

Re-rooting/routing the Black Experience in Édouard Glissant's Poetics: An "in-between" Perspective

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Article abstract

In his historical poetics, Édouard Glissant highlights the preponderant role played by the stripped migrant in his search for origins from Africa to the Caribbean. In so doing, he praises the latter's endeavors throughout the adoption and adaptation to his new surroundings, the new world. In this article, the analysis is on the re-presentation of the past lived by the stripped migrant before, during, and after the moment of entanglement, when he started forming a rhizome-identity in comparison and contrast to the single-root identity perpetuated by the Békés. Such an approach brings to the fore the theoretical notion of detour developed by Glissant to defy and redefine the History or rather histories of the Caribbean archipelago that have been purposefully hidden by the "fictionneurs de l'Histoire" [History fiction writers], which makes him an atypical historian who gives a renewed version of the Afro-Caribbean tradition.

Re-rooting/routing the Black Experience in Édouard Glissant's Poetics: An "in-between" Perspective

"It ain't where you're from. It's where you are at."

Mamadou Moustapha Ly

Since the theorization of his breakthrough poetics and politics of *Antillanité*,¹ Édouard Glissant has been hailed by many a critic such as Michael Dash, Celia Britton, Shireen Lewis, Françoise Lionnet, and Sam Coombes as a canonical revolutionary figure not only in Francophone Caribbean literary studies but also in Diaspora, Empire and Postcolonial studies in general. Reassessing the Black Experience across the Atlantic, *Antillanité* is a reaffirmation of a renewed and new identity that is anchored within the realms of the Caribbean archipelago, the main characteristics of which are "impermanence, instability and hybridity" well and fully developed in *Le discours antillais*² (1981) [Caribbean Discourse].

To better comprehend *Antillanité*, it is crucial to examine Glissant's poetical works in comparison and contrast to those by his predecessors (Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas) and successors (Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau), the respective proponents of Négritude and *Créolité* [Creoleness], the other two principal paradigms of Francophone Caribbean thought. This methodological approach in the understanding of *Antillanité* defined by Shirleen Lewis as "a bridge that leads from Négritude to Créolité" (72) is all the more fundamental because it gives a comprehensive view of Francophone Caribbean Studies as a whole.

Over the course of my analysis of the Black experience in Glissant's poetics, I will cross-reference the works by the latter to demonstrate how and why he stands out as an "in-between" writer and theorist, whose poetics reconciles both discourses, paving thus a "new way" that establishes dialogues not only between Africa and the Caribbean but also Europe and other regions in a "*Tout-monde*," which is associable to Homi Bhabha's "Third Space," a contact zone of interdependence that favors a form of "cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 5).

In this article, I will analyze the development of the Neo-America inhabitant whom Glissant renames the *migrant-nu*³ before, during, and after his "*point d'intrication*,"⁴ which is the most decisive landmark in Caribbean History or histories. In the pre-entanglement phase, I will focus on Glissant's reimagination of Black histories in the Caribbean that are centered on the narrative of the dispossession of the *migrant-nu* and then on how and where he retraces the latter's origins. In the entanglement phase, I will

1 Translated by Michael Dash as Caribbeaness in his seminal work entitled *Édouard Glissant* (1995).

2 Translations followed by page references are quoted from the published translations listed in the Works Cited unless otherwise noted. Translations of works with no published translation listed in the Works Cited are my own.

3 Stripped migrant. Glissant opposes the *migrant-nu* to the *migrant-armé* [armed migrant] from Euro-America and the migrant fondateur/familial [founding/domestic migrant] from Meso-America. He defines the *migrant-nu* as "L'Africain traité... [qui] ne pouvait emporter ses outils, les images de ses dieux, ses instruments usuels, ni donner de ses nouvelles à des voisins, ni espérer faire venir les siens, ni reconstruire au lieu de la déportation son ancienne famille" (*Le discours antillais* 66). [The enslaved African ...[who] could not bring his tools, the images of his gods, his daily implements, nor could he send news to his neighbors, or hope to bring his family over, or reconstitute his former family in the place of deportation] (*Caribbean Discourse* 50).

4 The moment of entanglement.

examine how the *migrant-nu* reconstitutes and recovers his African legacy and Glissant's notion of *détour* as opposed to that of *retour* proposed by the Negritude bards. In the final post-entanglement phase, I will analyze how the Black experience survives in the special space of the "*Tout-monde*" with a particular focus on Glissant's and Chamoiseau's exemplary evaluation of the election of Barack Obama as the first Black president in the United States, a victory they see as a "solution à des impossibles ethniques, raciaux et sociaux" (20)⁴ in *L'intraversable beauté du monde: Adresse à Barack Obama* [The Intractable Beauty of the World: an Address to Barack Obama]. Such an outlining perspective is all the more revealing since it is in phase with Glissant's trajectory as a writer and theorist, whose oeuvre moves logically from the "Je" [I] in his earlier works such as *Soleil de la conscience* (1956) [The Sun of Consciousness], *La Lézarde* (1958) [The Ripening], the "Nous" [We] in *Malemort* (1975), and finally "le Tout" [the All] in *Poétique de la Relation* (1990) [Poetics of Relation] and in the *Traité du Tout-monde* (1997) [Treatise on the Tout-Monde], as highlighted by his translator and critic, Michael Dash, in *Édouard Glissant*.

Before specifically analyzing Glissant's reexamination of the Black experience in the Caribbean in the three aforementioned main phases namely the pre-entanglement, the entanglement and the post-entanglement moments, it is worth revisiting the "Afro-Caribbean tradition" in foundational disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. In *Refashioning Futures* (1999), David Scott distinguishes two main directions in the articulation of the (re)presence of Africa and slavery in the Americas: the verificationist/essentialist and the anti-essentialist approaches. While the former defends that the African traces are indelible, the latter argues that the "presence of Africa in the Caribbean is too attenuated to be discernible" (109). Even though Scott's argumentative delimitation principally focuses on Anglophone Caribbean studies, it is indeed applicable to a certain extent to Francophone Caribbean literary thought, as the different parts under study will demonstrate. Situating Glissant in these two main approaches articulated by Scott at the opening lines of the article is important to the understanding of his "in-between stance" in the classical movements mentioned in the introduction of the article. Glissant is in line with both positions not without demarcating himself from them in the pre-entanglement and the entanglement moments through the development of the *migrant-nu*'s journey.

In the reassessment of the "Afro-Caribbean tradition" in his oeuvre, Glissant adopts and adapts the role of a historian in his rebuilding of a narrative of origins that explicitly unearths the realities faced by the *migrant-nu* in his Caribbean archipelago, a place wherein he builds a strong complicity with his new surroundings (Cailler, 117). In a round table organized by Jacques Chevrier, which features Patrick Chamoiseau, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Wole Soyinka, and Glissant himself on "De L'Esclavage au Tout-Monde," [From Slavery to Tout-Monde], Glissant highlights the permanent and pertinent mission of the writer in general and the Black writer in particular: "Je rappelle qu'un écrivain est quelqu'un qui extrait sa parole d'un terreau, qui est peut-être le terreau du passé, qui est le terreau à venir, qui est peut-être la parole d'un Dieu qu'il a écouté, qui est la voix d'un peuple qu'il a écouté" (5).⁵ In the rewriting of the histories of the *migrant-nu*, he focuses on the journey and the lived experiences of the latter by debunking the Colonial History that simplistically reduces the Martinican histories in an enumerative and linear way. Instead, he questions the very existence or rather preponderance of History in Martinique and by extension in the entire Caribbean. Such a

4 Solution to ethnical, racial, and social impossibilities.

5 I remind everybody that a writer is someone who extracts his word from compost, which may be the compost of the past, that of the future, which is perhaps the word of a God to whom he listened, which is the voice of the people to which he listened.

stance echoes Derek Walcott's in *The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?*: "In the Caribbean, history is irrelevant not because it is not created, or because it was sordid but because it has never mattered, what mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention" (259). Glissant's instance of the loss of history through the notion of dispossession showcases the symbolical image of the *migrant-nu*, a portrait that resembles to some extent to the one painted by the Negritude pioneers in their discourse about the hardships undergone by the Blacks across the Atlantic fiercely denounced by Césaire in his well-known *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950) [Discourse on Colonialism] with this focal equation "*colonisation=chosification*."⁶

While Glissant agrees with his predecessors on the treatment and the resulting effects of slavery and colonization on the *migrant-nu*, it is important to note that he and his successors, the Creolists do not subscribe to the Negritude narrative of origins that fully places Africa at the center to the detriment of the archipelago as obviously portrayed in Césaire's collection of poems on Africa and the slave trade and Joseph Zobel's *La Rue-Cases-Nègres* (1950) [Black Shack Alley]. In the former's *Ferments* (1960) [Iron Chains], Africa is praised and elevated as the mother of the archipelago:

Je vois l'Afrique multiple et une	I can see Africa multiple and one
Verticale dans la tumultueuse péripétie	Vertical in the turbulent adventure
Et je redis : Hoo mère !	And I say again: Oh mum
Et je lève ma force	And I lift my strength
Inclinant ma face	Bowing my face
Oh ma terre !	Oh motherland!

Likewise, in the latter's *bildungsroman*, Africa is the place of origins *par excellence*, thus that of return, recourse and repulse. In the novel, which relates the hard lives of the Blacks in the Plantations in 1930 Martinique, Zobel weaves a telling narrative, which uses an homodiegetic narrator José Hassam in his daily interactions with one of his round characters, Médouze, the symbol of Africa, from the beginning to the end. Performing the central role of the *conteur* [storyteller], he revives and reconnects José with his distant yet indistinct African sphere during their nocturnal *timtims* (riddles). Despite his young age, José becomes gradually immersed in African mythology as demonstrated after the death of his "Black Christ," when he convincingly immersed himself in the traditional belief that teaches that "the dead are not dead." While almost everybody else in the neighborhood believe in the death of Médouze, José imaginatively transports him to the real native land of his ancestors, the "paradise lost."

This narrative of origins that envisions displacing realistically or imaginatively the Caribbean to Africa has been under scrutiny and questioning by the post-Negritude writers and theorists such as Glissant and mainly Confant, who has devoted an entire book on the philosophy of origins developed by one of the Negritude pioneers, *Aimé Césaire ou une traversée paradoxale du siècle* [Aimé Césaire or a Paradoxical Journey through the Century]. In fact, while paying tribute to Césaire for his preponderant role in the shaping of Caribbean fiction and his combat for the emergence of an anti-colonial consciousness, Glissant and the Creolists demystify the Negritude discourse of origins because of its principal "vision of exteriority," which puts the Caribbean question at a peripheral stance.

Further, Confant demonstrates how Césaire creates a tension between the African Negro and the Caribbean Negro, the former as a "*bourreau*" [executioner] and the latter as a "VICTIME ABSOLUE" (134) [ABSOLUTE VICTIM], creating therefore a sort of

6 Colonization=thingification.

“complexe de déficit d’africanité.”⁷ Confiant’s refutation of such a narrative of origins to Africa stems also from his personal view on slavery. In the same chapter, “Le ressourcement dans l’Afrique-mère” [“Deep-rootedness in Mother-Africa”], Confiant accuses the Original Negro of his complicity in the enslavement and victimization of the New Negro, whom he defends in the following terms: “Il est, martelons-le, la victime absolue. Il n’est nullement un quelconque enfant prodigue, parti de son propre gré à la découverte du vaste monde. Il est à la fois le razzia (par l’Européen) et le mal défendu/vendu (par l’Africain) (135).⁸

Dissimilarly, Glissant’s narrative of origins places itself in-between the two discourses of recognition and denial of the Africanity of the Caribbean without indulging in the debate over the complicity of the African Negro underscored by Confiant. In other words, he accommodates or reconciles both discourses within the Caribbean soil by resituating the genesis of the *migrant-nu* within the archipelagic realms: “... [L]a véritable Genèse des peuples des Caraïbes, c’est le ventre du bateau négrier et c’est l’antre de la plantation” (*Introduction* 35).⁹ Unlike his predecessors, whose preoccupation in highlighting the two spaces (the boat and the plantation) is to revivify the hard experiences of the Blacks during the Atlantic crossing, Glissant intends to resuscitate the Caribbean people and re-anchor their histories in the archipelago as elucidated by the telling words “*ventre*” [belly] and “*antre*” [lair]. This new anchorage of the origins within the new environment enables the author to make the narrative of origins less exclusive and more meaningful and inclusive all the more since it is in better accordance with the actual situation of the Caribbean as the epigraph of this essay from one of the borrowed titles of Paul Gilroy’s articles suggests.

Besides, Glissant’s displacement of Césaire’s narrative of origins from Africa to the Caribbean does not negate dialogues between the dwellers of both spheres. It is also likely to erase the “complex of African deficiency” of the *migrant-nu* in his move from the pre-entanglement era to the crucial moment of entanglement from the deep waters of the Caribbean Sea, which is not just a sea of transits but that of encounters. To Glissant, the very moment of entanglement started at the sea as he indicated in the epigraph of *Poetics of Relation* derived from Walcott’s “Sea is History.” The sea, “[the] zone of interrelationship and polyphony” (Dash 36), plays a crucial role in Glissant’s poetics because it is the transitional phase that carries the solitary *être* [being], who becomes gradually an *étant*¹⁰ [be-ing] in solidarity and active member in the constitution or rather reconstitution of the Caribbean society, the main focus of the second part of this article.

Before dealing with the collective work of reconstitution of the diverse African traces by the *migrant-nu* in this central moment of entanglement in the rediscovery of Caribbean histories, it is worth pausing and questioning how Glissant really views and evaluates the traumatic moments of Caribbean past. Unlike Césaire whose *Discourse on Colonialism* is but an uncompromising indictment of Caribbean imposed past, Glissant acknowledges in a rather subtle and nuanced way that colonialism and slavery have brought about some unpredictable “potential.” In one of his earliest articles entitled “Le Romancier noir et son peuple” [“The Black Novelist and his People”], Glissant denounces the selective approach in the writings of his predecessors in portraying the Caribbean past: “Il semble qu’un roman qui se donne pour révéler une réalité doit aborder

7 Complex of African deficiency.

8 He is, let’s say it, the absolute victim. He is not at all a prodigal son, who has left willingly to the discovery of the world. He is the raided by (the European), and the undefended/the sold (by the African).

9 [T]he real Genesis of the Caribbean people, is the belly of the slave ship, and the center of the plantation.

10 *Étant* is the gerund form of the verb *être* [to be]. Both *être* and *étant* are normally translated as being. But to demonstrate the progressive changing nature of the being, Glissant uses the gerund form. To make a difference between these two forms, I translate *étant* as be-ing with a dash to highlight the progressive nature of the being.

cette réalité de tous les côtés à la fois, en ce qu'elle a de positif et de négatif" (29).¹¹ Further on, in the very chapter in *Le discours antillais* [Caribbean Discourse] where he elaborates on the consequences of the dispossession of the *migrant-nu* after the Atlantic crossing, he mentions that the slave trade has favored "...pas seulement agonie et perdition mais l'occasion aussi d'affirmer un ensemble estimable de propriétés. Celle par exemple de fréquenter 'les valeurs' non pas comme absolu de référence mais comme des modes agissants d'une Relation. Le renouvellement aux pures valeurs d'origine ouvre sur un sens inédit de la mise en rapports." (29-30)¹² (16). Glissant views the imposed past as a sort of "*mal générateur*" [generative evil] because it opens new vistas with the emergence of composite/rhizomatic cultures to the detriment of atavistic/single-rooted cultures of Europe and Africa.

It becomes quite obvious that, soon after the "recovery" from the traumatic moment of pre-entanglement of dispossession, the *migrant-nu* gradually rehabilitates and reconstitutes the African traces in his entrepreneurial formation of new composite cultures. Glissant analytically portrays this rebirth through the notion of trace not without enumerating an umbrella of elements, which are repossessed via the power of orality, a fundamentally expressive tool inherited from Africa:

La trace court entre les bois de la mémoire et les boucans du monde nouveau... La musique est une trace qui se dépasse, le jazz, la biguine, le reggae, la salsa, [...] la langue créole est une trace qui a jazzé dans les mots français (sic). La trace vous libère quand on vous tient par force sur le grand chemin pavé, goudronné. (*Tout-monde* 238)

Trace runs between the woods of the memory and the din of the new world... Music is a trace possible to be exceeded, jazz, beguine, reggae, salsa, [...] Creole language is a trace, which has jazzed in the French words. Trace frees you when you are forced on your large paved and tarred route.

Among all these aforementioned traces of the African heritage, language stands out as one of the most indelible marks in the Caribbean context, the *zone par excellence* of Creole language, foregrounded by Édouard Glissant himself before its relay to the leading figures of *Créolité*, who use it as the leitmotiv of their discursive paradigm in both of its phases, namely the Creolophone *Créolité* and the Francophone *Créolité*.

The centrality of the language question in Glissant's oeuvre is first and foremost a form of recognition and tribute to the efforts made by the *migrant-nu* in his successful attempt to surpass his "masters" in an enterprise of inventing a relational and uniting language: "Il était absolument imprévisible qu'une société ait pu produire une langue à partir d'éléments hétérogènes" (*Introduction* 20).¹³ The Creole language, which was labelled "français corrompu" [corrupt French] by the white masters, is a combination of all the dialects of non-uniformized French such as Norman, Poitvin, and Picard and a great deal of African languages such as Yoruba, Wolof, Akan etc.

Unlike his successors such as Confiant, who started his career in Creole during the period of the Creolophone *Créolité*, and Césaire who stated in an interview with Jacqueline Leiner in 1978 "Pour moi, l'écriture est liée au français, et pas au créole," Glissant opts for an "in-between" mode of expression in both his literary and theoretical production. In *Poétique de la Relation* [Poetics of Relation] for example, he resorts to

11 It seems that a novel that aims at revealing a reality must analyze this reality from all its angles, in its positive and negative aspects.

12 ...not just distress and loss but also a considerable set of possibilities. For instance, the possibility of dealing with "values" no longer in absolute terms but as active agents of synthesis. The abandonment of pure original values allows for an unprecedented potential for contact.

13 It was absolutely unpredictable that in two centuries, an enslaved community could have managed to create a language out of heterogeneous elements.

both languages by merging both “la syntaxe écrite” [written syntax] and “la rythmique parlée” [spoken rhythm] in an oral fashion from some chapters to the others.

However, it is important to note that Glissant does not promote or impose the Creole as the exclusive language of the Caribbean. Such an attitude would be at variance with his politics and poetics of language that promotes a sort of *ouverture* to the world, which he conceptualizes as “*Tout-monde*.”¹⁴ Instead, he revivifies the Creole language as a form of renaissance of the Black experience in the Caribbean and also as a grounding motive of his poetics and politics. In this regard, Glissant demarcates himself from the Creolists, whose prime goal is to impose the Creole language in the Caribbean archipelago. In the third part of *Poétique de la Relation* [Poetics of Relation], Glissant exposes quite explicitly the main differences between his vision and the Creolists’: “Les créolisations introduisent à la Relation, mais ce n’est pas pour universaliser, la ‘créolité,’ dans son principe régresserait vers des négritudes, des francités, des latinités, toutes généralisantes – plus ou moins innocemment” (103) [“Creolizations bring into Relation but not to universalize; the principles of Creoleness regress toward negritudes, ideas of Frenchness, of Latinness, all generalizing concepts more or less innocently” (89)]. The emphasis on the process of creolization to the detriment of its results in Glissant’s poetics of Relation is all the more crucial as it stands out against the general and generalizing perspectives traced by his predecessors, which his successors and himself condemn.

Glissant’s stance on retracing the past is far from being a nostalgic enterprise. The past is not just a means of pondering over the current situation but a means of projecting in the future as evidently demonstrated in the last part of *Le discours antillais*, where he elaborates on what he calls “Caribbean Future” by inviting the archipelago dwellers to go beyond a range of histories that are solely interested in articulating “an ability to survive,” the main preoccupations of the Negritude proponents and the Creolists, whose visions are focused more on the past/present than on the future. That is why Glissant’s special definition of the writer as a historian is all the more revealing as he refutes the pastness of the past while refusing to be its prisoner like some of his predecessors and the current reparation political activists, who claim the wrongdoings of slavery and colonization as tools for debt relief in their political “deals” with the international community. Glissant’s perspective echoes well Fanon in the last part of *Peau noire, masques blancs* [Black Skin, White Masks]: “Je ne suis pas prisonnier de l’Histoire. Je ne dois pas y chercher le sens de ma destinée. Je dois me rappeler à tout instant que le véritable *saut* consiste à introduire l’invention dans l’existence.” (223)¹⁵. The invention into existence within the archipelago comes true through a strategic *detour* which is definable not as a return to the place of origins but to the fundamental moment of entanglement, which favors the nascence of new identities originating from a panoply of cultures.

As the moment of entanglement happens within the Caribbean archipelago, it is plausible to analyze the dis/similarities between Glissant’s approach and that of the Creolists in the description and definition of the realities of the Caribbean in its entirety. In the prologue of *Éloge de la Créolité* [In Praise of Creoleness], Bernabé, Confiant and Chamoiseau deny any specific classification into the different peoples of the Caribbean (Europeans, Africans, Asians) and then declare a Creole identity. And, after this proclamation or reclamation of identity, they elaborate on their notion of a “*vision intérieure*” [interior vision] through a subtle denunciative exposition of the limitations of

14 *Tout-monde* or *kaytoun moun* in Creole is “la maison [qui] appartient à tous et [dont] l’équilibre passe par l’équilibre de tous” (*Quand les murs tombent* 7) [the house [that] belongs to all and [whose] stability rests on the stability of all]. [When the Walls Fall].

15 I am not a prisoner of History. I should not seek there for a meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence. (Trans. Markmann 229)

the preexisting theories of identity, including Glissant's. They envision their poetics in the following terms: "Elles [leurs paroles] ne s'adressent pas aux seuls écrivains, mais à tout concepteur de notre espace... dans quelque discipline que ce soit, en quête douloureuse d'une pensée plus fertile, d'une expression plus juste, d'une esthétique plus vraie" (13).¹⁶

Even though the Creolists do not relate in detail the historical process of creolization of the Caribbean, they are in line with Glissant on the rhizomatic structure of the narrative of origins of the Caribbean since they defend the view that the History of the Caribbean is actually "une tresse d'histoires" (26) [a braid of histories]. In other words, Glissant and his successors celebrate the diversity of the Caribbean society, which is brought into being by many shared histories. However, Glissant refrains from the Creolists' project of reducing or melting these diverse communities into a common Creole denomination as it closes the open structure proposed by Glissant in his defense and illustration of the rhizome over the arborescence, terms borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Mille Plateaux* (1980) [A Thousand Plateaus].

In both Glissant's oeuvre and in *Éloge de la Créolité*, there is indeed an allusive and expressive representation of the Caribbean as the mirror of the world without any imposition of the archipelago model. Glissant, in particular, expresses a sort of an "urgency of now," when multiculturalism¹⁷ leaves the way to creolization in the *Tout-monde*, wherein Blacks and all other peoples are invited to participate. In other words, his relational scope is all the wider because it expands not just to the Caribbean, the Americas but to the world in its totality, which he defends in *Traité du Tout-monde* [Treatise on the Tout-Monde] as: "...notre univers tel qu'il change et perdure en échangeant en même temps, la "vision" que nous en avons. La totalité-monde dans sa diversité physique et dans les représentations qu'elle nous inspire" (176).¹⁸

In order to comprehend the development of Glissant's *Tout-monde* and his "in-between" perspective in comparison and contrast to/with the theories developed within the Caribbean archipelago and outside in the phases of pre-entanglement and entanglement, which have been the focus of our analysis so far, it is important to highlight the preponderant role of Glissant's *monde* [the world] in his poetics as well as his politics vis-à-vis the globe in its complexity. In "Solitaire et Solidaire: Entretien avec Édouard Glissant" in the manifesto *Pour une littérature-monde* [Solitary and in Solidarity: Interview with Édouard Glissant] in [For *une littérature-monde*], Glissant demonstrates at the very outset how the "*monde*" [the world] is the focal and driving force of his oeuvre as a whole. Despite his ambition to re-place the "marginalized people" at the center of his vision, he demonstrates how the world as a *tout* is his prime reference or even reverence: "En matière de politique aussi, ma référence la plus haute était aussi le monde, non pas conçu comme l'internationale des prolétaires, mais comme lieu de rencontres, de choc des cultures, des humanités" (77).¹⁹ As suggested in the quotation, Glissant recreates an accommodating special space, a sort of "contact zone," where the colonizer and the colonized, the self and the other meet. Like Bhabha, whom I announced in the introduction, Glissant questions the classical postcolonial reactionary approach that turns the colonized into an "envious man" to use Fanon's appellation in *Les*

16 They (their words) are not solely addressed to the writers, but to any spatial theorist, in active search for a more fertile thought, a more just expression, a truer aesthetics.

17 Juxtaposition and superposition of cultures.

18 ... our universe as it changes and endures in exchanging at the same time, the vision we have of it. The *totalité-monde* in its physical diversity and in the representations that it inspires in/for us.

19 Likewise, in politics, my highest reference was also the world, not conceived as the International of workers, but as a place of encounters, of culture shocks, of humanities.

*damnés de la terre*²⁰ [The Wretched of the Earth], and moves the periphery to the center, a re-turn to the commencement. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha situates his “Third Space” in-between or rather beyond the pre-existing worlds resulting from the shared experiences of colonization:

It is significant that the productive aspects of this Third Space have a colonial or a postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory... may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of the cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture *hybridity*. (56)

Both Glissant and Bhabha warn against the dangers of the reproduction of any hegemonic and homogenous systematization model with its cult of nationhood in lieu of a form of “nation-ness.” The Glissantian in-between “nation” is thus not “...a fortress and landmass (the borders of which must be protected at all costs to maintain homogeneity within) but as fluid and open “one” that is receptive to change and exchange...” (Lionnet 1508). Therefore, Glissant’s space transports its “*étants*” (be-ings), whom he contrasts to the static or fix “*êtres*” [beings] not to a “in-between” space per se but “beyond” the already existing worlds regulated by systemic and systematic values of selfhood and self-sufficiency.

In order to live in this accommodating place, Glissant urges people in general and the descendants of the *migrant-nu* in particular to cultivate a sense of self-surpassing, an alternative that corroborates Fanon’s stance in his denunciation of slavery in the Black world in general and the Caribbean in particular. In *Peau noire, masques blancs* [Black Skin, White Masks], he urges colonizers and colonized to go “beyond” the enslavement of their respective superiority and inferiority through the denial of the existence of any “White burden” or any “Negro mission.” He challenges the victimized descendants of the *migrant-nu* more forcefully in the “new” endeavor, which necessitates a sense of self-surpassing towards the burdening past: “Je ne suis pas esclave de l’Esclavage qui déshumanisa mes pères” (224)²¹. In this regard, Fanon paves the way to Glissant’s *Tout-monde*, the *sine qua non* condition of entrance of which is a form of self-accountability in the quest for the other as commonly engraved in Caribbean belief system, which teaches that “l’autre est toujours à l’écoute.”²²

Glissant’s alternative response is dissimilar to that of the Negritude proponents. In the latter’s assessment of the Black experience, there is a vivid tension between the main components of the Caribbean society summed up by Fanon as the “négraille, the mulâtraille and the békaille” in his aforementioned book. In Zobel’s novel, Médouze relates to José the tensions between the Black and the Béké communities to explain his plight in the “damned country” despite the abolition of slavery. One of the most telling circumstances in the novel is one of the church scenes, where the young yet mature José wonders why the cross is not black, which highlights the tense climate that prevails in *Rue Cases Nègres* [Black Shack Alley].

As for the Creolists, the relationship self/other is one of the driving forces in their manifesto. They even find their concept to be more welcoming than Glissant’s as they narrow his field of action into the Americas by considering his concept of *Antillanité* “une province de l’Américanité à l’instar de la Canadienité ou de l’Argentinité” (32).²³ They develop a concept of “*double solidarité*” [double solidarity], which consists of

20 See *Les damnés de la terre* (5) [The Wretched of the Earth 32] in which he describes the colonized man as an “envious man,” who dreams of sitting at the master’s table, laying on his bed and if possible, sleeping with the master’s wife.

21 I am not the slave of the Slavery that dehumanizes my ancestors. (Trans. Markmann 230)

22 The other is always listening.

23 A province of Americanness like Canadianity or Argentinity.

“geopolitical solidarity” within the Caribbean archipelago and “Creole solidarity” with all the Creoles around the globe. However, I argue that the Creolist approach is exclusive because the larger part of Africa is not present in their “solidarity.” They only include the island dwellers of Africa such as Cape Verde, Mauritius and Seychelles in their conceptual diagram (33).

Compared to the worlds defined by the Negritude proponents and the Creolists, it is obvious that Glissant’s *Tout-monde* creates a larger dialogue between the self and the other in the cohabitation within the spatial sphere. In his one of his earliest theoretical works, *L’Intention poétique* [The Poetic Intention], he demonstrates the interdependence of this pair “L’Autre est en moi, parce que je suis moi. De même, le ‘Je’ périt, donc l’Autre est absent.” (95)²⁴ With Glissant, the self is urged to foster an attitude free of racist orientation, a racist being “quelqu’un qui ne supporte pas le mélange.”²⁵ Therefore, the *étant* in the *Tout-monde* accomplishes the relational task through “negotiation” in lieu of “negation,” notions articulated by Bhabha in his determination of the rules and regulations governing the “liminal space,” which resembles in many ways Glissant’s *Tout-monde* as demonstrated earlier.

To have a more explicit comprehension of Glissant’s *Tout-monde*, it is worth analyzing the address to Barack Obama, *L’intraitable beauté du monde* [The Intractable Beauty of the World], not only because of the dis/similarities between the two parts of the Americas but because of the revival of the Black experience in the world in its totality as illustrated by the diverse reactions preceding and following the latter’s election. Glissant and Chamoiseau revisit the campaign tensions between the WASPs²⁶ and the Blacks, the African Americans, who both refuted Obama’s belonging to their respective groups because of his being neither “white enough” nor “black enough.” As for the post-elections reactions, Glissant and Chamoiseau ironically invade the European political arenas with the prevailing quest for a Negro to “hybridize” and make more visible their different circles that vary from the media to the different sectors of the administration: “Aujourd’hui, en France comme dans beaucoup d’autres pays favorisés, chacun cherche son Nègre... et bientôt les partis politiques exhiberont sans doute leurs oriflammes en ‘diversité’ sombre” (32).²⁷ Glissant’s and Chamoiseau’s reemphasis of the pre and post-campaign reactions of Obama from both main circles is a motive to re-place and confirm the latter’s victory in the imaginary yet realizable project of *Tout-monde*, wherein the dwellers are seen by others and see themselves as exclusive and inclusive beings, particular and general. Obama’s victory has therefore the unpredictable potential of moving the United States from an *État-nation* [nation State] to an *État-relation* [relation State] because it opens an umbrella of possibilities that enable the minorities or rather the minoritized constituencies in general to be more visible citizens.

The other crucial point that comforts Glissant and Chamoiseau in their assimilation of Obama’s victory to the fulfillment of their “dream” is the latter’s negotiation power, a fundamental criterion in the *Tout-monde*. In this respect, he warns against another form of predestined imperialism. “Les relations du monde avec les États-Unis sont compliquées, le plus souvent fondées sur des rapports de force. Barack Obama est élu Président, l’important n’est pas du tout que le monde en appréciera ce pays. L’important est que les États-Unis apprécieront mieux le monde” (*L’intraitable beauté du monde*

24 The Other is in me, because I am myself. Likewise, the “I” perishes; therefore, the Other is absent.

25 Someone who does not support *mélange*.

26 WASP: White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, a group that represents the majority of American constituents.

27 Today in France as well as in many developed countries, everybody is looking for their Negro... and soon the political parties will undoubtedly fly high their black “diversity” banner.

35).²⁸ Glissant's and Chamoiseau's remarks were somehow an exhortation of the President to keep his campaign promises, which consisted in opening up to the world with its different complexities by "talking to the allied friends as well as to the enemies."

Despite the authors' optimism for a better future in the United States and in the world in general with the advent of a great deal of unpredictable possibilities, it is plausible to affirm that Obama's example is but a unique case that is very unlikely to reproduce in what he calls the economically "favored countries" such as France with its recurrent dilemma as a nation "*une et indivisible*"²⁹ in its diversity. France has been struggling with the definition and implementation of its politics of immigration and integration vis-à-vis the postcolonial minorities from the Caribbean, Africa including the Maghreb, who are generally concentrated on the periphery of the nation in the ZEPs (Zones d'Éducation Prioritaire) [Zones of Prioritized Education]. This struggle between France and its postcolonial minorities has been more than prevailing during and after the Sarkozy administration. One of the most telling examples is Sarkozy's controversial speech in Dakar on July 26, 2007, in which he remarks in a condemnatory and condescending tone: "Le drame de l'Afrique, c'est que l'homme africain n'est pas assez entré dans l'histoire."³⁰ This reminder of the "burdening past" has triggered off reactionary responses from the Black world in general including his own Ambassador to UNESCO, Rama Yade, the French politician of Senegalese descent, who dissociated herself from some of the party's decisions.

In light of the current conditions in both the developed and the developing countries, it is possible to deduce that Glissant's vision has yet to materialize in people's consciousness and conceptualization of the world in general. However, since his poetics is craftily directed into the transformation of people in constant being and becoming, there are glimpses of hope for its fulfillment among the present and future generations as pinpointed by the Creolists in a rather critical fashion in their *Éloge de la Créolité* (23). In all, in his (re)imagination of the particular Black experience within the shared histories of the Caribbean archipelago through the eras and areas preceding and succeeding the important point of entanglement, Glissant has developed a crucial attitude that could be adapted and adopted not only by the descendants of the *migrant-nu* but also by all races in their permanent quests for identity. His visionary poetics, which invites people into an "imaginary homeland," a decentralized center far from the realms of (pre)existing approaches whether colonial or postcolonial, has the potential of opening up new stimulating vistas in this world, where the self is more and more in dire need of the other in building and sharing a "*lieu commun*," a "common place."

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28 The relations between the United States and the world are complicated, most frequently based on force. Barack Obama is elected President; the most important thing is not at all how the world will appreciate this country but how the United States will appreciate better the world.

29 one and indivisible.

30 The tragedy of Africa is that the African man has not sufficiently entered History.

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