



From Creolization to Relation

An interview with Patrick Chamoiseau



Olivia Sheringham from the International Migration Institute at the University of Oxford conducted this interview during a fieldwork visit to Martinique for the research project 'Diaspora and Creolization: Diverging, Converging'.

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Patrick Chamoiseau, born in 1953, is a Martinican writer, thinker, social worker and an important public figure in Martinique. His novels have received international acclaim, in particular his autobiographical work *Antan d'enfance*, which won the Caribbean Prix Carbet in 1990, and *Texaco* which won the Prix Goncourt in 1992. He is particularly well-known for his work with the Creolité movement, a group of scholars who sought to assert the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity - or 'Creoleness' - of the French Antilles. It was also a response to what they felt were the inadequacies of the Négritude movement, which placed more emphasis on the region's Black African identity. Together with the novelist Raphaël Confiant and the linguist Jean Bernabé, he wrote the *Eloge de la Creolité (In Praise of Creoleness)* which was published in 1989. It was both highly celebrated and strongly critiqued.

Despite having distanced himself somewhat from the Creolité movement, Chamoiseau remains a strong advocate for the promotion of Martinique's creole identity. He is also heavily influenced by his close friendship and intellectual collaboration with the Martinican writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant (who died in 2011) and in particular Glissant's concept of 'Relation', which refers to the interconnectedness and interdependence of the world and seeks to move beyond atavistic notions of identity. He is currently involved in a project, funded by the French Regional Council in Martinique (Conseil Régional) to promote the cultural, ecological and historical heritage of the former Martinican capital, St Pierre, and the region of Trois Îlets.

During the course of this interview, Chamoiseau comments on the evolution of the terms creole, creolization and more pertinently, Relation, and explains what he sees as their relevance to the world today. He also comments on his involvement in the project for the Regional Council which represents an opportunity to bring some of his theoretical work into a more practical application.



OS: So, just to begin with: in your view, how have the meanings of the terms creolization and creole changed?

PC: Creole, yes . . . in the beginning Creole meant something that was born in the Americas - because the problem arose very quickly with regard to making a distinction between those who came from the metropolis (metropole) and those who belonged to the space [of the Americas]. So, I think that in the beginning the first Europeans, the first European colonisers here in Martinique were called the inhabitants - meaning those who lived here - and then later on the word creole began to be used to describe the descendants of white colonisers. But very quickly, even if the word had become known for being attributed to the descendants of European colonisers, very quickly in the creole language the word began to be used to describe everything that was, in inverted commas 'acclimatised' to the place - born in the place, grown in the place. So we had creole dogs, creole pigs etc., which were distinguished from others. We had creole Negros (les nègres créoles), which were distinguished from the 'nègres bossales' - those who had just come off the ships - born in Africa. So we made a distinction, quickly like that.

The other element is that the defenders of the Creole language in the 1960s and 1970s - who defended the creole language and culture - used the term creolité to designate everything that had to do with the creole language. So when the term was used in the first place it was very much with regard to language. And even when Glissant uses it in his Discours Antillais [Caribbean Discourse], it seems to me (you'd need to check), when he says creolité and creolization, it's still very linked to the mechanical constitution of the creole language. Glissant says that the mechanical constitution of the creole language is an echo of the world - showing that the creole language is formed of a mosaic of multiple languages and lexical presences. So it resembles the process of creolization. And after that, when we wrote the Eloge de la Creolité, the word creolité is used in our text, but it reflects more Glissant's term 'relation' - relational phenomena.

So we depart from the strict relationship with the creole language and enter into the process of the massive interlinking of many people, many imaginaries, many languages etc. . . . so that's roughly the evolution of the term.

OS: In today's world, do you feel that the idea of creolité is perceived as having relevance for the everyday lives of Martinicans? Do you feel that it still refers to the Martinican reality?

PC: Yes, yes (laughs!) I mean . . . before the Eloge de la Creolité, people defined themselves by saying 'Nègre' or

'African' - so it was 'négritude' on the whole. And the term creole - it was more related to folklore, to traditional cultural forms. But now, the idea of creolité has had a wide success. Nowadays people have integrated [the term] - and perhaps that's our biggest victory - we use the word to refer to the fact that we're a composite people (un peuple composite). And that notion is widely spread throughout the population. 15-20 years ago, it wasn't . . . I mean the Eloge came out in 1986. Before it came out it wasn't so clear . . . Now it's clear: we are a mixture of lots of different origins. Even if there's still a strong 'négriste' current . . . but we have, all the same, accepted, on the whole, the idea that we are a composite population. And as such the word creole - is used. There are those who are against it, saying that the word only refers to white people. But that's not true, that's just nonsense, the word has evolved, it shouldn't be a problem.

OS: But I know that there's an organisation called 'Tous-Creoles' which seems to have ideas that are quite different to those expressed in the Eloge. Do you think that it has the potential to be quite an exclusive term rather than an inclusive one?

PC: Of course! Duvalier was a supporter of Négritude. He was the cruellest dictator in the Caribbean - he was a supporter of Négritude.

That doesn't mean that Négritude was the dictator's idea. But these people support negritude. The majority of African dictators are supporters (or were supporters) of Négritude. So the fact that people use the idea of creolité, or creole, for different political aims, that doesn't change anything. It doesn't change the fact that in the Eloge de la Creolité, the process that we described and the words that we use are valid. When it [creolité] is used, you have to look at the context. It's true that not everyone uses it with the same ideas, the same intentions, but that can't prevent the use of the term.

OS: And aside from you three, is there a political movement that defends this notion of creolité?

PC: Yes, or rather, MODEMAS, from St Anne, for a long time used the concept of creolité - we were quite close to Garcin Malsa [former leader of MODEMAS]- it was a popular movement and ecological one, which took on a creole identity . . . But in the last few years we have distanced ourselves, Confiant and myself, from Malsa, and I've noticed that the more négriste flows are coming back. Because the term was used by MODEMAS or Malsa, but Marie-Jeanne [leader of the independence movement in Martinique] - the 'independentistes' - from Rivière-Pilote never used the term. And it's they who contest the term, saying: 'we're not creoles, we're Martinican'. And they even say that 'we're not creole, it's the whites - the békés, it's not black people'. They're wrong because in the creole language, the word creole is applied to everything - dogs etc - as long as we're 'from the country' we're creole.

OS: So there's still a big debate about the

concept?

PC: No, I think that it's quite settled, it's settled on the whole. I think there are, there will always be dissent, sectarians . . . those who are in a more binary logic . . . Because the problem with the idea of creolization is that it introduces nuances and subtleties, it's no longer very simple. With Négritude it's quite clear: we have blacks and we have whites; we have the West, we have the non-West. It's quite binary. But with creolization - and more so the notion of Relation - we enter into certain complexities that are very difficult to live with for certain people. For example, we (Martinique) were born from colonisation. This means that within Martinican identity there is the presence of the coloniser. The coloniser is part of us, because whatever there was before the arrival of the colonisers - the Amerindians - were killed through genocide for the most part. There were a few survivors, so we were born in colonisation. We are not in the same situation as the Senegalese, or the Amerindians themselves, who can say that there is a time before colonisation. For us there isn't a time before colonisation. The composite creole populations were born in colonisation.

This complexity is very difficult for lots of people to get their heads around. They would rather enter into a binary logic: black/white full-stop. But recently, in anthropology, in ethnology, within university discourses everywhere, there are no longer these binary definitions, that's over. We no longer consider Caribbean populations as black populations. We will no longer say that jazz is a Black music: it's a creole music. All music from the Caribbean - from the Americas - is creole music, it's clear. But we'll have people who will support Négritude and we'll also have those who will remain White French as well. Even though those who are White French - who see themselves as French above anything else - are more likely to accept creolization, than those who position themselves in the radical political opposition, who try to make things binary.

OS: But that was another question that I had, with regard to the concept of diaspora, which one could say is in some ways the opposite of creolization. Would you say that there are still - for example Chinese migrants, or other ethnic communities - who are opposed to the concept of creole, who do not 'creolize', or who do not regard themselves as creole?

PC: No, the process of creolization refers to the widespread and brutal coming together of several anthropological groups - several languages, several phenotypes, several visions of the world, several. . . I don't know . . . cuisines, music - everything - who, in less than three centuries - three or four centuries - were forced to produce new things. And the results of these processes of creolization are 'creolités'. So in all the Americas we have generalised processes of creolization, which will give rise to singular 'creolités'. Martinican creolité is not the same as Cuban

creolité, which isn't the same as creolité in the Southern US, which itself is not the same as the creolité of Trinidad or Porto Rico. But all of them are formed from the same process of creolization. From there, what happens with creolization is that it's an unconscious process, which means that the people who found themselves there didn't say to themselves 'we're going to create a new culture, a new world or whatever'. They were exploited. And everyone was in exile. So everyone attached themselves to their lost roots. The white creoles saw themselves (and still do) as more or less European, and for a long time the descendants of African slaves tried to reconstruct the idea that they were Africans.

This means that even though we are still in this space of creolization, the fantasy of lost roots (or sources) means we have people who attempt to remain pure. So we have white racism that emerges, there are black people who stay amongst themselves. Then, since the Indian migration flows, some Indians will try to remain amongst themselves, the Syrians the same, the Chinese also; all of them try to remain in their little groups. Which means that they have the impression that they're maintaining their identity, but this is because the process of creolization is unconscious and invisible. So they transform without realising that they are transforming. For example, a béké - a Martinican béké - has the feeling that he is very different from us, from a 'Black Martinican', but when he finds himself with a white person who is from France, he sees that he is very different from a white person from France. And lots of Martinicans in the 1950s and 1960s, like Maryse Condé for example, said 'I'm African', and went to Africa. And when they arrived in Africa they saw the big gap between us and Africans - even if there is some solidarity.

So the process of creolization is not a conscious, voluntary, or resolute one. It occurs without those who are living it being aware of it. Because those who are living it live in these fantasies of purity, linked to former conceptions of identity. And even more so because the process of creolization occurs in the context of domination and racism. Racism exists - so from that all mixtures are not well thought-of - meaning the idea of bastardisation/métissage was very badly thought of in colonial, American spaces. So for that reason métissage has never been celebrated - the métis was seen as being a mixture of the defects of all the races. You can see in all the literature from that time that there's a contempt for the hybrid (métis) and bastardisation.

So people have seen themselves in that way. They have always thought that if they weren't purely African or purely something, then they didn't exist. But when we look at the process of cultural mixture - the creation of modifications in human reality - we can see that they have come about almost always without people knowing. The work that we do is to raise awareness of the phenomena that we must reveal to human actors. And that's beginning to happen.

OS: In what ways has that begun to happen?

PC: I mean that people, on the whole, are increasingly aware that they are composite. That today you cannot say to a Martinican: 'you are an African'. People have understood that the traditional markers of identity no longer work with creolization. Which means that I could be closer to a white writer from the Caribbean, than to an African. And I'm closer to an Anglophone Caribbean writer than to a French writer. Before the language and the colour of your skin was enough to give people their sense of belonging. Nowadays that no longer works.

OS: So do you feel that creolization is something that is still happening, that it's contemporary?

PC: Yes, the process of creolization in the Americas has brought about creolités. But, we have now entered a process the most fundamental which is the process of the coming into contact (mise en relation) – the coming into contact of different humanities. And today we can see that with Christopher Columbus and the speeding up that colonisation brought about, all the populations in the world, all the cultures, all the imaginaries, everything the Homo Sapiens have produced - whether marvellous or catastrophic - are now in eternal. No one is in the absolute of their language; no one is in the absolute in their God. And when we have fundamentalism or fanaticism, it's precisely because we've lost the absolute - we feel threatened by other realities, so we become fanatic, fundamentalist, sectarian. So we're in this reality that means that the most determinant word to depict the contemporary situation isn't creolité or creolization, but it's the concept of Relation. Why? Because even the emergence of creolité is within the process of Relation. And the process of Relation creates a relational identity, which is an identity that is defined by the fact that it changes all the time without losing anything or being distorted. Whereas the traditional definition of identity was what is 'mine': this is my essence, my blood, my identity, in the face of the 'other'. Today relationships in the world are more characterised by fluidity of relationships, a relational fluidity to others and to the diversity of the world, which means that we exist in a flow that is constantly changing. So the master term for today is no longer so much creolization or creolité - which are the basics, but the master word is 'Relation'. We're all in Relation. And that changes practically all the former conceptions.

OS: And do you think we can use the term globalisation in a similar way? Do you think we can also use this word?

PC: There are two things. There's the process of coming into contact which was completed in colonisation, which means that no population can ignore the fact

that the others are there. So we're entering into a kind of total relativization, relativization and interaction. And I'd add to that another phenomenon, which is that of individuation. By this I mean that there are no longer communities in the world in which, like in the past, individuals are pre-conditioned through symbolic relationships which tell them what they must wear, what they must eat, what they must listen to or where they must live. There are individuals who emerge in a place, but in a place that is open and that is affected by phenomena that are a product of the totality of the world. And from there, everything has changed. We're no longer in the former conceptions. This is why the term 'Relation' is very pertinent today.

OS: There's a book that has just come out in the UK that talks about creolization in metropolises such as London. Do you think that we can use this term in contexts such as London?

PC: Wait, I'm just going to go back to what I was saying . . . There is the phenomenon of Relation which means that populations and cultures – or imaginaries - are no longer ignorant of each other, and alongside this we have had the development of capitalism, which, very quickly, through the absence of values, was easily adaptable to relational flows - much more so than the system of communities. It's paradoxical but that's how it is. Because capitalism was able to use two things - the relational flows that were already in place since colonisation and discovery, and the process of individuation. And capitalism is the only politico-economic ideology that is able to mobilise both at the same time - the individualisation and the relational flows - while all the other systems, which were progressive systems, remained within the notion of communities or 'the group'. So, with the relational flows - invisible or unconscious - within which people lived, economic globalisation emerged. But we can't say that economic globalisation is the same as Relation. No, the relational flow is something that exists, that existed prior to, and is much wider than, economic globalisation. And that's why Glissant proposed globalisation to refer to the coming into contact of economic markets with the desire to make profit etc., which he distinguished from 'globality' [mondialité] which refers to the fact that the imaginaries of the world are connected, or interconnected, and influence each other.

What was your other question?

OS: If you can use the term creolization in other contexts?

PC: Yes, the term 'creolization'. I would prefer to get rid of the term and to use the term Relation instead. Because the idea of creolization presupposes that we are still in the former absolutes - racial absolutes, black/white, linguistic absolutes - all the former identity markers that elsewhere defined métissage: métissage is black/white that gives us grey. Creolization supposes absolutes - 'my God, my skin, my language, my cuisine, my music',

- which meet 'your God, your language, your skin, your cuisine, your music'. So at a certain moment we had these creolizations when these absolutes begin to interact and reproduce themselves once again. But the problem is that Relation has existed for so long in the world . . . that there are no longer any absolutes, there are no longer any linguistic or identity absolutes. Rather, we're individuals. An Algerian who arrives in Martinique - he doesn't bring all of 'Algerian culture' with him. He's an individual who picks what he likes in Algeria and will pick what he likes in the Caribbean and constructs his relational tree.

So, for you to understand, individuals in former identities had genealogical trees - my mother, my father, my ancestors and it went on etc. Today we have a relational tree - what does that mean? It indicates the places we like, the images we like, the music we like, which is completely linked to the experience that I have of the world, and what I receive from the world. So, what an individual is today - is this 'relational tree'. Or maybe instead of taking the idea of the tree, we should think of a coral, with branches that go out in all directions and which are influenced by forces that come from everywhere - that's relation. The traditional, exclusive, identity system gave a genealogical tree. The relational flow gives a relational coral. That's the big difference. Thus, already the individuals who come to London are not religious absolutes - even though there is a bit of political fundamentalism - headscarves etc - but when you scratch the surface people wear Nikes, like the Beatles, like pizza, chinese food. We are in a relational flow - we're no longer in a situation of absolutes which leads to cosmopolitanism - a fairly interactive juxtaposition of various absolutes - linguistic, racial, identity. Rather we've now entered into the interconnections between diverse products of relational flows. This means that the situation today is so complex that it makes more sense to say that London is now a relational place - like all places in the world. A strongly relational space, because you can have relational places which are weaker. Creolization adapts more to spaces where the absolutes were more formed - in people's minds, and in the way things worked. Nowadays this is no longer the case.

OS: But talking about Martinique and its relation with France - would you say that the relationship with France and the policy of assimilation has limited, or challenged, the evolution of Martinican identity?

PC: No - because we're in a relational flow. So, the perception of identity can only be the perception of a relational identity. What happens is that the fact that we've been administered by France has, in a sense, closed the hatchways, the points of entry, of elements that would enter from the world. By which I mean that the window from the French side has been the only one open, and that is the one that has poured in much more than other influences. And that has led to a 'perversion' (in inverted

commas) which we called at the time 'assimilation'. It wasn't the 'denaturing' of our essential identity. Rather, it was the fact that the relational identity that came out of slavery and colonisation only received one input. Whereas a relational identity which down the line comes out in the world, receives other influences and evolves like that - through relation. So for us, our relation has been cut, in a sense, or at least been reduced, by allowing just one entrance. So, in a way that has meant that we've lost some of the richness of Relation. Moreover, the fact that we've been administered by France has meant that we've been cut off from rest of the Caribbean and the Americas.

OS: So do you think that that's changed the evolution of Martinican identity?

PC: Yes, in any case we're obliged to go through the relational complexity to be able to think about our political situation. As the world has become a relational world we can no longer think about independence, we're obliged to think in terms of interdependence. The world is a space of interdependence. Which means that the big nationalist movements, based on ruptures - 'my God, my skin, my language, my borders' - these are not things that are very well adapted to the contemporary world. So we find ourselves in a paradoxical situation where we must take into account the complexity of our situation of relational identity, in a world which has completely changed and which no longer corresponds to the former identities - in which we had 'my language, my homeland, my borders, my flag, my national anthem'. Today we can see clearly that we're in a process of interdependence, with the knowledge that we all belong to the same world. And at that global scale, the complexities of interdependence must come out. Meaning we must today invent something which goes beyond the nation state, to the 'meta-nation'. A 'meta-nation' - a relational nation - is something which legally, politically and economically, must be imagined. And we have all this to do.

OS: You talk about interdependence, but I have the impression that at the moment there is more 'dependence' on France by Martinique? Do you think that this must change so that Martinique can develop a truly relational identity?

PC: Yes, I mean, we have a process of dependence and charity, which could lead us to think it can be sorted out as it was thought in the 1950s which was independence, or breaking off from France. On the whole that was the discourse of the independence movement. But the problem of dependence can also be sorted out from the relational point of view. I would call myself an 'independentist'. But I don't mean an independence that involves a breaking off - 'my flag, my language, my borders' - but in the relational way. It means the opposite: 'leave me to live all my possible interdependencies, my interdependence with the Caribbean, with the Americas,

with Africa, with France and Europe etc. That's what 'independence' (in inverted commas) means nowadays. The declaration of independence today becomes a declaration of interdependence. And it's that complexity that we've not yet been able to do because to fight against our dependence (or charity), we go back to the notions of the 1950s of rupture, of breaking away. But today, paradoxically, to free ourselves and to exist fully, we have to enter into relations . . . For me independence is the mastery of our interdependences which are necessary for us.

OS: [But do you think that there is a political possibility to find this path - for interdependence?](#)

PC: Yes, yes I think so. We are in a complex situation. I supported the idea of the third voice - of Serge Letchimy. At the moment in the French constitution we have the articles 73 and 74. Article 73 says total assimilation: we are French, there's nothing else, full-stop. Article 74 recognises a certain difference, but at the same time it distances the person who's different from the French reality - so we lose a sense of solidarity and assistance. That's also a terrible option. So Serge Letchimy proposes that today in the French constitution, we constitutionalise autonomy, as they have in the Spanish constitution. In the Spanish constitution a region becomes independent but it never loses its Spanish reality. We could adhere to a Republican pact before our autonomy, but position ourselves in the Caribbean, make decisions in relation to the Caribbean - with the Americas - at the same time as adhering to the French Republican pact. It's this conceptual complexity that we should put into practice in order to move forward. We can't get out of that without the organisation of Relation, and certainly not through the rupture that was put forward by the independence movement of the 1950s. And I think it's possible, but it requires another political culture, another culture of identities, and another cultural politics - all the work that we're in the process of doing.

OS: [Yes, that's something that I wanted to talk to you about - the work that you're doing here in St Pierre and in Trois Ilets - how can you do that without falling into the traps of mass tourism, suggesting that this work is only for tourists, only to exoticise 'Creole' culture?](#)

PC: No, I mean there are two things - there is a system of relations in the world. This relational system, or rather this relational flow, creates in individuals a desire for the world - which has always existed of course - because voyages, voyagers etc have always existed. But with relational flows, the world has become more accessible. Capitalism has taken hold of this desire for the world, of getting to know the world and the diversity of the world, which exists within all individuals, so as to create out of it a system of tourism, which is that natural impetus towards the Other, the culture of the Other. Today this is instrumentalized through the politics of industrial tourism - brought by tour operators, charters etc. And

this discourse of industrial tourism has the tendency to say to countries like ours: 'you have a touristic vocation'. Why? Because it corresponds to the Western image of white sand, blue sea, palm trees. So we're subjected to the hold of the machinery of industrial tourism, which transforms us into a paradise. And that can bring us a lot of money, but at the same time we lose our essence, our authenticity, we are at the service of a mechanism that has been constructed to make money.

I would say that I'm against industrial tourism . . . I make a distinction between tourists and travellers [voyageurs]. For me the tourist is the one who stays within the codes and the laws of industrial tourism. The traveller, as in ancient times, or at the time of big voyages to Italy - all the big French intellectuals undertook the voyage to Italy, because it was the place of knowledge, of meeting, or discovery, of innovation etc. We can try to oppose the concept of tourist and reactivate it through the concept of traveller, the one who seeks to meet others: other cultures, other traditions, historical realities, memorial realities, places of creativity, places for reading the world, thinking about the world, places of poetry. And that's how we can try, at the same time, to live the relational flow without falling into the trap of industrial tourism.

The other element is that, as the world has become relational, the development of a country comes about through its capacity to attract people - meaning that we must become 'attractors'. Why? Because Relation means that today it's not because we were born in Martinique that we like Martinique, I am fully aware that someone can be born here and make their life in Japan. At the same time as a Japanese person could be fascinated by Martinique and could become Martinican. So we can choose our native land, we can choose our language, our God, our family. Our biological family (in relational flows) is no longer the most determining factor. We can feel closer to a brother that we've chosen than a biological brother. So this relational reality is very important. It helps to consider how the notion of diaspora, for example, doesn't mean anything any longer. Diaspora is something that is linked to a determined centre. It suggests that there were individuals who were linked, as if by an invisible chord, to their centre and who left into the world. But the little chord stays . . . the Africans believe that we're a diaspora. They don't understand that we're not a diaspora.

I prefer the term that is used by Haitians in Canada which is a 'metaspora', meaning that they are spores that leave, taken by the wind, and that have pollinated other spaces, other lands etc. And in the 'mataspora' new anthropological realities are created, where we have a more complex relational system. A Haitian who is born in Canada is in a 'metaspora' simply because he/she is a Canadian as much as he/she is Haitian. But he/she could not be at all interested in Haiti; he/she could also be more fascinated by Japan etc. It's this reality, this complexity, which we must understand today. That changes nearly

everything, all our relations.

So we must be 'attractors'. We have potentially in the world some individuals who can choose their native land, their language and they take their intelligence and their expertise to other places in the world. And we must be able to attract people. And for me, the policy that I'm trying to put forward here (in Trois Ilets and St Pierre) is to increase the level of attraction in all domains - culture, patrimony, scientific research, creation. If we are able to reactivate this capacity for attraction, we will attract not only travellers (or tourists), we will also be capable of re-attracting our own children. To attract the children from our country, it's important that our countries are attractive - in the relational spirit . . . But we also need to attract all those who could be fascinated by Martinique, and Martinicans are those who recognise themselves within Martinique.

OS: And have you been working for a long time on this project?

PC: No, not long at all, we began in February last year, 2011.

OS: So, do you feel that you have the opportunity to put your conceptual ideas into practice?

PC: Yes, absolutely . . . There's been a big loss of our heritage and there has been a slow shadowing of our cultural potential, an erasure of our cultural memory, the histories of Amerindians and slaves. All that means that the spaces don't express what they really are. So my role is to try to find ways to make the spaces express all the complexity that we've just talked about. We are at the same time Amerindian, African, colonisers - we're all of that. And all of that should be filtered into our urban development. That's what we're trying to do.

OS: There is sometimes a critique of this kind of emphasis on 'patrimony' - that it risks being a bit backward-looking, or folkloric. How do you think you can prevent falling into such a trap?

PC: No, because I'm not talking about old identities. I'm talking about Relation, that changes everything. From the perspective of Relation, we're in a relational flow where we don't have countries but rather spaces that are multi-transcultural, that must become attractors, that must witness the history of that space and the richness of that space . . . So when we talk about Relation, the growth of the heritage industry does not have the same effect as when we talk about atavistic identities, there aren't such problems. And that's why I feel it's important to convey the relational imaginary, to really understand what relation means. And there's a cultural policy that we need to put into place so that people understand fully that we're in relational flows. And that when we defend the richness of spaces here, the realities from here - we must ensure that it's in a relational perspective.

OS: I have done some interviews with people here who have suggested that many young people today are not

interested in Martinique and would rather go to France or elsewhere - due to unemployment etc - and that there's a lack of politicisation among young people. What do you think about that?

PC: When I was young I had flowery shirts, shirts from yeye fashion, boots like the Beatles - it's normal. But also, that's the old conception of identities: 'I was born here so I am condemned to like it'. No, within relational flows we choose our native land. I think that lots of young people want to leave because in the world there is a lot to see. Because first of all, when we're young we're more open to the world: a young person who is traditionalist would be problematic, so being open to the world is important. So, in the first instance, the first impulse is to leave the island, that's clear.

And in my opinion that's not a problem. Independently of that, they have the choice to choose the place that they want to live, the language that they're going to speak, and the music that they're going to like - that's the relational dimension. As long as it's made within a relational imaginary then it doesn't represent alienation. If we leave our country thinking that it's 'a horrible country' and that 'black people aren't any good', that 'the creole language is crappy', then we're in a pathological process. But if we're really in a relational flow and we can understand that we are at once in Martinique but that we can choose the countries that we like, and that we can have two countries, that we can be raised with two histories, that we can have two or three languages . . . it's that kind of spirit.

So I think that people who complain of that haven't understood the world. Today the world has become relational. Today our children, many of them are going to leave and never come back. But lots of them will leave and come back. And many people from elsewhere will come. Just as many people who have left our country are going leave and pollinate - like the 'metaspora' - other places. So that's why we need to become 'attractors'. And it's true that when there are high levels of unemployment, when there isn't any clear valorisation of places, when the relational spirit is not really adapted to what it should be, we will have a declining population. Not only young people who leave, but lots of people will go elsewhere. And that's why we need to become attractors. So the politics that I'm involved is the policy to develop our attractiveness, which will concern young people, but it will also concern all kinds of people who will be attracted to this reality. And who will come and work with us to help advance our country.

OS: To return to the question of creole - can we say that there exists a 'creole' culture? What is that in your opinion?

PC: It means that in the process of creolization, there have emerged things called 'creolités'. But creolité itself - Martinican 'creolité' which has produced a language, music, a way of cooking,

a way of dressing etc, is itself in a relational flow. So it undergoes changes. But there are two problems. There is the problem of cultural loss . . . there is a certain richness, or singularity, that has emerged here that we must save through cultural policies. But we must understand that relation continues. Which means that we have the policy of preservation of our cultural singularity. But we must understand that in today's world a great cuisine is a relational one. A great musician today is necessarily a relational musician - meaning the person who is able to find this genesis of time, place, and world - who is able to put into relation all the richness that he can capture and transform - this is valid for cuisine, for musicians, for everything. It's that spirit that we must understand - the relational imaginary.

OS: Personally, how would you define your identity? Creole, Martinican?

PC: I'm an American Creole . . . which means that I was raised through a process of creolization that came about in the Americas. But there are other processes of creolization which occurred in Africa, Asia - everywhere . . . But American creolization, produced a certain 'creolité'. And I'm part of these processes of creolization . . .

OS: And you wouldn't say that you were French?

PC: No, because creole implies the composite nature of my identity. In the creole American there is, by necessity, the presence of European powers that were in the area. So I'm not going to say that I'm Anglo-Saxon or Latin, that's not the most determining thing. What is determining is the transactional mosaic - which means that I'm creole, meaning a composite being . . . very much submitted to a process which was American and which is determined by Relation.

OS: And do you still have family in France?

PC: In the experience of Relation, everyone has an individual and a collective experience. So in the collective Martinican experience there is a very important French presence. From the biological perspective, there are lots intermarriages etc., which attach me to France. But that's another story. St Lucia has a similar relationship with London - the former colonial powers have created affective, biological relations that are very profound, psychic ones, which affect individuals and the community. For me, this mark is above all from France - as a result of my experience. But as we enter into Relation, my children, grandchildren etc, will have psychic points that are more linked to their relations - if its lived in the most open way possible, the borrowings will be more to do with choice - what we choose to like, the countries that we like, the languages we like . . . it's that which will have more of an effect.