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Re-sourcing Dependency

Decolonisation and Post-colonialism in French Overseas Departments

FRED RÉNO

When speaking of decolonisation and post-colonialism, it is essential to avoid the generalising approach which sometimes leads to a distortion of the real. Decolonisation is generally seen as accession to sovereignty. For the elites and the populations of the French Overseas Dependencies it represents a reforming of the bond with France. It is a conversion of what was political subordination into dependence on social and economic resources. This conversion is a rational process based on the following idea: Independence would be costly compared to the advantages of dependence. In other words, Guadeloupe, Guyane and Martinique would be decolonised without becoming independent.[1] Therefore, the transition from the status of colony to that of '*département*' is not a legal contrivance. Even if local populations did not choose their political status through the electoral process, they did vote for the parties which were in favour of French citizenship.

Decolonisation being a word with multiple meanings, how does post-colonialism fare applied to the cases we are considering? This question, it should be said, is less empirical than theoretical. The concept of post-colonialism has been used mainly by modern and post-modern literature although it too is polysemous. Curiously enough the notion has not inspired many political scientists. This is all the more surprising as post-colonialism refers to European colonialism and its consequences on the colonised territories, historical facts and realities which are definitely political. Besides, the main academic debates and ideological oppositions show the political dimensions of the phenomenon.

Those who see in it the modern manifestations of Europe's colonialism in the trust territories and in the former colonies have transformed it into a useful notion of it for the study of the insidious forms of subjugation of the developing countries by the European powers. It is also an efficient concept through which to understand the resistance of the subjugated. Those who emphasise the effects of the cultural encounter initiated in the colonisation period are giving priority to the hybridisation phenomena that resulted from it. This trend argues that in the final analysis post-

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colonialism is the celebration of cultural heterogeneity. But when all is said and done there is little point in opposing the meanings attributed to the notion. The interest in the reaction of societies to the colonial legacy and the assessment of the '*interculturation*' process are the activist and aesthetic sides of the modern expressions of the historical and political fact that colonisation constitutes. Indeed, the eager recourse to post-colonialism hodgepodge concept that it is, is likely to undermine both its roots and the conflicting realities it sets out to delineate. Still, it seems to us that the two meanings mentioned above are but two examples of the heuristic scope of the notion. One fact cannot be disregarded, irrespective of the definitions. Post-colonial relations are characterised by one outstanding feature, namely the variable and multifaceted dependence on the European model. Arguably, this contested though accepted inequality is what bridges the gap between the definitions of post-colonialism.

This article is an attempt to itemise the various modern political implications of decolonisation and post-colonialism in the French overseas territories in the Caribbean.

In these countries the demand for decolonisation is grounded less on a desire to achieve sovereignty than on the rational concern to maximise the advantages of dependency. Today this approach is made more appealing as the international context is favourable. On the other hand, there is a strong legitimisation of dependency notably from the *indépendentist*-elites who regard it as a step in their long-term strategy of secession.

In Guadeloupe and Martinique more than in Guyane, the cultural aspects of post-colonialism are extolled by the fact that Creoleness is praised while Negritude is refuted as being nothing more than the black side of the sham European universalistic coin. Creole '*diversalité*' allegedly discloses the uncertainties, the complexities and the richness of mixed cultures.

Creolisation finds its political expression in the hybridisation of a model of which the structures have largely been inspired by the French original and of which the functioning hinges upon communitarian rationales that challenge the principles which regulate the French State.

The Present Effects of Dependency

In the wake of the Second World War, the socialist and communist elites in the French colonies claimed and obtained the status of department for the various territories. The legal and political assimilation of the former colonies were phased in over several decades. The most undeniable success of the Assimilation Act is the social equality with metropolitan France. A comparison with the English-speaking Caribbean is remarkable in this respect. But there is no gainsaying that the economic failure has been blatant. Such an acknowledgement recently led the chief executives of the three American FOD (French Overseas Departments) Regional Councils to come

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up with propositions for a change in political status. To address the same problem the French government itself tabled a framework law before Parliament, which was passed after various statutory amendments. In the area of culture, the Assimilation Act failed to smelt the Antilleans and the Guyanese into the French crucible. Negritude and Aimé Césaire's essays, poems and plays can be said to have checked the '*francité*' trend by providing a counter culture.

Despite this check with the Assimilation Act, the French State has the upper hand over the society and probably manages to handle the contestation movement with more efficacy today.

The State as a Breadwinner...

Unlike neighbouring British colonies, the French Antilles have agreed to be subjected to the republican universality with the possibility to adapt the law when local realities require it. Therefore, all the political claims and the elections that have been hold since the war show a desire to remain within the framework of the French republic.

But dependency is not just money flowing in and the local people bound hand and fist. In fact the people consent to that dependency which is a totalising phenomenon. The State pervades the social fabric so successfully that most people, because they are aware of the advantages they can derive from the public sector in these countries where the private sector is little developed and less rewarding, want to become public servants. So a system is created which makes bureaucracy the quasi-exclusive way to gain social promotion. This is a trend peculiar to the French model. In the neighbouring countries, the metropolitan State has never had this power of allure because its intervention has never been so pervasive.

Yet another illustration of the dependency *à la française* is the fact that the public sector and the political world overlap. Since the Assimilation Act was passed, the number of elected politicians who are public officials has been rising. In Martinique for instance between 1949 and 1967 the percentage of elected politicians who were public officers rose from 27.7 per cent to fifty-eight per cent of all mayors and general councillors. The trend is similar when the number of public officers running in local elections is taken into consideration.

In 1993 32.8 per cent of the candidates were teachers or other public officers, the rate reaching more than forty per cent in Guadeloupe. A glance at the list presented by the separatist organisations adds strength to the idea that all the political currents depend on the resources provided by the state. In the 1998 regional elections the list presented by the Mouvman Gwadloupéyen contained the names of twenty-eight public officials out of forty-one candidates, which amounted to sixty-eight per cent of the total number. This marked trend among the separatists could account to some extent for the ambiguities in their discourse as well as in their practice,

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since they find themselves torn between the claim to sovereignty and the hard fact of the heavy dependency of all walks of the country's life *vis-à-vis* the State. This certainly accounts for the particular character of the relationship with Paris which is more akin to contestation than to real opposition.

The scope of the political claim is thus determined by the social status of the claimants, and particularly their positions as public officials makes contestation part and parcel of the very system they contest.

A step forwards into the participatory process has been taken since the separatist groups entered the administrative and political management of the system through the elective positions they hold. Their alliance with local right-wing parties converted to regionalism is yet another integrative element. The new political landscape is an unheard of scenario in which the left is opposed to the separatists and the right-wing forces which are both in favour of a substantial change in the political status of the Antilles and of French Guiana. Curiously enough, the left appears conservative compared to certain right-wing currents, leaving the initiative towards a change to those who so far had been clinging to a one-and-indivisible vision of the Republic.

The Separatists as Newly Converted Regionalists: The New Political Deal

The separatist discourse is yielding before the new challenges. All the more so as the separatists participate in the elections are holding important elective positions in a bid to prove their legitimacy.

The recent period has been characterised by the entry of separatists into the local assemblies. This has occurred in the wake of the implementation of institutional reforms by socialist governments, notably of the decentralisation provisions in the 1980s. The latter reinforces local power by vesting the executive power of the local authorities in local elected politicians.

In the overseas territories the anti-establishment parties jumped on the bandwagon of decentralisation. In Martinique for instance the various separatist organisations captured over twenty-three per cent of the vote at the 1986 regional elections. And in 1992 the Martinican Separatist Movement (MIM) alone got 16.2 per cent of the vote securing thus nine seats out of the forty-one seats in the regional assembly. In addition to managing two local councils and to being represented in several others, the separatists now sit in the regional council and are considering running for the legislative elections to have members in the French parliament in which Martinique is entitled to three seats in the National Assembly and two in the Senate. In 1997 the leader of the MIM was elected Member of Parliament for the southern constituency. In Guadeloupe the nationalists lost the two seats they held in the regional council, but they hold the executive power

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of three local councils and are represented in several local councils as opposition or majority councillors.

What accounts for this success and what effect does it have on the nationalist claims and practices? It is difficult to realise that the populations have bought into the nationalist ideology. Without setting aside their status as French citizens quite a few constituents regard the nationalists as a pressure group which paradoxically through its actions improves the functioning of the French political and administrative system on the island. By accepting the role of partners, these organisations acquire a new legitimacy derived not just from the ballots but also from the acknowledgment of their ability to manage.

The charismatic leader of the MIM, Alfred Marie-Jeanne, has been seen as a scrupulous administrator since his election as mayor of Rivière Pilote back in 1973. He is the first elected nationalist to have held (since 1998) the post of President of Region in an overseas territory. These political changes are evidence that the institutions are used today by these organisations as 'power resources'. In interviews carried out in 1994 in Martinique, the main separatist leaders admitted they believed in the efficacy of a traditionally centralised local council power. 'This is real local power' says a nationalist leader, 'you can take a decision and implement it, which means you are directly addressing the needs of the people. Being able to sway this power seemed necessary to us.'[2]

Such a view is also valid for the other decentralised authorities, even if there is a reaffirmation of separatism at the same time. A top-ranking member of the MIM told us that 'decentralisation was a decoy'. But, he added, being a general or regional councillor was an asset. 'From such elective positions you can speak out loud and clear. You can wake up the people. It is difficult to make yourself heard when you are not in these positions.'[3]

Referring to the participation of the nationalists in the management of the region, one of the persons interviewed said that 'the people expect a great deal from their political representatives. We use what little power we have. We are involved in a process. When you criticise the system, the people want you to roll up your sleeves and pick up the gauntlet. In 1992, we sat in all the commissions. We even had candidates for president.'[4] In 1998 they won the presidency of the regional council.

When faced with industrial action, the nationalist elected representatives are exemplary in the rational way they apply the rules of the French administrative management. 'We have reached a point where we are running out of money and the people have to grin and bear it' says the professional training commission chairman.[5]

Besides the desire to strengthen the image of nationalism, such an attitude like that fostered by the nationalists is motivated by the fear of being caught on the wrong foot by left-wing or right-wing parties whose misuse of public goods they have often criticised. The statement above could have

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been made by any elected representative. It is an illustration of the fact that the nationalist elected representatives have no choice but to toe the line in their management of the local institutions. It also shows the capacity of the political and administrative system to win the nationalists over to regionalism.

In accepting the electoral game and the management of the local institutions, the anti-system organisations may well end up buttressing up the very system they purport to be attacking. This would result in the nationalist option withering away into mere local regionalism.

Observation of the political life seems to confirm the idea that the balance of power changes with no deep alteration in the dependency on which it rests and which is called into question less and less as it represents a basic resource for all the local agents. The recent proposals for a change in the political status of the French overseas territories made by America are aimed at changing their relationships with France, while implicitly admitting the difficulties of a radical reassessment of the bond of dependency.

What these proposals have in common is that they affirm the necessity for the power and responsibility of the elected representatives in the decentralised authorities to be strengthened. Taking similar stock of the shortcomings of the system now in force, they advocate changes in the setting up of new institutions and the implementation of tax-break mechanisms for businesses plus incentive measures to boost employment.

The framework law for the overseas territories proposed by the government in December 2000 aims at 'promoting sustainable growth in these regions, valorising their assets, helping them compensate for their backwardness in public facilities, ensuring social equality and equal access opportunity to education, training and culture and equality between men and women'. 'Its object is also the continuation of the renewal of the pact between the overseas territories and the Republic. In that respect, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana and Réunion will be allowed the opportunity to endow themselves with an institutional instrument of their own.'[6]

The other proposal entitled 'The Basse-Terre Declaration'[7] results from a joint initiative by the three regional chief executives. It was presented on December 1 1999 by Lucette Michaud Chevry who is close to Jacques Chirac's RPR[8] party, Antoine Karam, member of the Guyanese socialist party, which is close to the French socialist party and hence to the prime minister, and by Alfred Marie-Jeanne who is one of the founding members of the MIM.

The Declaration states that the regions concerned 'see their situation gradually deteriorating' marked by 'an acceleration of the social currents', 'the impossibility of remedying the situation with the means available today', and the 'inadequacy of the tax system and social regulations designed for a developed country and applied in regions which tend to lag in their development'.

Arguably, the Basse-Terre Declaration is all the more surprising and

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presumably the more disconcerting of the two judging from the reactions of the political observers in the countries concerned. If only because it brings together political currents and families which had so far been poles apart. It federates organisations from the respective countries whose divisions have often been fuelled by prejudices. Guadeloupe and Martinique have generally been regarded as enemy sisters and many French Guianese see the Antilleans as 'invaders' whether in their turn the latter take the attitude of a colonist. The Basse-Terre initiative has sparked off controversial reactions. While the socio-economic sectors find it interesting, they draw the line according it public endorsement. The initiative sent a shock wave through the political spectrum causing the political landscape to change dramatically. The dividing line is no longer between the pro-status quo Right and Left on the one hand and the nationalists on the other. To be or not to be in favour of a self-governed region endowed with large management prerogatives both internally and in its cooperative relations with the neighbouring countries is now the question. Which means that the declaration has a symbolic scope that cannot be denied.

The content of the declaration has to a large extent been inspired by the provisions of the May 13 1991 Act on the status of Corsica. The executive power of the region would be exercised by a college which would be responsible to a local parliament endowed with the conjoined powers of the two existing local assemblies. The parliament would have additional fiscal and economic competences. The three overseas regions of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Guyane would share important prerogatives with the State (law and order, the regulation and the control of immigration, the recognition and the respect of local customs). The new assembly could legislate in 'areas of specific interests'.

The Basse-Terre Declaration considers the 'possibility of bilateral agreements with the neighbouring states in all areas falling within the lap of the Regions [...]'.[9]

Given the circumstances, the context seems to be favourable for a change to be set in motion in the three French territories in the America's. The government favours it. The majority of the elected representatives wish it. It remains for the people, to whom the change will be applied, to express their will.

The Political Dimensions of Creolisation: The Post-colonial Expression of Dependency

The notion of Creolisation is principally a literary one,[10] political science having so far paid little attention to it. Yet, just like the other social sectors politics is intricately interwoven with culture. In the Caribbean certain political attitudes are barely comprehensible unless a reference is made to the traditions and to the meaning the social agents assign to their actions.

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Failing to take these references into account leads to impasses or to distorted interpretations of the power relations in these countries.

In the Antilles and in French Guiana, politics falls between the two stools of the universalistic and the communitarian rationales.

The Ghosts of the Plantation System

The origin of the phenomenon must be traced back to the introduction of substantial aspects of the French political and administrative culture in the Plantation System, even though the former and the latter had different and even divergent rationales. The way the Plantation manifests itself can be compared to a ghost which appears regularly, but whose complex legacy and pervasiveness render it difficult to grasp.

The Plantation System is based on a rigid social framework in which the notions of class and of ethnic group overlap. Some countries in the region have inherited this feature with their private sector in the hands of an ethno-class. Barbados and Martinique are cases in point.[11]

Such a system has also exuded a sharp sense of authority and of informal hierarchy which is generally a form of compensation for those deprived of important material and/or symbolic resources. Certain of today's attitudes bear striking similarities to situations of the past. The relations between politicians and public agents as one group, and the citizens as another are sometimes reminiscent of what occurred between the plantocracy and the rest of the population.

The politico-administrative organisation introduced into the Plantation System reflected the main trends that were then developing in France. French centralism gradually assumed the shape of a structural uniformity of the administration and of a growing intervention by the central authorities in local matters. The universalistic pretensions of the State were to express themselves through an assimilation approach that the local agents shared. Egalitarianism does not necessarily means that differences are ignored, as the principle of adaptation enshrined in the present French constitution shows.[12]

In the colonial context the three features – centralism, universalism and egalitarianism – must deal with the legacy of the Plantation. Hierarchy does not rule out simultaneous interpersonal relations, which have a tendency to develop countrywide, as they compensate for the omnipotence of the State and the lack of flexibility of the social structure.

A self-contained world of promiscuity between unequal agents, the Plantation System developed simultaneously with violence and personal dependency, a sense of belonging. And for all the coercion and exploitation with which it is synonymous, it managed to be a vector of integration which did not smelt the protagonists into the pot of uniform identity.

Today it cannot be denied that modernity has not done away with the ambiguities of the Plantation System and with the compensatory mecha-

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nisms which go with them. Indeed the bonds of personal dependency can be interpreted as functional responses to the rigidity of the hierarchical relations. The pervasiveness of personal affiliations in the society and in political life is evidence that the particularistic allegiances are still very much alive. Such continuities defy the universalism and individualism of the metropolitan cultures. The politico-administrative order unfolds against an ambivalent backcloth which influences its functioning.

This double-bind, two-tiered character discloses the similarity of the structures and ideologies to those applied in the Hexagon on the one hand and the Creolisation of the administrative functioning and of the local political game. The phenomenon illustrates a deep-seated dependency on a political technology devised in Europe.

Beyond the status question, the Antilles and Guyane remain a zone of multiform dependency, of which the most important formal feature is undoubtedly the implantation of French institutions. The maintenance and the reproduction of the European institutions go hand in hand with a partisan game, which shows that the metropolitan political culture is in fact deeply rooted.

The importation of the French Right versus Left political partition with its umpteen parties, in countries with less than two hundred thousand citizens each, cannot fail to boggle the observer's mind. For a long time, the main political organisations of the French Antilles were branches of French parties. It can be said that all the ideologies born on the other side of the Atlantic, including more recently the far right whose discourse nevertheless does not sell easily in a Creole society, have found their expressions in the territories overseas. The Antilles presumably have the strongest party density in the world if one adds the right-wing organisations and the strictly local formations are also added.

The belief in the European constitutional forms comes from historical factors and from the interest the elites find in it, anxious as they are to secure the mechanisms through which they have acceded to local power and control the political space. The observation of that space and, in particular, of the attitudes which are developing in it reveals striking commonalities between the Creole culture and the configuration of politics. A sphere has gradually taken shape of which the autonomy and regulation rest on a system of dual significations. Beyond the formal functioning of the structures and mechanisms, the political landscape seems to be reconstructed, dependent to a large extent on local cultural elements.

'Autonomisation' and 'Deracialisation' of the Political Space

Obviously the public sphere shares the French institutional framework. Neither the former agents nor its stakes or strategies are exactly similar to those of mainland France. Not all French parties are present in these

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countries and similarly the Antillean and Guyanese organisations are not all local sections of French federations. While the rules of the game are generally those used in a competition for the control of power, the Left versus Right divide on which it rests in France sounds phoney transplanted overseas, owing to the fact that the stakes are defined locally. The reorganisation of the landscape around the question of the status underlines this well.

One of the forms of appropriation of politics by the Creole society is the de-racialisation of public life. To say that the Martinique society is based on race[13] is to acknowledge that history has bequeathed to Martinique a socio-cultural structure which is likely to generate feelings of ethnic exclusion. But this does not contradict with the idea that it is pervaded by a powerful movement of Creolisation which helps avoid partisan allegiances drawn along ethnic or racial lines as in Trinidad.[14]

Creolisation cuts across the phenotype spectrum. To be Creole means to partake of and to claim, albeit implicitly, a common system of significations irrespective of whether one is Afro-Antillean, Euro-Antillean, Indo-Antillean or mixed-blood.[15] In addition to informal rules inherited from the metropolitan model and the acceptance of ambivalent rationales by local actors, it seems that the citizens assess the effectiveness of this space through its capacity to distribute favours and social resources. The means to obtain them depend both on rational procedures and personal relations. This view of things is shared by the entire population, irrespective of class.

What is new in the present situation is the emergence of an environment-conscious discourse which taps the identity register (the land, the heritage) for arguments. Will it be in a position to alter the present configuration? For want of historical distance we are hard put to evaluate its impact. If the Association for the Preservation of the Martinican Heritage is undeniably successful, environment politics as represented by the Movement of Martinican Democrats and Ecologists for Sovereignty (Modemas), and the supporters of an urban environmentalism in Martinique has yet to be worked out. In Guadeloupe, political ecology appears as an extension of the French Green Party, in keeping with a traditional approach which for some activists consisted of affiliating to a metropolitan party in order to reduce the cost of political engagement.

Creole Language and Political Space

For a long time, in politics as well as in other fields, denigrating the Creole language and comparing it unfavourably with French was the rule. Strange scenes took place in political rallies in which orators were applauded less for the content of their speech than for their tone and stylistic effect; the applause was often interspersed with phrases like *mi bel fwansé* (what fine French!) to highlight the beauty of the speaker's words and his personal worth. If this situation is still the case we have to admit that it is not as common. Creole is nowadays often heard in politics.

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Is this trend ephemeral or will it last? The second hypothesis seems more likely to the extent that the phenomenon affects all the means of communication (the radio in particular) and trade unions as well as political parties. It must be said that the nationalist organisations have been instrumental in bringing about the change toward the acceptance of Creole. Undoubtedly they did it both out of conviction but they also wield it as a strategic weapon.

While we must abstain from passing judgement on the quality of the spoken language, listening to the nationalists' radio broadcasts shows how these movements use the idiom as a tool for popular mobilisation, endowing it as it were with a new role. This aspect is most visible in Guadeloupe through the role played by the General Union of Guadeloupean Workers known as UGTG, which has been using Creole massively since its birth in 1973. Accustomed to the monopoly of French, perceived as both the symbol of success and of exclusion, French West Indians take pride in hearing their mother tongue on the air without rejecting French. Creole has come out of the private sphere to take over the public space gradually.

Its status is enhanced, because of its cohabitation, however unequal this may be, with French in the same 'functional slots'. It is now common to hear officials and political figures being interviewed in Creole on important issues. All radio stations routinely give it special treatment. The now 'legalised' language increases its speakers' standing and their chances of success in the political marketplace. Remarkably it has been appropriated by all political parties. Conversely, those who refused to recognise the shift in the rules of the game have been disqualified. While the new deal is clearly the work of the nationalists and of some left-wing parties, the right-wing parties have been quick on the uptake. Not only do right-wing political leaders and activists use Creole too, when they have a chance to do so, they sometimes write it and definitely use it as an instrument of political communication. In the 1992 regional elections, a list that was close to Chirac's party, and which apparently wanted to capitalise on the polysemy and the shift in meaning when moving from one language to the other, asked voters to *bay la voi* ('give voice', voice meaning both the human voice and the ballot). In it there was also an allusion to the call and response pattern of traditional French Caribbean music. Written on a campaign poster this phrase should mean: 'Give us your voice'.

Our preceding remarks show that Creolisation is not restricted to language. In the context of the French dependencies in the Caribbean, language is a major factor in structuring the political space. It is part of the complex and interdependent processes of promotion/disqualification that allow a culture to define and regulate its political space. Through being used within a domain which had been until then dominated by a French-speaking elite, Creole makes it possible for the underprivileged, the underdogs, to access officialdom, and gives them a chance to build a political space based on their own references. It does not mean that it is an easy

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task. But their willingness to get involved in the political fray increases as they feel less excluded from the mainstream.

However, these changes have been impinging on the language itself. If the linguist and the political scientist both agree about the impact of the idiom on the Creolisation of politics, they may yet have diverging interpretations of the phenomenon. Linguist Jean Bernabé's analysis of it is both terribly disturbing and realistic. Dealing with how Creole has affected public life, he writes: 'the questions of why and how languages cohabit are important but not as decisive as the following one: Can different languages be functionally equivalent within the same space?' His answer is unequivocal: 'As Creole is encroaching on the territory traditionally occupied by French only (politics, intellectual analysis, media communication [...]) it is self-evident that through its borrowing from other languages, its phonological structuring and its syntatic underpinning, the French lexicon is better equipped to prevail.' He concludes that: 'Quantitative de-Creolisation may result in the fact that the more Creole speakers want to promote their language by endowing it with responsibilities and modernity, the more they expose it to the squandering away of its symbolic assets of difference, in building a continuum where formally there was a sharp opposition between the two poles of diglossia.'[16]

The observation is lucid. But is not this loss the condition of a penetration and paradoxically of a Creolisation of the public sphere? For the language to join mainstream political life there is a price to be paid because of the new status it is acquiring. The loss that accompanies the reorganisation is only one aspect of the quantitative de-Creolisation of the idiom. It does not entail that society itself is being assimilated and that Creole will die. We should not lose sight of some processes of re-Creolisation. Identity is first of all a construction. And as Edouard Glissant says, the pessimistic vision tends to confuse it, wrongly, with an immutable root. Resulting from a violent but fruitful exchange between different cultures, characterised by both domination and resistance, Creolisation has transformed the original referents and then contributed to defining the mode of regulation of the social space. Politically, it produces ambivalent models. Equipped with public institutions that are comparable with the French ones, they operate by intermingling a bureaucratic rationality with communitarian rationales.

To conclude, we may say that we need to question some of the concepts that serve as the backbone of identity analysis in Guadeloupe, Guyane and Martinique. For example, what is the meaning of the notion of cultural assimilation or the relevance of the left-wing/right-wing dividing line which has so far framed political activities in the French dependencies? It seems difficult to postulate *and* condemn the process of assimilation which supposedly brain-washed the West Indians and the French Guianese, and at the same time to assert that the alienating element is a component of a self-proclaimed Creoliteness.

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What is the impact of traditional political discourse and watchwords in a rapidly changing world? What does it mean for some to claim loyalty to the Republic and others their commitment to independence when decolonisation may prove compatible with staying within the framework of French institutions? Both the Marxist and the nationalist approaches have shown their limits when it comes to challenging the universality of the centre. Weapons of liberation in the hands of many anti-colonialists and supporters of the Third World, these ideologies bring about unexpected results once they have been reinterpreted locally. A large fraction of the local elites have adopted them to convey their demand for integration into the French institutions, either through assimilation or through regionalisation. Such was the claim of West Indian communists when they fought for the implementation of the metropolitan model in its most universalistic and egalitarian dimensions.[17]

It is definitely a dominant trend since supporters of autonomy and independence now share very similar practices, even if their discourses still differ. These questions and others call for a new approach to analysis. It appears that although dependency is criticised politically, it is endorsed globally by all actors on account of the social and economic advantages it provides. This acceptance is all the more real as the state's supervision has been lightened and the protesting elites share in the local power has strengthened and may in the future, if certain conditions are met, share in the sovereignty of the State.

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Notes

1 See for instance A. Murch, *Black French Men: The Political Integration of French Antilles* (Cambridge 1971).
2 Interview with a leader of 'Asé Pléré An nou Lité' (Don't cry let's fight).
3 Interview with a top-ranking member of Martinican Movement for Independence.
4 Interview with a leader of MIM.
5 Ibid.
6 *Framework Law for the overseas territories n° 200-1207, December 13, 2000.*
7 Meeting of the Presidents of Regions of the Antilles and La Guyane, 'Political Courage for Development', December 1, 1999.
8 *Rassemblement pour la République.*
9 Meeting of the Presidents, 'Political Courage', 9.
10 Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphael Confiant, *In Praise of Creoleness* (Paris 1989); Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* (Paris 1990).
11 See Fred Réno, *L'exportation de modèles d'administration opposés: le cas de la Barbade et de la Martinique* (PhD thesis, University of Paris I, 1987).
12 Article 73 of the October 4th 1958 French Constitution.
13 Georges Balandier, 'Introduction' in: Francis Affergan, *Anthropologie à la Martinique* (Paris 1983).
14 The fact that in Martinique social agents vote for and accept being represented by 'mixed-blood' leaders like separatist Marie-Jeanne, blacks like MP Turinay or former Mulatto MP Lise, regardless of ethnic origins shows that political life is colour blind thanks to the Creole culture. The failure of the Trotskyst group 'Combat Ouvrier' (Workers Struggle) to racialise politics by advocating a State of poor Blacks is telling.
15 See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures* (New York 1973).
16 Jean Bernabé, *Promouvoir l'identité culturelle? Eléments d'écolinguistique et de glottopolitique appliqués aux aires créolophones* in: Jean-Claude Fortier, *Questions sur l'Administration des DOM: décentraliser outre-mer?* (Paris 1989) 343.
17 Days before the adoption of the law which made the colonies into departments, the communists of Martinique declared: 'We want fully-fledged assimilation, we are ready to endure whatever it takes, we shall willingly share the tax burden of the French Citizen and whatever burdens that befall us, but we want our country to be administered with the same care as a French *département*', *Justice* (5 January 1946).

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