

Aesthetics and Intertexts of Resistance and Liberation in the African Diaspora: Hip-hop and Créolité

Isaac Joslin

In this paper, we examine aesthetic modalities and intertexts of poetry from the francophone and anglophone African diasporas through a concerted analysis of the structural and stylistic elements of the poetic discourses of créolité in the Caribbean and Hip-hop in North America. Here we contend that Afro-Caribbean and African-American identity construction and performance find their principal forms of expression in disrupting literary and cultural norms through intertextual relationality and revolutionary aesthetic appropriation.¹ One may even argue, as Fanon seems to suggest in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that any discourse of liberation is automatically one of appropriation.² The characteristic of taking, redefining, and remaking a discourse to mean something other than its original significance is at the heart of what an Africana literary tradition has become, a discourse which continually and collectively resists defining concepts of race, class, gender, and nationality through reiterative performance of relational identification.³ In diverse manifestations, the artistic productions of populations comprising the global African diaspora finds a fundamental mode expression through a poetics of resistance within the domain of the metropolitan setting.

The very concept of Africa in its modern form must be defined as an inherently diaspora concept, with multiple vectors of influence, a notion which is outlined by Achille Mbembe in *Critique de la raison nègre*.⁴ In the context of the British African diaspora, he Paul Gilroy writes in *The Black Atlantic*, “I have argued elsewhere that the cultures of this group have been produced in a syncretic pattern in which the styles and forms of the

Caribbean, the United States, and Africa have been reworked and reinscribed in the novel context of modern Britain’s own untidy ensemble of regional and class-oriented conflicts.”⁵ Gilroy’s example of the British cohort of Africana peoples scattered over the globe from Europe to the Americas who derive their heritage from the continent of Africa is in fact one specific example of a global transnational multilingual and poly-cultural phenomenon. Despite a shared collective memory of colonialism and enslavement, the diverse people groups that comprise the global African diaspora cannot be considered as singular unified community since they exist within the paradigm of western imperial hegemonic power, which divides people in terms of multiple intersecting demographic categories of class, gender, sexuality, and race.⁶ Although the twenty-first century has thus far been one of exacerbating irreconcilable differences (such that it is difficult to maintain the position that any single “black community” exists), it cannot be denied that there are certain shared quasi-cultural characteristics of art, poetry, music, and literature that help to sketch out skeletal structure of the sort of pan-African identity advocated by DuBois and Marcus Garvey at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷

This shared Africana culture is thus very dependent on language as a tool for defining its common heritage of resistance, not in terms of which language is spoken, since it can range from a multitude of indigenous African languages to French, English, and an infinite blend of Creoles. The common characteristic is the use of language to impart meaning(s) far more significant than mere semantic content. Richard Wright in *12 Million Black Voices* brilliantly describes this particular manner of using language:

“We stole words from the grudging lips of the Lords of the Land, who did not want us to know too many of them or their meaning. And we charged this meager horde of stolen sounds with all the emotions and longings that we had; we proceeded to build our language in inflections of voice, through tonal variety, by hurried speech, in honeyed drawls, by rolling our eyes, by flourishing our hands, by assigning to common, simple words new meanings, meanings which enabled us to speak of revolt in the actual presence of the Lords of the Land without their being aware! Our secret language extended our understanding of what slavery meant and gave us the freedom to speak to our brothers in captivity, we polished our new words, caressed them, gave them new shape and color, a new order and tempo, until, although they were the words of the Lords of the Land, they became our words, our language.”⁸

Wright illustrates quite clearly the process of appropriation that is at the heart of the development of the independent language system employed by Africana peoples, as a means to relate to one another on the common ground of enslavement that parallels the colonial oppression of peoples on the African continent. Whatever this language might be, it is the way in which it is expressed through the poetics of voice, tone, and rhythm makes it a discourse of liberation, a notion that clearly depicts the central nature of musicality in the formulation of an Africana identity. In this context, musicality and other nonverbal cues are the tools that allow for transcendence over the geographical, socio-political, and linguistic differences of modern society—differences that find their most intense manifestation in the global institution of the modern metropolitan city, whether it be London, Fort-de-France, Harlem, or elsewhere.

This urban setting was the backdrop for the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's, which is considered as a major point of departure for a deeply established African American poetic tradition, of which Langston Hughes and Claude McKay are considered primary representatives. In a poem entitled "The White City", Claude McKay writes:

I see the mighty city through a mist—
The strident trains that speed the goaded mass,
The poles and spires and towers vapor-kissed,
The fortified port through which the great ships pass,
The tides, the wharves, the dens I contemplate,
Are sweet like wanton loves because I hate.⁹

Here he paints a picture of the city in all of its industrial grandeur that is mystified in its appearance because it is seen through the eyes of someone who somehow remains outside of it, in the margins or along the periphery. As the title of the poem implies, the city and all of its great technological achievements are automatically attributed to the white man's progress and any others are therefore excluded from taking part in the opportunities it may offer. The metaphor of "wanton loves" implies that the comfort and conveniences that the city appears to provide are something to be desired, but can never be obtained because of an ambivalent feeling of hatred toward its exclusivist structures. But it is not so much the actual words that impart a sense of this condition of alienation, as it is the poetic nature of their expression—an expression that implies a resistance to such a condition as unjust and unacceptable. Barbara Kingsolver describes the city as just this sort of foreign and alienating construction in *The Poisonwood Bible*, which is an account of the journey of a missionary family into what was the Belgian Congo, later Zaire during the early 1960's, a period of intense political turmoil for African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora.¹⁰ She states, "This city is a foreigner's premise of efficiency planted on this soil, and it's a very bad idea. Living in it, no one could think otherwise. It's a vast congregation of hunger, infectious disease, and desperation, masquerading as opportunity."¹¹ Accordingly, the cosmopolitan city is seen as a modern institution of progress and prosperity, but this is only a façade as it falls short at the same time of its claims in its incapacity to include all of its inhabitants in the sharing of that prosperity.¹² Rather, a significant and disproportionate number of the people who make up a city are marginalized and exiled to the slums and the ghettos where simple existence becomes a difficult and dirty daily duty.

It is precisely this condition of being excluded from the city, which fosters a desire to confront the injustice and reclaim the city as one's own. Hence, like the appropriation of language by the peoples of African descent, the city is also appropriated in a certain sense, through the establishment of cultural centers like Harlem. This is also the case in francophone Antillean literature, which depicts the establishment of various settlements on the outskirts of the city in an attempt to assume political autonomy. Patrick Chamoiseau describes this process in his novel *Texaco*, which relates the story of a black woman named Marie-Sophie Laborieux who lived until 1989 and was an instrumental figure in the founding of the settlement of Texaco. What was particular to this settlement was its location on the

outskirts of Fort-de-France in Martinique situated in such a way that impeded access to the Texaco oil cisterns for which the settlement was named. Hence we see not only an appropriation of the space of the city, but a simultaneous resistance to the city itself. Chamoiseau describes the paradoxical nature of the city as something to be desired and something to be disdained, as both opportunity and danger. He writes:

"But the city is a danger, *our* danger. The automobile dominates the space, the center becomes abandoned, and the derelicts establish themselves there; it amplifies the alimentary dependence, the fascination for the exterior and the non-productive energy; open upon the world it ignores the countryside, and in the countryside, men; it seasons in solitude and poverty new unknowns to medicine; it abounds in pollution and insecurity; it establishes itself everywhere, menaces cultures and differences like a global virus. The city is a danger."¹³

According to this passage, the urban system is a space dominated by machines that pollute and destroy the environment and its ability to provide sustenance, which in its global nature ignores the peculiarities of the country and its people and becomes a breeding ground for disease in as much as it destroys its people through disease and de-culturation. Furthermore he writes,

"But the city is a danger; it becomes a megapolis and never stops; it petrifies in silence the countryside like in other times the Empires smothered the surroundings; on the ruin of the nation-state, it erects itself monstrously plurinational, transnational, supranational, cosmopolitan—demented creole of some sort, and becomes the unique dehumanized structure of the human race."¹⁴

Hence the city is an ever-expanding global system of decay that disrupts the natural rhythms of the country as well as the nation, in that it participates in the global capitalist economy that drives modernity towards its own utter depletion. It is the antithesis of a true creole identity, which is a central theme of Antillean literature as an open, inclusive cultural heritage that embraces the diversity of mixed cultural conditions—an identity based on a common exteriority to occidental principles of hegemony and cosmopolitanism.¹⁵

It is evident that the city, or at least the image of the city, must be transformed (as much as language must be transformed) in order to attain a new significance of liberty and openness rather than limitations and oppression, and for this transformation a creole identity is key as a hybridized state of mixed, partial, fragmented, and continually reconstructed conceptions of self and community that includes and embraces the multitude of cultural differences in the global metropolis. At the core of a creole identity is a lack of primordial constructs and concrete conceptions of culture and history, allowing for the conglomeration of fragments from multiple cultural heritages. Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant are three paradigmatic figures of this Creole literary movement who collectively wrote the work, *In Praise of Creoleness*, which opens by defining *créolité* as such:

"It will be for us an internal attitude, better: a vigilance, or better yet, a sort of mental envelope in the core of which our world will be constructed in full consciousness of the world. These words that we transmit to you do not hail from theory, nor from knowledgeable principles. They spring from a testimony. They proceed from a sterile

experience that we have known before putting ourselves to reclaim our creative potential, and to lay out the expression of what we are.”¹⁶

To be Creole is therefore to continually retrieve the shattered pieces of forgotten and living memory and to reconstruct a sense of self based on these fragments. Nick Nesbitt describes this state of loss in terms of the Franco-Caribbean experience of having to traverse the abyss of the Atlantic and the subsequent re-establishment of a sense of identity for these once enslaved peoples: “In seeking to expose and transcend this dereliction of memory, the pages that follow look into a region in which for four centuries [1560-1960] the problem of memory has been experienced in acute form, as if in distillation... This destruction and entombment of memory occurred through-out the New World plantation societies.”¹⁷ The task of recovering a lost cultural heritage that haunts the uprooted peoples of the new world also plagues the remaining inhabitants of the African continent who had to endure imperial conquest, colonization, and subsequent nationalization, all of which has fostered an increased confusion of identity and disunity amongst Africana peoples.

The many diverging forms that this conquest of black peoples has assumed throughout history adheres to one general paradigm that Anne McClintock describes in *Imperial Leather* as one that feminizes and hyper-sexualizes lands and people as void vessels (black or woman or both), in order to dehumanize the objects of conquest, making their exploitation justifiable. According to McClintock, this negating tendency stems from a crisis in male European identity, grounded in the Enlightenment epistemology, that requires the accumulation of knowledge, the possession of women, the domination of *others*, and the incessant collection of wealth. She lists three governing themes of Western imperialism: “the transmission of white, male power through control of colonized women; the emergence of a new global order of cultural knowledge; and the imperial command of commodity capital.”¹⁸ What McClintock here ascribes to the imperialist system in all of its manifestations, new and old, is an embedded belief in the notions of domesticity in the home and a market economy in society as basic modes of possession, and these basic notions are simply magnified and projected onto whichever land or people is deemed to lack civilization and therefore need “civilizing.” This is the backdrop against which an Africana discourse of resistance developed to prove that indeed they could repossess a language of the oppressed, and create their own musical discourse through a performative poetics of liberation, on the continent and in the far-reaching diaspora. Simone Schwarz-Bart, writer from Guadeloupe allows us to glimpse a portrait of this condition in her novel *Rains and Winds on Téliumée Miracle*, in which she describes a recurring pattern between Téliumée, the main character, and her mother Victoire who work as laundry maids. Speaking of her mother, the narrator recalls, “As soon as she arrived, she began to wash her laundry while singing, to dry it, to fold it and iron it, always singing.” Later on Téliumée herself is in a similar situation, doing the laundry for a rich white family, “...and I was doing my work while singing, and as I sang I was cutting my pain, I was slashing my pain, and my pain was falling into the song...”¹⁹ This emblematic character of the doubly oppressed black woman, who is a virtual slave both to the household and to the market economy, manages to overcome her deplorable condition through the power of song.

Caribbean writer Edouard Glissant describes this type of genuine cultural expression in a work entitled *Poetics of Relation* in which he relates the uprooted and fragmented condition of diasporic Africans as belonging to a post-black-nationalist creole identity that can only obtain meaning through poetics as something other than traditional, scientific, or categorical knowledge. He mounts the critique that, “Some critical minds, more given to talk than to analysis, proclaim or prophesy the obsolescence of poetry as no longer corresponding to the conditions of contemporary life and somehow outmoded in relation to the violence and haste abundant in modernity.”²⁰ However, he views poetic expression as a central aspect to the de-structured Creole language underpinning Creole identity, which can be viewed as the evolution of black consciousness poetics from the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights movements in the U.S., and negritude and other pan-African nationalist ideologies from the Caribbean and on the African continent itself. What else besides a musical poetics could capture such a broad range of lived experience as that comprised within the diversity of peoples of African descent, in so many languages, scattered over the face of the globe? Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant provide us with the answer to this question when they write *In praise of Creoleness*, stating poignantly: “We have extended the sense of certain words. We have deviated that of others. And metamorphosed many. We have enriched it as much in its lexical content as in its syntax. We have preserved it in many vocals of which the usage has been lost. In short, *we have lived it.*”²¹

The uprooted and scattered situations of Africana peoples makes the notion of diaspora essential to any articulation of any discourse of liberation, and hence I have attempted to show that such a discourse must be essentially poetic in nature at its base. Concerning the interrelated, enigmatic, and sometimes seemingly paradoxical undertones of this discourse, Penny Von Eschen writes, “African American political discourse was keenly informed by and deeply responsive to events in Africa, in the Caribbean, and throughout the colonized world.”²² This discourse shares the fundamental characteristics of promoting freedom for oppressed peoples through common cultural traits that derive their significance from songs and poems of liberation, ranging from Negro spirituals and ancient African folklore to militant poetry, jazz and contemporary Hip Hop.²³ These expressions of cultural solidarity stand in blatant opposition to the essentially rational paradigm of imperialism and domesticity that dominate the discourse of global capitalism, which are manifest in the institution of the global cosmopolitan urban center. The city is also apparently modelled on the same paradigm of masculinity in the way that it is structured vertically, ascending into the sky like a phallic edifice that bears witness to the imperial conquest of lands on which it rests. An altered perception of the city that de-structures its phallic inception, like an alternative way of employing language through Ebonics or creole (essentially poetic de-structured linguistics) are crucial to the development of any potentially universal black consciousness.

This development has been in progress since before the twentieth century, but reached a culminating point in the aftermath of the first World War, when people became overtly disillusioned with the notions of modern progress and the intense violence that was fundamental to its promotion. In this era, “It was Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro

Improvement Association that brought the notion of the links between the black world and Africa to a mass audience, creating a new working-class diaspora consciousness.”²⁴ This was a turning point in history that heralded the rise of what Dubois termed “Double Consciousness,” the notion that entailed being simultaneously self and other, at home and in exile, and it is based on a dualistic conception of humanity as oppressed and oppressors. Garvey aptly describes this dualism in his philosophy: “We see a small percentage of the world’s populace feeling happy and contented with this civilization that man has evolved, and we see the masses of the human race on the other hand dissatisfied and discontented with the civilization of today—the arrangement of human society. Those masses are determined to destroy the systems that hold up such a society and prop such a civilization.”²⁵ This description holds a certain Marxist undertone of a revolt of the masses, and this discontent with society recalls the poetry of Claude McKay who can only see the city through a mist. Likewise, civilization hides behind a veil of racial segregation that assimilates on one hand and excludes on the other. Logical discourse cannot oppose such contradictory notions without itself being contradictory (often seen as the pitfall of Black Nationalism, which moves simply to replace white with black), hence resistance to the injustices of an inequitable society naturally must assume an alternative form of artistic representation through the performative arts of poetry and musicality.

In the twenty-first century, a poetics of resistance is seen in the Caribbean and Africa through the music of its sons, Bob Marley, Alpha Blondy, Salif Keita, and many more, as well as in the theater, the poetry and poetic discourse of writers such as Glissant, Chamoiseau and, of course, Aimé Césaire. Nesbitt states: “The writings of Césaire and four of the authors who build upon his work—Edouard Glissant, Daniel Maximin, Maryse Condé, and Edwidge Danticat—have transformed colonial subjectivity, reconstructing a historical awareness lost amid the repressive violence of slavery, the plantation system, and the colonial control of historical discourse.”²⁶ This restructured subject/self is akin to the creole identity made up of multiple fragments that remain in the wake of the death of racial purity, and it parallels the de-structured language of an appropriated discourse of discontent that is infused with tones and rhythm to impart its deeply felt significance. In “The Fine Art of Rap” philosopher Richard Shusterman describes a particular aesthetic quality of rap as a musical genre, which has strong implications for my discussion of appropriated language and urban culture. He writes, “The music is composed by selecting and combining parts of pre-recorded songs to produce a ‘new’ soundtrack.”²⁷ This new soundtrack composed of old sounds is similar in its nature to the new language of African Americans composed of parts of the old language of the oppressors, but mixed and combined in different ways to make a new sound that is original and expresses the particularities of the lived black experience. This experience is also apparent in *Texaco* in the way that the houses of the resistance settlement are constructed from debris gathered from previously constructed and deconstructed structures. Chamoiseau writes of one of the settlers of Texaco, “With planks, with stones, on a ruin of someplace, he built his house.”²⁸ The Creole city, like its language are continually restructured from fragments and vestiges of multiple past and now dilapidated forms, like rap appropriates various samples from pre-

recorded music about which Shusterman continues: “It even appropriates non-musical content, such as media news reports and fragments of speeches by Malcom X and Martin Luther King.”²⁹ Hence we see how the now obsolete discourse of the liberation movements of the 1960’s continually resurfaces in different manifestations in order to reintegrate that legacy into a pluriform conglomerate of images, which when taken in context impart an idea of the significance of a continuous evolution of a poetic discourse of liberation.

The piecewise and continuous articulation of collective identity is not only in the case of African peoples, but as is suggested earlier by Penny Von Eschen it is a shared experience for all oppressed peoples, especially those who face racial oppression compounded by gender and class discrimination. These oppressed peoples can find unity across their diversity through a shared “Creole” identity, which expresses itself in the form of poetics like rap, as a deviation from the structured linear norms of Western hegemony in an attempt to articulate artistically something beyond binaries that is somehow better. Again, Glissant writes about this Creole identity: “But its actual poetics—or construction—was what was deviant in relation to any supposed classicism.”³⁰ For this reason, the discourse of liberation poetics and of rap is at least implicitly postmodern in the way it opposes traditional conceptions of rationality that underlie global imperialism and its accompanying economic form—capitalism. Shusterman recalls Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism*³¹ in this respect: “Jameson suggests that the disintegration of traditional modernist boundaries could provide the redemptive option of ‘a new radical cultural politics,’ a postmodern aesthetic which ‘foregrounds the cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of political art and culture.’”³² Hence a poetics of liberation, which de-structures the common conceptions of language, art, and politics is at the heart of the oppositional culture contesting oppression by the modern elite, a poetics or resistance which also exhibits the form of an appropriation and transformation of typical urban imagery.³³

Only a continual process of re-appropriation and re-articulation is capable of expanding consciousness beyond the limitations of traditional dichotomous conceptions. Charles Fager provides a poignant illustration of this fundamental dichotomy in a book entitled *White Reflections on Black Power* in which he writes about two Americas, one white and the other black: “The divisions between the two Americas are obscured by the language and social institutions that the races have superficially in common, as well as by patterns of life that discourage all but myth-reinforcing interracial contacts.”³⁴ According to this assessment, the shared structures of language and modern urban institutions obscure the differences between the two opposed races in what is a feigned assimilation that somehow reinforces the stereotypes of racial segregation. However, it is the way in which the institutions and language are shared that exemplifies the realistic difference. The dominant white culture has a traditional recorded history that legitimizes a concrete heritage, whereas the black culture has been lost in the depths of the Atlantic passage, and has since been reformulated in terms of appropriated and combined fragments of several cultural linkages. This reflects in the language and a historical tradition that is primarily oral and manifests itself today in several artistic mediums, rap being the most prominent. The language of rap, like the poetics of Creole are described in *Texaco* in terms of the revolutionary action

of a black female character: "She mobilized for this the resources of her language built from the languages that she had been bordered by."³⁵ Her language is therefore a construction based on several languages with which she has had experience, mixed and reconstructed in a montage of a personalized poetics of her own particular blend of Creole identity. Similarly, rap and the language of the "black community" consist of multiple structures combined in such a way that expresses the condition of discontent and desire for liberation, which employs forms of inversion and ambiguity to turn the language of the oppressor against them. It is this confrontational nature of rap that provides it with its power to resist. Shusterman writes, "For precisely this sort of ambiguity and inversion is basic to the black linguistic community."³⁶ Again, the only way to express the inexpressible condition of opposition to the contradictory conceptions of the modern imperialist discourse of oppression is through a postmodern poetics that relate the situation of daily life.

A problem arises when this type of expression becomes recast within the framework it opposes, such as is described by Fager: "Even where Negroes have managed to get a toehold in the mass media that project these images, they are seen doing the things and exemplifying the characteristics ascribed by a white nation to itself."³⁷ Accordingly, the traditional dualistic framework that promotes stereotypical images and maintains the status quo of oppression plays into the process of appropriation in filtering its content in such a way that commercializes rap, making it merely another reductive representation of hypersexualized and dehumanized black people. In order to circumvent this re-inscription into the modern dualistic oppositional paradigm, it is necessary to continually rearticulate and reformulate the language of resistance and infuse it with new meanings that resist even this kind of reintegration into the dominant discourse. This is certainly the case in dealing with the identity of the black woman whose intersectional nature cannot be statically conceived in terms of either race or gender. In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" Kimberle Crenshaw writes: "Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling."³⁸ This inability to tell characterizes the fragmented state of the black community's lack of unity, which is cross-cut with multiple intersections of class, gender, sexuality, generation, and nationality among others. What is common among these divergent and complex layers of identity, however is the way in which they appropriate and use language to express their silent resistance against the concepts themselves, and the way in which this poetic expression shapes their perception of the cosmopolitan urban environment as something else to be deconstructed and taken back. Hip Hop is but one vehicle for such a selected sampling and restructuring that allows for new forms or articulated resistance through liberation poetics within a transformed urban environment, and its tradition can be traced along with the African American literary tradition, back to Africa and the traditional life rhythms of its peoples.

Through countless years of struggle against oppression in its many forms throughout the globe, it is ever apparent that a poetics of resistance, grounded in a fragmented

experience of lost origins of diaspora Africans, continues to affect the way that we see ourselves and the global cities we share. This is not only the case for African Americans, or for Afro-Caribbean peoples, but for anyone who feels alienated from a lost cultural heritage. Barbara Kingsolver tells of this kind of experience in *The Poisonwood Bible*. "Let me claim that Africa and I kept company for a while and then parted ways, as if we were both party to relations with a failed outcome. Or say I was afflicted with Africa like a bout of a rare disease, from which I have not managed a full recovery. Maybe I'll even confess the truth, that I rode in with the horsemen and beheld the apocalypse, but still I'll insist I was only a captive witness."³⁹ Today Africa calls out to its peoples who are scattered over the face of the globe and exhibit an infinite gradation of skin colors and cultural experiences, beckoning to them all with traces of a lost common heritage. This feeling is shared by many and is expressed in as many ways through various poetic forms that escape the structural limitations of fixed modern discourse, in an endless intertwining of multiple perspectives that must continually reassert their validity. Rap artist Talib Kweli says it straight on his album *Quality* released in 2002:

It's like sayin' only gays gets AIDS, propaganda!
Like sayin' the problem's over when they lock that man up.
Wrong! It's just the beginning, first inning,
Battle for America's soul, devil's winning.⁴⁰

The urgency is sensed in the way the words are displayed, a feeling of continual beginning again that is necessary for a poetic articulation of resistance and desire for liberation. The problem of black and white will never get solved, it can only be suspended through a refusal to acknowledge its ideological relevance as an overly reductive and simplifying concept of an obsolete dialectic understanding of the world. In order to transcend the limitations of the discourse of modern hegemony, it is imperative to reinterpret oneself in relation to one's use of language and one's perception of the global metropolis in such a way that restructures individual and group identity, and calls for open consideration of everyone together as imperfect and creole, a condition that is only manifested in poetic expression. In conclusion, a pertinent quote from the prestigious *In Praise of Creoleness* reinforces the fact that, "Only poetic understanding... in short, artistic understanding will be able to discover us, to perceive us, to bring us back evanescently to a reanimation of consciousness."⁴¹

Notes

¹ Here it may be useful to consider Édouard Glissant's notion of *Poetics of Relation* (2000) as a means of characterizing the multi-lateral and interconnected rhizomatic nature of diasporic imaginations.

² In the chapter, "On Violence," for example, Fanon argues that only a reversal of colonial violence, which is violence in its purest form, is capable of reversing and thereby decolonizing colonial societies and subjects.

³ See Tate, *Black Skins Black Masks*.

⁴ Mbembe argues that Africa as an extant entity is the direct result of a colonial library—"une bibliothèque coloniale"—which constructs Africa as an other's fiction—"la fiction de l'autre" (142). As such, Mbembe proposes that this fiction constitutes a global reality for any and all diasporic populations participating in this fiction.

⁵ Gilroy *The Black Atlantic* (3)

⁶ The *Committée Invisible* would argue precisely the same point in *Gouverner par le chaos: ingénierie sociale et mondialisation* (2014).

⁷ DuBois *An ABC of Color* Address: "To the Nations of the World" from the first Pan-African Congress in 1900. (19-23)

⁸ Wright *12 Million Black Voices* (40)

⁹ Randall *The Black Poets* (61)

¹⁰ See, for example, the documentary film *Lumumba* directed by Raoul Peck (2000) for a vivid account of the turmoil of the de-colonization in the Belgian Congo.

¹¹ Kingsolver *The Poisonwood Bible* (455)

¹² Fanon *Black Skin White Masks* (35) The Negro is characterized as "the eternal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible."

¹³ 10. Chamoiseau *Texaco* (443-444) "Mais la ville est un danger, *notre* danger. L'automobile conquiert l'espace, le centre se dépeuple et les échoués y sédimentent; elle amplifie la dépendance alimentaire, la fascination pour l'extérieur et l'énergie non productive; ouverte sur le monde elle ignore le pays, et dans le pays, l'homme; elle saisonne en solitudes et pauvretés nouvelles inconnues des médecins; elle saccade des pollutions et l'insécurité; elle se répand partout, menace les cultures et les différences comme un virus mondial. La ville est un danger."

¹⁴ Chamoiseau *Texaco* (455) "Mais la ville est un danger; elle devient mégapole et ne s'arrête jamais; elle pétrifie de silences les campagnes comme autrefois les Empires étouffaient l'alentour; sur la ruine de l'Etat-nation, elle s'érige monstrueusement plurinationale, transnationale, supranationale, cosmopolite—créole démente en quelque sorte, et devient l'unique structure déshumanisée de l'espèce humaine."

¹⁵ Bernabé et al. *Éloge de la créolité* (14) "Nous sommes fondamentalement frappés d'extériorité."

¹⁶ Bernabé et al. *Éloge de la créolité* (13) "Cela sera pour nous une attitude intérieure, mieux: une vigilance, ou mieux encore, une sorte d'enveloppe mentale au mitan de laquelle se bâtira notre monde en pleine conscience du monde. Ces paroles que nous vous transmettons ne relevant pas de la théorie, ni de principes savants. Elles branchent au témoignage. Elles procèdent d'une expérience stérile que nous avons connue avant de nous attacher à réenclencher notre potentiel créatif, et de mettre en branle l'expression de ce que nous sommes."

¹⁷ Nesbitt *Voicing Memory* (3)

¹⁸ McClintock *Imperial Leather* (1-3)

¹⁹ Schwarz-Bart *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (31 & 92) "Aussitôt arrivée, elle se mettait à laver son linge en chantant, à le sécher, l'amidonner et le repasser, chantant toujours." "...et je faisais mon ouvrage en chantant, et lorsque je chantais je coupais ma peine, je hachais ma peine, et ma peine tombait dans la chanson..."

²⁰ Glissant *Poetics of Relation* (81)

²¹ Bernabé et al. *Éloge de la créolité* "Nous avons étendu le sens de certains mots. Nous en avons dévié d'autres. Et métamorphosé beaucoup. Nous l'avons enrichi tant dans son lexique que dans sa syntaxe. Nous l'avons préservée dans moult vocables dont l'usage s'est perdu. Bref, *nous l'avons habitée*."

²² Von Eschen *Race Against Empire* (7)

²³ See the documentary film *Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony* directed by Lee Hirsch (2002) for an illustration of the central role of music in the bringing about of an end to South African apartheid.

²⁴ Von Eschen *Race Against Empire* (10)

²⁵ Garvey *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* (31)

²⁶ Nesbitt *Voicing Memory* (xiv)

²⁷ Shusterman *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (202)

²⁸ Chamoiseau *Texaco* (200) "Avec des planches, avec des pierres, sur une ruine quelque part, il leva sa cabane."

²⁹ Shusterman *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (205)

³⁰ Glissant *Poetics of Relation* (97)

³¹ Jameson *Postmodernism*

³² Shusterman *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (213)

³³ Chancé *Poétique baroque de la Caraïbe*

³⁴ Fager *White Reflections on Black Power* (13)

³⁵ Chamoiseau *Texaco* (125) "Elle mobilisait pour cela les ressources de son langage bâti avec les langues qu'elle avait côtoyées."

³⁶ Shusterman *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (221)

³⁷ Fager *White Reflections on Black Power* (49)

³⁸ Crenshaw "Mapping the Margins" (1242)

³⁹ Kingsolver *The Poisonwood Bible* (9)

⁴⁰ Talib Kweli *Quality* (2002) track title "The Proud"

⁴¹ Bernabé et al. *Éloge de la Créolité* (38) "Seule la connaissance poétique... bref, la connaissance artistique, pourra nous déceler, nous percevoir, nous ramener évanescents aux réanimations de la conscience."

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Buddhist Recognition in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

Ikea M. Johnson

Since its 1952 publication, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* has been renowned as a twentieth-century American fiction masterpiece. The novel reflects the lives of African Americans during this time, and most scholars talk about race. During its publication, Ellison's former college Tuskegee Institute reported no lynching in the United States for the first time in 71 years of tabulation. Just a year before in 1951, on May 24, a mob of 3,500 Caucasians attempted to prevent an African American family from moving into a Cicero, Illinois apartment. Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson called out the Illinois National Guard to protect the family and restore order. In the same year of 1951, on May 24, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled racial segregation in District of Columbia restaurants as unconstitutional.

During a 1966 interview, Ellison begins to stroke the top of a sandstone Indian head of Buddha from the Jain period sitting in his study. He explains that after he saw the sculpture, dreamed about it a few times, he finally purchased it (on a monthly payment plan) from the gallery of William Wolfe on Madison avenue and 69th street in Harlem, New York. Ellison reveals that the artwork contributed to his creative process as a writer. He became interested in the philosophical and religious rituals that influence artists. He also believed the power of the writer lies in their ability to show a bit more about the complexity of humanity. Ralph Ellison thought the slightest thing overlooked which tells of the unity of the American experience beyond class, race, and religion is a disservice by a writer to the nation, especially a country that is still in the process of unifying itself. In addition to issues of race in his contemporary moment, Ellison also draws inspiration from Greek philosophy and Buddhist philosophy. The importance of Buddhist philosophy is especially significant in reading *Invisible Man* as a work of African American Buddhist Literature.

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