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Becoming Origin(al): Deterritorialization and Postcolonial Theory from the Caribbean

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"Becoming Origin(al)" alludes to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's idea of "becoming minor" in *Kafka: Toward a Theory of Minor Literature*. I will discuss Deleuze and Guattari's ideas more fully below, but first I would like to provide a context for thinking about postcolonial theory in relation to the Caribbean, with specific reference to Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* and Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant's *In Praise of Creoleness*. In both texts, the authors are interested in the role of language and literature as an intervention in the political world of the Caribbean. For example, Glissant identifies a problem for the artist that has larger social ramifications than aesthetic production when he makes the distinction between "natural poetics" and "forced poetics." The former he defines as "any collective yearning for expression that is not opposed to itself either at the level of what it wishes to express or at the level of language that it puts into practice"; conversely, the latter is "any collective desire for expression that, when it manifests itself, is negated at the level of desire, which never ceases, but at the level of expression, which is never realized" (Glissant 120). Glissant asserts that the French Caribbean denizen's inhibition in speaking French is a result of the official language, French, superseding the mother tongue, Creole: "He [the Creole speaker] must cut across one language in order to attain a form of expression that is perhaps not part of the internal logic of this language" (120-21). In the French Caribbean, particularly the French Lesser Antilles, this disparity between the ideal of a natural poetics and the reality of a forced poetics, is an "unsuspected source of anguish" as well as an impediment to reimagining the economic mode of production (120).

Bernabé *et al* are also interested in the role of Creole but their manifesto presents an affirmation of the positive effects of developing Creole into a standardized language. They see in "the lesson of Creoleness" that "ancestors are born every day and are not fixed in an immemorial past" (97). They propose to "inseminate Creole in the new writing. In short, *we shall create a literature*, which will obey all the demands of modern writing while taking roots in the traditional configuration of our orality" (98; their emphasis). In both *Caribbean Discourse* and *In Praise of Creoleness*, the authors position themselves as being on the cusp of a new era in

the Caribbean that must be brought into being by artists. They are calling for *originality* in the realm of literature that will provide the *origins* of a new politics and history. In this essay, I will analyze the effectiveness of their calls to "become origin(al)" with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming minor" through deterritorialization. Before I explicitly analyze the Caribbean theorists' relation to this idea of "becoming origin(al)," I will offer a brief explanation of the relevance of Deleuze and Guattari to these two postcolonial texts from the Caribbean.

In "Minor Literature: Kafka," Deleuze and Guattari posit that "there is nothing major or revolutionary except the minor" and further encourage their readers to "create a becoming minor" (163-64). Broadly speaking, deterritorialization is concerned with disrupting "traditional structures of expression," while reterritorialization reinforces traditional structures (Delaney 2). Deterritorialization is the "possibility of invention" in the face of reterritorialized mimetic representation (Deleuze 157). For example, when Kafka "blurs words," such as animal noises and nonsinging, he is deterritorializing mimetic representation (157). Deterritorialized language "stops being representative in order to [. . .] move toward its extremities or its limits" (159). Deleuze and Guattari note that "styles or genres or literary movements, even very small ones, have only one single dream: to assume a major function in language, to offer themselves as a sort of state language, an official language" (163-64). The call to perpetually deterritorialize language is a challenging demand to resist the lure of hegemony, that is, to be constantly inventive in the "intensive utilization" of language" (163). It is to unceasingly "oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality"; it is to resist becoming major (163).

Deleuze and Guattari are specifically interested in deterritorialization and reterritorialization as they relate to people who "live in a language that is not their own," that is, who live in the "disjunction between content and expression" (156). The minor writer who lives in close proximity to people living with social injustice has a paradoxically privileged position to deterritorialize language: "if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (154). Following the example of Kafka, they suggest that it is only through a process of constantly deterritorializing reterritorialized language that writers can create "the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature"

(154). The challenge of deterritorialization is ensuring that it does not reterritorialize language, that is, become an ossified, universalizing standard.

"Becoming minor" allows for a productive play of contingency in that no single official language has complete dominance over one's expression. To be more precise, Deleuze and Guattari use as a model for conceptualizing minor literature Henri Gobard's tetralinguistic model of language systems: vernacular, vehicular, referential, and mythic (Deleuze 160). The *vernacular* is the maternal language "used in rural communities or rural in its origins" ("*here*"); the *vehicular* is "urban [or] governmental" and the "language of businesses, commercial exchange, and bureaucratic transmission" ("*everywhere*"); the *referential* is the "language of sense and culture" ("*over there*"); and the *mythic* is the language "caught up in the spirit or religion" ("*beyond*") (160; Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis throughout). The four models of language systems are most readily apparent in polylingual speakers, because the various languages serve different functions in different contexts. "Becoming minor" divides languages into different functions and allows for the diffusion of "multiple centers of power" (160). It calls attention to the "blur, [the] mixed-up history" that is elided in totalizing, monolingualistic cultural models (161). Deterritorialized language is valuable for Deleuze and Guattari, because "there isn't a subject; there are only collective assemblages of enunciation" (154). To put it another way, these "collective assemblages of enunciation" are the polylingualism within "one's own language" (163). For Deleuze and Guattari, polylingualism is a way of resisting the universalizing impulse implicit in an official language, "the language of masters" (163).

Deleuze and Guattari's insights into becoming minor are relevant to the question of how individual persons or groups assert and preserve their identities when they are so acutely aware of being inhabited by "Otherness." The works of francophone postcolonial writers, such as Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse* and Bernabé *et al* in *In Praise of Creoleness*, provide varying accounts of the experience of becoming minor. In their respective works, these Creole writers describe in detail their intense awareness of the "Other" of language inside them. They perceive the language of the colonizer, French, as being the "Other" inside them that alienates them from themselves. For instance, in *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant describes the "non-functional situation of Creole" language as a "language of neurosis" (128). According to Glissant, Creole is neurotic, because it is a product of "forced poetics" (120). The need for expression that exists for the Creole speaker is inhibited, because the forced poetics of Creole is "created from the

awareness of the opposition between a language that one uses and a form of expression that one needs" (120). What is most significant about their painful assertions of the "Other" in language is not the presence of the "Other" in language but their intense awareness of it.

Glissant and Bernabé *et al's* observations on the "Otherness" in language can be clarified by turning to the work of Jacques Lacan who notes that there is an "Other" of language in everyone. Glissant and Bernabé *et al's* distinction between the "m[O]ther tongue" of the Caribbean, Creole, and the ostensibly "Other" language of the European masters, French, is ironic, because the m(O)ther tongue is already a foreign language at the moment it is taken up. To clarify, I turn to "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud." In this text, Lacan observes that the "unconscious is the discourse of the Other," because it "indicate[s] the beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition" (Lacan 754). Learning to speak is a struggle for all babies, because they are trying to take up a language that is more sophisticated than they are capable of enunciating. In the process of learning to be understood, the "Other's" desire is superimposed upon the individual baby's with the result that the language used to express desire ultimately expresses the "Other's" desire instead of the baby's (754). The significance of this "Otherness" in all speakers is that even if the authors could remove French as the "Other" in language, there would still be an "Other" inherent in language that would provoke a strong sense of alienation. Exchanging French as the ostensible "Other" in language for a Creole m[O]ther tongue as the unacknowledged "Other" in language will not remove one from the circle of alienation. Glissant and Bernabé *et al's* works illustrate the challenge for the nonwhite postcolonial francophone to assert and preserve an identity that is not based on colonization, domination, or subaltern status. Their respective works are effective only in so far as they can move away from the idea that one can remove the "Other" in language and move towards a productive sense of becoming minor, that is, of negotiating the complex interplay of what Deleuze and Guattari call deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

As provocative and interesting as Bernabé *et al* are in praising Creoleness, their attempt to assert and preserve Creole identity ultimately reinforces Deleuze and Guattari's admonishment that the "minor writer" should beware of blurring reterritorialization with deterritorialization. Initially, Bernabé *et al* seem to define Creoleness in terms of deterritorialization as the "*interactional or transactional* aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine

cultural elements" (87; Bernabé *et al's* emphasis). They assert that the value of Creoleness lies in its "annihilation of false universality, of monolingualism, and of purity" (90). For Bernabé *et al*, Creoleness serves as a productive alternative to objectification by the dominant European "Other," because it preserves its fundamental orality. They describe Creole as an oral language, because it has not been systematized in the same way as its forbearer, French. Creole, like Caribbean literature, is "still in a state of preliterate" in that it is a "written production without a home audience, ignorant of the authors/readers interaction which is the primary condition of the development of a literature" (76). Creole's status as "preliterate" is a direct result of "exteriority": the condition of viewing life through a French vision with French values (76). They oppose this harmful exterior vision with, logically enough, interior vision.

In declaring their intention to rehabilitate Creoleness with interior vision, Bernabé *et al* inadvertently reterritorialize Creoleness despite their concerted effort at deterritorialization. They state that through this interiority they will be able to expel the "Other" in language from themselves and will further be able to allow the free play of their "diversality" to flourish (114). They will then be able to "create the conditions of authentic expression" and "turn over the vision" they had of "reality in order to grasp its truth" (85). This vision will be "a new look capable of taking away [their] nature from the secondary or peripheral edge so as to place it again in the center of [themselves]" (85). It is in seeking this "center of [themselves]" that they begin reterritorializing their hitherto seemingly deterritorialized Creoleness. They refer to Creoleness as simultaneously an "open specificity" and a "central reference and as a suggestive explosion demanding to be aesthetically organized" (89). Rather than make intensive use of Creole as minor literature in the *deleuzoguattarian* sense, Bernabé *et al* are in quest for the "*real Creole*" that is the "language which more than any other language *belongs to us*" (105-06; my emphasis). "Real Creole" and "belongs to us" are the language of reterritorialization in that they imply possession of language that is based on exclusion. If Creole "belongs to us," then someone else is denied "ownership" of it. They assert that "Creole literature written in Creole must, before all, build this written language and make it known" (106).

The impulse to standardize Creole is the beginning of the end of the Creole characteristics that Bernabé *et al* admire so highly: continuous change and looseness (105). Bernabé *et al* want to deny universalizing or totalizing elements in their project, but their descriptions of it are contradictory and not entirely convincing. Their emphasis on creating a

literature of Creoleness, which implies standardizing a language, seems at odds with their "sketched hope" that they can one day unite with their Anglophone and Hispanophone neighbors within the Caribbean Archipelago (116). They refer to Creole as "a maelstrom of signifieds in a single signifier: a Totality. And we think that it is not time to give a definition to it" (88). They close with a self-diagnosis that Creole creativity has been stifled by the "obsessional concern with the Universal" and claim that they will have nothing to do with the Universal: "It is through Creoleness that we will be Martinicans. Becoming Martinicans, we will be Caribbeans, therefore Americans, in our own way" (111). In recreating the language of totality and universality, they reterritorialize Creole by associating Creoleness with the eventual totalizing goal of becoming Martinicans, then Caribbeans, and finally Americans. I must emphasize that I do not object to Bernabé *et al's* goals of wanting to preserve an identity for their communities that is not based on colonization, domination, or subaltern status. What I have tried to show in interpreting *In Praise of Creoleness* through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual negotiation of "minor literature" is that at the core of their manifesto is the repetition of the very problems that they are trying to resolve. In trying to replace the French Other of language with a Creole "Other" of language, they recreate the same totalizing blindnesses that they criticize in the ostensible language of exteriority, French.

As I suggested earlier, Deleuze and Guattari speak of the way "language compensates for the deterritorialization of sound by a reterritorialization of sense" (Deleuze 156). When Kafka invents animal noises or nonsinging, "sound itself [is] deterritorialized" and "no longer belongs to a language of sense, even though it derives from it [. . .] nor is it an organized music or song, even though it might appear to be" (157). This deterritorialized language "torn from sense, conquering sense, bringing about an active neutralization of sense, no longer finds its value in anything but an accenting of the word, an inflection" (157). Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that "deterritorialized sounds or words" are a form of escape from the subjectification that these Creole writers describe in their awareness of the "Other" in language. In *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant acknowledges that Creole was from the outset a deterritorialized language "forged as a medium of communication between slave and master" (Glissant 123). Creole is the "result of contact between different cultures [that] did not preexist this contact. It is not a language of a single origin, it is a cross-cultural language" (127). Creole is "marked by French" as its linguistic

background at the same time that it tries to reject French as a "conceptual system from which expression can be derived" (126).

Unlike Bernabé *et al*, Glissant recognizes that the chance for Creole to be standardized has, perhaps, passed, but that there once was a productive, deterritorializing function that it served. Even though he characterizes Creole as suffering from "neurosis," he suggests that the scream of opacity in language may have "contributed to maintaining Creole, in spite of the conditions that do not favor its existence. We know that delirious [neurotic] speech can be a survival technique" (129). Creole, "in the world of plantations," performed a role of defiance and secrecy; it deterritorialized French by introducing sound (the scream) into the sense (the utterance) (127). Noise and din are speech and discourse in the enslaved Creole of the plantation era. With the body in shackles and speech forbidden controlled by the slave master, "meaning and pitch went together": "it was the intensity of the sound that dictated meaning [and] the pitch of the sound conferred significance (123). Meaning at the sentence level was hidden by the "accelerated nonsense created by scrambled sounds" (124). Glissant identifies the problem of Creole's development with its origin in the plantation system of production during the colonial era: "The system has disappeared, but in Martinique it has not been replaced by another system of production" (127). He asserts that the Creole community suffers from the stunted growth of their language: "the stage of the secret code has passed, but language (as a new opening) has not been attained. The secretiveness of the community is no longer functional, the stage of an open community has not been reached" (125). In the light of this failure to grow, Glissant's version of deterritorialization is further expressed in his commitment to making Creole and French "opaque to each other" (133). This opacity is predicated on "transforming a scream (which we once uttered) into a speech that grows from it, thus discovering the expression, perhaps in an intellectual way of a finally liberated poetics" (133). The forced poetics of the suffocated patois must give way to a natural poetics that can transcend the limits placed on Creole.

For Glissant, Creolization is "not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of a people," as it seems to be for Bernabé *et al* (Glissant 140). Creolization is valuable because it acknowledges the Creolization inherent in all cultures and Glissant reminds the reader that it "deconstructs [. . .] the category of 'creolized' that is considered as halfway between two 'pure' extremes" (140). For Glissant, Creolization as a counterpoetics has "become worn out" because it has not developed "into a natural, free, open, cross-cultural poetics" (132). Creole is

stagnating, because its material circumstances in the colonial plantation era have disappeared (127). He observes that the impediments to the Creole's growth lie in its anachronistic status: "In such a land, whose present organization ensures that nothing will be produced there again, the structure of the mother tongue, deprived of a dynamic hinterland, cannot be reinforced" (127).

Glissant is aware of the very real problem of being part of a Caribbean archipelago that is "subjected" to very different "social, political, and economic regimes" (235). Glissant is clear that he wishes to benefit from the positive elements of nationhood: "Building a nation means today thinking first and foremost of systems of production, profitable commercial exchanges, betterment of the standard of living, without which the nation would quickly become an illusion" (235). He acknowledges the problem that perhaps accounts for the radically different approaches to Creoleness that have been explored here when he refers to the hesitation many feel at "choosing a Caribbean identity" (223). The problem as Glissant identifies it is not just the condition of being inhabited by an "Other" in language, but the "Otherness" in the relations between the various language communities of the Caribbean and the national intellectuals who represent those communities. He makes a valid point about the role of artists and intellectuals and their capacity to provide "a voice to give expression to common ideals, just as one heeds the realizations without which these ideas would never be fulfilled" (236). Here, Glissant presents an ideal that the voice of the intellectual, or artist, represents the common voice of the people. He frames the problem of the intellectual as "Other" within the Caribbean on two levels: firstly, the intellectual is an "Other" to the majority of Caribbean people; secondly, the regional intellectual is "Other" to *other* regional intellectuals (223). This deterritorialized status of intellectuals has the potential to give the artists/intellectuals the opportunity to fulfill the responsibility of "raising their voices for the benefit of those who cannot see the Caribbean world in its diversity or hear the word sung right there, just beside them" (225).

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialization is particularly useful for analyzing Glissant's description of postcolonial cross-cultural poetics, because Glissant grounds, so to speak, his poetics in the material Caribbean territory that the Creolophone inhabits. The "territoriality" that Deleuze and Guattari identify in the process of becoming minor finds a literal analogy in Glissant's analysis of the role of Creole in the Caribbean. Paradoxically, Creole citizens cannot function in their territory without deterritorializing the language: "Creole cannot become the language of shopping malls, nor of luxury hotels. Cane, bananas, pineapples are the

last vestiges of the Creole world. With them this language will disappear, if it does not become functional in some other way" (Glissant 127). To close this essay, I will turn to a very brief example of Creole aesthetic production that Glissant identifies in particular as representative of the non-functionality of Creole that is the absence of landscape in the Creole folk tale. The Creole folktale is emblematic of the problems of the stultification of forced poetics. For Glissant, the Creole folktale is "striking" in "the emphatic emptiness of [its] landscape; in it landscape is reduced to symbolic space and becomes a pattern of succeeding spaces through which one journeys" but never stops (129). The landscape is never described, because it is not a place "meant to be inhabited" (130). Glissant concludes that "a place you pass through [. . .] is not yet a country" (130). To move from a forced poetics to a natural poetics is to deterritorialize Creole and to provide a way of reimagining the Creolophones's relations to the territories under their feet.

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