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Culture seen as a commons

Osmosis, crossroads and the
paradoxes of identity

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change
- contribute to new theoretical approaches
- advance understanding of the multi-level forces driving migration

Abstract

This is the keynote lecture given on the occasion of The Impact of Diasporas event, held on 17 September 2015 at the Royal Geographical Society, London. This event marked the culmination of two major research projects, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The Oxford Diasporas Programme (University of Oxford) consisted of eleven projects looking at the social, economic, political and cultural impact of diasporas (transnational communities of people dispersed from their homeland) through a range of disciplinary perspectives and research methods, covering case studies from both the global North and South. This project investigated the connections between people who migrate to other countries and those who stay at home. It explored what effects these connections have on people in the country of origin, people in the country of destination, and on the migrants themselves. The Impact of Diasporas on the Making of Britain (University of Leicester) was built on the premise that diasporas are not a modern phenomenon. Ever since the last Ice Age people have moved into the British Isles from the European continent. The programme's research focused primarily on the cultural, linguistic, and genetic interactions between peoples known to history as 'Celts', 'Britons', 'Anglo-Saxons', and 'Vikings'. This keynote lecture was the final component of a day of presentations from researchers from both programmes which linked the projects through themes of 'home and away', 'lost and found', 'coming and going' and 'remembering and forgetting'.

Keywords: diaspora, cultural identity, creolisation, identity politics, migration, cultural flows

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1 Introduction

This event marks the occasion of two large, successful research projects that have come to an end: The Oxford Diasporas Programme and The Impact of Diasporas on the Making of Britain. Not only would I like to congratulate the participants in the projects and their leaders for their considerable and not least original achievements, but it also deserves to be mentioned that their way of collaborating rather than competing (or worse, ignoring each other) should serve as a model for others.

One thing that I do not aim to do in this lecture is to discuss terminology: I will accordingly refrain from discussing the possible definitions of a diaspora, which has been done well by others (e.g. Cohen 1997); or seeing the diaspora concept in relation to that of transnationalism (Glick Schiller 1995), and so on. Instead, I'll focus on some of the trickier issues in this field of inquiry, namely questions concerning the relationship of the social to the cultural, and that between purity and mixing. The French novelist Michel Houellebecq's recent novel *Soumission – Submission* in English (Houellebecq 2015) – is set in France in the near future. It depicts a country where the secular masses are held hostage to identity politics, which holds the public sphere in a gridlock. In the second round of the presidential elections, the main opponents are the Muslim Brothers and the Front National, both hovering somewhat above 20 per cent of the popular vote, but separated only by a thin margin from the third largest political force, the socialists. There are riots and widespread unrest in the country. Following elections, when the dust has settled, the French citizens, heirs to the secular republicanism of 1789, wake up to the presidency of Mohammed Ben Abbas, an enthusiastic supporter of gender segregated schools, polygamy and the expansion of the European Union into North Africa and the Middle East. The charismatic and mild-mannered Ben Abbas rules with the support of the socialists, who prefers him to the xenophobic nationalists of the FN.

As you may remember, by a perverse coincidence, Houellebecq's novel was released on 7 January this year, the very same day as the jihadist attack on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, which left twelve dead, and which was followed by an attack on a Jewish grocery. Houellebecq's novel immediately became a bestseller, while the author himself, fearing for his security, cancelled the promotional tour and went into hiding in the French Alps. He has said that although the book is fiction, it depicts a political scenario which in his view is realistic. Marine Le Pen of the FN, herself a character in the book, has expressed her agreement with this.

The book is fiction, while the ideological polarisation described in Houellebecq's novel is not. It has been described and analysed by social scientists, journalists and writers for at least a couple of decades (Bauman 2004, Holmes 2000). The Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik, who saw himself as an officer in a de facto non-existent National Liberation Army, bases his entire world view on the assumption that there is a latent civil war between Muslims and nationally-minded Europeans on this continent (Bangstad 2014). And he is not alone in this. Websites, civil society organisations, informal networks and cyberforums devoted to this assumed civilisational conflict proliferate in Europe. Whereas some of the Muslim online forums are mainly concerned with equal rights and minority issues, others have an uncompromising jihadist attitude, criticising the West for its double standards, calling for a purification of Islam and glorifying violence in the name of the Prophet. Likewise, some of the nativist European arenas are dominated by liberal, secular concerns that a misguided multiculturalism serves to justify gender inequality and self-imposed censorship, while others spend considerable time and energy demonstrating the inherent evil of Islam, the ways in which it threatens European culture and society, and the inevitability of violent conflict between natives and invaders.

Nobody who is interested in diversity, creolisation, the politics of difference and questions of social identity can afford to be indifferent to this development, and although one should be careful not to exaggerate the importance of virulent identity politics, it cannot be written off merely as the obsession of a few paranoid, intolerant fanatics. In September 2015, an opinion poll suggested that the Swedish Democrats – the Swedish approximate equivalent to France's FN, Britain's UKIP and Norway's Progress Party – is currently the most popular party in the country, with 25 per cent of popular support. This is all the more significant in so far as Sweden was for many years an exception in Western Europe, a country where right-wing populism and ethnic nationalism had failed to make its mark on the political scene. During this last year, which began with the shocking attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, we have been witness to Pegida marches in Germany and elsewhere, the IS destruction of ancient treasures in Palmyra, the burning of asylum centres in Western Europe and, of course, the mounting refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, which has still not been addressed properly by Europe. These political developments all depict a world on the move, but perhaps most importantly they remind us of the existence of a strong resistance to mobility, creolisation and change, through earnest attempts to freeze the passage of time, to stem the promiscuous flows of culture and to purge the world of impurities and anomalies.

2 Cultural flows

Perhaps I should apologise for starting my lecture in such a grim and dark way, since this is a day of celebration as two major research projects on the contributions of diasporas to Britain and the world have come to an end. After all, the impact of diasporas has been and is enormous and indispensable around the world; indeed, the world as we know it would not have existed without immigrant groups. A three-volume work, collectively written by a group of Norwegian historians and published just after the turn of the century, called *A History of Immigration* (Kjeldstadli 2003; see Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008 for a shorter English version) could almost as well have been called *An Alternative History of Norway*, since virtually everything interesting taking place in the country since the 9th century has involved the movement of foreigners into the country. As one of the informants of the *Impact of Diasporas on the Making of Britain* project in Leicester says, he is gratified about the research since it helps him to find an invasion he can identify with.

But I won't apologise, since the frictions and conflicts expressed through identity politics are not only part and parcel of this overheated world of ours; they are also very tangible, often dramatic reminders of the importance of the work these research groups are doing – studying, documenting, analysing, making sense of, offering new perspectives on, diversity past and present.

The Leicester and Oxford research projects both concern people on the move, people who have left their place of origin, voluntarily or not, and settled elsewhere. There are many questions, some of them naïve, but none of them stupid, that may be asked – and have been asked by the researchers – about their situation. Let's take a few:

- Do they eventually become assimilated into the majority population through intermarriage and what in the past was called acculturation?
- And if not, what are their methods for remaining apart – kinship, religion, professional networks or something else?
- Do the cultural influences mainly emanate from majorities to minorities, or are we instead talking about a two-way osmotic process?
- Is the diaspora by and large welcomed or stigmatised, or both? Are diasporic groups treated differently to others by the state, and if so, is this negative or positive for them?

- And if it can be described as negative or positive, to whom?
- Is the price to pay for strong group cohesion a weakened participation in greater society, and is the price to pay for multiculturalist tolerance a refusal to allow minority individuals an escape route from the double-edged cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997) of their community?

And there are many other questions that might be asked, which are illuminated in different ways by the diverse research projects undertaken here. I will restrict myself to raising two questions, which may perhaps shed light on the overheated identity politics we are currently witnessing not only in Europe, but around the world. I shall talk about the complicated relationship between cultural flows and social boundaries, and the undertheorised tension between multiculturalism proper and cultural creolisation or hybridisation. As pointed out by Cohen and Sheringham (2016), diaspora and creolisation are often seen as opposites, and at the level of the ideal-typical model, they are; one favouring mixing, the other purity, one looking towards the future, the other towards the past; but as any in-depth empirical study will reveal, real life is messier than models are able to depict. There are nevertheless real tensions between a social ontology founded in rootedness and origins, and one favouring mobility and change.

The flow of culture which is usually entailed by human mobility does not necessarily, or even usually, entail the mixing of people or the obliteration of social boundaries. Cultural mixing takes place all the time, but frequently without being accompanied by ethnic or racial mixing. The most obvious example is that of Western popular rhythmic music – jazz, blues, rock, soul – which builds on slave music, itself the result of an intercultural encounter taking place at the crossroads of the enforced displacement of African adolescents, men and women and their European slavemasters. There is always cultural osmosis taking place at the crossroads, with the people meeting absorbing, consciously or unconsciously, impulses from the commons which is the pool of cultural signs being propagated. Culture is invisible, mobile and continuous. Although flows are sometimes regulated and the direction of the flows sometimes reflect social hierarchies, they can also be surprising and counterintuitive, producing new concoctions and blends as they go along.

By contrast, group identities are discontinuous – they are bounded. Sanctions against intermarriage, which would disrupt the integrity of the group, are far more widespread than sanctions against other people's music, language and food. Changes in the social structure of a group are more dangerous, and easier to identify, than changes in the 'cultural stuff' (Barth's, 1969, term) they carry. Groups, you might say, are like inverted refrigerators. Their purpose is to create warmth inside, but almost inadvertently, they thereby create outward coldness. Groupness is a matter of degree, but groups need criteria for inclusion. This goes for creole groups just as much as for diasporic communities, although the grammar of inclusion in the former case is often looser and more flexible than in the latter (see e.g. Boswell 2006).

Can two groups be culturally identical yet insist on their mutually exclusive uniqueness, and reproduce their discrete ethnic identities? Although Barth (1969) tended to believe that if all cultural differences disappear, the ethnic boundary becomes difficult to uphold, is not unthinkable; consider the situation in Bosnia before the war. The main marker of difference was religion, but people tended, in general, not to be particularly religious, and they had language, dreams, ambitions and a general way of life in common.

But it is more complicated. Let me start by considering the possibility of seeing culture as a commons, which I have already alluded to: it is a collectively produced, managed, modified, tweaked and reproduced system of meanings with no clear boundaries. Some aspects of culture – food, clothing, music – flow more freely than others – religion, language. Moreover, the economy of signs is not one of scarcity in the same way as the economy of material goods. It is not as if native speakers of English

feel that they have lost anything if foreigners learn their language. On the contrary, the spread of their cultural worlds increases their symbolic capital and thereby their potential power. The economy of culture is not one of scarcity, but one of abundance. The tragedy of the commons, famously analysed in Hardin's 1968 paper, showed that a commonly owned resource would quickly be depleted due to overexploitation if there was no coordination between the actors. What seemed rational to any one individual exploiting, say, a fish resource, would ultimately be irrational and destructive if everybody did the same thing without considering the higher-level cumulative consequences. With cultural meaning, there is in principle no similar tragedy of the commons. Consider the great religions of conversion, or food recipes, or pop ditties, or soliloquys from Shakespeare: No resource is being depleted, and I don't lose my tune if I teach it to you.

Or so it may seem.

3 Culture as a commons

Sharing material resources is different from sharing meaning, since there does not seem to be scarcity in the latter case. There is enough for everybody, and cultural meaning is collectively managed, possessing a democratic quality which is frequently missing in social organisation, which tends to be hierarchical and jealous in guarding its boundaries.

However, if culture can be seen as a commons along these lines, the tragedy of this commons may occur when cultural meaning is being commercialised or otherwise misused. The depletion of a fish resource has its parallel in culture here: Overuse of cultural meaning is perfectly conceivable, and it is well known in the worlds of art and of consumption. Cultural piracy (Harrison 1999) occurs when a group 'steals' another group's cultural products or values in order to make money or claim rights. Commercialisation (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009), similarly, can take the meaning out of a valuable symbolic world. In Scandinavia, we may speak of an IKEA syndrome whereby reasonably good taste (in this case, in interior design) is being flattened, simplified and spread to the masses, thereby diminishing the symbolic capital of the bearers of good taste (who may have had to work hard to achieve it). The fetishisation of the original in the art world similarly indicates that cultural flows are not meant to be indefinite and indiscriminate. Although the painting is small and the crowds intimidating, people make a beeline every day to behold the original Mona Lisa painting. In my native Norway, *Scream* T-shirts, mugs, posters and helium balloons have turned this original work of art into something of a national symbol, but at the expense of diminishing its artistic power. Finally, only yesterday, my wife mentioned to me that she found it confusing and slightly disturbing when an actor's voice that she associated with the theatre suddenly appeared on radio in a sales pitch for a domestic heating system. It was out of context, and those actors were somehow being contaminated by commercialisation. In other words, there is clearly a law of diminishing returns in this domain just as in the material world, where the depletion of the resource results not in its disappearance, but rather in its ubiquity. Good taste, Bourdieu taught us decades ago (Bourdieu 1984), must by definition be exclusive.

Identity politics follows a similar economy of signs; alleged misuse of flags, religious symbols and other markers of group identity is frowned upon at best, triggering violent sanctions at worst. There is nevertheless another aspect of the flow of cultural meaning that I would now like to speak about, namely situations whereby the flows of culture clashes with the hierarchies of society and the boundaries of identity politics. I am not here thinking of high culture and art, but rather the stuff of everyday life, from beliefs and values to dress and popular music. Under identitarian regimes, cultural forms may become banned, or monopolised; boundaries are being patrolled, and when this happens, the flowing rivers of symbolic meaning may be clogged or dammed, or they may change course. Some may even go underground, popping up in unexpected places behind enemy lines.

Incidentally, positive appraisals of diversity from afar are always selective and partial. When diasporic populations retain their identity, they are often celebrated for doing so, if not by the host populations, then at least by the UNESCO and their fellow ethnics in the home country. Yet it needs to be mentioned that whereas their food, dance and language are praised, their gender relations, treatment of animals and socialisation methods may be objected to, as if they were less important parts of diasporic cultural heritage.

Let us look a bit more closely at the relationship between the symbolic and the social, and in particular how new meanings and cultural mixtures may articulate with pre-existing social identities. There are several options here; identities may merge, they may change, or they may resist influences from outside.

4 Common culture and ethnic boundaries

Mauritius, a country which consists exclusively of population groups which might be considered diasporic – and a place to which several in the audience are also attached – is one of the most committed multiculturalist societies in the world (Eriksen 1998). Its population came from various parts of India, continental Africa and Madagascar, China and Europe, and the official ideology unanimously presents ethnic and cultural diversity as a positive quality of Mauritian society. ‘We are the tomato of the Indian Ocean,’ a publicity stunt once had it, ‘we go with everything’. At major public ceremonies, it is the rule rather than the exception that several cultural traditions are presented through song and dance numbers, recitals of poetry or similar. Hindu, Catholic, Muslim and Buddhist religious holidays are recognised, and Mauritians sometimes talk of their society as *une société arc-en-ciel*, a rainbow society.

In spite of the admirable spirit of compromise and mutual recognition pervading Mauritian society, it easily lends itself to exemplifying the three contradictions, or paradoxes, that I would like to call attention to, all of which have a bearing on the relationship between the symbolic and the social.

First, multiculturalism in the public sphere, which I here take to mean the active encouragement of expressions of cultural diversity, does not necessarily encourage mixing and impurity. As you know, the celebration of cultural diversity often conflicts with individual liberties, notably the freedom not to belong to a cultural tradition. The Mauritian ideology can thus, slightly facetiously, be described as apartheid with a friendly face. Of course, there are other voices, or alternative scripts if you like, which challenge the rainbow society by mixing the colours. A much loved popular musical group called Grup Latanier was formed by the Indo-Mauritian brothers Ram Joganah and Nitish Joganah around 1980 and has been active since then. The group mostly play séga songs, a genre associated with the Creoles, but often incorporate Indian instruments such as tablas, performing engaged songs based on a class analysis rather than an ethnic vision of Mauritian society.

There are, moreover, many Mauritians who deny the validity of ethnic categorisations, and they are often, but not always, associated with the political left. They see culture as a commons, something belonging to humanity and not to be monopolised by communities or interest groups. Indeed, an old friend of the Joganah brothers, namely the linguist, playwright and poet Dev Virahsawmy, in his youth argued in favour of creolising – mixing – the religious practices in Mauritius in order to strengthen the sense of community and unity (Eriksen 1988). This did not go down well in the wider public. Years later, commenting on another, related matter, the then Archbishop of the Mascareignes, Mgr Jean Margéot, pronounced that ‘we should keep the colours of the rainbow distinct for it to remain beautiful’.

The metaphor of the fruit salad is also sometimes used in describing Mauritius in positive terms. In practice, this entails that intermarriage is not encouraged in public or by politicians. While cultural

mixing is mostly uncontroversial – even if what is usually celebrated is the purity of ethnic cultural expressions – intermarriage, which threatens to break up the very structure of the multiethnic society, is not. Few parents, regardless of their background, are particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of their son or daughter marrying someone from another community. Intermarriage does take place not infrequently in Mauritius, and it can naturally work well for all parties, including the in-laws, but it is not part of the Mauritian social contract, where your community membership to no small extent defines who you are.

Why has the popularity of Grup Latanier not led to an upsurge in mixed marriages? Here, it is clear that culture follows a different logic to social processes; a dissolution of ethnic boundaries would entail the loss of the corporate estate possessed by ethnic groups.

In this, the avowedly multicultural society of Mauritius differs from those South American societies where *mestizaje*, or biological mixing, is commonly regarded as their heritage and source of present identity. Although these societies are also hierarchically ordered along mainly racial lines, they lack sharp boundaries between the categories, except for the native Amerindian groups (Wade 2010).

The second feature of Mauritian society that deserves examining concerns the nature of its cultural flows, or cultural osmosis if you like. As I have pointed out, interethnic marriages are problematic and contradict the multicultural or polyethnic structure of Mauritian society by challenging the boundaries between groups. When it comes to cultural meaning, it flows more easily. For example, nearly all Mauritians speak Kreol or Morisyen, a French-lexicon creole, on an everyday basis. There are no sharp ethnic boundaries when it comes to food habits either, and through school, mass media and public events, Mauritians develop a broadly shared cultural world. There are variations to be certain, some of which follow class or regional lines, some ethnic or religious lines; but as Mauritians overseas may testify – diasporic people in a second diaspora, you might say – there is a recognisable Mauritian cultural space which cuts across ethnicity and even class, which includes language, food, music and shared jokes. Nonetheless, these commonalities do not prevent ethnic boundaries from remaining clear. In other words, there is a clash or at least a tension between common culture and ethnic boundaries.

A society in some ways very similar to Mauritius, but also in important ways different, is Trinidad. The main social contrast defining both these plantation societies is that distinguishing Africans from Indians. In Trinidad, however, unlike in Mauritius, the influence of Afro-Caribbean culture is perceptible everywhere. Trinidad has an annual Muslim procession, Hosay, presented abroad as a Shia Caribbean ting, which involves loud rhythmic drumming and street processions, and where non-Muslims are invited to take part. Although its roots are in north India, Trinidadian Hosay is thick with intertextuality relating it to Carnival, notwithstanding its religious content.

Although intermarriage has been more common in Trinidad than in Mauritius, possibly owing to the ideological and demographic dominance of a Creole population rather than a South Asian one, that is one where endogamy was never a major preoccupation, people of mixed origin have problems in relating to group membership and communal solidarity. The calypsonian Clatis Ali, performing under the sobriquet The Mighty Dougla, was crowned as Calypso King of 1961 for his song ‘Split Me in Two’. A *dougla* is a Trinidadian of mixed Indian–African origin. Ali's song describes the problems of social belonging experienced by a person who is ‘six of one, half a dozen of the other’, and we should note that the song is not about cultural flows, but about social boundaries. He was not preoccupied with clothing, food, language or even kinship or religion, but with recognition and belonging. Here is the first verse:

If they sending Indians to India

And Africans back to Africa
Well somebody please just tell me
Where they sending poor me?
I am neither one nor the other
Six of one, half a dozen of the other
So if they serious about sending these people for true
They got to split me in two.

Cultural meaning, in the Mauritian or Trinidadian environment, can often function as a commons, flowing and mixing quite freely; while group membership is an either/or phenomenon. A common interpretation of this discrepancy between cultural flows and group boundaries, is that ethnic boundaries and identity politics are not really about preserving cultural identity, but the promotion of group interests. Some elements of culture are then reified and enlisted in this struggle through symbols and practices which are tweaked and manipulated to fit the political message. Since boundaries are fixed and cultural meaning is not, border patrols are set up to slow down – ideally stop – the promiscuous flows of culture. Without perceptible cultural differences, justifying the integrity of the boundary may be difficult (although not, as pointed out earlier, impossible). Traditionalism – the conscious revival of tradition in post-traditional societies – can to some extent be understood against this backdrop, as a way of strengthening boundaries which have become porous and weak.

But this analysis is, at the end of the day, too rash and cynical. There are not only political, but also existential reasons for controlling and stemming cultural flows. Even cultural phenomena which are not associated with political rights or material goods may be scarce resources because they lose their power as sources of personal identity if they are being used, or abused, by people who have not earned the right to do so. The songs, handicrafts and poetry with which I am familiar says something about who I am and where I'm coming from. Were they to be mass-produced, or taken over by neighbouring peoples, I would lose my sense of being in the world as a particular kind of person. And surely, in a diverse society, not only creole and hybrid strategies should be considered legitimate; self-conscious rootedness in tradition, which have kept many of the diasporas examined in these research programmes going for centuries, should be equally unproblematic.

There are nevertheless some further problems here, frequently commented upon and perhaps depicted most succinctly by the philosopher John Gray in his *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Gray 2002), where he points out that liberalism is simultaneously an ideology of tolerance and a model of society. How to relate to members of a liberal society who do not accept the premise of liberalism thereby becomes difficult. Gray's view, phrased in general terms, is that contemporary, complex societies should be able to accommodate diverse views of the good life, concepts of personhood and value systems. Yet this position raises its own, obvious problems, already alluded to and expressed in an extreme way in Houellebecq's controversial novel, concerning the relationship between person, community and greater society. And this dilemma is at the heart of the virulent forms of identity politics with which I began this lecture. For if persons are allowed to choose their group allegiances and marriage partners, their ways of life, their religion or lack thereof themselves, the group becomes fuzzy at the edges – or even at the centre – and soon ceases to function as a corporate entity. This is why the Trinidadian *dougla* has historically been far more threatening to the Hindus and Afro-Trinidadians than the opposing groups,

which do not challenge any boundaries. In a society consisting of named groups, nothing is more dangerous than the non-group. As a result, the exit door can be difficult to find for a dissatisfied member of a strongly incorporated diasporic group. Since the flow of culture is harder to steer and control than the flow of people and material resources, the boundary work engaged in by identity politicians becomes more desperate and defensive the faster and more powerfully the whirls of global or transcultural flows invade their life-worlds. Getting along in a complex society, or even a superdiverse society, as Steve Vertovec (2007) has it, does not preclude cultural puritanism, but it requires agreement about a set of traffic rules or basic principles for conviviality. One of them may well prove to be the existence of an emergency exit for displeased members of a named cultural group.

The third aspect of Mauritian society that I should like to comment upon concerns social hierarchies and cultural flows. A common critique of multicultural programmes in Europe, not least in this country [the UK], is that they depict a harmonious, colourful, multicultural community, while realities are complicated and often conflictual. Critics of multiculturalism in its strong form (where the social world is depicted as consisting of bounded cultural groups) may emphasise either withdrawal into patriarchal, conservative and/or overly religious diasporic communities, or structural racism and systematic discrimination from majority society. Multiculturalism is, somewhat paradoxically, a liberal ideology (with objections coming both from the left and the right) which defends the right of people to be illiberal. In the Mauritian case, accusations of withdrawal have not featured prominently on the agenda, and similar personal ambitions and dreams of success and influence are shared across Mauritian society, again as a reminder that ethnic boundaries do not preclude cultural flows and commonalities.

At the same time, Mauritius, an admirably tolerant multicultural society, remains an ethnically hierarchical one. A tolerant multiculturalist society may perfectly well practice strict ethnic or racial segregation. In Mauritius, séga music and its permutations such as ‘seggae’ (séga with a strong reggae element) is widely seen as a national music with significance for all Mauritians, although it is rightly associated mainly with the Creole ethnic group. At the same time, there is general agreement that the Creoles have been the main losers of the Mauritian economic miracle which has transformed the island since the 1980s. In other words, their cultural production is not just tolerated but positively admired, at the same time as their downtrodden position in the social hierarchy is being reproduced. It bears mentioning that the only ethnic riot in Mauritius since independence in 1968 involved the arrest and subsequent controversial death of the popular seggae artist Kaya in 1999 (Eriksen 2004). The protests and riots were strongly ethnically marked, with protesters accusing the ‘Hindu police’ of having murdered the Creole cultural hero while he was in detention; incidentally, he was arrested on charges of marijuana smoking, which is illegal, but extremely common in Mauritius. The incidents following Kaya's death are yet another reminder of the importance of keeping social boundaries and cultural meanings analytically apart. As more than a hundred years' history of rhythmic popular music in North America have shown, the spread of minority culture and its grateful appropriation by the majority do not preclude the continuation of racial or ethnic hierarchies.

5 Identity politics

I have used this opportunity to address some of the knottier intellectual and political issues concerning the relationship between purity and mixing, identity politics and creolisation. Identity politics can be a reaction to creolisation, or it can mirror another group's identity politics. The identity politics of the state is frequently one of control and cohesion, while that of minorities is often a reaction against perceived exclusion. The rise of Islamism must at least partly be understood against this backdrop; it is

the ideology of the disgruntled, the marginalised, the losers of globalisation. In order to come to terms with the rise of virulent identity politics in Europe, therefore, it is necessary to understand not only its cultural expressions, but its social roots in inequality and disenfranchisement. This goes for right-wing nativism just as much as political Islam.

Interestingly, questions of class and hierarchy lie at the core of the debate over *créolité* versus *négritude* in the Caribbean (Cohen and Sheringham 2016). The question is whether the *créoliste* movement's openness to mixing, or an equitable attitude to cultural flows regardless of their origins, in reality conceals the continuation of social hierarchies. The older *négritude* movement, which was based on a class analysis and was less concerned with culture, is being accused of essentialising racial boundaries, while the opposite accusation is that a celebration of creolisation conceals important structural inequalities. *Négritude*, harking back to Fanon (1952), is a politics of identity, while *créolité* is a politics of mixing. Also, as pointed out by Richard and Sally Price (2007), the *créoliste* movement ignored the wider Caribbean context and was in danger of becoming a new essentialism based not on shared origins, but on a particular form of mixing.

Creolisation, then, solves many of the problems in a world with increased mobility and intergroup encounters, but not all. It strives to make origins irrelevant, but may understate or divert attention from ethnic or racial hierarchies. This, among other things, is why widespread cultural mixing is rejected by so many people in the world today. But there is another reason as well, which I have only barely touched upon, namely that continuity with the past is existentially important to human well-being, and it can only be achieved by tracing one's life-world back in time. In this overheated world of mobility, withdrawals, frictions and cultural symbiosis, therefore, concerns with roots and traditions cannot be dismissed as reactionary and dangerous. This is the point made by Claudio Magris (1989) in his rich and appropriately meandering essay on the cultural history of the Danube, where he points out that a fascist is not someone who has intimate friends, who loves his Heimat, the local folk music, his country's 19th century romantic poets and so on, but someone who is incapable of seeing others, who love their home village, folk music and so on, as equals. In this way, we may see the entire cultural production of humanity as a commons, but not one which is available for everyone at any time. Cultural meaning is always caught up by, and entangled with, social processes involving power, boundaries, hierarchies and indeed existential issues to do with personal identity. The tragedy of the cultural commons does not just concern originals versus copies, discourses of authenticity and the law of diminishing returns in a world of mass production and consumption, but it has a political dimension and an existential one. The three do not always fit together. Ernest Gellner, who was a political cosmopolitan and a liberal, nevertheless loved the Czech folk music of his childhood and would sometimes play it on his mouth organ. There is no contradiction here. Yet – and here I end – we must not forget that cultural meaning is always caught up by, and entangled with, social processes involving power, boundaries, hierarchies and indeed existential issues to do with personal identity. So the tragedy of the cultural commons does not just concern originals versus copies, discourses of authenticity and the law of diminishing returns in a world of mass production and consumption. It always has a political dimension and an existential one. The three do not always go together. The task, in other words, is not completed with these two research projects and the preceding half century of serious research on the cultural dynamics of complex societies. We still have quite a bit of unpacking and repacking to do.

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