CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Creolizing Turn and Its Archipelagic Directions

Ananya Jahanara Kabir 🄳

King's College London
Email: ananya.kabir@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract

Recent years have seen a resurgence of scholarly interest across disciplines around the concept "creolization" even as there has been some pushback against this development in other academic quarters. This article contextualizes this state of art around "creolization" and presents an analytical overview of the term's discursive history. First, I discuss the appearance of the term *creole* in several areas of the world as an epiphenomenon of the first wave of European expansionism from the fifteenty century onward. Second, I track the emergence of "Creole" as an analytical category within nineteenth-century philology and its further development within linguistics. Third, I focus on milestones in the move of "creole" to "creolization" as a category for theorists of culture. Finally, I discuss recuperations of creolization as a theoretical model, including my own work that articulates it together with theoretical approaches to archipelagos.

Keywords: creolization; creoles; Creole; creolization theory; littorals; archipelagic thinking; relationality; postcolonial memory

"Creolising German/Kreolisierung der deutschen Sprache" is one of several monumental paper charts by German artist Moses März that were exhibited in "Present! Still," the 12th Berlin Biennale, which ran from June 11 to September 18, 2022.[1] März's flowcharts of discursive linkages spectrally follow the world map's continental outlines only to draw attention to unexpected lines of connection and fracture superimposed on them. Concepts and events occupy island-like text bubbles that are also nodes on multi-directional vectors with arrowheads that swoop across the white space, criss-crossing, branching, and looping. "The goal is not to map out (new) territory, but to conceive of a vectoral space," as Ottmar Ette observes while analyzing islands as interpretative models for

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processes of both splintering and (re)constellation.[2] Precisely this phenomeno-logical simultaneity of islands renders them *archipelagic*: "a term stemming from comparisons made in the wake of colonial endeavors," and therefore "a fitting analytic for examining interconnected (post)colonial histories— especially those that, at first glance, do not seem to be interconnected yet, much like archipel-agos, might be linked by subterranean networks not easily visible from the surface."[3] The archipelago's heuristic potential is exemplarily realised in März's "Creolising German." It not only presents so-called dialects of High German (Limburgisch, Westfälisch, Yiddish, etc.) on the same plane,[4] but links them vectorially to political and cultural watersheds ranging from those initiated on German territory (Gutenberg's printing press, the world wars, the Shoah) to others outside it (the Haitian Revolution). "Creolising German" is not just the act of making German minor, or of provincializing it.[5] It is to reconstitute German(y)'s place in modernity by emplacing the language and its speakers within an archipelago of Glissantian relationality.[6]

This map, declares the Biennale's curator Kader Attia, reveals "German, and Germany, as fragmented and creolised from inside."[7] Passing German(y) through the prism of creolization as process, and deconstructing it through a call to creolization as theory, may appear as surprising moves to those who associate creolization with the Caribbean's cultural history. Those aware of creolization as an area of linguistic study might find equally unsettling that German, a venerable "Indo-European" language, be thought of as a contact language created through capitalism's contingencies rather than genealogical processes akin to evolution.[8]

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[2] Ottmar Ette, *Writing-Between-Worlds* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 105.

[3] Hans-Jürgen Burchardt and Johanna Leinius, eds., *(Post-)Colonial Archipelagos: Comparing the Legacies of Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022), 4–5.

[4] On varieties of German and their social ramifications, see Oliver Falck, Stephan Heblich, Alfred Lameli, and Jens Südekum, "Dialects, Cultural Identity, and Economic Exchange," *Journal of Urban Economics* 72.2–3 (2012), 225–39, and Eric Hobsbawn, "Language, Culture, and National Identity," *Social Research* (1996): 1065–80.

[5] See Gilles Deleuze, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), which in fact theorizes from the affective and linguistic relationship between German, Yiddish, and Kafka's non-German nationality; and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[6] März explicitly attributes his "interest in mapmaking" to his "engagement with Édouard Glissant's philosophy of relation" whereby he "seeks to replace a modern segregational worldview marked by the establishment of impermeable categories, genres, and borders with a relational perspective inspired by non-Western ontologies that consider entities as constituted by the relations that bind them to one another." See https://12.berlinbiennale.de/artists/moses-marz/. The urtext here is Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betty Trask (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

[7] Kader Attia, personal communication with author, September 20, 2022.

[8] The Indo-European epistemic model of the "family tree" was developed in the nineteenth century by a group of philologists based at Leipzig who called themselves the Neogrammarians. This model became racialized into the concept of the Indo-European civilizational family and instrumentalized by National Socialism. For the breakaway preference of some neogrammarian-trained philologists for languages born out of contact rather than any kind of evolutionary model, and for sensing, therefore, the radical potential of creoles as contact languages, see Ananya Jahanara

But März's approach resonates with a resurgent academic interest in pushing creolization as an object and tool of analysis beyond the spaces, cultures, and methodologies it has become stereotypically attached to. Studying Europe as a creolized product of encounter is not merely a matter of turning the northern anthropological gaze back on to itself;[9] sociologists and literary scholars alike are now mobilizing creolization to creolize the very idea of Europe, and to creolize theory as an epistemic emanation of European claims to universalism.[10] In the meanwhile, linguists are examining historical Creoles to illuminate not universal rules around language acquisition and loss, but cultural production in colonial-era contact zones in Pacific and Indian Ocean worlds.[11] My own work with and on creolization belongs to this convergent "creolizing turn" across disciplinary backgrounds. To this collective endeavor, I contribute in two ways: empirically, by unearthing evidence from continental littorals, particularly that of peninsular India, but also of western Africa, for creolization as a historical process; and theoretically, by deploying—much as März does—epistemic insights from a body

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Kabir, "*Creolising Universality: Hugo Schuchardt's Germanic Interventions into Malayo-Portuguese*," Markus Messling and Jonas Tinius, ed., *Minor Universality* (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming 2023). See also the observation by Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 96: "An idiom like Creole, one so rapidly constituted in so fluid a field of relations, cannot be analyzed the way, for example, it was done for Indo-European languages that aggregated slowly around their roots."

[9] See the essays, for instance, in Oscar Hemer, Maja Povrzanović Frykman, and Per-Markku Ristilammi, eds., *Conviviality at the Crossroads: The Poetics and Politics of Everyday Encounters* (New York: Springer Nature, 2020), especially the essay by Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "Creolisation as a Recipe for Conviviality," 43–64; and the work of Francio Guadeloupe, including, most recently, *Black Man in the Netherlands: An Afro-Antillean Anthropology* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022).

[10] Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih, eds., *The Creolization of Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Shirley Anne Tate, eds., *Creolizing Europe: Legacies and Transformations* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015); and Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2022), a collaboration between a sociologist (initially trained in literary studies, and a literary critic).

[11] Exemplary here is Hugo C. Cardoso's work on Indian Ocean Luso-Asian creoles; see, for instance, his "The African Slave Population of Portuguese India: Demographics and Impact on Indo-Portuguese," *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 25.1 (2010): 95–119; "Convergence in the Malabar: The Case of Indo-Portuguese," *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 36.2 (2021): 298–335; and the collaborative scholarship involving historical linguistics, paleography, and cultural exegesis to illuminate a manuscript of pantuns in Java Creole, culminating in Ivo Castro, Hugo C. Cardoso, Alan Baxter, et al., eds., *Livro de Pantuns/Book of Pantuns* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 2022). On Indian Ocean creolized words and worlds, see also Tom Hoogervorst, "Qaliyya: The Connections, Exclusions, and Silences of an Indian Ocean Stew," *Global Food History* (2022): 1–22, and his "Sailors, Tailors, Cooks, and Crooks: On Loanwords and Neglected Lives in Indian Ocean Ports," *Itinerario* 42.3 (2018): 516–48. For the deployment of creole linguistics within sociohistorical investigation of Indian Ocean contact zones, see Stefan Halikowski Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora in the Portuguese Indies: The Social World of Ayutthaya, 1640–1720* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), and his "Languages of Subalternity and Collaboration: Portuguese in English Settlements across the Bay of Bengal, 1620–1800," *International Journal of Maritime History* 28.2 (2016): 237–67; for the Pacific, see Karin Speedy, "Who Were the Reunion 'Coolies' of 19th-Century New Caledonia?," *Journal of Pacific History* 44. 2 (2009): 123–40.

The concept of the contact zone was developed by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 8 and *passim.*

of thinking we can call, broadly speaking, "archipelagic."[12] As my work increasingly demonstrates, it is this archipelagic framework that enables me to effect a "topological shift" from islands to coastlines,[13] while using creolization as a heuristic tool for analyzing postcolonial cultural production. Creolization, in short, is good to think postcoloniality through; but it gains added value when conjoined with archipelagic theory.

There nevertheless remains a curious gap between this thriving revival of the concept in several academic quarters and an atavistic resistance to it in others. Such resistance draws support from Stephen Palmié's notorious "discontent" that the concept has become too generalized to be useful,[14] as well as from unsubstantiated declarations that creolization is too marginally evident outside the Caribbean to be theoretically meaningful. But can a concept be repudiated for being both everywhere and in too few places? This paradox is actually constitutive of the history of creolization as a cultural phenomenon and the development of creolization as a theoretical concept—as I will demonstrate through a four-part discursive genealogy. Firstly, I discuss the appearance of the term *creole* in several areas of the world as an epiphenomenon of the first wave of European expansionism from the fifteenth century onward. Secondly, I track the emergence of "Creole" as an analytical category within nineteenth-century philology and its further development within linguistics. Thirdly, I focus on milestones in the move of "creole" to "creolization" as a category for theorists of culture, including Palmié's "discontent" with creolization, as well as Ulf Hannerz's apparent recommendation of it for the world at large.[15] Finally, I discuss recuperations of creolization as a theoretical model within which I place my own work, including my articulating it with theoretical approaches to archipelagos. It is through dialogue with archipelagic thought, I argue, that the conceptual value of creolization can be best extracted, and its heuristic utility clarified and sharpened.

New Words for New Worlds

In the center of the island of Santiago in the Cape Verde archipelago, in a town known since the eighteenth century as Cidade Velha ("Old Town"), is a paved stretch of road 0.14 kilometers long called Rua Banana. Dating to circa 1495, it is the oldest street laid by Europeans on extra-European soil. On Rua Banana also stands A Igreja de nossa Senhora do Rosário, the oldest Catholic church

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[12] These strands come together in Ananya Jahanara Kabir, "Creole Indias, Creolizing Pondicherry: Ari Gautier's *Le thinnai* as the Archipelago of Fragments," *Comparative Literature* 74.2 (2022): 202–18; see also Ananya Jahanara Kabir, "Elmina as Postcolonial Space: Transoceanic Creolization and the Fabric of Memory," *Interventions* 22.8 (202): 994–1012.

[13] Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, eds., *Archipelagic American Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 11.

[14] Stephan Palmié, "Creolization and Its Discontents," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006): 433–56.

[15] Ulf Hannerz, "The World in Creolisation," *Africa* 57.4 (1987): 546–59.

constructed outside of Europe. Here, both Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama stopped to pray before continuing on their journeys eastward and westward. Well before the discovery of the Americas and the sea routes to India, therefore, and functioning in fact as a crucial mid-Atlantic stopover to enable those longer voyages, it was this archipelago that was the site of a completely new social and economic experiment. The Portuguese had begun settling the uninhabited Atlantic archipelago of Cape Verde in 1456, soon thereafter bringing the first enslaved people from Africa to assist in the taming of its difficult volcanic terrain. Rua Banana, Igreja de nossa Senhora, and indeed the entire settlement of Ribeira Grande, as Cidade Velha was then known, was part of the archipelago's rapid transformation through European ideas of urban planning, the labor and know-how of the Africans who became their coinhabitants, and, of course, local materials. Ribeira Grande, indeed, was the first *creole* settlement created through European expansionism.[16]

New worlds need new words—such as the word *creole.* Etymologically linked to the Latin verb *creare* (to be born, to create), "creole" folds into itself the history marked through its very appearance. The English word's Romance language etymons *crioulo* (Portuguese) and *criollo* (Spanish) appeared by the late sixteenth century to describe the cultural transformations that commenced with the expansionist push southward and westward from the Iberian Peninsula's Atlantic seaboard. Children were born here, in the so-called New World, of Old World stock. To verbalize this reality as incarnated in a new kind of being, "crioulo" emerged as a lexical, semantic, and ontological category. It quickly gained Spanish and French cognates. While in 1580, the Peruvian Garcilaso de Vega ("El Inca") could write of *criollo* and *criolla* as local children born of Spanish parents, in 1694, the French friar Père Labat was extending the term to include children born to the African enslaved on the Martinican plantation he was in charge of.[17] By the early seventeenth century, in fact, in all three languages, *creole/ crioulo[a]/criollo[a]* was being used for children born outside of Europe to European, African, and mixed-race parents alike. English-language uses of "Creole," modeled on the French but with early versions spelled "criole" showing

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[16] Tobias Green, "Creole Identity in Cape Verde," in *The Creolization Reader: Studies in Mixed Identities and Cultures*, eds. Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato (London: Routledge, 2010), 157–66, esp. 157; see also Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato, "Introduction," in *The Creolization Reader*, 6: "As Cabo Verde and the Indian Ocean cases demonstrate, creolization was a process not confined to the Caribbean." For further on Cape Verde as "one of the sites of the earliest thick encounters between Europe and Africa" (3), see Miguel Vale de Almeida, "From Miscegenation to Creole Identity: Portuguese Colonialism, Brazil, Cape Verde," in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (New York: Routledge, 2016), 116–40. For more recent recuperations of the term in Lusophone contexts, see Derek Pardue, "Kriolu Interruptions: Local Lisbon Rappers Provoke a Rethinking of 'Luso' and 'Creole,'" *Luso-Brazilian Review* 52.2 (2015): 153–73.

[17] Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios reales de los Incas, Primera parte* (Madrid, 1723), 339–40; Père Jean Baptiste Labat, *Nouveaux voyages aux îles de l'Amérique* (Fort-de-France, Martinique: éditions des Horizons Caraïbes, 1972), II, 37. See also José Juan Arrom, "Criollo: definición y matices de un concepto," *Hispania* (1951): 172–76.

the influence of Iberian etymons, began appearing by the late seventeenth century in the British West Indies.[18]

Initially functioning as a noun, the word in all its cognate forms soon gained an adjectival dimension as it became mobilized to designate elements of the particular habitus that was being cocreated in step with European expansionism, colonialism, and enslavement. By the early eighteenth century, the English word *creole* was describing foodways, architecture, musical instruments, livestock, plants, and even people (in formulations such as "creole Negro") that context demanded specifying as having emerged in creole societies. The first category of cultural product to be thus described as "creole" was, unsurprisingly, language itself: that which emerged out of the need to communicate between diverse migrant or forcibly transplanted groups of people now obliged to live together in constricted spaces. Unlike vehicular contact languages that had sprung up from time to time in anterior historical periods to facilitate trade and other pragmatic needs,[19] these creole languages assumed native language status of new generations born in creole settlements across the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, in coastal forts, insular plantations, and maroon hideouts— indeed, wherever Europeans settled and interacted with locals and one another, producing offspring who continued developing and elaborating these transplanted societies.[20] The relationship between the contact languages known collectively as pidgins, and creole languages that gained mother-tongue status in these creole societies worldwide, remains a matter of intense linguistic debate and discussion.[21]

From Ontology to Epistemology (and Back)

The descriptive use of "creole" for the native languages of people who fit the (admittedly capacious) label creole gained an analytical dimension by the third quarter of the nineteenth century. "Creole," and German *kreolisch*, now designated these languages—not all of which were called "Creole" (in any orthographic variation) by their speakers—as representative of a class of linguistic

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[18] "Creole, n. and adj.," *OED* online, September 2022, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/44229?redirectedFrom=creole+. See also "creolization, n.," *OED* online. September 2022, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/44232?redirectedFrom=creolisation+. This etymology is also offered by Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820* (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005 [1971]), xiii–iv, though he implicitly restricts "Creole" to Afro-diasporic identity.

[19] Most emblematically, the original Lingua Franca of the Mediterranean region; see Cyril Brosch, "On the Conceptual History of the Term *Lingua Franca*," *Apples: Journal of Applied Language Studies* (2015): 71–85.

[20] Peter Bakker and Aymeric Daval-Markussen, "Creole Studies in the 21st Century," *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 45.2 (2013): 141–50. On fort creoles in the Atlantic world, see Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," in *Origins of the Black Atlantic* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 124–66.

[21] Suzanne Romaine, *Pidgin and Creole Languages* (London: Routledge, 2017); for a recent intervention, see Salikoko S. Mufwene, "Creoles and Pidgins: Why the Latter Are Not the Ancestors of the Former," in *The Routledge Handbook of Language Contact*, eds. Evangelia Adamou and Yaron Matras (New York: Routledge, 2020), 300–24.

phenomena.[22] This development took place within philology, or the study of languages through their historical interconnections as traced through reconstructed genealogies and cognate lexis, among scholars who were drawn to languages that did *not* fit within the genetic-arboreal model.[23] By the mid-twentieth century, the philological approach was supplemented (and arguably, supplanted) by the declaredly scientific discipline of linguistics.[24] The inaugural Creole Linguistics Society meeting in 1959 at Mona, the University of the West Indies's Jamaica campus, was a turning point. Within a decade, debates around the emergence and development of creole languages came to occupy a prominent position in linguistics, so that, in 1968, an overview of the new subfield of creole linguistics declared, "There is an increasing tendency to speak not of creoles but of creole."[25] The move from documenting particular creole languages to searching for underlying principles demanded a corresponding abstract noun. Hence the term *creolization*, already attested in general use by 1850, began to be deployed in investigations of languages for the processes whereby they had become, or were becoming, "creole." The shift from creole as ontology—being— to creolization as epistemology—knowing—was under way.

This shift brought in its wake divergent discursive pathways that rapidly deepened into disciplinary and linguistic grooves. The Caribbean location of the first Creole linguistics conference may well have strengthened the narrowing association of creolization with the Caribbean. At the same time, Anglophone scholarship increasingly conducted the study of creole languages within abstract paradigms of linguistic universalism, detached from consideration of the historical processes whereby creole languages had emerged and the cultural worlds in which these languages operated. Linguistic work on pidgins and on creoles could now be seen as complementary efforts toward clarifying creolization through grids of language acquisition and change, as demonstrated by Suzanne Romaine's landmark book *Pidgin and Creole Languages*, published in 1988.[26] But in the Anglophone world, at least, creolization's epistemological potential to shed light on cultural processes at large through the lens of language was being lost in

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[22] See, for instance, Hugo Schuchardt, "Kreolische Studien IX. Über das Malaioportugiesische von Batavia und Tugu," *Sitzungsberichte der Philosophisch-Historischen Classe der Kaiserlichen Academy der Wissenschaften* 122.9 (1890): 1–256, where the title and subtitle illustrate both my points. For other creoles that do not call themselves "Creole," see Gerald Stell, "Guest Editor's Preface: Dutch-Based Creoles," *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 26.3 (2014): 183–90.

[23] Philipp Krämer, *Die französische Kreolistik im 19. Jahrhundert. Rassismus und Determinismus in der Colonialen Philologie* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 2016). The relation between Hugo Schuchardt and the Portuguese philologist of Galician, José Leite de Vasconcelos, is particularly interesting in this regard; see Ivo Castro and Enrique Rodrigues-Moura, eds., *Hugo Schuchardt and José Leite de Vasconcelos: Correspondência* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2016). See also footnote 8 earlier in this article.

[24] On the relationship between philology and linguistics, see Jan Ziolkowski, "'What Is Philology': Introduction," *Comparative Literature Studies* 27.1 (1990): 1–12, and the entire special issue that this article is an introduction to.

[25] David DeCamp, "The Field of Creole Language Studies," *Latin American Research Review* 3.3 (1968): 25–46.

[26] See footnote 21 earlier in this article.

a thicket of abstraction. In the Francophone world, in the meanwhile, the term was evolving very differently, as a French work published a year after Romaine's, attested: *Eloge de la Créolité*, jointly authored by the French Caribbean writers Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Barnabé, and Rafael Confiant.[27] This manifesto marked a return to creole as ontology, albeit through a second tier of linguistic abstraction ("creole-ness"). A radical politics of difference, tied to the incomplete decolonization of Martinique and Guadeloupe, now reclaimed being creole for self-empowerment in a French national frame.[28]

Créolité drew its resistive charge from historical inequalities between the enslaved and their masters on the plantation, who, despite those inequalities, required a common language of communication. Creole-ness, in this sense, surpassed linguistic and biological referents to valorize the creation of culture from extreme adversity, and it was as a political project worthy of augmented readership that its English translation was published in 1990.[29] However, the concomitant movement out of its immediate political context robbed créolité of the processual dynamism of "creolization," even while seemingly confirming the Caribbean as its ambit. That the study of "creolization" need be restricted neither by geography nor to linguistics was amply demonstrated by the publication, in 1992, of the French linguist Robert Chaudenson's magisterial *Des Iles, des hommes, des langues.*[30] Keeping an eye on Antillean politics, this work drew French-based Creoles from the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean into a rich elaboration of creolization as a process of transcultural encounter encompassing evidence from music, religion, orature, and foodways. But Chaudenson's discussion remained too empirically Francophone to respond to the pressing need of the 1990s: theoretical terminology to explicate the wider consequences of globalization and of decolonization, including postwar migration from Europe's former colonies to the north. The same year as Chaudenson's book was published, another term shot into the limelight, *hybridity*, which appeared in a volume of essays by Homi Bhabha collected under the rubric of "the location of culture."[31]

Mixing Metaphors with Models

The enormous popularity of "hybridity," together with its supporting concept of an interstitial "third space," can be attributed to Bhabha's dazzlingly

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[27] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, et al., *Éloge de la créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).

[28] For which see Jocelyne Guilbault, Gage Averill, Édouard Benoit, et al., *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993); also Manuela Boatcă, "Thinking Europe Otherwise: Lessons from the Caribbean," *Current Sociology* 69.3 (2021): 389–414.

[29] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, et al., "In Praise of Creoleness," *Callaloo* (1990): 886–909.

[30] Robert Chaudenson, *Des îles, des hommes, des langues: essai sur la créolisation linguistique et Culturelle* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1992); a revised translation into English appeared only a full said decade later as Robert Chaudenson and Salikoko S. Mufwene, *Creolization of Language and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[31] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992).

sophisticated apparatus, which combined Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Foucauldian equation of knowledge and power, which had already entered Edward Said's foundational critique of Orientalism.[32] To literary critics eager to embrace postcolonial perspectives, hybridity offered a pliant and pliable tool, able to explicate a wide range of imaginative responses to sociocultural factors in historical contexts ranging from the medieval to the contemporary. In the race for concepts best suited for the *zeitgeist*, it was a clear winner. The enthusiastic propagation of its theoretical efficacy by literary scholars helped it overtake other terms that had crystallised within cross-disciplinary research by the 1990s; these remained heuristically useful for certain conditions, but were, by the same token, granted only restrictive salience.[33] Syncretism seemed appropriate for religious systems but affectively bland as a descriptor for literature; transculturation/transculturality remained fixated on flows rather than sites or subjects;[34] métissage/mestizaje, while linguistically appropriate lens for the Francophone and Hispanophone Americas, were too obviously linked to biological processes.[35] Creolization, in the meanwhile, clung to insular worlds, bogged down by its overlaps with créolité and the polysemy around creole(s)/Creole, and hamstrung, too, by anthropologists quibbling over whether or not "creolization" could be applied to analyze conditions beyond those of historically creole societies.

We return to Palmié's over-cited "discontent" with the use of creolization for every possible scenario of cultural encounter, and his putative target, Hannerz, with his equally notorious claim that the whole world was becoming creolized. I consider their respective positions to be widely misunderstood. Neither did Hannerz wish to universalize creolization, nor was Palmié so fed up with the term as insisted upon by those who wheel him out to support their own discontents. A rereading of both essays reveals, in fact, their convergence on a crucial issue: that creolization can tease out entanglements of peoples and their cultures, over the *longue durée*, in places that were "the core areas of European colonial overseas expansion, and so, at least arguably, in those regions which historically functioned as the cradle of global modernity."[36] On the one hand, Hannerz retrieves from this history the notion of a "creolizing spectrum" that can intervene within Manichean antagonisms marking European culture wars:[37] as enacted by März's cartographic

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[32] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

[33] See the overviews by Charles Stewart, "Creolization, Hybridity, Syncretism, Mixture," *Portuguese Studies* 27.1 (2011): 48–55, and Parker Van Valkenburgh, "Hybridity, Creolization, Mestizaje: A Comment," *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 28.1 (2013): 301–22; also the clarifications offered by the proponents of créolité in Lucien Taylor, "Créolité Bites: A Conversation with Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Jean Bernabé," *Transition* 74 (1997): 124–61.

[34] See the introduction in Laila Abu-Er-Rub, Christiane Brosius, Sebastian Meurer, et al., eds., *Engaging Transculturality: Concepts, Key Terms, Case Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2019), xxii–xxiii.

[35] The breakthrough for mestizaje in Anglophone discourse was Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); on métissage, see François Laplantine and Alexis Nouss, *Le métissage* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).

[36] Palmié, "Creolization and its Discontents," 435.

[37] Hannerz, "The World in Creolisation," 555. The creolising spectrum was early observed by Schuchardt, too; see Kabir, "Creolising Universality."

experiment in creolizing German. On the other, it is not creolization *per se* that Palmié is discontented with, but "theoretical piracy," or "borrowing the term while gutt[ing] it of its original connotations" through "metaphorical overextension to inappropriate conceptual domains and analytical contexts."[38]

The problem, therefore, lies in not what creolization is "a model of" but what it can be made "a model for"[39] and how to move from the particular to the universal in its heuristic mobilization. It is ironic that Palmié should castigate the "interactive metaphors" within proliferating conceptual vocabulary as an excess of "semantic hybridization,"[40] for it is *hybridity* that has indiscriminately hybridized the conceptual freight of creolization. Hybridity implies anterior essences, which, in Bhabha's abstraction, predicates a duality through the interstices of which a third space emerges.[41] It functions as a metaphor for culture. Creolization, in contrast, leaves binaries to examine process through multi-directional metaphors of webs, matrices, spectrums, and swirls. It is not itself a metaphor, but a *model* of linguistic genesis, which offers in turn a model for the production of culture under specific material conditions. I foreground this multi-level epistemic function of the concept to underline its theoretical utility. Although Palmié found problematic, for instance, that archaeologists mobilize the linguistic model of creolization, the compatibility of linguistic and material traces within analyses of cultural production that the model can demonstrate is, for me, its added value.[42]

"A Home Called Archipelago"

"A meta-archipelago?" asks Palmié at one point, throwing up his hands in despair at anthropologists' fixation on the Caribbean as a site of creolization.[43] His exasperated dig at the Caribbean's discursive ubiquity unwittingly reveals the secret of creolization's usefulness: its relationship to the archipelago. Bhabha's universalization of hybridity drew on British colonial history while evaporating its specificity to accrue theoretical credence. But creolization is not a one-size-fits-all model; its universality operates in minor mode.[44] As demonstrated by the cognates of "creole" that sprung up across the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds

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[38] Palmié, "Creolization and its Discontents," 437, citing Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean* (London, Routledge, 2003), 188, on "theoretical piracy."

[39] This helpful distinction is from Stewart, "Creolization, Hybridity, Syncretism, Mixture."

[40] Palmie, "Creolization and its Discontents," 437.

[41] Throughout *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha's exhilarated tone and recondite style transmits the sense of the "third space" as being politically and affectively ascendant over the implied first and second spaces it existed between. For a more historicized explication of the term, see Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[42] As vindicated by new work on Caribbean archaeology bringing creolization models to pre-Columbian material culture, see Corinne L. Hofman, John Angus Martin, Arie Boomert, et al., "Reimagining Creolization: The Deep History of Cultural Interactions in the Windward Islands, Lesser Antilles, through the Lens of Material Culture," *Latin American Antiquity* 33.2 (2022): 279–96.

[43] Palmié, "Creolization and its Discontents," 435–38.

[44] Lionnet and Shih, *The Creolization of Theory*, 4.

in the wake of European expansionism, it is a historical phenomenon both intensely localized and sweepingly transoceanic. To smooth out that variegation to make it fit for the purpose of universalist theorizing is to drain creolization of historicity and affect. What if we stop worrying about the polysemy that is the foundational principle of "creole," converting it instead to our epistemic advantage? The key here is the archipelago. As I noted earlier, archipelagos such as Cape Verde, the Caribbean, and the Mascarenes were the sites of modernity's earliest creole societies. Writers born on archipelagos, including Glissant, Derek Walcott, and Antonio-Benítez Rojo, have tightened this mutuality between cultural process and geological structure. My proposal, however, moves beyond geohistorical determinism. The archipelago offers us an epistemological structure that heuristically complements creolization as model for a certain kind of cultural encounter.

Creolization, in my use, comprehends innovations, improvisations, collaborations, and compromises arising from unexpected encounters between people transplanted to unfamiliar spaces, whether contingently, voluntarily, or against their volition, in the course of capitalist modernity. Despite conditions leading to estrangement and antagonism—unequal power relations, economic rivalry, divergent social codes, lack of common language—these groups have ended up cocreating culture in novel and unforeseen ways. These cultural transformations may be catalyzed by biology, but they are propagated by proximity, or inescapable cohabitation in spatially constricted sites that are also nodes on vectors of travel and exchange, such as islands, coastal forts, or ports. The archipelago enables us to lever empirical evidence for creolization from such sites into a theory of creolization. Archipelagic thinking recuperates islands as not isolated, but interconnected,[45] in configurations that the "coloniality of power" subordinates and erases through "continentalism."[46] It tracks connections, and a rationale for these connections, between not just islands, but island-like sites, and not only geographic entities, but acts of intellection and cultural production.[47] Archipelagic thinking converts these units from appearing fragmentary, isolated, or coincidentally recurrent into patterns that reverberate fractally

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[45] As proposed eloquently by Epeli Hau'Ofa, in "Our Sea of Islands," in *Peoples of the Pacific* (London: Routledge, 2017), 429–42; see also Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "'The Litany of Islands, The Rosary of Archipelagos': Caribbean and Pacific Archipelagraphy," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 32.1 (2001): 21–51.

[46] See Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* 15.2 (2000): 215–32. On the problems of continentalism, or the discursive privileging of landmasses, see Roberts and Stephens, *Archipelagic American Studies*, 9–10.

[47] Brian Russell Roberts, "What Is an Archipelago? On Bandung Praxis, Lingua Franca and Archipelagic Interlapping," in *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking*, eds. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Michelle Stephens (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 83–108, and Brian Russell Roberts, *Borderwaters: Amid the Archipelagic States of America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021). See also Bill Ashcroft, "Archipelago of Dreams: Utopianism in Caribbean Literature," *Textual Practice* 30.1 (2016): 89–112, and Ottmar Ette, "Le monde transarchipélien de la Caraïbe coloniale," *Caleidoscopios coloniales: Transferencias culturales en el Caribe del siglo XIX/Kaléidoscopes coloniaux: transferts culturels dans les Caraïbes au XXe siècle* (2010): 23–64.

through scalar levels.[48] As Ryuta Imafuku observes, this meaningful web generated through a shared awareness of not history but its lack, constitutes a new home—"a home called archipelago."[49]

Imafuku is a Japanese theorist whose work moved from creolization as linked to archipelagos to the archipelago as link between creolizations. In 1991, approximately two years before *Eloge de la créolité* was published, appeared his own *Kureoru-shugi* (*A Manifesto of Creolism*).[50] This work distilled his experiences of fieldwork in Latin America and reading of Caribbean authors who took his "imagination to the creole seas," from which emerged eventually a "vision of archipelago" as articulated in his magnum opus of 2008, *Gunto-Sekai Ron* (*The Archipelago-World*).[51] Imafuku's "vision of archipelago" is a space-time splintering conducted from "underwater, anti-continental perspectives." It melds "ana-chronic (non-chronological/nonlinear) and trans-geographic networks of islands and oceans" to delineate "a concrete arena of social production in which the process of the world's continuous transformation shows its own predicament and hope." This is a journey from creole toward archipelago. "Departing from the culturally hybrid delta of Mississippi, Louisiana, I sailed through the creole voices of the Caribbean islands, mythical storytelling of the Pacific islands and coral atolls, the dialect and pidginized poetics of the East Asian archipelagos and Malay archipelagos, up to the spiritually haunted voices in a barren coast of Gaelic Ireland." Imafuku's "long voyage in the midst of 'unpacific' oceans" dredges up his Japanese, Pacific, identity as a divining rod for sensing archipelagic connections between differently creolized subjectivities.

Creolizing Archipelagos and Postcolonial Memory

Opening his book on postcolonial Accra with a discussion of the Tabon, the city's Afro-Brazilian community, and their relationship with the Ga ethnic group, Ato Quayson suggests, "If we learn anything from the Tabon for our understanding of Accra, it is that they represent a mode of cultural hybridity that is easy to bypass due to their degree of apparent ethnic assimilation into Ga culture."[52] What if Quayson had described the Tabon as representing, instead, a mode of creolization? For one, the divergence between their Lusophone heritage, memorialized

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[48] On the fractal patterns of archipelagos, see Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), and Ette, *Writing-Between-Worlds*."

[49] Ryuta Imafuku, "Somos os naufragos" ("We are Castaways"): Unpublished transcript of lecture in Portuguese delivered at Universidad de São Paulo, May 3, 2020; translations from the Portuguese are mine, cross-checked in some cases against Imafuku's. I am grateful to Professor Imafuku for making this material available to me. Quotes in the next paragraph are also from this lecture.

[50] Ryuta Imafuku, *Kureoru-shugi* (*The Heterology of Culture: A Manifesto of Creolism*) (Tokyo: Seido-sha, 1991; definitive edition, Tokyo: Suisei-sha, 2017); For more on Imafuku, see Dennitza Gabrakova, *The Unnamable Archipelago: Wounds of the Postcolonial in Postwar Japanese Literature and Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2018). On creolization and/in Japan, see Michaël F. Ferrier, "Creole Japan; or, The Vagaries of Creolization," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 14.3 (2010): 33–44.

[51] Ryuta Imafuku, *Gunto-Sekai Ron* (*Archipelago-World*) (Tokyo: Suisei-sha, 2017[2008]).

[52] Ato Quayson, Oxford Street, *Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 62.

in the very name *tabon* (derived from the Portuguese greeting, "esta bom?") and their relationship with Gold Coast Dutch brokers,[53] would be explicated through the model of creolization as a swirled matrix. The historic congruence between linguistic creolization evident in "tabon" and cultural creolization through the Afro-Atlantic conjuncture would provide a template to rethink Ga identity as a similar product of creolizing under the "shadows of the different European forts and castles on the coast."[54]

   An archipelagic twist would further link Accra's fortified past to creolizing enclaves in an arc from Senegal to the Ivory Coast, and to its Indian Ocean counterparts, for example, on India's Coromandel and Malabar coasts. Our understanding of postcolonial Accra, what it remembers and what it forgets, and why, would be inevitably altered.[55] Creolizing archipelagos is a perspective that can transform coincidences into meaningful connections by activating memory: for instance, Haiti, long a difficult outlier within postcolonial discourse,[56] becomes integrated into an archipelagic frame by the appearance of a new biography of Toussaint Louverture by a scholar of Mauritian heritage.[57] Not only does Sudhir Hazareesingh's biography repeatedly remind us of Louverture's "creole republicanism,"[58] this reinstating of creoleness within the Haitian revolution alerts Hazareesingh's readers that Mauritius, too, has a creole language and creole history:[59] the fact that is it not the "same" as Haiti's is exactly the point where difference and similarity strike against each other to generate a flash of solidarity through mutual recognition.

   The archipelagic twist to the creolizing turn reminds us that postcoloniality did incorporate a project of remembering differently.[60] Archipelagic memory tracks intersecting vectors of creolization to reveal marginal(ized) outliers to postcolonial grand narratives as linked through a resistive rationale, a performance of repair. Reading for these linkages we can ask: When and why do creolizing archipelagos fragment into isolated islands? Under what conditions can their archipelagicity be restored, and to what ends? To search for answers is not to deny the fragmented presence of creolization in the postcolonial present;

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[53] Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra*, 47.

[54] Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra*, 39. See also Berlin, "From Creole to African."

[55] I have conducted a similar maneuver for another Ghanaian coastal enclave; see Kabir, "Elmina as Postcolonial Space."

[56] See Charles Forsdick, "Situating Haiti: On Some Early Nineteenth-Century Representations of Toussaint Louverture," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 10.1–2 (2007): 17–34.

[57] Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin United Kingdom, 2020).

[58] See the review by Nick Nesbitt, "Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture. By Sudhir Hazareesingh," *French Studies* 176 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/knac175.

[59] Thus Adolf Alzuphar, "What Should I Do with Such a Man? *On Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture*," *LA Review of Books*, November 26, 2020, begins his review by calling Hazareesingh a "fellow Creole" of Toussaint's. See https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/what-should-i-do-with-such-a-man-on-black-spartacus-the-epic-life-of-toussaint-louverture/.

[60] See in this context, the archipelagic memory conference organized at The University of Mauritius in August 2022, https://archipelagicmemory.wordpress.com; and Fabienne Viala, "Towards an Archipelagic Memory," in *The Post-Columbus Syndrome: Identities, Cultural Nationalism, and Commemorations in the Caribbean* (New York: Springer, 2014), 229–33.

rather, it is to generate an "archipelago of fragments" that places sea, coastline, island, and heartland in non-hierarchical relation.[61] To reactivate the memory of creolization is to act differently, through modes of coexistence alternative to majoritarian hegemonies of territorialization, continentalization, and bounded-ness that flourish in the contemporary moment. To read through creolizing archipelagos, likewise, is to open out to new interdisciplinary, transregional, and transoceanic conversations. It is a hermeneutic key to a Glissantian memory of the future.

Author biography. Ananya Jahanara Kabir is a professor of English literature at King's College London. She the author or coeditor of *Dance and Decolonization in Africa*, *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia*, *Territory of Desire: Representing the Valley of Kashmir*, *Debating the Afropolitan*, and *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*.

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[61] See Kabir, "Creole Indias, Creolizing Pondicherry."