

Antillanité, créolité, littérature-monde

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Edited by

Isabelle Constant, Kahiudi C. Mabana
and Philip Nanton

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

Comme le titre de cet ouvrage le laisse entendre, les auteurs des chapitres contenus dans ce recueil étaient invités à s'interroger sur l'acception des mots et des concepts d'antillanité, de créolité et de littérature-monde. Pour chacun de ces chapitres, on peut se poser les questions suivantes: sont-ils basés sur le conflit ou vont-ils dans le sens de la conciliation? En d'autres termes cherchent-ils à rapprocher les cultures? Les écrivains du mouvement le plus récent, la littérature-monde, recherchent-ils la division dans leurs écrits où veulent-ils créer de nouveaux concepts? La définition même de « créolité » ou « créolisation » est le mélange des cultures et au cœur de ce concept se trouve la possibilité de créer quelque chose de nouveau à partir de cultures différentes. La créolisation s'oppose à l'idée de pureté et d'essence. Comment les écrivains évitent-ils ou résolvent-ils cette question de l'essence? Ils utilisent différentes stratégies, démontrées dans ce recueil. Des difficultés théoriques subsistent. Si la littérature-monde, comme son nom l'indique, rassemble et inclut, court-elle le risque en même temps de devenir moins marquée et inopérante, incapable de créer une quelconque nouveauté?

Lydie Moudileno, l'invitée d'honneur de notre colloque de 2010 à l'université des West Indies Cave Hill de la Barbade, où ces essais furent initialement présentés, aborde ces trois concepts comme ils apparaissent dans le continuum de la littérature noire. Elle remet également en question leur statut d'étiquettes destinées à remplacer des termes plus chargés comme « littérature en français », « francophone » ou « postcoloniale ». Elle montre comment les trois mouvements proposent un but similaire de distanciation du centre hexagonal et essaient de représenter une vision authentique de l'histoire, la culture, l'identité, la réalité et la diversité des mondes qu'ils décrivent. Mais selon Moudileno, le changement d'étiquette ne fait que produire plus d'insatisfaction, car il équivaut toujours à une manière de catégoriser ce qui refuse de l'être. A la fois, Moudileno reconnaît l'utilité de néologismes tels qu'antillanité et créolité en tant qu'outils critiques et dénonce la possibilité de leur récupération et des nombreuses interprétations fallacieuses qu'ils génèrent. Elle détaille en particulier les contradictions internes d'*Eloge de la créolité*, le manifeste des créolistes. Enfin, tout en reconnaissant qu'il s'agit surtout de nommer des littératures qui sont trop souvent marginalisées par rapport au centre

parisien, elle préfère considérer ces trois mouvements comme des entités en coexistence plutôt que comme des mouvements qui effacent leur prédécesseur. Elle y lit un dynamisme de notre champ d'études. Cependant elle considère la littérature-monde et l'identité-monde comme une rupture épistémologique.

Dans les chapitres suivants, il sera question de langue, de langage et d'un combat entre différentes langues qui constitue à la fois une lutte pour s'exprimer, pour se faire entendre et une tentative de communication entre peuples. Cheryl Toman retrace le début de la littérature du Gabon aux écrivaines gabonaises fang. Elle explique comment l'usage de la langue fang ainsi que de formes empruntées au *m'vet*, la poésie épique fang, et au *megane*, la forme poétique du fang réservée aux femmes, dans les textes de ces écrivaines, est une façon de décoloniser la langue française, la repoussant au statut de langue mineure. Selon Toman, la culture fang influence les protagonistes dans leur vision de la mort et dans la manière dont des écrivaines telles que Justine Mintsu et Sylvie Ntsame emplissent leur écriture de ces éléments culturels « offrant des perspectives émergentes qui nous montrent le chemin d'une définition de la littérature-monde » (notre traduction). Ces écrivaines créent du nouveau en mélangeant une langue orale et le français.

Les relations de lutte se trouvent au sein même de la langue et à un niveau micro linguistique, comme le montre Savrina Chinien qui, à partir du jeu des pronoms, revisite chaque roman de Chamoiseau en explorant la figure profonde et les multiples sens du narrateur. Ce chapitre est informé en théorie par la psychanalyse et la narratologie ainsi que par la poétique de Glissant et l'expression théorique de Chamoiseau dans *Eloge de la créolité* et *Ecrire en pays dominé*. Chinien conclut sur les motivations qui poussent les auteurs antillais à l'écriture, par exemple pour comprendre une vie chaotique et explorer la richesse de la diversité. D'une manière beaucoup plus globale, Kahiudi Mabana exploite la composition du récit dans *Chronique des sept misères* de Chamoiseau afin d'étendre à toute l'œuvre de celui-ci les contours d'une poétique personnelle et unique. Il découvre à la base des romans de Chamoiseau une parole initiale porteuse d'une catastrophe ou d'une malédiction, parole à partir de laquelle la construction du roman créole est possible. Ces deux derniers exemples nous montrent que l'auteur créoliste Chamoiseau explore des traits spécifiques de la culture créole tels que le sentiment du chaos et l'oralité. Alors que son imaginaire trouve ses thèmes dans les histoires locales, sa créativité se trouve dans la recherche poétique. Il invente une langue personnelle. Cependant, la présence de poésie épique reste certainement une caractéristique que de nombreux critiques ont perçue et décrite chez

Chamoiseau. Virginie Jauffred s'attache à démontrer le caractère épique de l'œuvre de Chamoiseau en s'attardant sur l'aspect oral de ses écrits. Elle le compare aux aèdes ou rhapsodes de l'antiquité, conteurs itinérants qui comme des tisserands cousaient plusieurs textes ensemble. Elle conclut à un travail créole et épique de Chamoiseau. Aux yeux des Antillais, le créole ne s'écrit pas, mais à partir de l'œuvre de Chamoiseau, *Chronique des sept misères*, Elisabeth Lore parvient à démontrer que Chamoiseau opère un renversement du cliché, en modifiant l'image négative du créole tout en établissant le français comme langue de l'agression. A partir de ces quatre chapitres, on peut conclure à l'unicité d'un auteur qui a su modifier deux langues pour en inventer une. En ce sens la créolité de Chamoiseau, même si elle est basée sur le conflit, crée de nouveaux concepts.

Un autre style, souvent appliqué aussi à Chamoiseau est le genre baroque que Mamadou Wattara analyse ici chez René Philoctète. Wattara revisite les relations fratricides entre Haïtiens et Dominicains à travers l'œuvre de René Philoctète: *Le Peuple des terres mêlées*. Il rappelle le contexte historique de la mésentente entre les deux peuples et insiste sur l'importance d'écrire l'histoire des Antilles, au delà de l'histoire coloniale. Il souligne l'importance de l'écriture afin de transcrire cette histoire, et montre comment l'écriture est une continuation de l'oralité –l'un ou l'autre terme désignant la même chose--. Philoctète met en avant les grands dangers de l'essentialisme et Wattara suggère qu'à partir d'une réalité tragique, une poétique hybride de témoignage historique et de diversité baroque peut créer une vision nouvelle et pacifique. Il appelle "baroque" le mélange du trivial et de la description historique génocidaire décrits dans *Le Peuple des terres mêlées* et conclut que ce texte, de par sa polyphonie linguistique « entretient des points de convergences avec d'une part, la pensée de la Relation de Glissant et d'autre part avec le concept même de littérature-monde ». Ce livre, en effet basé sur un conflit, se veut rassembleur.

Explorant également le conflit et la violence, Florence Ramond Jurney étudie un aspect que l'on pourrait qualifier de thème « monde » dans la littérature, car il s'agit d'un sujet largement exploité dans le roman antillais et malheureusement universel. Elle relie le thème de l'inceste et de la violence sexuelle contre les enfants au leitmotiv du secret familial lui-même associé au thème plus large du secret identitaire antillais. Gisèle Pineau a très tôt abordé ce sujet dans ses romans avec pour intention de dévoiler une histoire familiale dans un but thérapeutique. L'écriture prend alors un rôle thérapeutique de recouvrement d'identité. La violence physique ou verbale contre les femmes et les enfants, sujet extrêmement

conflictuel, présenté de façons différentes selon que l'auteur du roman est homme ou femme, ne peut être conçu que comme fondamental à la compréhension de son identité et à la connaissance de soi. Ramond Jurney montre pourquoi, dans une recherche de vérité nécessaire à la création d'un monde nouveau, cette vérité là doit être dite.

Le conflit et la violence constituent aussi le matériau des romans de Nick Stone. Françoise Cêvaër explore la transculturalité de cet auteur métis haïtien-écossais de roman noir écrivant en anglais des œuvres qui ont pour toile de fond Haïti ou la communauté haïtienne en exil. Il met en scène un escroc (le *trickster* des contes africains et antillais) et adopte lui-même ce rôle dans sa façon de jouer avec le lecteur. Dans un roman noir historique qui revisite la période de la dictature et de l'intervention américaine, Nick Stone passe « au crible la responsabilité et la culpabilité de chacun (états, institutions, individus) dans le chaos historique haïtien ». Dans un autre roman il exploite la communauté haïtienne en exil à Miami dans les années 80. Il trouve évidemment dans ces contextes tous les ingrédients d'histoires criminelles: crimes, trafic de drogue et prostitution. Cêvaër ramène la marginalité et l'utilisation de la magie, spécifiquement du vodou, des personnages de Nick Stone, à la tradition orale de l'araignée Anansi, incarnée en Haïti comme symbole de résistance. Les *tricksters* de Nick Stone, transculturels, font fi des frontières et des époques. Les regards croisés de personnages appartenant à une communauté sur une autre communauté reprennent des clichés et les annulent tout à la fois, créant des romans-monde. Elle conclut que Nick Stone, de par un parcours et une transculturalité biographique et romanesque inédite participe à la littérature-monde. Ces trois derniers chapitres démontrent que la littérature-monde, au travers de thèmes dramatiques, interroge l'incapacité des êtres à échapper à la haine et présente la violence comme une réalité globale.

Certains mots et concepts, importés aux Antilles au moment le plus sombre de l'esclavage, possèdent une force unique pour marquer les imaginaires. Lucy Swanson débute son chapitre en offrant une explication étymologique diversifiée du sens du mot zombi et développe les différentes formes et concepts que le mot recouvre tels qu'on les rencontre chez Depestre, Césaire, Mênil et Glissant. Elle contraste le sens de ce mot en Martinique et en Haïti. Swanson remarque que le journal *Tropiques* pourrait être considéré comme un prédécesseur de l'antillanité plutôt qu'exclusivement comme le père de la négritude. Elle note que l'ancêtre du zombi de Glissant naît en Afrique. A la recherche de l'origine de l'image du zombi dans l'inconscient culturel des Haïtiens et des Martiniquais, elle attribue leur contraste à une histoire différente. Elle

explique que les créolistes englobent le zombi dans le bestiaire folklorique surnaturel pour en faire un symbole vivant plutôt qu'un symbole de mort et d'oppression. Elle conclut sur la fonction de procédé littéraire du zombi: « A travers ses nombreux avatars, le zombi évoque des ressemblances inter-îles, archipélagiques en même temps qu'il connote la singularité de l'insulaire » (notre traduction). *De pluribus unum*. Avec l'exemple de l'approche diverse d'auteurs majeurs autour d'un thème singulier, Swanson montre une antillanité qui rapproche les peuples de l'archipel.

Pien relie *Le Chercheur d'or* de Le Clézio à son parcours autobiographique, par l'entremise des lieux cités et de la relation particulière de Le Clézio à la langue. En effet Le Clézio recherche un langage des signes, dans la matière et non dans la conscience. Ces signes se trouvent dans les lieux. Selon l'analyse de Pien, l'apport d'ailleurs venus avec des personnages au sang mêlé créolise certains lieux privilégiés dans la poétique de Le Clézio, des lieux privilégiés où le narrateur peut se perdre et apprendre à voir. L'île conclut-il avec Glissant est cet espace privilégié, non pas lieu clos, mais lieu de relation. Le Clézio, le plus célèbre des signataires du manifeste de 2007 représente cet écrivain-monde revendiquant toujours l'idéal d'un monde créolisé, d'une civilisation arc-en-ciel. Sa forte opposition à l'essentialisme et sa représentation spacieuse des cultures ne l'a jamais empêché de créer sa propre poétique.

Les textes de ce recueil analysent le caractère de littératures qui échappent à la notion essentialiste de pureté. Ces chapitres démontrent que l'échange permanent entre des cultures et des langues, même si elles partent d'un conflit, sont fertiles et créent de nouveaux styles et des œuvres originales.

Isabelle Constant et Philip Nanton

INTRODUCTION

As the title of this essay indicates, the authors of the chapters were invited to ponder the meaning of *antillanité créolité* and *littérature-monde*. We ask the following questions of each contribution: Is this study a conflict based study or one that syncretically aims to bring cultures together? Are the writers of the most recent movement, *littérature-monde*, oppositional or innovative? The very definition of *créolité* or creolization is a mixture of cultures and the key feature of this concept is, ultimately, the ability to create something new out of different cultures. What creolization opposes is the idea of purity and essence. How, then, do the writers avoid or resolve the idea of essence? They have different strategies and this is what the following collection of essays demonstrates. Some theoretical difficulties remain. For example, if *littérature-monde* is, as its name indicates, all-encompassing, does it not become less potent and perhaps incapable of innovation?

Lydie Moudileno, who was the guest speaker at our 2010 conference at the University of the West Indies Cave Hill in Barbados, where these chapters were initially presented, introduces the three concepts *antillanité*, *créolité*, *littérature-monde* as they appear in the historical continuum of black literature. She also questions them as labels destined to replace other more loaded terms such as 'French', 'Francophone' or 'postcolonial'. She shows how the three movements offer similar goals of distancing themselves from the hexagonal center and seek to represent an authentic view of their history, culture, identities, reality and diversities. But the change of labels only produces more dissatisfaction, claims Moudileno, as they are always ways of categorizing that which refuses to be categorized. At the same time, Moudileno recognizes the usefulness of neologisms such as *antillanité* and *créolité* as critical tools and she denounces the possibility of recuperation and misinterpretations of those concepts. She details especially the contradictions found in *In Praise of Creoleness*, the creolists' manifesto. Finally, although she recognizes that the aim of these movements is often to label literatures that are too often marginalized, she prefers to consider these three movements as coexisting entities rather than as movements that obliterate their predecessors. She perceives that their coexistence reflects the dynamism of our field. Nevertheless, she considers

that *littérature-monde* and *identité-monde* offer nothing less than an epistemological break.

The following chapters in this collection reflect on language and the power struggle between different languages, a struggle to express one self, to be heard, and to communicate. Cheryl Toman retraces the beginning of a literature in Gabon to the Fang women writers. She explains how the use of the fang language as well as forms borrowed from *m'vet* --fang epic poetry-- and *megane* --the women's form of *m'vet*-- is a way of decolonizing the French language, returning it to the position of minor language. She explains how the fang culture influences the protagonists in their vision of death and how writers like Justine Mintsia and Sylvie Ntsame infuse their writing of these cultural elements "offering emerging perspectives as to how we are to define the notion of '*littérature monde*'". She suggested these writers create something new by mixing an oral language with French.

Relationships based on struggle are found at the very grammatical core of language and at a micro linguistics level, as is shown in Savrina Chinien's chapter. Starting with the play on pronouns, she revisits each of Chamoiseau's novels, exploring the deep tropes and the multiple meanings of the narrator. This chapter is informed by psychoanalysis, narratology and by Glissant's poetics as well as Chamoiseau's theory expressed in *In Praise of Creoleness* and *Ecrire en pays dominé*. Chinien concludes on the motivations that draw Caribbean writers to their art, for example to comprehend a chaotic life and to explore a rich diversity. In a more global fashion, Kahiudi Mabana perceives that *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows* is informed by Chamoiseau's unique and personal poetics. He finds at the root of Chamoiseau's novels an initial formula, that is, a spoken word associated with catastrophe or a malediction, it is a formula that makes the construction of the creole novel possible. These two chapters show us that the creolist author Chamoiseau deals with specific traits of the creole culture, such as a feeling of chaos and orality. While his imagination is grounded in local stories, his creativity lies in researching the poetics. He invents his personal language. However, traces of epic poetry are a characteristic that numerous critics have perceived and described in Chamoiseau's work. Virginie Jauffred chooses to demonstrate the epic style of Chamoiseau through the oral aspect of his writings. She compares him to antique bards or song-writers, and, nomad story tellers who, like weavers, used to sow many texts together. She concludes that Chamoiseau offers simultaneously both a creole and an epic work. In the eyes of the French Caribbean, Creole should not be written, but utilizing Chamoiseau's work *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*, Elisabeth Lore demonstrates how Chamoiseau overcomes this cliché, by modifying the negative image of

the Creole while establishing French as an aggressive language. In light of these four chapters, one can identify a unique author who was able to modify two languages to invent his own. In that sense, Chamoiseau's *créolité*, even if it is based on conflict, creates new concepts.

Another style, often applied to Chamoiseau, is the baroque, which Mamadou Wattara analyses in a work of René Philoctète. Wattara revisits the crimes committed between Haïtian and Dominican communities through the novel by René Philoctète : *Massacre River* (2005). He recalls the historical context of dissension between the two communities and insists on the importance of writing the history of the Antilles beyond colonial history. He insists also on the importance of "orature" in order to transcribe this history and he shows how writing is a continuity of "oraliture" – both terms refer to the same concept. Philoctète identifies the great dangers of essentialism, and Wattara suggests that using the material of a tragic reality, the author's hybrid poetic of historical testimony and baroque genre diversity can generate a new and pacific vision. Wattara refers to baroque as the mixture of the trivial and the genocidal. Descriptions of these are found in *Massacre River* and he concludes that the polyphonic language of the text "refers on the one hand to Glissant's concept of relation and on the other hand to the concept of *littérature-monde*". Ultimately, the goal of this book, which is based on conflict, is to bring people together.

Conflict and violence are universal themes in literature and are widely exploited in Caribbean novels. Florence Ramond Journey deals with themes of incest and sexual violence against children in the writing of Giséle Pineau. She shows how these constitute the leitmotiv of the family secret, which itself is part of the larger topic of secrecy surrounding Caribbean identity. Gisèle Pineau has dealt with this topic since her early writing, with the aim of bringing about healing through the unveiling of family history. Writing thus takes a therapeutic role of recovering one's identity. Similarly, the subjects of physical or verbal violence against women and children--presented differently whether the author is male or female - affect fundamentally the understanding of one's identity and self knowledge. Ramond Journey shows why, in the search for truth necessary to the creation of a new world, this truth must be told.

Conflict and violence also constitute the material of Nick Stone's novels. François Cêvaër explores transculturality in his detective novels. Nick Stone is an author of Haitian-Scottish origin who writes in English. His novels are located in Haiti or among the exiled Haitian community. His main character is a crook (the trickster of African and Caribbean tales) and, like Anancy, Stone adopts this role as a way of playing with the

reader. Cévaër notes that in a *roman noir*, which revisits the time of the dictatorship and the American intervention, Nick Stone ‘leaves no stone unturned in searching for responsibilities and guilt of everyone (state, institutions, individuals)’. In another novel, Stone deals with the Haitian community in exile in Miami in the 80’s. He evidently finds in these contexts all the ingredients (crime, drug dealing and prostitution) of criminal stories. Cévaër links marginality and voodoo in Stone’s novels to the oral tradition of Anansi the spider, incarnated in Haiti as a symbol of resistance. In these novels characters from different communities meet each other’s gazes, defy borders and time. She concludes that a unique combination of biographical and novelistic transculturality is sufficient to locate Stone in the *littérature-monde* movement. These last three chapters demonstrate how *littérature-monde* examines the general human incapacity to escape hatred and they represent violence as a powerful global reality.

Some words and concepts, imported to the Caribbean in the dark times of slavery, possess a unique strength able to strike the imagination. Lucy Swanson starts her article by giving an etymologically diverse explanation of the meaning of the word ‘zombie’ and goes on to explain the different shapes and concepts behind the word as found in literary texts by Depestre, Césaire, Ménil and Glissant. She contrasts its meanings in Martinique and Haiti. She contends that the journal *Tropiques* might be viewed as a predecessor to *Antillanité* and that Glissant’s zombie is to be traced to Africa. Searching for the origin of the image of the zombie in the cultural psyche of Haitians and Martinicans, she relates its contrasts to a different history. She explains that the Creolists incorporate the zombie into the Martinican folkloric supernatural bestiary, hence making it a living symbol instead of a symbol of death and oppression. She concludes on the function of the zombie as a literary trope: “Through its many avatars, the zombie evokes archipelagic, inter-island resemblances at the same time that it connotes the singularity of the insular”. *De pluribus unum*. Taking the example of major authors dealing with one singular cultural trope, Swanson demonstrates how *Antillanité* brings together the people of the archipelago.

Nicolas Pien links *Le Chercheur d’or* to Le Clézio’s autobiographical journey, through names of places and the special relation Le Clézio entertains with language. It appears to Pien that Le Clézio is looking for a language of signs, found in matter and not in consciousness. Those signs are found in places. According to Pien’s analysis, the effect on the writer of living elsewhere and the encounter with hybrid characters creolizes some favoured spaces in Le Clézio’s poetics, where the narrator can lose

himself and learn to see. Pien concludes with Glissant that the island is this favoured space, not a closed space but a space of relation. Le Clézio, the most famous signatory of the 2007 manifesto, represents the ultimate writer-monde, always claiming an ideal creolized world. His strong opposition to essentialism and his representation of cultural diversity never prevented him from creating a poetics of his own.

The texts analysed in this volume allow an escape from essentialist notions of purity. The eleven chapters in this collection demonstrate that the constant exchange between cultures and languages, including those exchanges which are conflict based, is a fertile one offering new styles and original texts.

Isabelle Constant and Philip Nanton

CHAPTER ONE

FROM *PRÉ-LITTÉRATURE*
TO *LITTÉRATURE-MONDE*:
POSTURES, NEOLOGISMS, PROPHECIES

LYDIE MOUDILENO

The sequencing of the terms “*antillanité*”, “*créolité*”, and “*littérature-monde*” suggests at the outset a chronological trajectory in the ways in which Francophone Caribbean cultural productions have situated themselves or have been situated historically and transnationally, with respect to French hexagonal literary traditions.¹ A few decades back, the expression “from Négritude to *Créolité*” was a staple of Francophone studies, with “Négritude” and “*créolité*” serving as the two movements bookmarking (and, in a sense, bookending) the transfiguration of Afro-Caribbean voices: on the one end stood the now famous 1940’s race-based reclaiming of negro identity by Césaire; on the other, the 1980’s celebration of hybridity and syncretic cultures celebrated by Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, co-authors of *Éloge de la créolité*, directly following Edouard Glissant’s relational theories of *antillanité*. Since that time, much has changed. For one, our critical perspectives, the concepts with which we apprehend our/the world are radically redefining academic disciplines as a whole. French and Francophone studies have not been exempt from the kinds of paradigmatic shifts that have occurred; new claims, imperatives, rifts and conjunctures force us constantly to renew our theoretical toolboxes. Among the more recent theories that have both seduced and challenged us in the last years, the idea of “*littérature-monde*” is certainly one of the most striking: first developed in the manifesto “Pour

¹ To follow Jean Jonassaint’s argument that one should take into account the “historical and structural differences in the delimitation of the Haitian and the French Antillean literary corpuses, I will do my best to use the term “Antillean literature” whenever I am referring to the literary tradition of Martinique and Guadeloupe in this essay. See Jonassaint, 56.

une littérature monde en français” in 2007, it has generated a wave of media attention and academic effervescence, of the kind one had not seen in the field since the publication of *Eloge de la créolité* almost twenty years earlier, in 1990.² Today, alongside “Négritude”, “antillanité” and several other terms, “littérature-monde” indeed needs to be critically acknowledged as an important moment in contemporary postcolonial theory.

My title, “From pré-littérature to littérature-monde,” explicitly envisions the kind of continuum with which I began this essay, but it does so in order to better situate more broadly the recurring postures and prophecies that have marked the history of post-war Francophone Caribbean thought. In sum, I want to open up the temporal and conceptual bookends of Négritude and now Littérature Monde: backwards, with a consideration of “pré-littérature” as a phase of “prehistorical” literary endeavors, located before the point of departure that Négritude might represent; and forward, with “littérature-monde” marking an alleged point of arrival, or the ultimate aspiration of twentieth and twenty-first century cosmopolitan production, a kind of literary “end of history.” If indeed “*Antillanité*”, “*créolité*” and “littérature-monde” are some of the major concepts that have transformed the way we think about the intersection of identity and literature in the “post-négritude” decades, what do they have in common and in what way can they contribute to a historiography of twentieth and twenty-first century postcolonial literature? Since the time this emerging corpus was referred to as “littérature négro-africaine d’expression française” over half a century ago, the field now known as Francophonie has undergone many reconfigurations, producing both a canon and its own margins—and, in the process, juggling many labels. Its literary history has been marked by numerous, more or less spectacular ideologies, often sustained by pan-African, national, regional, linguistic and/or ethnic claims. How, then, one might ask, does the recent, equally seductive neologism “littérature-monde” proposed by Michel Le Bris (and the 44 signatories of the 2007 Manifesto “Pour une littérature-monde en français”) find its place along this historical continuum? As the editors, Alec G. Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy ask in their introduction to *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-Monde*: “Does the declaration of a littérature-monde signal the advent of a new critical paradigm destined to render obsolescent those ‘French’, ‘Francophone’ and/or ‘postcolonial studies?’” (Hargreaves et al,

² Among the numerous publications on the “littérature-monde” phenomenon, see Cloonan and Hargreaves, 2010; Hargreaves et al, 2010; Gauvin, 2010.

1). We also need to examine, in the Antillean context particularly, the extent to which “littérature-monde” as a (self-declared) telos for contemporary world productions enters in ideological competition with earlier theories of “*antillanité*” and “*créolité*”. In short, can we really speak of a continuum from “pre-littérature” to “littérature-monde;” or instead, are there important disjunctures that need to be accounted for, disjunctures that might even challenge the valence of this new paradigm?

With this set of questions in mind, I propose: 1) to examine the singularity of individual and collective positions adopted by Antillean intellectuals with regards to their literary tradition; 2) to interrogate the conceptual efficacy of some of the neologisms that have been regularly offered to account for non-hexagonal productions; and 3) to reassess the currency of some of the prophecies put forward in pamphlet-like texts, among which Caribbean Discourse, *In Praise of Creoleness* and the Littérature-Monde Manifesto. In order to begin to answer these question I would like first to sketch out the setting for this discussion by examining the different “postures” that can be said to characterize Caribbean writers’ discourses of identity, difference and literary creation.

The 1980’s was a rich decade for Francophone Caribbean studies, not only because it saw the maturity of the post-Césaire generation, with writers like Maryse Condé, Raphael Confiant, Daniel Maximin, Patrick Chamoiseau, Ernest Pépin, and Edouard Glissant producing some of their most outstanding novels, but also, because it gave visibility and currency to two critical concepts: While Edouard Glissant developed his notion of “*Antillanité*” at the very beginning of the eighties (1981), his (and Césaire’s) compatriots now known as the “*créolistes*” put forward the notion of “*Créolité*” in their famous *Éloge de la créolité*, published at the end of the decade in 1989.³ Continuities and contrasts between Glissant’s notion of “creolization” as the transformative process responsible for historical, geographical and sociological “*antillanité*”, and “creoleness” as the ontological product of this process, have been amply demonstrated.⁴

As postcolonial writers whose mission entails writing back to/in the French cultural center, the fathers of *antillanité* and *créolité* have assumed the typical postcolonial posture of providing a counterdiscourse aimed at reclaiming the specificity of their region’s history, people, and experiences. Whether it is called a “*retour au lieu*” [“return to one’s place”] by Glissant,

³ As David Scott very rightly explains, “several years before the ringing declaration embodied in *Eloge de la créolité*, there already existed a fundamental body of Caribbean work devoted precisely to the excavation of the interior landscape of “creoleness.” (Scott, viii).

⁴ For more on this, see Murdoch, 2001.

or “vision intérieure” [“interior vision”] by the créolists, the imperative is similar: to (better) account for the complex singularity of given regions and to situate them within the bio-cultural diversity of the planet. In *antillanité* and *créolité*, this specific postcolonial posture involves a distancing from the French metropolitan center and sharp examination of the real. In this sense, *littérature-monde* echoes *Antillanité* and *créolité* in that it calls both for the end of French ethnocentrism while advocating for a “return to the world.” This return to the physical world as a privileged site of authenticity seems, in all three, to guarantee a better representation of contemporary identities, realities and human diversity. Ultimately, though, what is at stake is literature and its capacity to apprehend a world saturated with history, culture, identity, yet increasingly resistant to traditional categories.

These claims have appeared in a rich body of theoretical texts. Glissant’s theories of *antillanité* have been expressed and reworked since *L’Intention poétique* in Caribbean discourse reappearing in *Poétique de la relation*, his idea of the “Tout-monde” etc.; indeed, this endless mulling is part and parcel of Glissant’s discursive practice. Similarly, while most forcefully expressed in *Éloge*, theories of *créolité* have been reiterated and refined throughout the 1990s in *Lettres créoles* and *Écrire en pays dominé*, and *Écrire la parole de la nuit*. Finally, after its initial launch in *Le Monde*, the idea of “Littérature-monde” has been expanded by Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud and several of the original signatories in the collective Gallimard volumes, *Pour une littérature-monde* and *Je est un autre*, and *Pour une identité-monde*.

Indeed, one recurring posture of twentieth and twenty-first century Francophone writers is the forcefulness, if not violence, which characterize some of the most significant texts. If we look at the history of “prises de parole” as far as the Caribbean is concerned, we can see that the production of a counter-discourse often takes the form of outbursts of violence. Indeed, when given the conditions and opportunity to express themselves, poets and essayists from colonized countries have widely relied on one of the most powerful rhetorical genres: the manifesto. David Murphy proposes the term “postcolonial manifesto” to account for the series of texts that “became the site of concerns relating to empire and its aftermath [and] that have emerged, at least in part, as a response to a colonialist nostalgia for France’s former imperial ‘greatness.’” (Murphy, 68) When *Le Monde* published the “Manifeste des 44” in 2007, there was no doubt that it continued this postcolonial tradition.

Neologisms

There is little question that various forms of the manifesto have marked the history of the postcolonial canon and most notably in the Francophone Antillean context. In these broadsides, we witness the carving out of new epistemological and ontological spaces, spaces designed to have done with the colonial past and its inheritance(s). In each case, there is the active claim to a particularity, to a valorized difference, even if, that difference increasingly becomes a universal cypher. If such is indeed, the case, one way to “manifester sa différence” [Claim one’s difference] (to use Louise Gauvin’s expression) and to challenge dominant epistemology is, most certainly, to propose new words that claim to represent, or better account for, the distinct experiences of minorities. With this in mind, in this section I move away from the form of the manifesto as a distinguishing feature of the evolution of the Francophone Antillean canon in order to examine “*antillanité*”, “*créolité*” and “*littérature-monde*” as they reveal yet another authoritative posture”: that of the postcolonial writer as privileged commentator of his own status and as an active producer of theory.

Again, an examination of the history is particularly useful here. In this case, looking at the accumulation of terms that have been proposed to account for the literatures produced outside of the French Hexagonal limits reveal their popularity: “*littérature nègre*,” “*littérature negro-africaine*,” “*Littérature d’expression française*,” “*littérature francophone*,” “*afro-latin*,” “*antillaise*,” “*creole francophone*,” “*postcoloniale*,” “*littérature-monde*,” etc. In fact, today we are still struggling mightily with such terms as “Postcolonial French studies,” the “Postcolonial Francophone,” the “Francophone postcolonial,” with all the possible combinations of brackets, quotes, capital letters, dashes, slashes and parentheses that one might imagine. What this proliferation of words and punctuation reveals is both a persistent need to label and a continuing uneasiness, or dissatisfaction with proposed labels. This unease become all the more apparent when one realizes that new labels are often used to replace old ones by the same people responsible for both.

In the 1960’s, at a time when Negritude was starting to wane under ideological criticism, when the wave of African independences embarked the continent on distinct, increasingly nationalistic trajectories, and when scholars from across the humanities demanded a conceptualization of the Caribbean as a singular cultural region, Glissant’s concept of *antillanité* was a timely and powerful addition to the critical toolkit available to literary and cultural critics of the Caribbean. As is well known, Glissant’s

neologistic term *antillanité* offered a way of reasserting the distinction and originality of the islands' cultural history. In contrast to Négritude, which focused on race, "*antillanité*"—a neologism linguistically rooted in the very topography of the Caribbean sea—pushed forward an "esthétique du territoire" [aesthetic of the territory] which entailed, according to Glissant, a vital "return to the place." Ernest Pépin and Raphaël Confiant argue in their commentary on Glissant's influence on *créolité* that his contribution to both present and future generations is undisputed. They go on to note that Glissant re-centered the process and terms by which one would read Antillean culture, and especially creole literature. "Instead of posing Africa as a fundamental matrix," they argue, "Glissant put forward the unfinished and unpredictable creativity of the historical, geographical, and anthropological space of creole society by focusing our point of view as well as releasing a semiology of ourselves." (Pépin, 98) One might ask, based on this last comment, if part of this striking expression, "a semiology of ourselves," didn't involve developing an adequate lexicon with which to "apprehend" this newly coalescing self, a new taxonomy of terms that would be created by those to whom they might apply, rather from the outside. This might begin to explain this proliferation of neologisms that I have noted.

That being said, one might ask whether the idea of *antillanité* as a paradigm really did get picked up in the French context. Interestingly, other concepts later developed by Glissant such as "relation" or "rhizomic identity," seem to have superseded it. In fact, David Scott suggests, although in passing, that "[Glissant's] 1990 *Poétique de la relation* might be understood as doubting the seeming virtues of the syncretistic model of "creoleness" presented by *Eloge*." He goes on to note that,

"[t]he suspicion, so it seemed, was that the very demand or a model of *créolité* might harbor as many obstacles as it overcame, that despite the open-ended rambunctiousness of, say, Chamoiseau's fiction, the irreducibly makeshift mixtures out of which his characters' lives were contingently assembled, an unavoidable conceptual hypostatization foreclosed the rhizomatic impulses of *antillanité*. (Scott, viii)

Scott's suggestion, here, that Glissant reaffirmed the "rhizomatic impulses of *antillanité*" in light of the ontological drift of *créolité*, is an interesting one. It points to Glissant's possible perception of the limits—or even dangers of a neologism such as "*antillanité*," when it gets recuperated in the context of specific identities. It also breaks the generational continuum that goes from Césaire to Glissant to Chamoiseau (Négritude-*Antillanité*-

Créolité) by showing Glissant engaged in the production of counter theories aimed at rectifying his own compatriots and self-declared disciples. As a neologism, then, it seems that *antillanité* suffered from a seductive appeal which opened the way to ontological recuperations as well as a series of potential series of misunderstandings. It would appear that “Relation: and “Tout-monde” on the other hand, have seen a less turbulent conceptual fate.

Pépin and Confiant recall, that when *Eloge de la créolité* was first published some were suspicious: “What kind of neologism is that?” (Pépin, 98) The issue of the actual novelty of the creolists’ discourse would subsequently become the topic of many Caribbeanists’ debates. What, some scholars would ask, is so new in the propositions of *Éloge*? For example, Peter Hawkins notes in his book *The other archipelago* that the “Créolie” movement of Axel Gauvin and Jean-François Sam-Long in Reunion island largely predated *Éloge*, and that their 1977 pamphlet *Du créole opprimé au créole libéré*” constitutes a clear but unacknowledged precursor, one that preceded by over ten years the Caribbean *Créolité* movement launched in Martinique in 1989 by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant in their “*Éloge de la créolité*” (Hawkins, 126). Michel Giraud, for his part, clearly denies the novelty of the movement, calling *créolité* “a delusive rupture” (Giraud, 795). Maryse Condé’s criticism is even harsher, when she calls *créolité*’s discourse “faussement révolutionnaire” [falsely revolutionary], and sees in its opposition between French and creole traditions “l’héritage de l’obsession coloniale entre vainqueur et victime.” [the heritage of the colonial obsession between victor and victim” (Condé, 309).

Despite these unflattering comments, there is no question that as a manifesto, *Éloge de la créolité* did in fact constitute an epistemological irruption on the French as well as Francophone and Caribbean literary scenes. Reactivating the century-old, historically charged word “creole,” the authors of *Eloge* famously open with the identity claim: “We proclaim ourselves to be Creoles” (Bernabé, 75). In true manifesto form, the text goes on to pose rules and to make pronouncements which forcefully introduce the words *créole* and its corresponding neologism *créolité* into Caribbean theory. The reiteration of the word *créolité* is powerfully affected throughout the manifesto. Thus, the authors will say: “It seems urgent to quit using the traditional raciological distinctions and to start again designating the people of our countries, regardless of their complexion, by the only suitable word: Creole” [We declare that creolity is the cement of our culture]; “La *créolité* est notre soupe primitive” [Creoleness is our primordial soup]. These declarations thereby performatively

contribute to the epistemological incorporation of *créolité* as an immediately operational Caribbean concept. Terms like “littérature afro-antillaise, négro-antillaise, franco-antillaise, antillaise d’expression française, francophone des Antilles”, must be discarded, as their accumulation reveals a problematic epistemological “unstability.” The authors of *Éloge* therefore declare them “useless” (“inopérants” (Bernabé, 35)), proposing instead the expression “Littérature creole.” In this sense, the whole gist of the manifesto as a performative act has to do less with claiming a collective identity, and more with inventing a literary label for contemporary Caribbean production.

According to Dominique Combes, “Littérature-monde” as a neologism can be traced most clearly to Glissant’s lexicon, by way of the creole language and of European philosophy⁵. According to Combes:

Dans sa formulation même, le titre *Pour une littérature-monde* fait directement référence au ‘Tout-monde’ d’Edouard Glissant, qui est l’un des signataires du manifeste et qui donne au volume un entretien. Le mot composé, qui consiste dans la juxtaposition de deux substantifs reliés par un trait d’union, est un procédé récurrent chez Glissant, surtout dans ses ouvrages récents, à partir de *Poétique de la relation* (Glissant 1990).

On peut certes y lire une influence de la syntaxe créole, que les romanciers Raphaël Confiant et Patrick Chamoiseau, par exemple, transposent dans un français ainsi ‘créolisé’. Mais le procédé est également fréquent dans le discours de la philosophie contemporaine, sous la plume de Derrida et surtout de Deleuze, que Glissant a beaucoup lu (Combes, 237).

[In its very formulation the title *Pour une littérature-monde* makes a direct reference to the idea of “*Tout-Monde*” proposed by Edouard Glissant, one of the signatories of the manifesto, who contributed to the volume with an interview. The use of composite words, that is, the juxtaposition of two words connected with by a hyphen, is a recurring process for Glissant, especially in his recent works starting with *Poétique de la relation* (Glissant 1990). One can see in it the influence of creole syntax, which novelists Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau transpose in a “creolized” French. But the process is also frequent in contemporary philosophy, in the writings of Derrida and especially Deleuze, whose work Glissant read a lot.]

Having thus followed a complicated trajectory in the French language, including its deterritorialization by Glissant’s theories of “tout-monde” and “chaos-monde”, “littérature-monde” has now become a lexeme of its

⁵ Eric Prieto also documents, although less forcefully, *Littérature-monde*’s direct debt to Glissant’s theories.

own, which can potentially serve to modify all sorts of nouns, including, as in Michel Le Bris's recent publication, *Je est un autre. Pour une identité-monde*, "identité" itself.⁶ A lot of the discussions regarding the novelty of the expression proposed by Michel Le Bris have involved a systematic critique of *Littérature-monde*'s relation to Goethe's nineteenth-century idea of *Weltliteratur*, and contemporary Anglo-Saxon conceptions of World literature, emphasizing its shared agenda with comparative literature and the transnational approaches it advocates.⁷ But beyond its genealogical and linguistic relation to other literatures, thereby claiming to encompass the production of "the world," it is also useful to consider *Littérature-monde* as a neologism destined to compete with the thoroughly loaded term, *Francophonie*. Again, as is typical of a manifesto, its pronouncement also seeks to represent the demise of something; in this particular case it is of *Francophonie* as an operative category: "The end of "Francophone" literature—and the birth of a world literature in French."⁸ As Françoise Lionnet insightfully noted, the fervent debates sparked by the manifesto were not "mere questions of definitions rooted primarily in a *querelle de mots*" (Lionnet, 206) but a legitimate and persistent "question of labels, and the hierarchies they underwrite" (Lionnet, 213). Indeed, the provocative declaration of the death of *Francophonie* touched a sensitive chord for many, from Parisian-based writers to American scholars of *Francophonie*, who had been both promoting and challenging their literary field's label for several decades. In that respect there is no doubt that the spectacular appearance of the new term, together with its sweeping rhetorical gestures and quick indictments, constituted an intellectual event with formidable potential for catharsis, in the broader, international context of French and Francophone cultures' contested categories.

Prophecies

One of the key, and most striking propositions in *Éloge*, alongside "We proclaim ourselves Creoles," is the idea of a literature that has remained, or still is, in a non-accomplished state. Confirming this is the rather puzzling statement found in *Eloge*, "Caribbean Literature does not yet exist. We are still in a state of pre-literature: that of a written production without a home or audience, ignorant of the author/reader interaction

⁶ Le Bris and Rouaud, 2010. I have written elsewhere on the shift from "Littérature-monde" to "Identité-monde". See Moudileno, 2012.

⁷ See Leservot, Typhaine, "From *Weltliteratur* to World Literature to *Littérature-monde*: The History of a Controversial Concept" in Hargreaves et al.

⁸ Manifesto "Towards a world Literature in French", 2010.

which is the primary condition of the development of a literature.” (Bernabé, 79) Readers of Glissant will recognize an echo of a similar claim in *Le Discours antillais*, where Glissant gave contemporary Caribbean writers the status of “préfaciers d’une littérature future.” [Preface-writers of a future literature] (Glissant, 600) In her *Littérature and identité créole*, Mireille Rosello devotes a chapter precisely to the implications of such a statement asserting the non-existence of a literary corpus by the very authors who are supposed to make it up. According to Rosello, the use of this kind of rhetoric can be interpreted as a strategy related to Michel Serres’s concept of “noise”: In this case, a deliberate disturbing of consensual discourse meant to disrupt the French canon.⁹ For Dominique Chancé, such a statement is symptomatic of the Antillean writer’s condition as what she calls an “auteur en souffrance.”¹⁰ Playing on the double meaning of the French expression “en souffrance”, which can mean both to suffer and to await, Chancé defines the Francophone Antillean writer’s lack of (institutional and popular) recognition as a pathetic effect of acculturation, while at the same time projecting it as the basis for a productive outcome in the future. In other words, the state of preliterate does not preclude the advent of literature. However, as much as the readership defines the existence of a true literature, for the creolists in particular it is the writer’s responsibility to achieve the passage from the preliterate to the literary. For the creolists, then, the problem lies less with the lack of a politically conscious audience, and more with the lack of committed authors: Following their logic, Antillean literature has not matured because its authors have yet to fully commit to retrieving and truly representing their creoleness and the creoleness of their environment. “None of our writers”, they claim,

took over Creoleness from the abyss of our ancestral speech. This non-integration of oral tradition was one of the forms and one of the dimensions of our alienation. Without the rich compost which should have contributed to a finally sovereign literature and brought it closer to potential readers, our writing . . . remained suspended. Hence the denominative instability of the written production of our countries: Afro-Caribbean, Negro-Caribbean, Franco-Caribbean, French-Speaking Caribbean, Francophone Caribbean Literature, etc. (Bernabé, 96-97).

Against what they see as a problematic “denominative instability,” the creolists basically propose not to add yet another denomination to an existing corpus, or even revisit it, but to inaugurate a new literary tradition

⁹ See Rosello, 1992.

¹⁰ Chancé, 2000.

altogether. Their commandment in *Éloge* is explicit: "In short, we shall create a literature, which will obey all the demands of modern writing while taking roots in the traditional configurations of our orality." (Bernabé, 97-98) Along with the imperative to wipe the literary slate clean of inauthentic texts, and to put forward a prescriptive *art poétique*, the future tense in "we shall create" ultimately functions as a cultural pledge. The 1990s were going to be the decade of the end of alienation, the liberation of speech, the unearthing of all the hidden treasures of creole cultures and above all, the advent of a "true" creole literature as "one of the most extraordinary and fairest ways of entering in relation with the world" (Bernabé, 113).

As David Scott puts it, "When *Éloge de la créolité* appeared in 1989, there was an understandable enough elation in Francophone Antillean studies. It was something of an intellectual event" (Scott, vii). Indeed, the "elation" was brought about by the feeling, not only that something significant had happened in Francophone studies, but also that something even bigger was going to happen in the following decades, in keeping with the enthusiastic pledge of the 1989 manifesto. In truth, *Éloge* did not keep all of its promises. A close look at the manifesto reveals that the limitations of its promises were in fact already evident within the text itself. In particular, many scholars have commented on the text's most obvious paradox, namely that it was published in French and given legitimacy by the very center from which it sought to distance itself.¹¹ I would add that another, perhaps less apparent contradiction haunts the rhetorical strategy of *Éloge*. For while the authors forcefully call for the advent of a Creole literature as that which will allow them to fully relate to the rest of the world, at the same time, their prescriptive program entails a problematic isolation from the rest of the world. The statement "our literature must progress by itself and come across no one during this period of development: we mean: no cultural deviation" (Bernabé, 102) is particularly baffling. If the urgency is to promote creoleness as "the mental envelope in the middle of which [their] world will be built in full consciousness of the outer world" (Bernabé, 75), how, then, can this be accomplished while shutting down communication and cultural exchanges with the rest of the world? How can the idealization of creoleness as the epitome of hybridity be reconciled with the imperative that there be "no cultural deviation?" In a sense, the dogmatic rigidity demanded that creole

¹¹ In an article entitled "'This Creole culture, miraculously forged:' The contradictions of créolité," Maeve Mc Cusker ponders "the peculiar paradox that these islands have been at the forefront of a tradition of 'writing back' to a center of which they are supposed to be an integral part." (McCusker, 113)

authors focus exclusively on an alledged creole authenticity has had the unfortunate effect of transforming the “mental envelope” into an intellectual fortress. A pessimistic evaluation of *Éloge* could be, then, that *créolité* has failed to keep its most appealing promises, that is, that Antillean authors should “deepen [their] Creoleness in full consciousness of the world.” (Bernabé, 111) Rather, the last decades have shown that if indeed creoleness has served to “crystallize Caribbeanness” (Bernabé, 111), one of the negative effects of this cristallization has been, paradoxically, to repress creativity.

Two decades later, the publication of the 2007 manifesto brought with it the same sense of elation that David Scott recalls for *Éloge*. It also contained its fair share of prophecies, including, in the opening lines, the promise of a radical transformation: “In due course, it will perhaps be said that this was a historic moment. . . a Copernican revolution” (Manifesto, 113). The 2007 manifesto prophesied literature’s renewed capacity to represent an ever-evolving world whose global forces increasingly create new identities and new experiences. If indeed the publication of the *littérature-monde* manifesto constituted an event comparable to *Éloge* in the 1990s it did not do so as a neologism which would ultimately put an end to the “denominative instability” denounced by the Creolists, but, rather, further underscored it.¹²

It has been my argument throughout this essay that in so doing, this latest manifesto took its place alongside a long list of words, expressions and movements that have attempted to account for Francophone Caribbean cultural productions originating from a wide range of regions, traditions, individuals and aesthetic projects. As I hope this essay has shown, the advent of “Littérature-monde” and its corollary “identité-monde” can be seen indeed as a significant epistemological break from previous movements that have marked the history of twentieth-century Francophone (Caribbean) literature, among which are *Antillanité* and *Créolité*. Nevertheless, while the seme “-monde” symbolically marks a clear disavowal of these earlier, more centripetal literary movements, and while it has tremendous conceptual power as a new tool for understanding a distinct group of twenty-first century texts and identities, what its academic popularity ultimately demonstrates is a typical preoccupation with labeling productions that exceed the borders of the French hexagon. As such, and beyond their stylistic similarities, many of the words of the 2007 Manifesto echo those of *Notebook of a return to my native land*, or

¹² For a discussion of the manifesto’s rejection of the concept of “Francophonie” see my essay “*Francophonie*: Trash or Recycle?” in Hargreaves et al, 2010.