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“Borderisation” versus “Creolisation: A Caribbean game of identities and borders

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Abstract

Borders between states are being challenged by transnational flows bound to bypass such discontinuities. Territories as we know them are on the verge of death but ironically, *borderisation* is spreading — as a political response to fear and demands for higher security.

A trend that has not spared the present-day Caribbean — an ideal observation post when it comes to modern, global issues. The fruit of (sometimes forced) mass migration waves, it is home to an original Creole culture, born of the brutal womb of slave plantations.

Creolisation strips *root-identities* from their sacred aura, just like *transnationalisation* challenges border-territories through political strategy. Considering the way culture and politics interact in their midst, how do these two globalising processes relate to each other?

How and to what extent may the Creole rhetoric make sense of *borderisation* as experienced in diaspora and across the Caribbean area?

Keywords: creolisation, borderisation, political transnationalisation, meta-nation

Introduction

Traditional borders between states are being jeopardised by globalisation. In fact, in a world where networks are bound to transcend such boundaries, their very existence is being challenged. Territories¹ as we know them could thus become obsolete due to globalisation, thereby setting aside a cornerstone of the nation-state model.

A disputed theory that suggests state divides are bound to decline gradually. The territorial principle would in that sense be called into question by transnational networks and flows, as they challenge the rationale of sovereignty and act as operational substitutes to national regulation.

Still; it seems that borders are not only resisting but getting stronger — which might be a salient feature of the 21st century.

¹ Bertrand Badie, *La fin des territoires*, Fayard 1995

Now, before we proceed, we must clarify the terms of reference governing the following discussion.

A border may be construed as a boundary between two states. However, it is also, quite often, a living space that cannot be scaled down to a mere geographical divide. It can also be comprehended based on its functions.

From an economic standpoint, it is a corridor where goods are being traded. From a strictly legal perspective, it defines a state's political jurisdiction – which also embodies the state's sovereignty.

In that sense, borders still serve a purpose. Globalisation has impacted — but not obliterated — traditional territories and the borders meant to delineate their shape and meaning physically. Many believed that the end of the Cold War and fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 would wipe out boundaries between peoples. “Nearly thirty years later, walls and fences have spread exponentially all around the globe... all border experts agree on the fact that these are building times, walls are trendy. Walls, fences, barricades – and even the electronic and virtual “wall” that Brazil wants to build along its border with ten countries – mirror today's political arena.”² These observations implicitly highlight the pervasiveness of fear and the resulting security policy. Borders are a political response to a general craving for safety.

Walls mirror the fear of losing control over a given territory and identity – and convey, first and foremost, the reassertion of state sovereignty.

Migration, combined with heightened security requirements, now tend to trigger identity claims that end up fueling destructive self-confinement policies.

The thousands of migrants from the Middle East and Africa, whose corpses have been littering the Mediterranean sea or drifting towards South European shores, epitomise these unreasonable confinement rhetorics or practices.

This shifting state of things defies transnationalisation — yet another reality strongly embedded in modern agendas.

While relying on antagonistic principles, borders and transnational matters are deeply intertwined, based on mutually providing purposes. Transnational flows are expanding

² Le Monde, February 5th, 2018, p.14-15

because borders have proven ineffective in a globalised context where state regulation is receding and adjusting to societal shifts.

More than ever, migration is being used as an excuse to increase territorial borderisation.³ This process translates, for the most part, a willingness to make territories safer

– which results in a variety of claims operating through multiple platforms. A symbolic ensemble that builds on notions of territory, collective memory, language and more generally, culture.

Here, “borderisation”, is identity’s partner in crime in that it delineates material and symbolic spaces for better and for worse. While the sense of belonging is what makes territories meaningful, it can also give way to “murderous identities”.⁴

Migration flows typically reveal the border’s protective purpose. Hurdles and walls are rising as a result of migrants being construed as competitors in the realm of wealth distribution and as threats to readily essentialised lifestyles and cultures.

Borderisation is a permanent hazard for those who endure it and have no other choice but sheer survival — yet it reflects how others entrench themselves in the name of allegedly besieged identities, and use that process as a guillotine (as noted by Patrick Chamoiseau).⁵

The sense of belonging can thus foster isolation based on the self-preserving and sometimes, belligerent rationale that may be observed nowadays. However, when it comes to liberal globalisation, identities and borders do not necessarily blend so smoothly.

Which is most apparent in the migration of Creole populations from the Caribbean to major American and European cities. Exodus has brought them to reconfigure their native identities and territories in keeping with a world where diversity is challenging monocultural borders. Mass displacement has paved the way for an archipelagic world, as defined by Edouard Glissant.⁶

³ Paolo Cuttitta, « La « frontiérisation » de Lampedusa, comment se construit une frontière », *L'Espace Politique* [Online], 25 | 2015-1, uploaded on April 8th, 2015, read on January 12th, 2018.)

⁴ Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières*, Editions Grasset et Fasquelle 1998, 189p

⁵ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Frères migrants*, Seuil 2017

⁶ Edouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout Monde* Gallimard 1997

Our planet seems to be embracing this new, archipelagic spatio-cultural set-up — one made of perpetually regenerating identities. Especially in light of constant demographic and cultural flows across an interconnected world where distance is not so much about miles and kilometres anymore. While America displays profound (yet, unaware) creolisation dynamics, such might also be the case of Europe, making it a fertile ground for observation of such dynamics.⁷

“Europe is indeed creolising” according to Edouard Glissant. “It is turning into an archipelago. It comprises several vibrant languages and literatures that influence and permeate each other, with students learning and speaking several tongues at once — and not only English. Also, Europe is home to several local islands of sorts, ever more vibrant, ever more engaged in the global arena, such as the Catalan, Basque or even Breton islands. Not to mention the presence of communities from Africa, North Africa, the Caribbean — each endowed with century or millennium-old cultures, some of them displaying self-withdrawal tendencies while others commit fiercely to creolisation, such as young *Beurs*⁸ in the projects or French West Indian populations. The fact that insular spaces exist within Europe, construed as an archipelago, further blurs the very notion of intra-European borders.”⁹

How do creolisation (as defined above) and borderisation connect in Creole arenas where multicultural identity is inherently open and “porous to all the breath of the world”¹⁰?

Such is the fundamental question addressed in this paper.

The Creole Caribbean provides, indeed, an ideal observation post regarding the relationship between borders and identity. Socio-economic constraints and its long history of colonial deportation and acculturation reveal the peculiar and contrasting features of that relation.

⁷ Encarnacion Gutierrez Rodriguez, Shirley Anne Tate, *Creolizing Europe*, Liverpool University Press 2015

⁸ Translator’s note: colloquial term used to designate people of North African descent, who were born in Europe.

⁹ Frédéric Joignot (interview by), According to author Edouard Glissant, the world’s creolisation is “irreversible” in *Le Monde*, February 4th, 2011.

¹⁰ Aimé Césaire, *Return To My Native Land*, bilingual edition, *Présence Africaine* 1971 p.119

In a region characterised by ancient migratory traditions, creolisation is embedded in transnationalisation as a process but is now facing identity tensions that seem to challenge its very core.

Wherever social unrest goes hand in hand with increasing politicisation, regional specificities, as well as local and national allegiances, are often used against inter-community and universalist solidarities. A reality which migration flows between Caribbean societies and major American and European cities have come to expose.

The electoral success of the far right across French dependencies in America, in 2017, is yet another illustration of that phenomenon.

I/ A culture, “porous to all the breath of the world”

One of the Caribbean’s core features is that it is an area where identities are being rearranged almost constantly. Migration’s primary effect is that of relocating such Creole identities.

A/ Transnationalisation of Creole identities

Creolisation as pictured by Barbadian author Brathwaite or Glissant, in Martinique,¹¹ is a historical process triggered by the encounter of European and African cultures amidst the brutal and dehumanising context of the plantation system.

It lies first and foremost in the mutual acculturation of masters and slaves who, while retaining some of their native cultures, now share a brand new and heterogeneous culture – despite the abuse inherent in their relationship.

These dynamics paved the way for intra-Caribbean migration and West Indian populations moving to North-American and European megacities. A recent shift that might not be as brutal, but proves nonetheless confrontational.

As a process based on cultural entanglement, creolisation unravels the partition of root-identities and fosters relocation as well as border transcendence, to a certain extent.

¹¹ Kamau Brathwaite *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, Clarendon Press, 1971, GLISSANT E., « Identité comme racine, identité comme relation » in *Comité culture, éducation, environnement : Identité, Culture et Développement*, Paris, Edit. caribéennes, 1992, p. 199

Such is the narrative shared by the entire Caribbean and American continent – albeit to diverging extents, based on socio-historical backdrops and political cultures. Thus, creolisation in Jamaica does not resonate with the process depicted by Glissant with regards to the French West Indies. Its Anglo-Saxon heritage characterises the former. In contrast with root-identities and just like its French-speaking neighbours, it incorporates various cultural inputs. And yet, the African root has come to dominate its specific Creole canvas.

According to Rex Nettleford, « The battle between Europe and Africa continues for an African centrality in the indigenising process, if not for uncontested supremacy: and neither Guyana and Trinidad with their growing East Indian aggregates, nor Cuba with its predominantly European population or Jamaica with its overwhelming African majority can escape the fact of the African Presence in the national cultural ethos. This is a fact of Caribbean life! »¹²

According to the French-speaking fathers of *In Praise of Creoleness*, on the other hand, creolisation cannot be reduced to any of its single components. “Neither Europeans nor Africans nor Asians; we proclaim ourselves Creoles.”¹³

The creole identity is an inevitably inclusive patchwork, spreading through massive waves of migration, which contribute to “deterritorialising” the Caribbean and showing the limits of a sheer geographic definition.

While the geographical aspect cannot be ignored, the border is, first and foremost, a spatialised sociopolitical reality.

Due to factors related mostly to the colonial history and socioeconomic opportunities, Paris, London, Amsterdam, New York, Miami, Montreal, Ottawa have become Caribbean territories of sorts. Entire communities have chosen to settle in these big capitals, without forfeiting their Creole identity.

This relocation phenomenon has been impacting both host and Caribbean societies in multiple ways.

¹² Nettleford, R. *Cultural action and social change: the case of Jamaica; an essay in Caribbean cultural identity*. Ottawa, Ont., IDRC, 1979. P.7

¹³ Bernabé J., Chamoiseau P., Confiant R. *Eloge de la créolité*, Bilingual French-English edition, Gallimard p.13

In order to understand what is at stake as far as these relocation dynamics are concerned, one must grasp the continuum between the diaspora and the homeland. Embracing the host society's citizenship does not keep the diaspora from nurturing its original identity, which grows and shifts according to the new living location. Its identity remains fundamentally Caribbean. One may even speculate that it often proves even more vibrant in host societies as if heightening the features of that collective sense of belonging were vital in ensuring its survival. Recent research seems to challenge such assumptions. New US citizens thus seem to be gradually forfeiting their Caribbean allegiances to fully embrace the American model.¹⁴

In truth, the Creole identity fuels transnationalisation.

Communities are taking steps to provide transnational financial support precisely because they still have family in the Caribbean and feel attached to the homeland.

Hence, the sense of belonging to that whole, and family, in particular, has been fueling the diaspora's overall engagement.¹⁵

B/ Practical implications of cultural relocation

Even imagined, that sense of belonging is performative.

Shared identity drives the "diasporisation" of national and sometimes, strictly local engagement

– which is the case for French dependencies and their *mainland*-based communities. Many mayors, overseas, sustain significant ties with associations whose members come from the city they run. The ensuing politics endow the act of voting with a specific meaning. Indeed, voting is not only about casting a ballot and dropping it in the dedicated box. The path leading to that box is just as fundamental. Funding associations, even located outside of the mayor's jurisdiction, partaking in their celebrations, helping the city's natives or mainland-based relatives, are typical steps taken by candidates or elected representatives. As a result, the act of voting appears as a transaction that has little to do with programmes or ideological considerations. An ironic effect of said relocation dynamics is that they tend to strengthen the ties between both ends, and may

¹⁴ Roger Waldinger and Lauren Duquette-Rury, Emigrants politics, Immigrant Engagement: Homeland Ties and Immigrant Political Identity in the United States, RSF: The Russell sage Foundation Journal of the Social sciences, Vol. 2 N°3 June 2016 pp. 42-59

¹⁵ Mary Chamberlain, Caribbean Kinship in a Global Setting, Caribbean Studies vol 32. N°1, Jan-Jun. 2004 pp. 73-98

exert significant influence on political engagement in the homeland. While research remains insufficient on that matter, many studies have examined the economic impact of such diasporas; they typically revolve around developing countries and the associated diasporic remittances.¹⁶

In 2015, 676.000 Haitians were living in the United States. Following Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, Haiti is the Caribbean territory with most citizens residing in the United States.¹⁷

The relocation of entire communities also results in the territorialisation of their transplanted collective identities. Such population concentrations in foreign cities often go hand in hand with a toponymic appropriation of these domains.¹⁸

Thus, deterritorialisation is not the end of territories. Little Havana or Little Haiti in Miami are tangible proofs that Caribbean identities are being reterritorialised.

Creolisation does not prevent the national fragmentation of Creole identities against inevitably racialised backdrops.

Such spatialisation does not homogenise transnationalisation, which is fundamentally driven by a small group of players engaging on a regular basis with the homeland. In reality, most migrants are only sporadically in touch with the latter.¹⁹ For the time being, Creole solidarities have yet to replace national allegiances.

Donald Trump's election as President of the United States has further stiffened the country's migration policy, especially towards Haitians with a Temporary Protected Status (TPS). This status will expire in July 2019. They might be forced to leave the United States as a result.

Donald Trump's decision has fueled objections on all sides. "It makes no sense to repatriate 60.000 Haitians to a country that cannot provide for them" stated a Florida senator, for instance.²⁰

In anticipation of their status expiring, many Haitians are now fleeing to Canada.

¹⁶ Rosa Titouche Haddadi, « Impacts économiques et sociaux sur les pays en développement des envois de fonds des émigrés sur leur région d'origine », *Insaniyat* 62 2013, 121-146.

¹⁷ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/haitian-immigrants-united-states?>

¹⁸ Cédric Audebert « La diaspora haïtienne: vers l'émergence d'un territoire de la dispersion ? » in Carlo Célius (edited by) , *Le défi haïtien : économie, dynamique sociopolitique et migration* Paris : L'Harmattan. 2011

¹⁹ José Itzigsohn, Incorporation and transnationalism among Dominican Immigrants, *Caribbean Studies* vol 32 N°1 Jan-jun 2004 pp.43-72

²⁰ Bill Nelson , Floride Senator, in *The New York Times*, 59,000 Haitians Must Leave U.S. As White House Ends Protections, November 21st, 2017.

This migration policy could directly impact Haiti's economy, as it is fueled to significant extents by the diaspora's remittances. In 2016, these money transfers displayed a 7% growth compared to 2015, amounting to over two billion dollars and 25% of Haiti's gross domestic product.²¹

The tensions engendered by this migration policy and the significant volume of said remittances show how transnationalisation is impacting the home country.

A representative of a Jamaican bank thus points out that « The significance of these remittance ratios for the Jamaican economy has raised increasing interest among academics and policymakers alike about the role remittances play in poverty alleviation, and the impact of these flows on economic development and social welfare. In Jamaica, more than half of total remittance inflows come from the US, particularly New York and Florida, about one-fifth from the UK, about one-tenth from Canada, and about 7-8 per cent from the Cayman Islands. They are an essential source of financing to many Jamaican remittance recipients in order to supplement household income for necessities such as food, utilities and education. »²²

The trend does not only affect the economy. One of the latest questions to be raised asks whether migrants could be catalysts of change and political change in particular.²³

How do we know for sure that certain behaviours or developments do result from political transnationalisation? How may creolisation support transnational regulation of policy matters?

The first question requires a multi-level approach to migrants' political engagement in both the homeland and the host country's political arena.

The second question, on the other hand, demonstrates that creolisation provides no clear alternative to state regulation – and does not aim at doing so, either.

²¹ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/haitian-immigrants-united-states>

²² Eliud George Ramocan Remittances to Jamaica, Findings from a National Survey of Remittance Recipients, Bank of Jamaica, Survey 2010 p2

²³ Steven Vertovec, Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation, The International Migration Review vol. 38 N°3 (Fall 2004) p. 971

II/ Creole discourse: from nation-states to meta-nations?

Globalisation is a reconfiguration process that proves both stimulating and doubt-generating. In the Caribbean, the Creole rhetoric has gone hand in hand with independence waves and nation-state building in a context where part of the elite seemed tempted by ethnic considerations. Nonetheless, on a transnational scale, it could support the rise of a meta-nation with somewhat elusive borders and substance.

A/ Transnationalisation, identity tensions and politics

Most research dealing with the political aspects of transnationalisation tend to underestimate the state's influence in regulating the process as if freedom of movement were the starting point of all migration flows. Because of its political regime, drive for control and even its failures, the state is ubiquitous²⁴ – still a driving force in politicising transnational relations.

General collapse, repression and anti-democratic features may push its citizens to flee or become political activists.

Protectionism and ultra-nationalist leaders can bring the host state to restrain migratory inflows, thereby fostering conflicting relations with the issuing country. Poor communication between the two institutions is a crucial factor in the politicisation of both diasporas and the public opinion.

State regulation stands because the territorial principle lies at the core of the migration policy paradigm and “its primary asset is the clear and unambiguous definition of the *border* as a concept and a reality...”²⁵. Ironically enough, territoriality is being vocally promoted while the role of said regulation is fading. As if transnational flows, increasingly triggered by migration and non-governmental players, were acting as operational substitutes to territories.²⁶ The nation-state model is being challenged by

²⁴ Roger Waltinger and David Fitzgerald, transnationalism in Questions American Journal of Sociology Vol. 109 N°5 March 2004 pp.1178

²⁵ B. Badie, Nous ne sommes plus seuls au monde, La découverte 2016 pp.13

²⁶ Badie, la fin des territoires Op. Cit.

new forms of regulation that overstep traditional borders. The international arena seems to expose the revenge of nations and the simultaneous isolation of state entities.

In a Caribbean, ethnicised context, it appears primarily as improvised nationalist rhetoric. « Creole discourse has been the bonding agent of Caribbean society. It has functioned in the interest of the powerful, whether represented by a colonialist or nationalist elite. It is the identific glue that bonds the different, competing and otherwise mutually exclusive interests contained within Caribbean society. »²⁷

In a globalised world, Creole discourse may be construed as both transnational and "meta-national" experiences.

A country like Haiti could thus be seen as a *transnation* made of both people back home and in diaspora.²⁸

Political parties in the homeland, migrant associations and organisations abroad as well as other non-governmental bodies are now contributing to "deterritorialising/reterritorialising" identities.

On a strictly political level, empirical research conducted in Dominican, Haitian, Colombian and Salvadoran communities in the United States reveal many constants and specificities that show how tricky it is to define that phenomenon.

« Thus the meaning and scope of political transnationalism is not uniform. Although there are common forces bearing on all immigrants, the particular circumstances of each community also affect the extent and character of these activities. For some immigrants, transnational politics is a mean to maintain an active presence in their country's centers of power, for others, it is a means to avoid such centers in order to provide direct assistance to their native regions, and for still others it is a practice to be avoided in order to leave a violent and unsettling past behind »²⁹.

Conducting a political campaign abroad is a way of acknowledging the expatriate community's political influence.

²⁷ Percy C. Hintzen, Race and creole ethnicity in the Caribbean in Vera Sheperd and Glen L. Richards,(edit.ors) Questioning Creole, Creolisation discourses in Caribbean Culture, Ian Randlers, James Currey Publishers 2002 p.93

²⁸ Laguerre, State « Diaspora, and Transnational Politics: Haïti reconceptualised,»Millennium: Journal of International Studies, 28 (3) 1999: 633-651

²⁹ Luis Eduardo, Alejandro Portes and William Haller, Assimilation and Transnationalism : Determinants of transnational Political Action among Contemporary Migrants, American Journal of Sociology Vol. 108 N°6 May 2003 p.1235

Campaign activism, mobilisation against injustice or in favour of a given political cause in the homeland, are recurring aspects of transnational political engagement.

Comprehending a migrant's activism demands that we consider not only domestic realities but also political socialisation fostered by life in the host society.

Concern for host country politics is what drives, to a significant extent, part of the diaspora's transnational agenda.

Cédric Audebert assesses this mechanism as follows: "... growing engagement of Haitian natives in the political arenas of their host countries (the United States and Canada in particular) does not seem inconsistent with their commitment to Haitian politics; on the contrary, it appears to be a primary pillar of that engagement."³⁰

The scientific community how the experiences of migrants in their new environment might determine said engagement — given the lack of comparative data regarding their behaviour before and after departure from the homeland.³¹ Also, as far as the Haitian case is concerned, discussions typically focus on how migrants contribute to democratising Haiti.

The political weight of money providers informs in no small extent said political influence; in addition to the economic aspect, come sheer political considerations such as the naturalisation of migrants in host societies, actually supported by Caribbean authorities. Dual citizenship is likely to foster the diaspora's political influence on the host country's foreign policy.³²

Advocacy by public figures of Haitian descent can also prove influential on US policy towards Haiti, as is the case in the following example: « Dr Mathieu Eugene, who represents the predominantly Caribbean 40th Council District in Brooklyn, New York, told the Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC) on Saturday that he will be joined Sunday at a rally in Brooklyn by immigration advocates, elected officials, clergy members and constituents reiterating their calls on the Trump administration to extend the status granted to almost 60,000 Haitians.

³⁰ Cedric Audebert, op.cit. p.26

³¹ Anar K. Ahmadov and Gwendolin Sasse, Empowering to engage with the homeland: do immigration experience and environment foster political remittances ?, *Comparative Migration studies*, (2016) 4: 12 pp.1-25

³² José Itzigsohn, Immigration and the Boundaries of Citizenship: The Institutions of Immigrants' Political Transnationalism, *International Migration Review* Vol 34 N°4(Winter 2000) pp. 1126-1154

Eugene, the first Haitian to be elected to New York City Council, said he will also re-launch an online petition requesting that the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) grant an 18-month extension of TPS for Haitians and protect the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Programme (DACA), initiated by former US President Barack Obama that Trump plans to rescind».33

Lobbying and the Black Caucus are other platforms where such influence may be exerted not only in favour of African and Caribbean countries but the Black diaspora as a whole.

« Being members of a racial diaspora with affective transnational ties to ancestral African homelands, black members of Congress feel an obligation to represent a global black community, and act to advance the interests of that community through their effort as legislators and committee chairs ».34

The fact that former President Aristide – demoted from his position after the 1986 military putsch — was able to return to Haiti in 1990 is an excellent example of how efficient the Black Caucus can be in that sense.

In truth, the diaspora's direct influence on national politics should no longer be doubted. Just like the existence of a Ministry dedicated to Haitians living abroad is yet another indication of Port-au-Prince's keen interest in the "Tenth department", established in the 1990s by Haitian authorities with regards to Haiti's nine electoral and administrative districts. No matter how symbolic, this recognition is undeniably political and the chosen title, all but incidental. It shows how human dispersion has been construed as both a unified political arena and a deterritorialized national player. Which is quite ironic, to say the least, for dual citizens living abroad, as is often the case, can neither vote or run for office back home. The constitution forbids their electoral participation despite what their affiliation to the "Tenth department" could suggest.

Authorities have gone to absurd intellectual lengths to justify this contradiction.

For an entire community of Haitians living abroad are thereby being kept out of homeland politics and yet acknowledged as citizens of that very nation. And yet, being

³³http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/latestnews/Haitian_legislator_reiterates_appeal_to_US_President_to_extend_TPS_for_Haitians

³⁴ Walter Clark Wilson and William Curtis Ellis, *Surrogates Beyond Borders : Black Members of the United States Congress and the Representation of African Interests on the Congressional Foreign-Policy Agenda*, *Polity* Vol. 46 N°2 *Constructing Boundaries* (April 2014) p. 256

acknowledged as such bears no legal implications, despite the diaspora's undeniable impact on said nation's economic and political life.

Underneath what may be construed as blatant incompetence or mere technicalities, lies the fear of seeing the diaspora – whose economic influence is crystal clear – seize the political power it has already begun to impact. This political dismissal is typically legitimised by the notion that prospective returnees should not become active electoral players in a country they barely know.

In 2010, as the presidential race was being launched, the Minister of Haitians abroad pointed out that diasporic candidates failed to comprehend Haiti's background and to command both official languages.

Arguments opposing diasporic vote also suggest that national parties lack the technical ability to establish relays abroad and to sustain continued ties with the diaspora. "None of Haiti's political parties has an official office abroad to provide fellow citizens with proper training or to enable political activism," said that same Minister.³⁵ Yet another dubious claim blamed the failure to complete on time the electoral reform meant to branch out a large number of polling stations abroad.³⁶ In reality, it seems that the elites have agreed to restrain the diaspora's political involvement to sheer power of electoral suggestion if we look at how reluctantly public authorities have been considering amendments to the constitution in that sense.

The symbolic aspect of the situation should also be noted. The politicisation of the diaspora stems from the experience of exile shared by many Haitians as a result of chronic instability, coups and dictatorship. Dual citizenship and voting rights would formally ensure freedom of speech to Haitians who used to be deprived of it in Haiti.

This statutory exclusion does not keep migrants from getting politically involved, as noted by that Minister, "convinced that the diaspora can truly influence votes in favour of their chosen candidate via economic support to relatives and friends."³⁷ An observation that captures one of the Tenth Department's preferred paths of political activism – which implicitly explains why official candidates would take campaigning

³⁵ <http://www.haitilibre.com/breve-1024-haiti-elections-tous-les-candidats-de-la-diasporas-exclus.html>

³⁶ <http://www.haitilibre.com/article-825-haiti-elections-la-diasporas-exclue-des-elections-2010.html>

³⁷ *ibid.*

across the Tenth Department so seriously, along their electoral journeys. Miami, Boston, New York or Cayenne are all mandatory stops on the presidential route.

In 2015, the diaspora's political engagement could not be more transparent. On October 4th, all presidential candidates were invited to present their programme and debate in the city of Miami. The event was broadcasted live on over fifty Haitian radios and diasporic media. In other words, national elections are no longer bound by national borders. While casting ballots is reserved to Haiti's residents, the election, henceforth denationalised, does transcend the borderline.

A shared identity and money transfers thus allow for the transnationalisation of politics. Because they are kept from voting or running for office, Haitians abroad seek to influence the elections by converting the act of voting into a symbolic transaction. On a national scale, securing votes may entail calling upon a relative or a friend living abroad. Political influence is the diaspora's asset in its relations with candidates and public authorities in general. In return, it gains recognition and a symbolic status as a domestic player.

Haiti is not the only territory in the Caribbean where diaspora remittances go hand in hand with pleas for political recognition, voting and office rights in homeland institutions.

The following remarks, with regards to the situation in Jamaica, hint at palpable tensions between national authorities and migrants when it comes to the terms of said transaction.

« What exactly is remittance? It is members of the diaspora taking care of the barrel children they left behind, the elderly grandparent who raised them, and the family members who are too lazy to work and who benefit from the favourable exchange rate... One of the primary justifications for a diaspora vote in parliament is to represent the intentions of those who claim a strong emotional connection to Jamaica... They do not share the anxiety induced by the tax system, nor do they endure long bouts of drought. They do not join the needed volunteers; do not engage with the churches and social organisations to offer guidance to the youth to enhance their quality of life. They seem

only to want the power of representation in Parliament to tell us how it must be done...
No vote should be accorded to the diaspora »³⁸

This seemingly unbalanced transaction also relies on the symbolic player status granted to this scattered community, but also on its undeniable political influence – as shown by official candidates deterritorialising their campaigns and becoming the (unwilling) wannabe leaders of a borderless nation. Creole discourse could endorse this transnational entity for, no matter how symbolic, it also has practical implications.

In a critical approach to transnational studies, Waldinger and Fitzgerald note that « Connectivity between source and destination points is an inherent aspect of migration, but migration networks generate a multiplicity of "imagined communities" organised along different, often conflicting principles. Consequently, what immigration scholars describe as transnationalism is usually its opposite: highly particularistic attachments antithetical to those by-products of globalisation denoted by the concept of "transnational civil society".³⁹

Ironically, in the Caribbean, both local specificities and symbolic borderisation prevail – typically because of the politicisation of challenges faced by Creole societies, whose varied cultures usually bring social players together, beyond socio-economic disparities. Immigration and insecurity, which have been unduly correlated, are part of the campaign topics picked by candidates with a tendency to over-dramatise the political discourse and bolster existing borders.

The 2017 presidential election in French Overseas dependencies is yet another illustration of that reality.

B/ Meta-nations: a response to borderisation in the Caribbean?

Diasporas have been fostering the emergence, on the international stage, of *transnations* through which peoples and their diasporas end up defying traditional borders. Nevertheless, these symbolic entities are still caught in between reterritorialised borders.

³⁸ Ronald Mason, attorney-at-law and Supreme Court Mediator in *The Gleaner*, April 24th, 2016

³⁹ Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald, *Transnationalism in Question*, *American Journal of Sociology* 109 N° 5 (March 2004) pp. 1177

Historically speaking, the Caribbean has been the stage of a profound migratory and cultural entanglement. However, it is also a region where migrants undergo significant stigmatisation. After the age of nation-states and the *transnation* era, it might be about to enter that of the meta-nation.

Typically, times of turmoil and feelings of insecurity underlie isolationist tendencies as well as actual or symbolic border shutdowns. As noted by Glissant, “still-identities are hampering the sensibility of the modern man who engages with the chaos-world and lives in creolised societies. Relation-identity or “rhizomatic identity” as described by Gilles Deleuze, seems to depict the situation more accurately.”⁴⁰

But Creole identities also tend to tribalise and may be construed as ethnic in a context where migration is perceived as a threat. The same effect permeates multicultural societies such as French Guiana, where Creoles are asserting themselves as a community competing with others for access to and preservation of resources.⁴¹

From that perspective, political elections put voters’ motives to the test, and are opportunities to examine how they perceive a given situation as well as foreigners.

Despite its construction as an integrative matrix, creolisation cannot prevent the clash of identities. It is ill-equipped to face strategies based on the over-dramatisation and stigmatisation of foreigners.

A realisation inherent in the following observation by sociologist Michel Giraud: “The French West Indian and Guianese people (who) actively marginalise Caribbean migrants who have to the French West Indies or Guiana to earn a living, share with the latter a joint history of overall similar colonial predicaments and are, at the very least, cultural cousins.”⁴²

An excellent example of this trend is the result of the last presidential election, all around the French Departments in the Americas (DFA). First of all, the growing feeling of immigration-related insecurity has fostered massive voting numbers in favour of

⁴⁰ Frédéric Joignot, Op. Cit.

⁴¹ Fred Réno and Bernard Phipps, The dichotomy of universalism and particularism in French Guiana in Rosemarijn Hoefte, Matthew L. Bishop and Peter Clegg, Post-Colonial trajectories in the Caribbean: The Three Guianas, Routledge 2017 pp.46-58

⁴² Michel Giraud, Racisme colonial, ethnicité et citoyenneté. Leçons des expériences migratoires antillaises et guyanaises, Caribbean Studies vol 32 N°1 Jan.-Jun. p.164

Marine Le Pen, the National Front's (FN) candidate. A party that has become expert at building its xenophobic rhetorics on the rejection of migrants.

“Immigration encompasses all fears; economic (*“they take advantage of welfare programmes”*) cultural (*“they disrespect our values”*), and political (*“a Muslim mayor tomorrow?”*)... FN voters see immigration as the most crucial issue, even more so than unemployment.⁴³

In France, Muslims and Arabs are the primary targets of that discourse.

In French Guiana, social turmoil and crime — which is often associated with Brazilian immigration — have been instrumental in favouring the far-right vote.

On April 21st, 2017, after a one-month long social campaign, an agreement was signed between the state, elected representatives and the group of protestors.

An evident motive underlying this entire standoff was the blend of insecurity and severe migratory pressure. The territory attracts mostly Brazilian, Haitian and Surinamese migrants; 35% of the whole population is allegedly foreign. In 2016, 4,000 individuals were deported by local authorities.⁴⁴

French Guiana is allegedly the deadliest French collectivity, with 42 homicides in 2016 for a population of 252,000. Over 50% of all inmates held in Guiana are foreigners.⁴⁵ Figures that have been fueling a certain feeling of insecurity as well as defiance towards public authorities, thereby translating into substantial voting numbers in favour of the far-right candidate during the French presidential elections in 2017.

In Guiana as in Guadeloupe and Martinique, that vote mirrors not only the rejection of foreign citizens but also a drive to “control the border” in the name of safety and preservation of local identities.

Even a quick comparison between the 2007 and 2017 presidential elections shows a shift in public opinion towards greater rejection of the cultural cousins mentioned by Michel Giraud, — as well as even broader symbolic borderisation.

⁴³ Nonna Mayer : « Marine Le Pen fait encore peur »

http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/04/11/nonna-mayer-marine-le-pen-fait-peur_5109156_3232.html#YUf4Gji7DA0ygCii.99

⁴⁴ Laurent Marot, Les Guyanais dénoncent les défaillances de l'Etat sur l'insécurité, Le Monde, March 30th, 2017

⁴⁵ see le Monde, La Guyane en proie à des blocages, March 22nd, 2017

In 2007, voting numbers to the presidential election broke several records with a 59.16% turnout in Guadeloupe and a 58.97% turnout in Martinique. Ten years later, it lies below 55%.

In 2007, the National Front gathered 3.8% of all votes. Ten years later, it reached 21.9% and garnered more ballots than any other French party in the overseas as a whole. In St. Barth, it led the first round with 42.99% and gained 64.89% of all votes – topping Emmanuel Macron in the process. In Guiana, Marine LePen reached unprecedented heights with 24.21% (6,521 ballots), right behind Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his leading 24.72%. In Guadeloupe, 13.51% (15,159) of all voters allowed her to rank fourth in the race, far ahead of the socialist candidate. Martinique stood out in that only 10.94% of ballots were cast in her favour, although such figures are still substantial and equal Guadeloupe's rankings.

These high scores echo equally significant abstention rates, which tend to favour candidates with a clear pool of voters such as the National Front. In Guadeloupe, Guiana and Martinique, these rates exceed 60% — as opposed to 21% for France as a whole.

In the French West Indies, there is no correlation between immigration and insecurity since very little crime is committed by foreigners, even though public opinion tends to think otherwise.

When it comes to Haitians, who are the primary target of such xenophobic penchants, rejection draws first and foremost from the negative image most Guadeloupe and Martinique natives have of Haiti, which proves quite ironic, considering that these very individuals show considerable passion for the culture and especially the music of those they reject. Haitian *konpa* has achieved unprecedented popularity across the French West Indies and Guiana, to the point where local bands have embraced it at the expense of *zouk*.

This dismissal of their Caribbean neighbour, despite a shared Creole identity, stems primarily from a refusal to share public resources. “If in the French West Indies, as in Guiana and everywhere else, xenophobia is fueled by the competition for access to decidedly scarce resources, it is also particularly fostered by identity-related tensions...”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Michel Giraud, Op. cit p. 176

The case of the French West Indies and Guiana quash post-nationalist theories according to which identity claims are to fade along with the rise of human right claims⁴⁷ — For this theory hardly applies to Guadeloupe or Martinique. A survey shows that in the early 2000s, immigration ranked second among the Guadeloupean population's list of concerns. The fact that a conference was called by local representatives to discuss that very matter — which is supposedly state jurisdiction shows that it has been significantly politicised in response to what is being construed as social demand.⁴⁸

However, even against a divisive and often politicised backdrop, a border is much more than a simple wall. It can also be an ecosystem where original forms of human interaction may emerge — as illustrated by relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, or life on the border-river between French Guiana and its neighbours.

Guiana's river border with Suriname (the Maroni), in the West, is 323 miles long. The river-border acts as a legal divide between two states, as well as a transportation route and living area for the Bushinengue — who reside on both banks and have always construed it as such. That particular border thus takes on a specific meaning for those who live around it and thereby challenge the established legal frameworks.

That French territory, located in South America, also has a river-land border with Brazil comprised of 188 miles of land followed by 265 miles of river (the Oyapock). Just like the Bushinengue, Amerindian communities with distinct nationalities (either French or Brazilian) but living on both sides of that border, are holding on nonetheless to their original identities.

River identities rule out border politics and support the notion that borderisation arises from over-dramatised social interactions.

Therefore, it challenges the perspective of “setting up more adequate and additional means of intervention along rivers and streams, to enforce the French border with Brazil and Surinam in particular”⁴⁹ as worded by the National Front party.

⁴⁷ Soysal Y. *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*, Chicago University Press 1994

⁴⁸ Fred Reno, *les élus ont le peuple qu'ils méritent* in Yvan Combeau (Ed.) *Le vote de l'outre-mer, présidentielle et législatives de 2007*, Les quatre chemins 2007

⁴⁹ https://www.frontnational.com/pdf/PROGRAMME_OUTRE_MER_2016.pdf p.8

In response to a perceived menace to their identity, people are voting for candidates who contend that unemployment and insecurity can be solved by deporting foreigners and building walls. Undermining the *jus solis* principle is part of the protectionist arsenal envisioned by the far-right champion.

As a matter of fact, she promised to “abolish *jus solis* across the entire national soil to deter — on the mid to long-run — potential migrants from settling in mainland France or the Overseas. This alteration of our citizenship rights is expected to boost, overseas, the people’s national pride and sense of belonging, while also encouraging genuine candidates to French citizenship to engage in a larger-than-self, committed approach to assimilation”.⁵⁰

This situation is by no means exclusive to the French West Indies. On a global scale, it mirrors the nation-state’s intrinsic limitations and calls for the rise of a meta-nation as imagined by Edgar Morin with regards to European construction.⁵¹ As both a province and a meta-nation, Europe could foreshadow a political structure tailored to a global reality where territory and sovereignty alike are growing ever more ineffective. An idea rehashed as follows by Patrick Chamoiseau: “The nation-state as it stands, cannot deal with issues embedded in the Whole-World paradigm... Hence, which sort of state, which type of structure could nations — organic or not — be expected to embrace? How can a meta-nation come into being? That is the main difficulty.”⁵²

What, then, could be the meaning of a Creole, Caribbean meta-nation?

Conclusion

Like Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, one may « see Creole cultures as almost entirely new creations which seek to adapt to new social and geographical environments... »⁵³. Historically speaking, they result from the founding international displacement and deportation scheme that involved European and African populations as part of the transatlantic colonial trade. Fertilised in the plantation, its integrative purpose characterises Creole culture. Indo-Asian populations thus arrived after the abolition of slavery, while Levantine communities experienced creolisation to diverging extents

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.9

⁵¹ Edgar Morin, *Penser l’Europe*, Gallimard Paris, 1990.

⁵² Patrick Chamoiseau, Silyane Larcher, *les identités dans la totalité-monde*, Cités 1/ 2007 n°29, 121-134

⁵³ Veron A. Shepherd and Glen L. Richards (Editors), *Questioning Creole : Creolisation discourses in Caribbean culture*, Ian Randler Publishers 2002 p. xiii

from one location to the other. It is supposed to enable the integration of migrants who are, just like their host society, Creole.

The relative failure of Creole discourse in adjusting this role to a global arena struck by borderisation is rooted in our homogenising approach to creolisation.

Hence, this discussion benefits greatly from Nigel Bolland's input — or the theory according to which Creole society does not require a dialectical approach to socio-cultural trends. « The Creole society thesis offers an approach to national integration by seeking to unite people of diverse origins in an overarching ethnicity based on the recognition and creation of a developing Creole culture...Conceptually, however, « creolisation » and « the Creole society » remain ill-defined and ambiguous. On the one hand, the vision of a Creole nation rests on the axiom that the individual is the elementary unit of social life and hence that « society » is the aggregate of its individual citizens and « cultures » are simply the aggregate of what individuals believe and do in a society...This dualistic view of society leads to the portrayal of creolisation as a « blending » process, a mixing of cultures that occurs without reference to structural contradictions and social conflicts ». ⁵⁴ Beyond a sheer dialectical approach, this train of thoughts brings new leads to the table for a sociopolitical assessment of creolisation.

⁵⁴ Nigel Bolland, *Creolisation and creole societies : a cultural nationalist view of Caribbean social history*, in Verene Sheperd and Glen Richards Op. cit. pp. 29-30