

A Reunion Island Season in South Africa Event

CREOLISING SOCIETIES:

**Theory and experiences from Reunion Island,
the French Antilles... and South Africa ?**

IFAS/Wits University

5-6 may 2009, University of the Witwatersrand, Bernard Price building

PROGRAMME

The aim of this seminar is to facilitate scientific exchanges between French and South African researchers and students with regards to the notion of creolisation, as well as to engage members of the general public interested in social sciences and the transformation of South African society. Creolisation will be taken here to mean a permanent process of inter cultural transformation, including (amongst others) racial and language transformations. While creolisation reached international status within the field of social sciences in the 1990's to explain the transformation of societies due to globalisation, the very notion was formulated in the highly specific context of the *creole* societies of the Antilles and Reunion Island (amongst others); its main supporters being intellectuals, both authors and academics, such as E. Glissant (*Poétique de la Relation. (Poétique III)*, 1990), P. Chamoiseau, R. Confiant & J. Bernabé (*Eloge de la créolité*, 1989). This seminar wishes to get back to the origins of these developments, assess their evolution in the past twenty years, and relate them to the South African usage and experience of the notion.

When formulated originally, the concept attached a positive value to the whole experience of interracial transformation, and this represented a step further from the idea of hybridisation or "*métissage*", which were still diminutive and also quite pejorative in terms of the outcome of the mixing process (of races, languages, cultures, etc.). The concept of creolisation captures that which is new and original, that which gets created from the mix, not just what is "diluted", and this represents an on-going process, a state of permanent transformation. Far from only being a celebration of diversity, hybridization and "*métissage*", the notion also takes into consideration the violence and oppression (slavery mainly in the creole societies) at the very origin of the process of creolisation. It does not dismiss either the domination still at hand in creole societies or the power relations at the core of the creolisation process. The memory of these past traumatic events is thus central to the current transformations induced by creolisation, and this seminar will also discuss the question of the representation of these memories and their possible reification overtime.

During the course of this two-day seminar, participants and discussants will reflect on the evolution of the notion, going back to its genealogy as well as its recent reprises and critiques in a first panel. The issues of language and the overall representation of creolising societies will be addressed in two other panels, and a series of three films on Reunion Island commented by their director/anthropologist will focus on daily experiences of this creolising process on the Island.

Tuesday, 5 MAY:

8h30 Registration

9h00 **Welcoming address:** Dean of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand

9h30 *Session 1: Theorising creolisation: the state of theory in the French Antilles and Reunion island, and its South African adaptation*

Chair : Eric Worby, School of Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand.

Going back to the theoretical developments of the notion, this first session will offer a discussion on the birth and evolution of the notion of creolisation in the creole societies of Reunion Island and the French Antilles. In the same vein, the participants will evaluate the validity of the transposition of the notion in the global context: the session will help question the scientific credibility of this broad adaptation to contexts so different from those experiencing post-slavery situations. The South African case will here provide an interesting middle-ground to test the possible adaptation of the notion as well as the highly political consequences it could imply: while post-apartheid South Africa has been actively promoting diversity since 1994, this political acknowledgment seems to leave little room for creolisation processes and indeed could be seen as occasionally contributing to the reification of former categories (through racially oriented politics of redress for instance).

9h40-10h00: Jean Benoist, Université Paul Cézanne, Aix-Marseille III

10h00-10h20: Denis-Constant Martin, Centre d'Etudes d'Afrique Noire, Bordeaux

10h20-10h40: Round of questions

15 min Coffee break

11h00-11h20: Zimitri Erasmus, University of Cape Town

11h20-11h40: Carpanin Marimoutou, Université de la Réunion & MCUR, Reunion Island

11h40-12h00: Round of questions

12h00-12h30 : Achille Mbembe (WISER- University of the Witwatersrand) for general comments and questions

12h30-13h30: Finger lunch

13h30: Session 2: Filming creolisation: a presentation/commentary of Laurence Pourchez films

Anthropologist and filmmaker, Laurence Pourchez has been working for the past 15 years in the Mascareignes islands (Reunion, Mauritius, Rodrigues) and more recently in Cuba. Her work focuses amongst other topics on creolisation, childhood and family, as well as rites of passage.

13h30-13h50: *Understanding Creole Society and cultural complexity in Réunion Island : The contribution of visual anthropology*, Presentation by the filmmaker, Laurence Pourchez, Université de la Réunion

13h50- 15h20: *Cavadee* (26 mn): 10 days of ceremonies honouring the God Mourouga in Reunion Island hindouism.

15h20-15h50: *Le Repas des Esprits*, (26mn): 24h ritual for families of madagascan descent destined to the ancestors.

15h50-16h05: *Loto Bon Dié*, (14 mn): The Benediction of Automobiles on Reunion Island.

16h05-16h25: round of questions for the author

15 min. Coffee break

16h45 Session 3: Creolisation and language: what role for creole languages in creolizing societies ?

Chair: Gerrit Olivier, School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand

The issue of language, its control and its place in society was central in the *créolité* movement initiated in the French Antilles by authors such as Glissant. This session will reflect on the political dimensions of language, retracing the gradual acknowledgement in the Antilles and Reunion Island of the creoles, through their inclusion in the curriculum but also through the celebration of a creole literature. The panel will discuss the existence and the conditions preventing or encouraging the raising of similar issues regarding transforming African languages and Afrikaans in South Africa.

16h55-17h15: Ernest Pépin, author, Guadeloupe

17h15-17h35: Michel Lafon, IFAS-Llacan-University of Pretoria

17h35-17h55: Lambert-Félix Prudent, Université de la Réunion

17h55-18h30: round of question and general comments by Sarah Nuttall, WISER- University of the Witwatersrand.

Tuesday evening: Cocktail for the participants

Wednesday, 6 MAY:

10h00: *Session 4: representing creolisation: museum projects and their way of addressing creolisation in Reunion Island and South Africa*

Chair: Cynthia Kros, School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand

The *Maison des Civilisations et de l'Unité Réunionnaise*, soon to open on Reunion Island, will be the focal point of this session: the participants will discuss the difficulty of representing, in a museum geared towards the general public, an ever-changing, ever-evolving process like that of creolisation and the various solutions subsequently implemented. The current experiments at hand in the MCUR will be fruitfully compared to those of South African museums, specifically with regards to those focusing on formerly mixed areas or to historical times that could be reinterpreted as reified versions of the South African society and people.

10h10-10h20: Multimedia presentation of the MCUR project

10h20-10h40: Françoise Vergès, University of London & MCUR, Reunion Island

10h40-11h00: Ciraj Rassool, University of the Western Cape & District 6 Museum, Cape Town

11h00-11h20: Round of questions

15 min Coffee break

11h40-12h00: Eric Alendroit, MCUR, Reunion Island

12h00-12h20: Ali Hlongwane, MuseumAfrica, Johannesburg

12h20-12h40: Round of questions

12h40-13h00: Pamila Gupta (WISER-University of the Witwatersrand), for general comments and questions

13h00-13h15: Concluding remarks.

13h30: End of the seminar and Finger lunch

"CREOLISING SOCIETIES..." CONFERENCE, 5-6 MAY 2009

PANELLISTS – ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

Zimitri ERASMUS, University of Cape Town

BIOGRAPHY

Dr Zimitri Erasmus lectures in Sociology at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and holds a Doctorate from the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands. Her research focuses on understanding the concepts of race, creolisation and mixing through qualitative methods. She is a Commonwealth Fellow at the London School of Economics since 2005 and was awarded the title of Distinguished Teacher at UCT in 2006. She published many works on the importance of race in post-apartheid South Africa and edited *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: Re-imagining Coloured Identities in Cape Town* published by Kwela Books in 2001.

ABSTRACT

Creolisation: a conceptual orientation against ethnological thought

In this paper I look to Caribbean scholarship for an orientation that might advance thinking about social categorisation in Africa. I critique selected authors' use of the concepts 'creole', 'Krio', 'coloured', and 'creolisation' as they write about the histories of 'the Krio' in Sierra Leone and 'coloured' communities at the Cape in South Africa. This amounts to a critique of acculturation, biological and cultural preservationist conceptions of creolisation - conceptions rooted in ethnological thinking. I suggest that 'creolisation', as both a conceptual tool and an orientation, has the capacity to pry open possibilities more supple than the habitual postures of such thinking.

Michel LAFON, IFAS/University of Pretoria

BIOGRAPHY

Researcher at the CNRS and expert on African Linguistics, Dr Michel Lafon is currently on secondment from the Laboratoire Llaçan to the French Institute of South Africa. His research concerns the use of African languages in education (Mozambique and South Africa) in particular. Together with Vic Webb from Pretoria University, he is co-directing a research programme on the modernisation of emerging languages in Africa. He recently published "De la diversité linguistique en Afrique du Sud: comment transformer un facteur de division en un outil de construction nationale?" in P. Guillaume, N. Pégout and A. W. Kabwe-Segatti, *L'Afrique du Sud, dix ans après - transition accomplie?*, Paris: Karthala, 2004, p. 215-247.

ABSTRACT

South Africa: a case of failed creoles

When one compares SA to other colonial societies, a striking fact is the (apparent) absence of creoles, in strong contrast to the island societies of the West Indies. Still, throughout the history of this part of the continent, creoles have certainly emerged as

many different people mingled. However, the lasting development of the creoles that did surface on the back of colonial invasion was thwarted by the particular political frameworks into which circumstances placed them and this is what informs the current picture. Could it be that present conditions are leaning towards the emergence of a creole (or creoles) of a possibly new type or that, again, due to the context, for better or worse, this potential will not be realised? We shall look briefly at the history of creoles in SA, drawing possible lessons for the present situation.

Denis-Constant MARTIN, Sciences-Po Bordeaux, CEAN

BIOGRAPHY

Prof. Denis-Constant Martin is a Research Director at the Centre d'études d'Afrique Noire (CEAN) in Bordeaux. He lectured at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Paris, for the Master's Degree course on African Studies of the University of Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne and at the University of Paris 8-Saint-Denis. His work in ethno-musicology questions the creation and transformation process of identities and intends to show the importance of mixing in the music creation process, through research on jazz practices in South Africa. He recently wrote on the issue of creolisation in the *Revue Internationale des Sciences Sociales*: "Peut-on parler de créolisation a propos de l'Afrique du Sud ? Métissage, hybridité ou créolisation, comment repenser l'expérience sud-africaine", *Revue internationale des sciences sociales*, 2006(1), 187.

ABSTRACT

The poetics of creolisation, according to Edouard Glissant

This presentation will propose a sociological reading of Edouard Glissant's recent essays (ie, published after *Le discours antillais | Caribbean Discourse*) emphasizing how, from the idea of Antillanité, he extended the scope of his reflections to elaborate a concept of creolisation which is inseparable from his notion of Relation, and constitutes a cornerstone of his vision of the *Tout-Monde* (Whole-World). In this perspective, creolisation is a phenomenon which is not confined to the West Indies, but affects, and contributes to transforming, the world in its entirety. Considering South Africa as, almost from the start of the European conquest, a creolising society could help realise that, beyond centuries of racism and apartheid, human interactions begot an original culture that transcends separation, humiliation and violence.

Laurence POURCHEZ, Université de la Réunion

BIOGRAPHY

From Reunion Island, Laurence Pourchez is an anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker. In 2000, she defended her doctorate in Ethnology and Anthropology at the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, on the Anthropology of Infancy in Reunionese Creole Society. She is associated with the works of UMR 5145 of the CNRS (National Museum of Natural History) in Paris. She is also currently associated with the Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherches sur la Construction Identitaire (CIRCI) at the University of Reunion. The documentaries presented as part of her Doctorate won her

First Prize (CD-Rom category) at the 5th Festival international du film de chercheur in Nancy in 2000.

ABSTRACT

Understanding Creole society and cultural complexity in Reunion Island: The contribution of visual anthropology.

This paper aims to tackle, on the basis of three ethnological films, the notions of cultural complexity and creolisation, as well as the way society is influenced by the original cultures of those who came to populate the island, as much as the recent exogenous inputs, consumer society in particular. Each film presents an aspect of life in Reunion Island and may be analysed from the creolisation viewpoint. In the first film entitled *Loto bon dié*, we discover that cultural creation is a central part of creolisation. The rite of blessing of a tourist car reveals various influences, some associated with Hinduism, others derived from catholicism and others still, connected to the consumer society as found in Reunion.

The second film, *The meal of the spirits*, deals with the cult of ancestors and looks at a ceremony led by inhabitants of the Island acknowledging their Malagasy origins. However, the film does not reveal the Malagasy part of the ritual but the Creole part, which includes a strong Hindu influence throughout the ceremony.

Finally, the film entitled *Cavadee* brings to light an aspect of Reunionese complexity resulting from creolisation: wishing, unrealistically, for a return to one's origins and to a "pure" religious practice, closer to one's supposed roots.

Lambert Félix PRUDENT, Université de La Réunion

BIOGRAPHY

Lambert Félix PRUDENT is a professor in Language Sciences at the University of Réunion. In his thesis from 1979, he looked at the genesis and history of Creoles in the Lesser Antilles before beginning a series of research works on language contacts in Creole communities around the world. He has ever since extensively written on the possible comparability between various creoles as a language.

ABSTRACT

A Few Problematical Facets of Creolisation: In the West Indies, the Mascarene Islands and in South Africa

In charge of co-ordinating the 25th Volume of the journal entitled *Études Créoles*, Albert Valdman, in June 2002, chose to title his work *Creolisation: to each his own truth*. The idea was to show, with the help of a few contributors, that the phenomenon has given rise to many different interpretations and a very wide array of explanations on the construction of Creole societies. In fact, despite the great success of the discipline (and more so of the name) in the last third of the 20th century, there has been as many "creolisations" as there are theories studying them! Every Creolisation expert defines the process personally and it is hard sometimes, to understand how they all manage to

communicate with one another, using the same word that actually never means the same thing exactly.

As such, my contribution starts off with the polysemous word **creolisation** as well as the term **Creole** and a few of its derivatives, such as the verb **to creolise** and the phrase **Creole identity**. In an attempt to throw light on this field, I will come back to the first outlines elaborated by linguists during the inaugural Conferences of Mona in Jamaica at the end of the 1950s and the 1960s, a key moment for the articulation of the creolisation concept as a language creation process, where Creole evolves from a pidgin. Since then, Creolistics has become a worthy academic discipline, new researchers have filled sought-after positions in renowned universities, many works developing daring theories have been published, a literary and ideological movement has focused the attention on West Indian and Parisian environments, and after the subject truly gaining ground, we are now witnessing a calm phase in the debate around the meaning of "creolisation", as defended by Edouard Glissant who presents it as a major aspect of globalisation.

By relying on former research works conducted mainly in the West Indies and in Reunion Island, and by questioning the validity of a creolisation principle at work in South Africa, I will defend the idea that, like for ecology, one needs to distinguish between science and militancy. Anthropologists and linguists have everything to gain from distinguishing themselves radically from "Creole identity" on the one hand, the wild slogan of a literary movement on the wane, and from "creolisation" on the other hand, the philosophico-poetic metaphor of a brilliant writer from Martinique who wanted to describe tomorrow's world in his own way.

RASSOOL, Ciraj, University of the Western Cape & District 6 Museum

BIOGRAPHY

Prof. Ciraj Rassool lectures History at the University of the Western Cape and directs the programme entitled African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies. He has worked on the notion of public history in South Africa and on the historiography of resistance in particular. In 2001, he co-edited, *Recalling Community in Cape Town: Creating and Curating the District Six Museum*. Prof. Rassool is a member of the District Six Museum Steering Committee, and a member of the board of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). He is also a member of the Editorial Committee of the *South African Historical Journal* and is a scientific correspondent for the *Journal of Southern African Studies*.

ABSTRACT

The core element of the mission of the District Six Museum is to build a postapartheid society without race, and not just one which seeks a society based on 'racial equality'. This needs to inform the ways in which all questions of race and 'mixing' need to be understood. This is not a magical, utopian world of racelessness, but a politics of building a society in a way that continually creates platforms that cumulatively build a discourse of nonracialism in the face of long, deep histories of racism, racial capitalism,

racial beliefs and notions of inherent superiority and inferiority. The museum's position builds upon understandings that emerged in the liberation movement that drew distinctions between non-racialism and multiracialism, and that were critical of attempts to build political solidarity based on race. These efforts are particularly important after the end of apartheid when, just as a society without racial classification has been created, South Africans are constantly required to designate their 'race', as an act of self-classification, as if apartheid's races are the natural order of things. This presentation will discuss the challenges of racial representation in the work of the District Six Museum, as well as Iziko Museums of Cape Town.

ALENDROIT, Eric, MCUR, Reunion Island

Eric ALENDROIT studied Human Resources Management and completed a Master's Degree in Social and Educational Actions in Urban Space. He is currently Project Leader at the MCUR where he is looking at MCUR audience and inclusion issues: the aim of his project is to see that all audiences can access the museum. He worked previously as a consultant in both the private and public sectors, as Head of local government office, Head of project for the empowerment of youth, and as Advisor for business creation at the Chamber of Commerce of Reunion Island. He also works as a voluntary worker in the cultural sector.

BENOIST, Jean, Université Paul Cézanne, Aix-Marseille III

Doctor and Anthropologist, Professor Emeritus with the Laboratoire d'Écologie humaine at the University of Aix-Marseille, Prof. Jean Benoist specialises in Reunionese cultures and mixing. Among his publications on Indo-Creole societies, "Métissage, syncrétisme, créolisation: métaphores et dérives", revue *Études créoles*, vol XIX, n°1, 1996, pp. 47-60.

HLONGWANE, Ali, MuseumAfrica, Johannesburg

Ali Khangela Hlongwane was the first Chief Curator of the Hector Pieterse Museum and the Kliptown Open Air Museum. He is currently the Chief Curator of MuseuMAfrica in Newtown. He is co-editor with Sofiso Ndlovu and Mthobi Mutloatse of *Soweto 76-Reflections on the liberation struggles. Commemorating the 30th anniversary of June 16, 1976* and editor of *Footprints of the "Class of 76": Commemoration, memory, mapping and heritage*.

MARIMOUTOU, Carpanin Jean-Claude, Université de la Réunion, MCUR

Born on the 1st of December 1956 in Saint-Denis (Reunion Island), Prof. Carpanin Marimoutou lectures at the University of Reunion and is a member of the UMR 6058 of the CNRS. He is the Scientific Co-Director of the *Maison des Civilisations et de l'Unité Réunionnaises (MCUR)*. Poet and editor, he is behind the publication of many anthologies and works (e.g. *Grand Océan Publishers*). Together with Françoise Vergès, he co-authored *Amarres: créolisations india-océanes*, published by L'Harmattan in 2005.

PÉPIN, Ernest, author, Guadeloupe

Born in Guadeloupe in 1950, Mr Ernest Pépin a novelist and a poet who exercised many different activities including lecturer in French, literary critique and consultant to Unesco. Since 1985, he has filled the post of Representative at the Departmental Council of Guadeloupe. Like many West Indian authors, Ernest Pépin draws on his native island to write his poems, and is known as the main voice of Guadeloupe and the Caribbean. His work was awarded many prizes, including the prestigious Casa de Las Americas Prize in 1990, the Caribbean Prize in 1994 and the RFO Book Prize in 1997.

VERGÈS, Françoise, University of London & MCUR, Reunion Island

Prof. Françoise Vergès, born in 1952, is a French Historian and Political Expert. After obtaining her Doctorate in Political Science in Berkeley, she lectured History at the Goldsmiths College (University of London). She is an expert on the history of slavery, post-colonial political theories and "creolisation" phenomena. Prof. Vergès was Vice-Chairperson and, since the 13th of February 2008, is the Chairperson of the Commission on Slavery Remembrance. She co-directs the scientific project of the Maison des Civilisations et de l'Unité Réunionnaise (MCUR).

PANEL CHAIRS AND DISCUSSANTS

GUPTA, Pamila, WISER-University of the Witwatersrand

Pamila Gupta is currently a researcher at WISER(Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research), based at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. She completed her PhD in Socio-cultural Anthropology from Columbia University in 2004. Her dissertation, entitled "The Relic State: St. Francis Xavier and the Politics of Ritual in Portuguese India" is an historical ethnography of a series of public expositions surrounding the corpse of a Catholic missionary-turned-saint in Goa, India; it is currently under final revisions to be published with Columbia University Press.

KROS, Cynthia, School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand

Cynthia Kros is a senior lecturer in the History Department at the University of the Witwatersrand. She completed her PhD on the origins of Bantu Education and has been involved for some time in training history teachers. Currently, she is also the Head of the Division for Postgraduate Heritage Studies at Wits University. She has published widely in the fields of education and heritage and has recently been appointed coordinating editor of the South African Historical Journal.

MBEMBE, Achille, WISER- University of the Witwatersrand

Born in Cameroon, Dr Achille Mbembe obtained his Doctorate in History from the Sorbonne in 1989 and a Master's Degree in Political Science from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Paris. Assistant Professor in History at Columbia University (NY) from 1988 to 1991, he became Associate Researcher at the Brookings Institute of Washington D.C. from 1991 to 1992 then Associate Professor in History at the University of Pennsylvania from 1992 to 1996, and Executive Director of the Conseil pour le Développement de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales en Afrique (Codesria) in Dakar (Senegal) from 1996 to 2000. He was a visiting lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley in 2001 and at the University of Yale in 2003, he wrote many works, chapters and articles on African history and politics. He is the author of *La naissance du maquis dans le Sud-Cameroun*, Paris, Karthala (1996). His last work *On the Postcolony* was published in French in Paris in 2000, and in English by the University of California Press, Berkeley in 2001. Dr Achille Mbembe is currently a researcher at the Wits Institute for Socio-Economic Research in Johannesburg.

NUTTALL, Sarah, WISER- University of the Witwatersrand

Cultural Studies expert Sarah Nuttall who obtained her Doctorate from Oxford University in 1994, is a South African Rhodes Scholar. She taught English at Stellenbosch University from 1997 to 2001. She was a visiting lecturer at the University of Salzburg (Austria) and at Yale University (USA). She wrote several volumes on identity, memory as well as on culture and the sense of taste in Africa, e.g. *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (OUP, 1998); and *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies* (OUP, 2000). She also edited the anthology *Beauty and Ugliness: African and Diaspora Aesthetics* (2004).

WORBY, Eric, School of Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand

Prof. Eric Worby is an anthropologist, a lecturer and the Dean of the School of Social Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. His work is dedicated to public and material cultures, sports as well as race ethnicity issues in the post-apartheid context. He authored many publications on these subjects. His last publications concern the xenophobic violence of May 2008 (Hassim, S., Kupe T. and E. Worby, eds. 2008, in press, *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press) as well as sports and the ethnicity of sports (Worby, E. 2009, in press, "Cricket Ethics and Indo-Xhosa Ethnics: In Pursuit of a Politics of Virtue along a South African-Indian Axis", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 41, No.1.)

ÉDOUARD GLISSANT (1928 -)

WORKS AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH

(Poetry excluded)

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Essays on Édouard Glissant :

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BRITTON (Celia), *Édouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory : Strategies of Language and Resistance*. Charlottesville, Va. : University Press of Virginia, 1999.

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SUK (Jeannie), *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing : Césaire, Glissant, Condé*. Oxford : Clarendon, 2001.

WEBB (Barbara J.), *Myth and History in Caribbean Fiction : Alejo Carpentier, Wilson Harris, and Edouard Glissant*. Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press.

Compiled by: Denis-Constant Martin, Sciences-Po Bordeaux, CEAN

FURTHER READING:

A Classic by Jean Benoist:

http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/benoist_jean/Metissage_syncretisme_creolosation/metissage.html

A Paper by Denis-Constant Martin re: South Africa

http://www.cairn.info/resume.php?ID_ARTICLE=RISS_187_0173

About French Guyana

http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/cea_0008-0055_1997_num_37_148_1834

The MCUR Manifesto:

<http://www.reunion2008.eu/pdf/Maison-des-Civilisations-et-de-l'Unite-Reunionnaise-fr&en.pdf>

An *Africulture* paper about Reunion Island by Laurence Pourchez

http://www.africultures.com/index.asp?no=3721&menu=revue_affiche_article

Glissant and Chamoiseau: l'Institut du Tout-Monde

<http://www.tout-monde.com/>

UNE LETTRE DE ERNEST PEPIN A EDOUARD GLISSANT

Mon cher Edouard Glissant,

« Il ne s'agit pas d'écrire des livres mais de faire une œuvre », voilà une des phrases que j'ai apprises de toi. Elle a le tranchant net d'une injonction et l'exigence d'une forme d'honnêteté envers l'art et la pensée. Si aujourd'hui je la cite, c'est pour rappeler que jamais tu n'as jamais triché ni avec la littérature, ni avec les autres. Cette éthique léguée par les aristocrates aux pieds nus qui, confrontés à la géhenne des habitations, trouvaient le moyen de rehausser l'homme en eux a toujours fait geste et sens dans la raideur de ton parcours. Je dis « raideur » comme j'aurais pu dire « solitude » ou peut-être « hauteur » au sens créole du terme.

Tant de titres, pierres semées ou éclats d'un soleil de la conscience, ont illustré ce cheminement qu'aujourd'hui nous sommes requis par la poésie, le roman, l'essai de te dire honneur et respect !

Honneur et Respect non pas seulement pour la quantité mais surtout pour la qualité. La pensée ne supporte aucune arithmétique car elle relève du pur jaillissement et de la lumineuse coulée où le chaos se métamorphose en une esthétique de l'imprévisible. L'imprévisible n'est pas la supposée folie du hasard. Il s'apparente plutôt à une orientation (aimantation ?) qui dans le désordre de l'inédit ou de l'invu organise la beauté des formes neuves par lesquelles nous sommes sommés de (re) lire le monde.

Honneur et Respect pour tant d'aventures où le dit loin de s'éparpiller se rassemble en vérité drue et projette par-delà l'archipel de la Caraïbe l'énergie de toutes les mers, de tous les courants, de tous les glissements de plaques tectoniques pour tenter de saisir la diversité-monde. J'entends par là ces vibrations de la pensée créatrice lorsqu'elle s'élabore en poétique des poétiques. Il est des mots qui depuis ont pour moi un autre sens. Je ne puis dire « acomat » sans ressentir cet ensoucement et cette mobilité qui font que les ombres et les lumières bougent comme les notes d'un free-jazz. C'est d'un laboratoire qu'il s'agissait alors et j'ajouterai même d'un laboratoire prophétique. « Discours antillais » cette masse défragmentée d'un réel intenable et pourtant révélé à cause de son opacité. « Malemort », cette épopée d'une érosion au cours de laquelle l'antillais renonce à des fixités antérieures pour ruser avec ses rêves ou rêver avec ses ruses. Etc....Etc....

Et toujours dense, l'écriture comme une lenteur suractive, une patience bouillonnante, une force libératrice. J'entends ses cadences baroques. Je vois ses sinuosités lucides. Et de toute cette musique du composite émerge un sens résolument diffracté du réel. Défaire l'harmonie pour chercher le noyau dur de l'acte d'écrire à travers l'immense défi des imaginaires.

Car c'est de cela qu'il a toujours été question : de dévoiler d'une manière presque « barbare » les illusions de l'UN, les masques de l'universel, l'ivresse meurtrière des identités ataviques, la cécité d'un humanisme. Sans pour autant prétendre à un quelconque éloge, cette écriture là, fille du divers, donne à lire les frottements, les entrelacements, les fascinations d'un monde où les frontières sont de plus en plus impuissantes et de plus en plus absurdes.

A charge pour nous de comprendre que l'imaginaire loin d'être une fantaisie ou un caprice des peuples est au contraire l'outil le plus efficace pour désamorcer les pièges tendus par les conformismes, les atavismes, les racismes et tout ce qui procède de l'exclusion de l'homme par l'homme. D'où l'importance de Faulkner, de Victor Segalen, de Saint-John Perse, totems de territoires fertilisés par l'imaginaire des ailleurs et la connaissance intime des diversités. Ils sont, avant tout, des magiciens qui convertissent une « intuition » du monde en « intention » du monde.

Mais qu'avons-nous réellement à faire de la conscience du divers ? Ne serait-ce pas là la nouvelle coquetterie de notre temps ?

Répondre à cette question c'est tout de suite lancer le foudroiement de la Relation comme principe d'une humanité hantée par les dominations, les exploitations, les coupures hiérarchisées, les oppositions irréductibles, les fractures... La Relation eut-on dit « cicatrisante » et plus encore salutaire en ce qu'elle impose, par-delà les langues, un langage poreux à toutes les expressions de l'humain.

Répondre à cette question c'est comprendre qu'il n'est plus de confort intellectuel immuable, plus de certitudes blindées, plus de dominants de droit colonial, plus de lecture unique du monde, de sens unique de l'histoire et qu'il faut opposer à ces monstruosité la relativité et l'instabilité créatrices du vivant. Ceux qui observent le surgissement de la Chine, les tentations impériales de la Russie, la montée de l'Inde, l'incessant tangage du Moyen-Orient, la précarité de l'hégémonie des USA, les résistances éparses et les flux migratoires savent que le monde cherchera désormais son équilibre non pas dans un centre mais dans un décentrement généralisé des possibles. Des guerres de civilisations sont en veille. Elles nous invitent à repenser les vieux clivages alors même que la

planète se réchauffe et que l'écosystème se fragilise. Nous n'en sommes plus à détecter nos failles mais à affirmer une pensée solidaire de la mondialité. L'économisme hautain et aveugle a fait son temps et la gestion des ressources nous condamne tous à une redéfinition (nécessairement culturelle) de nos représentations et de nos prétentions. Et c'est là que la Caraïbe a son mot à dire parce qu'elle a toujours tâtonné dans les marges, toujours bricolé des syncrétismes, toujours douté de la validité des prétendues grandes puissances, toujours récolté les imprévus en des « adaptations » innovantes. Peu importe qu'on les appelle « créolité » ou « créolisation » ! Ce qui vaut c'est qu'elle tente de proposer une anticipation féconde de la pensée du monde.

Tout-monde as-tu dit et voilà, pour ceux qui veulent entendre, une saisie non conquérante des « tremblements » actuels et des circularités contemporaines. Il faut te rendre cet hommage d'avoir su broyer les héritages multiples pour ressentir frémissements du futur, d'avoir bousculé les immobilités pour libérer des traces, des élans et des questionnements tendus vers l'alliance des peuples. Découvrir les fastes de l'en-dessous tel un archéologue des royaumes perdus, forcer le langage à advenir à la relation, nouer d'improbables connivences, dénouer les imaginaires, nous entraîner dans des plongées suffocantes, tel est ton incessant labeur d'écrivain.

Il est des « penseurs » qui ne savent que penser. Toi, tu sais vivre ta pensée comme une générosité. A preuve, en ce qui me concerne, Carifesta à Cuba, le Parlement des Ecrivains, le Prix Carbet, l'Institut du Tout-Monde. Toutes ces présences partagées qui sont la manifestation d'un savoir-vivre et d'une élégance du vivre-savoir.

Tu ne souffleras pas les bougies de tes ans mais celles du grand livre de ton œuvre. Ce par quoi tu es jeunesse !
En cette heure où je suis loin de toi (et si proche !), reçois cette lettre comme l'expression d'une gratitude.

JOYEUX ANNIVERSAIRE !

Ernest Pépin
Cayenne le 15 septembre 2008