbols that we can

identify and describe, but as a series of past, present, and future processes. Not as cultural grammars to be deciphered and reconstructed but as a series of transformations, some very grand indeed, some minimal in their impact. This, of course, accords well with our understanding and view of globalization as a vast field of active horizontal and vertical links, albeit with clear power differentials.

Culture then becomes a *field of action* and our roles in interpreting and acting upon this action invariably reflect the degrees of Creolization of which we are a part, in some places to a greater and in others to a lesser extent. What I am attempting to explore is thus the nature of those creolized transformations reflecting cultural continua, beginning with the example of Belize.

The concept of Creolization, although introduced in social theory recently as a tool for analyzing contemporary, complex phenomena, has, long been embedded in the Creole societies themselves. It is, therefore, critically important to go to Creole contexts directly to discover the processes and outcomes of this hybridization.

The word Creole is itself in origin a word describing *creation*, as I have noted, the creation of new life, the melding of peoples. Linguists have described Creole languages at length, but this scholarship has studiously avoided any discussion of cultures or power.¹⁸⁾ “*Originally used to describe . . .*” These words, when spoken of anything Creole, smack of the social science emphasis on ‘purity’ and ‘essence’ of much of the 20th Century. There is, in fact, little of the sense of ‘originally’ in the case of Creoles, little at least that can be described in terms of monogenesis. The contested meanings of ‘Creole’ speak loudly and clearly for the robust and assertive nature of this concept itself. Créolité, an active and influential voice from the Caribbean, is the most visible of these movements to recognize the multiple worlds of the Creole, asserting the power of Creoleness, of ‘being Creole.’¹⁹⁾

While some authors have defined Creole as first coming from the Portuguese *crioulo* (as a definition for slaves of African descent born in the New World),²⁰⁾ the word's origins are also Spanish and (very quickly in the historical record), French and English. One of the first meanings mentioned for Creole was to distinguish slaves born in the Americas from their African-born contemporaries.²¹⁾ It was later used to describe White Spanish people born in the New World in some contexts and Mixed-Blood children of Blacks, Whites and/or Natives in others. The term was used even further back to describe the cultural intermediaries in western Africa who lived and worked between Africans and the European slave traders, often being mixtures of these two.

The word Creole thus has multiple meanings in its New World and West African settings:

- a) *Natives, Black or Mixed, born in New World/African Ports*
- b) *Spanish Whites born in the New World*
- c) *Mixed Black/White culture found in New World/African Ports*

Creoles are distinct societies, named as such, which play major roles in Belize, Haiti, and many other Caribbean countries. While language featured prominently in early discussions of Creolization,²²⁾ as did religion,²³⁾ the word later, of course, comes to describe a wide range of phenomena, of the mixing of languages, religions, and cultures, in ways that were, at least initially, almost always relegated to second-class status.²⁴⁾

The Caribbean, an archipelago of cultures and languages, is the region where Creole cultures and languages have been most obvious, 'mirror(ing) the islands' geography: slowly shifting, multi-layered, constantly arriving at new forms and possibilities."²⁵⁾ The many layers of history, language and mixing among cultural groups means that these islands in the Caribbean are "laboratories in Creolization."

Gupta defines these islands as *in the process of developing a way of life and language peculiar to the new locale, but over time becoming a third lifestyle and mother tongue of the community.*²⁶⁾

It is important to note, too, that, since almost every country in the Caribbean has developed its own unique Creole culture, there is no single claim for authenticity or representation. There are, for example, at least six Creole languages, including Papiamentu (Spanish-Portuguese based); Sranan, Saramaccan, Djuka (all English influenced); Jamaica Talk and Patois. Because of Creolization, ethnicity is more flexible and more easily related directly to economics. When a particular group decides to politicize race or ethnic status in Creolized societies, ethnicity is thus used as a tool for getting resources (land, capital, labor) rather than just as an expression of separatist tendencies. We are dealing here with a number of related concepts, including ethnicity, hybridity, and identity. Or rather, *ethnicities, hybridities, and identities.*

Recent explanations of Creolization have ever become more sophisticated. The following definitions, derived from the Louisiana context, give us some idea of the breath-taking span of the term, as well as the ways in which the concept itself is breaking out of traditional forms. An oppositional concept itself, Creolization breaks boundaries and creates new discourses.

Creolization: Despite its use of the root word Creole, the word creolization is not used exclusively to describe Creole culture. A broad anthropological term, it describes any coming together of diverse cultural traits or elements, usually in the context of the West Indies or Louisiana, to form new traits or elements. In the context of linguistics, for example, creolization occurs when two or more languages converge to form a new, indigenous language. Often ap-

*plied to Cajun culture, creolization can be said to describe Cajun music, because of its mixing of black and white sounds; it also describes the Cajun dialect, because of its mixture of French and English words. Cajun food also is a good example of creolization: the dish called gumbo (a word of African origin) derives from French, African, and American Indian origins.*²⁷⁾

These words, written by scholars sympathetic to the concept of Creolization, do not however, reveal its raw sides. Many of the encounters which have resulted in creolizations have been violent indeed. Slavery is the most egregious example, of course. Even in the context of a society supposedly as peaceful and air-tight in its homogeneity as Japan can be found *creolizing spaces* and *shared cultures* that are the products of extreme cultural clashes. This was, of course, demonstrated dramatically following one of the most violent encounters of all time, that between Japan and the United States, World War II. The rapid, ubiquitous, and penetrating Creolization following the war astonished everyone, perhaps no one more so than the staffers of General MacArthur's GHQ, who had issued stern orders against 'fraternizing' with the Japanese.²⁸⁾

Part of what we are witnessing when we look deeper, of course, is a continuing discomfort with the central point of being Creole: the mixing itself. What Berlin and others see as a weakness of the term, its multiple meanings, can also be seen, as a strength. Berlin was on the right track with his explications of the Atlantic Creoles, but such a term as Creole itself needs *further* elaboration, not less. Creole is indeed a slippery concept, with a history of multiple definitions, yet the varietal definition of "Creole" and "Creolization" reveals the importance of local versions of history and identity as we continue to look for larger connections. What of Creoles as peoples and societies his-

torically?

Biologists have long noted the power of *hybrid vigor*, a strong contrast with the simple prejudices, deep misunderstandings, and abominable racisms of human cultures against 'the Other as half-breed' that appear to have their origin in the essentializing of what is really extreme complexity.²⁹⁾ What Creoles have taught us, above all else, is that to essentialize is to limit our understanding. As living examples of fluid mixing, of sometimes more, sometimes less, successful cultural hybridization, we can now understand better the complex task before us.

What we need to accommodate to is a completely different way of seeing the world, where one dimension, be it race, culture, language, or whatever (or a package of those dimensions), is no longer so neat and tidy. It is, in fact, in the messiness between two or more worlds that we find the most creativity. What is most powerful about the Creole approach is its diversity and its multiplicity.

Creolization has the following characteristics, according to Glissant:

- 1) *The Lightning Speed of Interaction Among Its Elements*
- 2) *The "Awareness of Awareness" Thus Provoked in Us*
- 3) *Reevaluation of the Various Elements Brought Into Contact*³⁰⁾
- 4) *Unforeseeable Results*³¹⁾

Glissant sees this cultural interbreeding and its often violent encounter of peoples and cultures, as *the condition of a new way of being in the world, of an identity both rooted in a land and enriched by all the lands now related*.³²⁾ The key is *relation*, which contextualizes the mixture transversally instead of hierarchically, the opposite of the cultural/political domination of the Other or a clash of civilizations which

reduces diversity. It is a fraternal relationship and not one of causes and effects. *Creolization is the idea of a continuous process capable of producing the identical and the different.*

Creolization is seen as “a process whereby new shared cultural forms, and new possibilities for communication, emerge due to contact. It highlights the open-ended, flexible and unbounded nature of cultural processes, as opposed to the notion of cultures as bounded, stable systems of communication.”³³⁾

Cultural Creolization, “the intermingling and mixing of two or several formerly discrete traditions or cultures,” can be seen almost anywhere in the world.³⁴⁾ All of these communities are characterized by movement, transformation, and uncertainty, while what defines particular Creole communities, like the Caribbean Creoles, the Atlantic Creoles, or the Pacific Creoles,³⁵⁾ are the kinds of mixing that occur and the historical ethnoscares which are their contexts. Creolization, like hybridity, describes both the mixing of two or more elements and the initiation of a process of change.³⁶⁾

Creolization has no uniform rules or invariant characteristics, but it is a system of classification. In this sense it does provide us with possible guidelines for possible transformations. Creolization accents culture as existing, not as a complex whole with clear signs and structures, but in its internal variations, transitions, and historical roots (*diachronicity*). Emphasizing the distinctive mixing of cultural, linguistic, and philosophical elements from specific historical circumstances, creolization is a new manifestation of cultural continuity and cultural reproduction.³⁷⁾ Culture *is* Creolization, as past, present, and future processes and their results. Rather than focusing on locating a coherent cultural grammar, with Creolization we are now interested in the dimensions of transformation responsible for *Creolized and Creolizing Cultural Continua*.

Although linguists were among the first visible scholars to take careful note of Creolization, they had of course borrowed from colonial historical roots, which lay in slavery and the often-violent transformations of large populations as they moved *en masse* from continent to continent. The colonial dimensions of Creolization, the roots of oppression and abuse, varied according to economic regimes, plantation economies being the worst and comprador economies in entrepot like New Orleans being the most liberal, for example. The lopsided character of power relations must not be forgotten, either. On one side is the old, the rooted, the traditional, *the pure*; on the other is the new, the strange, the attractive, *the impure*.

Creoleness has always been about power, whether the patron was Thomas Jefferson, a mahogany merchant in Belize City, or an Englishman in the port of Kobe. Unspoken, unspeakable, the taboos and the vivid lure of the relationship with the Other are unmistakable. These relationships may be between women and men, resulting often in Creole offspring, or they could be cultural and social, rather than genetic. Tragic stories of the women on the other side, the Malinche's and the Okichi's,³⁸⁾ are repeated by those in power because of their fear of the Other. The human obsession with race and blood has meant that we have often overlooked the subtler and ultimately more important miscegenations of cultures *in individuals*, some of whom will never *look* like the Other.

Another view of Creolization is by Premdas, who asserts that on the local level in the Caribbean (Trinidad and Suriname seem to be the compelling examples) . . .

Part of the debate has degenerated into assertions of loyalty to the homeland reminiscent of the American preoccupation with the authenticity of a citizen's Americanness or un-Americanness. Here

*the discourse turns on the issue of 'creolization' or cultural adaptation of the descendants to the local milieux. Creolization as a cultural mode of indigineization is often rendered as essentially a single Afro- or Eurocentric standard, and for some the acquisition of this pattern of adaptation should serve as the litmus test of loyalty and entitlement to the patrimony of the land. Applied in this way, for those whose peculiar cultural adaptations are different, especially among Indians in Trinidad, Guyana, and Suriname, creolization is a hegemonic concept that elevates the cultural practices of one community as the measure of membership and entitlement.*³⁹⁾

Yet as Premdas himself notes, "it is clear that there are many types of Creole adaptations." Not all of these result in what he terms "the contest over entitlement by the rival communities in different regional locations." Although historical trends do legitimate certain variants of 'creolization' at certain times (as they tend to be "appropriated by one or another ethnic section as the 'authentic form' to legitimate its claims"), this is not the only form in the contest for power and resources in the Caribbean. Increasingly, the power of identity finds new and then mediated versions of Creolizations taking place, Belize being a particularly good example of this process.

Creolization also empowers those who are party to the mixing of cultures. African-Americans, for example, while mastering the conventions and codes of Euro-America, have also drawn on their own knowledge in creating *an oppositional repertoire of signs and meanings*.⁴⁰⁾ Thus, Creolization is not entirely, as some would argue about hybridity, simply a re-constituting of another cultural form but a very different contribution to cultural discourse, *the intersection of "outsider" conventions with "insider" knowledge and practice*.⁴¹⁾ We note here the power of double consciousness and the wider range of poten-

tial action in this context.

Mixtures of cultures have always been part of cultural landscapes, but what is different today is the breath-taking speed at which encounters and Creolizations are taking place. For graphic realism in this chase for mixture, few settings offer as complex and sophisticated data as Belize, a hyper-matrix of cultural blendings.⁴²⁾

Creolization (and what I am reporting from Belize) is not about smooth transitions but about a process of disjunctions and displacements. These are being enacted in . . .

- 1) *Creole* Cultural Spaces
- 2) *Creolized* Cultural Spaces
- 3) *Creolizing* Cultural Spaces

The emphases are different for each. *The first is predominantly (and from the time of their creation / generation) Creole.* The perspective is from the Creole point of view. These would be the people I study: Creole/Mixed in their cultures in many ways. *The second is about one (or in our case two) larger cultural space(s) which have been 'invaded' by someone / something new and where a mixture has resulted.* That mixture fills some of the spaces of the larger culture with provocative processes of transformation. *The third is about the process itself,* first of all, and, secondly, about the cultural spaces. The raw nitty-gritty of historical documentation of transformations fits here. And all of these fit, of course, onto their own cultural continuum (continua).

Succeeding waves of Créolité are washing over our planet, refreshing our multiple shores with new and diverse ways of seeing the world. We are now in a New World, one that is very much a wildly active stage, one where transcultural orientations and dreams are born

and nurtured, a stage of the experiences of people who are Europeans, Africans, Asians, and Americans. The social construction of Creolized spaces which they engage in can be seen as appearing like the multitudes of coral spawn during the full moon over the barrier reef off Belize, in places we could never have previously imagined. The different social spaces in Belize thus represent multiple dimensions of what we might call *New Creolizing Cultural Spaces*.

Creolization and Creole Cultures mark an important shift in the human understanding of the world. The context is very clear, and while mixed cultures have been studied before, what we are viewing in Belize is different from the older emphasis on the nation and on the limited concepts of nations and societies as boxes. There has not been enough emphasis on the key phenomenon of in-between-ness, of mediators, of bridges. We have a good beginning in those writings on class and Créolité, especially Palacio as he proposes a new, more encompassing version of being Creole.⁴³⁾ Wilk, too, notes the emergence of a shared identity with links to the world system.⁴⁴⁾ As he states, "*Belize has become a cultural place.*" Yet it is important to note that this is within the context of a new vision of culture.

Like Confiant, the notion of culture I am proposing here redefines culture and society: not the universalism of the white Euro-American culture alone but the *diversalism* of the world.⁴⁵⁾ Societies like Belize are mapping the grammar of new, shared values by enacting Creolization. There is in all of this, too, a negotiation of difference as well as a sharing of common ground.

In Belize, it is in the spaces of encounters that we find the intersections of America, Africa, and Europe. And now Asia. Moreover, the communities in these spaces, and especially the individuals living and working there, tell us much about their nature as crossroads and how cultural exchange/ interchange/ production is enacted. They also open

spaces for deeper understandings and, generally speaking (but not always), the tolerance of difference.

Listening to others, as the multifarious communities of this one small country in Central America do on a daily basis, has become a new sign of independence and liberated consciousness. For diverse, multicultural countries like Belize, and for the world as a whole today, we need more exploration of identity/identities in the contexts where societies meet each other, where connections are established and maintained. Boundary construction is actually not so much the putting up of walls as it is an activity alive with the spectacular creation of new forms of human societies and human consciousness.

Borders, in our world today, a world of intensely negotiated creolizations, are not where something stops. Borders are where something begins.

Flying to Belize City from Houston, and then back again to America from Belize, I was struck by the open, warm, and easy-going nature of human relationships on the two flights. In contrast to the sudden deep-freeze in human relations I experienced when returning to Houston International Airport, the many conversations begun with myself and others by those Belizeans sitting around me on the flights revealed something very different, a new way of approaching the humanity around us, not nervously and defensively, but with open arms, minds, and hearts.

Notes

- 1) Belize has long been a hidden gem for explorers, travelers, biologists, and social scientists, though perhaps not for much longer. Surrounded by powerful neighbors with domineering cultures, Belize has escaped many of the onslaughts which have devastated these other countries. Eco-tourism, for example, owes much of its conceptualiza-

tion to on-going practices created and maintained in this part of the Yucatan. For social and historical perspectives on Belize see Tom Barry with Dylan Vernon, *Inside Belize* (Albuquerque: Resource Center Press, 1995); Anne Sutherland, *The Making of Belize* (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1998); Assad Shoman, *Thirteen Chapters of a History of Belize* and *Backtalking Belize* (Both books: Belize City: The Angelus Press, 1995); Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517–1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998); and Roland Wright, *Time Among the Maya* (New York: Henry Holt, 1991). Travel guides, which are particularly well-done for such a small country, include Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., *Route of the Mayas* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc: 1995); Chicky Mallan, *Belize Handbook* (Chico, California: Moon Travel Books, 1995); Tony Perrottet, ed., *Belize* (Singapore: APA Guides, 1998); Tom Brosnahan and Nancy Keller, *Guatemala, Belize and Yucatan: La Ruta Maya* (Hawthorn, Australia: Lonely Planet, 1997); and Mark Whatmore and Peter Eltringham, *Guatemala and Belize* (London: The Rough Guide, 1998).

- 2) See Susie Post Rust, "The Garifuna: Weaving a Future from a Tangled Past," *National Geographic*, September 2001, pp. 102–113. Eduard Conzemius provided some of the first academic commentary (1928): *Ethnographical Notes of the Black Carib (Garif)*, *American Anthropologist* 30: 183–205. See also William V. Davidson (1980), *The Garifuna of Pearl Lagoon*, *Ethnohistory* 27(1): 31–47.
- 3) In a paper which explores the very complex state of mixing and power struggles for the Garifuna. "Reconstructing Garifuna Oral History—Techniques and Methods in the Story of a Caribbean People," Joseph O. Palacio, University of the West Indies, Belize, This paper has been published in *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 24 No. 1, March 1999, <http://www.iisg.nl/~sephis/palacio.pdf>, p. 7. See also Lynne Guitar, "Criollos: The Birth of a Dynamic New Indo-Afro-European People and Culture on Hispaniola," *KACIKE: Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology* ISSN 1562–5028 V. 1, n. 1, Jan 2000–Jun 2000: 1–17. © 2000 Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink, <http://www.kacike.org/LynneGuitar.html>; and Maximilian C. Forte, "The Contemporary Context of Carib "Revival" in Trinidad and Tobago: Creolization, Developmentalism and the State (1),"

KACIKE: Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology ISSN 1562-5028, V. 1, n. 1, Jan 2000-Jun 2000: 18-33. © 2000 Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink. <http://www.kacike.org/MaxForte.html>

- 4) An interesting article examining the challenge which the Garifuna bring to dominant Creole, Mestizo, and Mayan conceptualizations of culture in Belize and Central America is found in Sarah England and Mark Anderson, "Authentic African Culture in Honduras? Afro-Central Americans Challenge Honduran Indo-Hispanic Mestizaje," http://136.142.158.105/LASA_98/England&Anderson.pdf
- 5) Cited by Maryse Conde, another major Creole intellectual voice, in "O Brave New World," in *From Research in African Literatures*, Volume 29, Number 3, Indiana University Press (Keynote address at the joint meeting of the Comparative Literature Association and the African Literature Association, Austin, Texas, March 1998), http://iupjournals.org/ral/ral_29-3.html.
- 6) Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000).
- 7) Examples include Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, Trans by R. Howard (New York: Harper Collins, 1982) and *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993); Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1993); and especially Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1994).
- 8) Kevin Meehan and Paul B. Miller, "Caribbean Literature And Popular Culture" <http://www.4.ncsu.edu/~pbmille/2/caribbeanliterature.htm>
- 9) Please note Pieterse's *continuum of hybridities* (1995) in his important, seminal essay on *Globalization as Hybridization*, Op. cit. Other work of critical importance on globalization can be found in Appadurai, Arjun, Guest Editor, *Globalization*. Special Issue of *Public Culture*, Millennial Quartet, Vol. 12, No 1, Winter 2000.
- 10) Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity* (New York: Columbia UP, 1992), *Transnational Connections* (London: Routledge, 1996), and *Flows*,

boundaries and hybrids: keywords in transnational anthropology. Website, Transnational Communities Working Paper Series, Oxford: Oxford University. 15 Oct 2000. <<http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/hannerz.pdf>>

For ethogenesis, see Michael D. Olien (1988), Imperialism, Ethnogenesis and Marginality, *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 16(1): 1–29.

- 11) Hannerz (2000), Werbner and Modood, and Pieterse, Op. cit.; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), and a host of other authors.
- 12) Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration* (London: Polity P, 2000) 209.
- 13) Excellent discussions can be seen in Werbner and Modood, Ibid. Jonathan Friedman, for example, warns us of the self-identification of some hybrid cosmopolitans who attempt to define the identities of others in what he sees as making a normative argument. See his *Global crises, the struggle for cultural identity and intellectual pork-barreling: cosmopolitans versus locals, ethnics and nationals in an era of de-hegemonisation*, in Werbner and Modood, Ibid., 70–89.
- 14) Ronald Takaki, *Culture wars in the United States: closing reflections on the century of the colour line*, in Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh, eds. *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power* (London: Zed, 1995), 166–176.
- 15) Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Tu dimunn pu vini kreol: The Mauritian Creole and the concept of creolization*. Website paper from lecture presented at the U of Oxford December 1999. August 20, 2000. <<http://www.sv.uio.no/~geirthe/Creoles.html>>
- 16) Hans-Rudolf Wicker, *From complex culture to culture complexity*. In Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, eds., *Debating Cultural Hybridity* (London: Zed Books, 1997) 38.
- 17) Wicker 37.
- 18) Loreto Todd, *Pidgins and Creoles* (London: Routledge 1995). For more on the role of language see Kathleen M. Balutansky and Marie-Agnes Sourieau, *Caribbean Creolization* (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1998). The linguistic aspects of Creolization can be found in Michel DeGraff, *Language Creation and Language Change: Creolization, Diachrony, and Development* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001).
- 19) Creolization in literature and literary settings was explored in a re-

- cent conference of the Caribbean Studies Association: *Caribbean Studies Association Annual Conference, St. Lucia, May-June 2000*. April 22, 2001. <[PDF] [www.fgcu.edu/csa/2001/csa/2000/Images/CSA 2 K-Abstracts.pdf](http://www.fgcu.edu/csa/2001/csa%2000/Images/CSA%20K-Abstracts.pdf)> The Francophone Caribbean has been the site of considerable discourse on Creolization. See Edouard Glissant, *The Cultural "Creolization" of the World. Interview with Edouard Glissant, 2000 Exchanging*. Label France-January 2000-No. 38. April 23, 2001. <[http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/label_france/ENGLISH/DOS-SIER/2000/ 15 creolisation .html](http://www.france.diplomatie.fr/label_france/ENGLISH/DOS-SIER/2000/15%20creolisation.html) >, passim.; and Gisele Lorient-Raymer, *Transcultural Identities: The Francophone Caribbean Paradigm*. April 10, 2001. <[http://www.3one.net/~garns/gened/ID/ syllabi/ raymer 320.html](http://www.3one.net/~garns/gened/ID/syllabi/raymer320.html)> Other major Caribbean voices concerning Creolization include Derek Walcott, Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé, and Raphaël Confiant.
- 20) Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998).
 - 21) *Expresiones Latinas. Culture and Aesthetics of the Black Atlantic*. April 25, 2001. <[http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/american/artes-expresiones_latinas/aesthetics.html](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/american/artes-expresiones-latinas/aesthetics.html)>
 - 22) See Michel DeGraff, *Language Creation and Language Change: Creolization, Diachrony, and Development* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001). For linguistic definitions see Peter L. Patrick, *Definitions: CREOLE (-ization)*. April 24, 2001. <<http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~patrickp/Courses/PCs/CreoleDefs.html>>.
 - 23) Some examples of religious mixing of the Afro-Atlantic are Vodou in Haiti, Candomblé in Brazil, and Santería in Cuba, which integrate West African, European and Native American influences. The creolization of Japanese and Western ideas in the religions of Japan and America, especially new religions, is a topic waiting to be studied. The Kerouacs, Watts, and Ginsbergs (Americans who brought Zen and other Asian religions to the U.S.) undoubtedly have their Japanese counterparts in the Japanese Christian Kyodan and Mu-Ha movements, for example. Belize, too, is likely to be a rich field for those wishing to study religious syncretisms.
 - 24) Ira Berlin, *Ibid*.
 - 25) Charu Gupta, *MG Almanac-Caribbean Intro. Introduction to the Region Asian-American Village, Region of Creolization*. April 21, 2001. <[http://www.imdiversity.com/villages/global/Article_Detail.asp?Arti-](http://www.imdiversity.com/villages/global/Article_Detail.asp?ArticleID=1)

cle_ID=158>

- 26) Ibid.
- 27) *Creolization. Encyclopedia of Cajun Culture*. February 14, 1999. April 20, 2001. <<http://www.cajunculture.com/Other/creolization.htm>>
- 28) John Dower has documented the 'fraternizing' well in his majestic Pulitzer Prize-winning study titled *Embracing Defeat* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2000)
- 29) See Francoise Verges, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Metissage* (Durham: U of Duke P, 1999).
- 30) For Glissant, Creolization has no presupposed scale of values. Mignolo, Op. cit.
- 31) Noted in Mignolo, Op. cit.
- 32) Glissant, Op. cit (2001).
- 33) Eriksen, Op. cit.
- 34) Hannerz (1992), Op. Cit., and Eriksen (2000), Ibid.
- 35) Creole communities can be found in many other places, too, of course, the Creoles on the Indian Ocean islands of La Réunion and Mauritius, for instance. See Erikson, Ibid.
- 36) Nikos Papastergiadis (2000) 170.
- 37) Hans-Rudolf Wicker, *From complex culture to culture complexity*, in Werbner, Pnina and Tariq Modood, eds., *Debating Cultural Hybridity* (London: Zed Books, 1997) 37–42.
- 38) Malinche was the Aztec woman who became the mistress of Cortez, taught him what he needed to know to conquer Mexico, and is regarded by Mexicans as the Mother of all Mothers of their mestizo nation. Her story is controversial and laced with the innuendo of machismo as she is seen as a *chingada*, a violated woman who invited her own downfall and thus betrayed the nation. The story of Okichi, the mistress to the first US envoy to Japan (Townsend Harris), is seen as a tragic metaphor for purity sullied and the demise of the nation (read male nation). See also Papastergiadis (2000), Op. cit., 174–175.
- 39) See Ralph R. Premdas, "Ethnicity and Identity in the Caribbean: De-centering a Myth," December 1996, <http://www.nd.edu/~kellogg/WPS/234.pdf>
- 40) Grey Gundaker, *Signs of Diaspora / Diaspora of Signs: Literacies, Creolization, and Vernacular Practice in African America* (Oxford:

Oxford UP, 1998).

- 41) Gundaker, Ibid.
- 42) There have been relatively few studies to date of Creolization by Japanese scholars, and little about creolization in the Japanese context. The most complete to date is Takeshi Matsuda, ed., (2001), *The Age of Creolization in the Pacific* (Hiroshima: Keisuisha). A recent special topic section of Tokyo University's *American Studies* also devoted attention to the phenomena of creole identities and immigration, but aside from a signal essay on Creoleness in the French Caribbean, these were simply descriptive reports in the area studies tradition. The title of this special section was misleading, implying that 'creolization of cultures' would be discussed. See Kazuo Masuda, *Gyosetsu no kusetsu kgaku: kureoru to fransu fuhenshugi* [Dioptrics of Discourse: Creoleness and the French Universalism], in Yasuo Endo, ed., *Kureoru no shiten kara mita kan karibu koiki imin kenkyu (tokushu I)* [Comparative Studies of Immigration and the Creolization of Cultures (Special Topic I)], *American Studies, University of Tokyo Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 4, 1999, 9-97.
- 43) Joseph M. Palacio, "May the New Creole of Belize Please Rise," *Ideas - A Spear Publication*, <http://www.spear.org.bz/story2.html>
- 44) Richard R. Wilk, "Emerging Linkages in the World System and the Challenge of Economic Anthropology," in *From Local to Global*, T. Hall and R. Blanton eds., University Press of America, 1997, <http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/links.htm>
- 45) Confiat, cited in Mignolo, Op. cit.