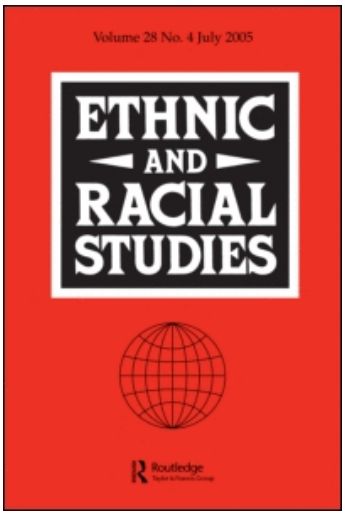

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The Antillese in France: Trends and prospects

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The Antillese in France: Trends and prospects

Michel Giraud

Abstract

The cultural drives in the Antillese population in continental France have switched, in step with migration dynamics, in direction and target: they focus less than in the past on the future of the 'native lands' and more on improved integration in the host country. But in such a situation, facing racism, Antillese peoples in France are paradoxically reduced to emphasizing their collective identity, notably through associations, to obtain recognition from the host society's institutions and achieve social advancement within that society. A recognition of the diversity and complexity of the cultural dynamics in question should lead to break with any essentialist thinking and, then, to reappraise many of the ideas that are at the heart of the discussions inspired by those dynamics, notably the idea of diaspora.

Keywords: Identity; cultural hybridity and essentialism; associations, racism; migration; diaspora.

From home to Babylon

'Black' cultural experience in the interwar years and just after World War II generally fired or was fired by anti-colonialist sentiment. It was for the most part the province of intellectuals concerned for the political future of their home countries and keen to assume power there. It was the heyday of '*Négritude*' and the movement's noted Paris-published journals: *Légitime Défense, L'Etudiant Noir, La Revue du Monde Noir, Présence Africaine.* By the late 1970s, the pioneer action of the intellectual elite had been superseded on the Antillese[1] immigrant culture scene by more popular manifestations, quite often festive in character. Examples were the Caribbean Carnival, pop concerts given by bands well-known on the international entertainment circuit, like *Kassav* and *Malavoi*, and others by groups deeply rooted in the tradition of French Antilles rural music (the *Gwoka* of Guadeloupe, the *Bélé* of Martinique).

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The atmosphere at these concerts was a torrid mixture of revelry and exaltation. Their essential function, for the Antillese in the audience, was the assertion of a collective identity. In this sense, they resembled the *Fania All Stars'* first big music shows in the Yankee Stadium for New York's Porto Ricans, or Bob Marley's concerts and the Notting Hill Carnival for London's West Indians. Alongside these big-scale events, many activities, often sponsored by associations, were aimed at reviving traditional Caribbean art forms. Dance or drum-band workshops and groups were a favourite choice. Their work was often presented at galas organized by the associations and in festivals all over France.[2] By this consolidation of certain traditional pillars of Antillese identity, workshop and group members, like the audiences at their performances, acquired a stronger feeling of belonging to a special community.

The celebratory upsurge and the folk revival did not, however, completely banish intellectual considerations. The popular phenomena mentioned led also to collective pondering on many aspects of Antillese immigration. The associations held regular study and discussion days and evenings on such varied subjects as the after-effects of slavery on the present condition of the Antillese peoples, schooling in France for the children of Antillese families, the role of Antillese medical staff in the Paris region's hospitals. In the early 1980s, several 'free' radios claiming to speak for the Antillese community took to the air to pursue the thinking and discussion of the associations. A publishing house, now defunct, specializing in Caribbean material, was also set up.

All of the above is evidence of the wish, through the highlighting of Antillese cultural peculiarities, of a large segment of the population to obtain admittance on their own but equal terms to French society. It could well be said that this was the undeclared social purpose of the cultural ferment in question. The peculiarities are made to serve socio-political strategies designed to obtain recognition from the host society's institutions and achieve social advancement within that society.[3] Many Antillese immigrants are persuaded that only a 'community' bound together by its identity can get the host society to admit that it is an individual group with its own problems and its own demands, and thereby obtain satisfaction for them. Ethnic identity and its cultural attributes thus become political strengths. 'New political practices [emerge] which assert both collective identity and citizens' rights' (translated from Anselin 1990, p. 220). Given the particular nature of the problems, notably racism, which the Antillese peoples must face in continental France, they are reduced to emphasizing their 'difference', since that is the only criterion they can use for justifying their specific claims.

It is for this reason that they prefer to promote their wishes and demands – whether to do with employment, housing, living conditions, or greater opportunities for cultural self-expression – through the association system. The associations permit mobilization on a community

basis of a sort not possible in France through trade union or political party action.[4] It also explains the fact that most associations are primarily concerned with keeping alive and giving prominence to the group's cultural heritage. By doing this and projecting the resulting image of a united community, they hope to be seen by local institutions and even by the national government as valued channels of communication and respected talking partners. For the associations, the ultimate purpose of advertizing the community cultural heritage with celebrations, carnivals, performance days and other public festivities is to gain official recognition and so be given a say in local and national policy-making of concern to the 'community's' existence.[5] The president of an Antillese association in the Paris suburbs told one of my colleagues during the project mentioned in Note 3, 'Now that we've become known here, the town council makes us party to its decisions.' The associations do not feel that by themselves they have the wherewithal to solve the material problems of their members and their families. The store they set on cultural action shows that they choose instead to mobilize and exploit the resources of community cultural identity to exert pressure on the authorities. It is a lobbying approach used by the associations to induce the authorities to iron out their difficulties.

It is easy to understand, then, why many Antillese associations maintain close relations with the authorities of their local host societies. The first of these are their neighbourhood town councils which often grant them financial support and material assistance, especially for their various cultural events. There are cases where association staff also serve as local officeholders. Among the associations studied during our research project, nearly half had premises provided free of charge by their local Town Hall; and more than two-thirds received a municipal subsidy amounting sometimes to thirty or even fifty per cent of their annual budget. In return, the city dignitaries – who were often guests of honour at the associations' cultural performances – could hope to rake in the Antillese vote at the local elections.

The main focus of the associations' attentions, however, was the central government, or at least certain of its organs: such as the Secretariat of State for Overseas Departments and Territories [DOM-TOM] and, above all, the [ANT]. One of the ANT's banner activities for a long time, until its role started shrinking in the last few years, was its work in the direction of associations of DOM members; it had even compiled a directory of them. All the associations we studied – with the exception of one, the *Union des Travailleurs Emigrés Guadeloupéens*, with strong nationalist leanings – had sought ANT patronage for either training courses, financial aid, solutions to housing, job and health problems, or trips back home for their members and contacts. A few had signed agreements with the ANT and most received subsidies for occasional events and actions.

In other words, the Antillese association movement in France was, and still is, magnetically attracted by the State. A tissue of vertical networks spreads down from the State enabling it to channel the community's aspirations and have its community policy accepted. It is not surprising, then, that the government was the instigator of the two largest gatherings of Overseas people's associations – once in 1983 and again in 1987, under two cabinets of diametrically opposed political colours, that of Pierre Mauroy and, later, that of Jacques Chirac. The first was the 'Congress on the social integration of Overseas citizens' (*Assises pour l'insertion des originaires d'Outre-mer*). It had been pre-prepared by a National Study Day and research by a working group which handed in its report[6] to the Minister concerned shortly before the Congress. The Congress was opened by the Secretary of State for the DOM-TOM and closed by the then Prime Minister in person. The second gathering was the 'General assembly of Overseas people's associations' (*Etats généraux des associations des originaires d'Outre-mer*), not only closed but chaired by the Prime Minister of the day.

The striking thing here is the switch in direction and target of these cultural drives. They focus less than in the recent past on the future of the 'native lands' and more on improved integration in the host country. Times have changed. In the situation under review (as in many other similar situations), they have changed in step with past and present modifications in population flows, not only as regards their volume but, perhaps more importantly, as regards their sociological make-up. Times have changed in step with migration dynamics, and these are always central to cultural dynamics.

Migration dynamics and cultural dynamics

Until the late 1950s, France-bound Antillese migration was negligible, amounting to a few thousand people only. According to the 1954 National Population Census, no more than 4 per cent of French Caribbean-born people resided in continental France. The main feature of what may be called 'early' Antillese migration – since it began back in the interwar years – was that it consisted mainly of well-educated persons of middle-class origin (for the most part, students, fee-earning professionals and civil servants) who could, and probably would, return to their country of birth. For them, or at least for those who decided to settle for any length in France, being an immigrant posed no great problem. As far as we know, most of them therefore adopted a policy of 'ethnic transparency' (rocking the boat as little as possible). Where their behaviour was concerned, they played the card of their French citizenship (literally played their national identity card) to become established and rise on the social ladder in France.

The turning-point which was to transform the Antillese immigrant

situation in France came at the beginning of the 1960s. At the end of the 1950s, the 'old colonies' (Guadeloupe, French Guyana, Martinique and Reunion) were given the status of French Departments. This brought about a lasting collapse of the colonies' plantation economies, plunged the French Antilles into a serious social crisis and triggered a wave of migration out of the area (see Table 1). It must be said that the French government actively encouraged, and even helped to organize, the exodus. Its first step was to create in October 1961 a public office to look after the operation: the Overseas Department Migration Development Bureau (*Bureau pour le développement des migrations intéressant les départements d'outre-mer* – BUMIDOM). The Bureau had two purposes: to relieve pressure on the overstrained local labour market, and to meet a strong demand for unskilled workers in France in certain sections of the civil service. At the time, Castro's revolution was triumphing in Cuba, Algeria was on the brink of independence, decolonization was in full swing around the world and, locally, the first French Caribbean independence movements were starting to form. All these developments, not forgetting the violent rioting in Martinique in December 1959, were threatening the colonial order in France's American Departments.[7]

This great wave of migration was primarily composed of under-skilled people from the lower walks of society. The 'proletarization' of emigration from Guadeloupe and Martinique changed the nature of the

Table 1. *Population trends for Antillese dwelling in continental France (1962–1990)*

Year	Population actually born in the French Caribbean	Annual intercensal change (%)	Population of Caribbean 'origin',(a)
1962	37,591	–	n.a.
1968	61,160	10.45	n.a.
1975	115,465	12.69	163,945
1982	182,728	8.31	265,988
1990	211,550	1.90	337,006

Source: Condon and Ogden 1996, p. 38.
Note*:* (a) By 'population of DOM origin', the National Statistics and Economic Studies Institute (*Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques* – INSEE) and Claude-Valentin Marie, author for INSEE and the Ministry for Overseas Departments and Territories of the only complete analysis of census data on the Overseas Department population living in France (see Marie, 1993a), mean all persons born in an Overseas Department residing in continental France **plus** their children aged under twenty five living under the same roof.
Comment: An idea of how massive this emigration was may be gained from the fact that the number of people of Antillese extraction living in France in 1990 practically equalled the whole population of one of the two Antillese Departments (387,000 in Guadeloupe, 360,000 in Martinique) during the same period. Over a quarter of the people born in the French Antilles lived in France and, numerically, the Antillese ranked fifth among France's immigrant populations. In Alain Anselin's phrase (Anselin 1990), the Antillese in France had become a 'third island'.

Antillese immigrant community in France. It also changed the 'spirit' of that community's combat.

From that point on, most of the migrant population experienced much greater difficulty in finding decent jobs than had their 'early' immigration predecessors. This was despite the fact that – given that most of them found positions in the public sector[8] – they benefited from better employment opportunities than foreign immigrants.[9] Their situation in the public sector was typified by dismal promotion prospects, since more than two-thirds of them (compared with less than half of all French workers) were occupied in the sector's least-qualified categories. They were often hospital maids or orderlies, service personnel in crèches and school canteens, menial government employees, Post Office or city transport workers. In the private sector, where the vast majority of Antillese are today blue-collar workers, their skills status kept falling with every successive wave of immigration. The proportion of executives, technicians and white-collar workers dropped while that of labourers, storemen and maintenance staff rose (see Anselin 1990, p. 100). The same trend can be seen within the latter group; the comparative number of unskilled workers and labourers grew while the number of skilled workers and foremen shrank (see Anselin 1990, pp. 104, 106).

Thus, most Antillese employees have occupied until recently and still do occupy a particular position in the metropolitan employment system, due to their French nationality and in accordance with the needs of this system. This position is both similar and complementary to that of foreign workers, since they have occupied, mainly within the public sector, low-skilled jobs, which mostly foreigners occupy in the private sector. But it has given them an undeniable advantage over the latter in terms of job security. However, as new immigrants from the Antilles and children of Antillese families already settled in France have arrived on the Metropolitan labour market, where it has been increasingly difficult to land the more secure public jobs, this advantage has been fading. The Antillese population residing in France has been slipping towards joining the most underprivileged sections of French society.

The prospects that educating this population's children in France might raise for its future do not seem to be able to remove the concerns relating to the observation I have just presented.[10] As far as can be ascertained, these children, overall, perform poorly at school (see, for instance, Galap 1990, 1993b; Giraud 1993). Thus, in a contribution I wrote for the Lucas report (see Note 6), I indicated that, at the time, there were twice as many children born in the West Indies and residing in France in vocational schools (regarded as devalued channels of the educational system) as children from Metropolitan France. Similarly, the latter enter twice as often as their Antillese counterparts the longer cycle of general secondary schools (leading to the *baccalauréat*, an examination that acts as a gateway to higher education).

The general trend towards a proletarized Antillese immigration in France shows itself in the high proportion of these immigrants living in social housing in towns with many socially underprivileged populations (see Marie 1982, pp. 7–8).[11] And this trend has been heightened by the growing social and economic crisis which French society, as a whole, has undergone in the last two decades. Antillese people living in France, 73 per cent of whom reside in the Paris region, have thus been led to a situation which, although different in certain respects, is similar, in many ways, to that of the most depreciated populations of foreign descent. Theirs is especially similar to those from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, to whom they are often likened. For example, they are sometimes faced – when applying for social housing – with the same obstacles as those encountered by 'foreigners', and this is due to a discrete policy of 'quotas' carried out by certain local authorities (of which some are 'left-wing');[12] both populations – Antillese and 'foreigners' – having been categorized, because of this policy, under the same heading: 'non-native populations' (*populations allogènes*). Or they are often faced, as the most stigmatized foreign workers are, with refusals of employment, which an official study into the occupational integration of unskilled young people proves to be caused by applicants' phenotypes.[13] Antillese people, when looking for employment, are sometimes told that 'if they weren't black, they would be hired' (see Mélin 1996, p. 100). And, when they do have a job, it is a known fact that '(. . .) [In France,] a worker from an overseas department has more difficulties than a worker from Metropolitan France with the same level of training in finding a job suitable for his/her training, or is more often pushed towards a job requiring less qualifications' (translated from the Lucas report, p. 43). In a context of growing social and economic crisis and deepening racism, they have been exposed even more to the mechanisms of social selection. And all the more so because in the light of the above-mentioned employment situation and the job market in the French Caribbean, the Antillese population now living in France has far fewer chances of returning home than was the case for the 'early' immigration.

It is not surprising, in view of the current situation of the Antillese population in France and the racist reactions it sometimes excites, that many of its members have chosen to assert their identity. They do this both to affirm their rights and to obtain the leverage they need to fit into their host society satisfactorily.[14] They are all the more incited to do so by the fact that the place of the 'large immigrant presence' question at the top of France's political agenda has produced what many sociologists call an 'ethnicization' of social relations in France.[15]

Although mobilization around identity and sense of community constitutes the 'ground-swell' of the Antillese immigration process, not all Antillese living in France endorse it. The Antillese, even less than other immigrant groups, cannot be considered as a seamless whole. They

are stratified along social and generational lines whose strategies can not only diverge but also contradict one another. The socio-demographic structural changes outlined above have not completely obliterated the features of the earlier period. Many of those belonging to the 'early' migration wave are, along with their offspring, still present in the country. That wave was mostly composed of and dominated by middle and senior rank civil servants, or graduates who stayed on to work in France after completing their studies. Their presence has enabled a different kind of migratory experience to survive – observably, in terms of their reasonably acceptable living conditions and real prospects for social advancement, and mentally, because they see French law and citizenship as the best means of achieving integration. With the prestige attached to their long residence and social standing in France, they control many associations where they advocate pro-assimilation policies whose influence reaches well beyond their authors' own social milieu. That influence tends to be easily accepted since most Antillese immigrants are themselves civil servants (albeit humble ones) and would like to imitate the model represented by the elite.

The disparate nature and contradictions of the Antillese immigrant community would seem to be reflected in the structure of the association movement. The associations dub themselves either 'Antillese' (or 'Antillo-Guyanese') or 'DOM'. It is fair to suppose that each adjective corresponds to a different strategy for integration in the host society. The first, which expresses the sentiment of belonging to a specific culture, could be interpreted as a wish to reconcile integration in French society with respect for the Antillo-Guyanese migrants' particular character. The second, since the DOMs can hardly claim a single cultural heritage, reveals more of a strategy for organizing all Overseas' migrants into a large pressure group pushing for integration on the strength of their country's French Department status.

The above account of the present situation and composition of the Antillese population in France should make it easier to understand the change of direction, mentioned at the beginning, which has occurred in its collective action and method of expressing itself. The future of Guadeloupe and Martinique, more especially, is no longer at the forefront of Antillese immigrant concerns. The seeming paradox here is that community mobilization around the native cultural heritage is simultaneously increasing. What must be remembered is that large numbers of today's migrants eke out a precarious and problem-ridden existence in a hostile social environment, with little or no realistic chance of joining or rejoining the labour market in their (or their parents') homelands. The drains made on them by the everyday struggle for living in the host country do not leave them enough energy for interesting themselves in what is happening in their ancestral lands. Many of them remain attached to their native soil, but the political leaders and much of the population

back in the Caribbean do not show any great solicitude for the fate of their emigrant brethren.

It may be guessed from this that, beneath their common denomination, a serious rift is opening between the identity profiles set in play by 'Antillese' on either side of the Atlantic. It is indeed true – counter to what, on the one hand, the irredentist sentiments voiced at home and inside the emigrant population and, on the other, the anti-foreign ideology embraced by certain fractions of the host society would have people believe (sentiments and ideology oddly at one in their essentialization of cultural identities) – that the collective 'soul' which inspires the community manifestations mentioned earlier is not a simple replica in new surroundings of the frozen-in-stone traditions of the community's 'native culture'. The migrant community, like the whole of French society, is caught up in a cross-flow of cultures which brings together all kinds of traditions and blends them into new configurations. No one of these traditions can remain in its original state; each is transformed by entering into contact and mixing with the others. Only rarely does immigration feed on pure nostalgia and live passively off a heritage guarded and kept as 'authentic' as possible, at the risk of its reduction into folklore; more often is it a crucible of invention where homeland traditions undergo profound change.[16] In other words, immigration is by nature destined to demarcate itself from the country of origin.[17] Owing to this distancing, celebration of identity in the immigration context acquires meanings and, even more, serves purposes different from those observable in the source country. It is revealing that the Antillese immigrant associations studied by my colleagues and myself hardly ever defined themselves in national terms (that is, with reference to Guadeloupe or Martinique); this at a time when nationalism is on the rise in both islands. The associations prefer instead to call themselves 'Antillese'.[18]

Another feature of the migration dynamics associated with the Antillese population in France helped powerfully in shifting the focus of their immigration on to itself. This was the population's gradual stabilization and taking root in the areas where it chose to settle. The tendency was greatly reinforced by two of its main characteristics. First, the population was comparatively young (a feature common to all labour-based migration); in 1990, seven out of ten Antillese leaving their home Department to live in Metropolitan France were aged under forty. Second, the gender ratio, unlike that of most other labour migration, was balanced; in 1990, women accounted for 51.6 per cent of the total Antillese population in Metropolitan France. In combination, the number of young and the number of women produced a sharp rise in the numbers of Antillese families and children born in France (to the detriment of the home islands' demographics). A labour migration became a settlement one. According to the 1990 census figures, 91 per cent of the 104,637 children

of Antillese extraction aged under fifteen were born in France, as against 44 per cent of the 68,032 in the fifteen twenty-four age brackets (Marie 1993a). The Antillese immigrant community therefore renews its numbers more by internal growth than by outward migration from the Antilles. The trend was accentuated by changes in immigration policy (see Constant 1987; Giraud and Marie 1987, pp. 31–4). The French government stopped encouraging migration from the DOMs, placing the emphasis instead on the integration of those who had already migrated. In 1982, it replaced the BUMIDOM with the ANT, the National Agency for the Integration and Advancement of Overseas Workers. The change of title was deliberately meant to signal a change in direction.

Nevertheless, since the mid-80s, there has been a decrease in the number of Antillese people settling in France. This is due to their integration becoming more difficult there, and the number of those who go back to their homeland increasing.[19] Those who have stayed in the West Indies tend not to leave for France so often, even if unemployed. And when they decide to go, their leaving is experimental, and they often go back quickly. Mind you, they may leave again later on, since there is total freedom of movement between Antillese departments and Metropolitan France and the relative decrease in air fares makes it easier to fly back and forth. As Alain Anselin wrote, from now on '(. . .) *people don't emigrate anymore, they go back and forth*' (translated from Anselin 1990, p. 197).

The very substantial increase in the numbers of 'second' and 'third' generation Antillese in France is of capital importance for our subject, since it brought about decisive changes in the cultural dynamics of the Antillese immigrant population. Most of the young people in question grew up or were raised in the French working-class environment, and more particularly in the social universe of the Paris suburbs. There they rubbed up against not only children from the 'foreign' immigrant communities, extremely numerous in the boroughs inhabited by the Antillese, but also 'native' French children from the underprivileged classes. Their relation with these other children was founded partly on the situation they all shared but also – since social amenities were scarce – on a certain rivalry. Given the relatively small degree of race-based housing segregation in France and the consequent multi-ethnic composition of many groups of young people in the working suburbs, a great deal of mutual borrowing and cultural swapping occurred. The result of this interplay has been the emergence of new, syncretic cultural forms, the best example of which, besides the new styles of music that have appeared, is a kind of speech considered to be typical of the suburban apartment block complexes. It would be wrong to reduce it to its use of the old *verlan*[20] invented over a century ago by the 'bad lads' of the outskirts of Paris when these were the '*fortifs*' (the fortifications around the French capital) and not yet suburbs. In its modern versions, a

reinvented *verlan* is incorporated into new language patterns and speech rhythms, punchier than ordinary spoken French.

Language aside, all the syncretic phenomena noted here arise out of cultural assimilations in which the traditional cultural forms of the different groups living together, as well as cultural forms practised by groups completely absent from the French migration scene, receive a new interpretation. The resulting amalgams cannot be analysed in terms of their component parts or even the sum of these parts. There is a further complication: in the wake of today's trans-nationalization of cultural models (especially the irresistible world-wide spread of North American – and, as regards our subject groups, African-American[21] – fashions and customs) has followed the adoption of borrowed identities having little to do with their disciples' origins. Good examples are the creeds of the *Zoulous de France* – who copy the American reworking (that of the 'Zulu Nation' of Afrika Bambaata and the hip-hop movement of the Black ghettos in America) of an African identity – or of the Parisian believers in the Jamaican Rastafarians' mythical Africanness. All these manifestations come clothed in novel cultural languages disconnected from the accepted references to the nominal culture of origin. While a large proportion of the Antillese immigrant population in France continues to assert its identity by remaining loyal to its own culture, another large and growing fraction (among the young especially) is recasting its system of representation and values at the cost of a crisis in its symbolic framework. Individual groups which no longer fully identify politically or culturally with the migration source countries are beginning to appear. Yet, as minorities, they are still left on the edges of the host society. They increasingly regard this society as their own, but would like to join it on their own terms ('communitarist' or 'particularist' integration, as some scholars call it; see, for example, Genestier 1991). France's young Antillese are thus becoming 'blacks' in their own and in other people's eyes.

'Open the windows! Some air! Some air!'[22]

The dynamics governing the Guadeloupean and Martinican immigrant populations in France are so fluid, labile and complex – owing to the variety of situations and corresponding attitudes in play – that they erode the stability of the subject-matter in the debates in France and elsewhere on the 'identity' of migrant people and their descendants. The fact is that these dynamics do not sit well with the temptation – often not far from the surface when these themes are formulated – to accord an absolute value to cultural identities, to treat them as 'second nature' and their transmission as a genealogical imperative from which no person can escape without losing his soul or mind. This intellectual propensity for essentialism (whether in connection with race, origin, roots or tradition) can lead to the concealment of an undeniable reality. While it is perfectly

true that migrants do not land naked, that they carry their culture with them, it is equally true that that culture may not have 'travelled well' and that displacing it has transmuted it into something very different. Even if (and probably because) it has 'travelled badly', it is rich with the promise of creative resurrection and, in the new land, that promise is often kept.

A recognition of the diversity and complexity of cultural dynamics should lead us to reappraise many of the ideas (nation, race, culture, identity, etc.) that are at the heart of the discussions inspired by those dynamics. When we examine the ideas' development as we do here, it becomes clear that too often they are the victim of crypto-essentialist thinking.

The loose and haphazard use (when the subject of migration comes up) of one of these ideas deserves the closest attention, since it is a particularly instructive example of how the identity dynamics discussed above risk being essentialized. It is the notion of 'diaspora'.[23] Many authors, of course, refer to it without any reductive intention, using it to signify groups in which new non-hermetic identities are produced – by hybridization or syncretism – in a pluralist cultural context. In doing so, they deliberately break with a certain tradition. Stuart Hall, for example, writes:

> (. . .) diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, (. . .) This is the old, the imperializing, the hegemonizing form of "ethnicity" (. . .) The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined not by essence or purity, but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (Hall 1990, p. 235)

If the idea of diaspora is made to cover, however, any human group shaped by cultural cross-fertilization (a necessary consequence of any migration), and its only measuring-stick is the creative potential of people of different origins mingling together (a general process), there is a risk of the idea losing any distinctive meaning – as the earlier quotation from Robin Cohen (see Note 23) was intended to show. Persons really needing to make the appropriate distinctions are left with no choice but to give the word back its traditional meaning and relevance, namely belief in a lost homeland to which one will some day return, a sense of exile, of being cut off from one's roots in a society where one does not really belong. But this interpretation implies that, in a group's feeling of identity, the most important factor is the relation with the home country, that 'the heart is, and can only be, where this first

homeland was or is' (Cohen 1993, p. 63).[24] Thus, to use the term 'diaspora' when speaking of groups whose collective existence does not necessarily reflect belief in a 'lost homeland' or a 'sense of exile' is to run the danger, often unwittingly, of rendering the concept tendentious. It would come to mean that the identity of any migrant group is proof that a 'people' remains an indissoluble social and cultural whole no matter what distance of land and sea physically separates its scattered components.

Much of what we have said about the identity dynamics affecting Antillese in France tends to show that as a rule the relation with the 'homeland' is not, or is no longer, a high priority. The term 'diaspora' in its strict sense is not therefore the right one to convey the diversity of the identity strategies and identity-building processes already described, nor the extreme novelty of many of them. While many individual Antillese most definitely continue to identify themselves with exclusive reference to the 'homeland', there are others – and they are increasingly numerous as succeeding generations take root in continental France – who seem to be adopting new modes of identification. One of them, practised by some members of the community who feel adrift in a sort of ether which is neither 'here' nor 'there', consists in forming 'a borderless social bond' (translated from Chivallon 1995, p. 204). The space to which they attach their identity can be called truly trans-national since it lies in a 'yonder' beyond their origins or, at least, is defined with respect to mythical origins, as in the case of the 'Zulu nation'.[25]

The work of deconstructing/reconstructing the ideation normally employed in thinking over the question of the identities of 'Afro-American' populations living in Europe and North America obviously has implications that extend far beyond considerations of conceptual and terminological accuracy. Its scope is eminently political. This is because the inadequacy and vagueness of our and the social protagonists' declarations on the subject, combined with the ill-suitedness of our and their language to convey the novelty and fluidity of contemporary social dynamics, help to consolidate the domination of the very modes of thought nurturing the propaganda and politics of exclusion which we try to fight. This is admirably expressed by Arjun Appadurai when speaking of the theme of Nation (although it can easily be extended to the theme of Origin):

> Although many antistate movements revolve around images of homeland, of soil, of place, and of return from exile, these images reflect the poverty of their (of our) political languages rather than the hegemony of territorial nationalism … Put another way, no idiom has yet emerged to capture the collective interest of many groups in translocal solidarities, cross-border mobilizations, and postnational identities. Such interests are many and vocal, but they are still entrapped in the

linguistic imaginary of the territorial state. This incapacity of many deterritorialized groups to think their way out of the imaginary of the nation-state is itself the cause of much global violence since many movements of emancipation and identity are forced, in their struggles against existing nation-states, to embrace the very imaginary they seek to escape. Postnational or nonnational movements are forced by the very logic of actually existing nation-states to become antinational or antistate and thus to inspire the very state power that forces them to respond in the language of counternationalism. This vicious circle can only be escaped when a language is found to capture complex, nonterritorial, postnational forms of allegiance. (Appadurai 1993, p. 418).

When ethnic minorities sacralize their origin and brandish it like a weapon, as they so often do in the face of exclusion, they are merely changing the value sign on xenophobic opprobrium and turning it into a badge of honour. They are acquiescing in the logic of discrimination. The rigid welding together of their forms of cultural expression with a 'root' produces an 'it's nature' effect; it lends credence, although the minorities would be loth to admit it, to the racist ideology which they oppose. For, as one of the best French experts on this ideology notes, if the claim is made that

> each culture is at once stable (in its identity), immemorial (through its roots) and specific (by its difference), [what is found] is precisely the set of elements hitherto covered by the word "race". This leads people to think that the semantic step from "race" to "culture" is, partly at least, a cosmetic effect. Or simply a refusal to face the truth (. . .). It might be thought that, by shunning the idea of race, the question of substance can be avoided but it rears up again under the idea of culture. (translated from Guillaumin 1994, p. 7)

It is indeed striking to see how closely the arguments discussed here parallel the debate still raging in France around the question of immigrant population integration. This is especially true of the appropriation by Rightist ideologists – under the guise of 'inherent difference' – of the 'right to be different' and the cultural relativism upon which it is grounded, both of which had initially but imprudently been claimed on the immigrants' behalf. The Right uses this difference to justify marginalizing the immigrants in French society, not to say expelling them back to where they came from.[26] Racist ideology continues in this way to propagate itself in France. What it does, for its promotion of exclusion, is to disguise as 'cultural otherness' the biologist theses fallen into disrepute after the crimes of Nazism. In so doing, it preserves intact the essentialist logic of this line of thinking.

For all that, there should be no dismissing the very real and mostly fecund specificity of the rich history and original cultural outpouring of the 'black' populations settled in Europe and North America on the

pretext that the classifications and reasoning of ethnic theory used to account for it do not adequately reflect the depth of its reality. This would be an intellectually baseless and politically irresponsible attitude. What is needed rather is to 'hold both ends of the string', as Stuart Hall recommends: '(. . .) attempting to valorize and defeat the marginalization of the variety of Black subjects and to really begin to recover the lost histories of a variety of Black experiences, while at the same time recognizing the end of any essential Black subject' (Hall 1991, p. 57). It is important not to enclose the aforesaid specificity in identity moulds that would reify the social and cultural dynamics responsible for it. This would be as reprehensible as the dominant groups' persistent attempt to confine it by putting it at a distance. Both approaches, as has been said, are similar in kind. The solution is to consider that specificity as expressing an ongoing creativeness. While successive cultural sedimentations precede and partly constrain it, the creativeness in question does not yield to any orthodox vision of identity; on the contrary, it displays full freedom and a multitude of identifications. This is what Edouard Glissant was praising when he wrote that a return had to be made 'not to a renewed excess of specificities but to a total liberty . . . in their relations, forged out of the very chaos of their interclash' (translated from Glissant 1990, p. 75). The identifications are powered by the social and political challenges attaching to the situations – and often the struggles – in which the immigrant populations and their individual members find themselves involved. For populations and individuals alike, they are by nature relative, varied, flexible and changeable.

Any form of politics aimed at the advancement of 'black' populations dwelling in European and American societies must therefore, upon pain of failure, respect the fluidity and complexity of the identity dynamics running through these populations. They must be 'a politics which . . . is able to address people through the multiple identities which they have – understanding that those identities do not remain the same, they are frequently contradictory, that they cross-cut one another, that they tend to locate us differently at different moments (. . .)' (Hall 1991, p. 59). No one can succeed in placing identity under house arrest, whether in the owner's mansion or the slave's cabin. What must be won, and then safeguarded, is freedom of collective and individual identity choice. The road to this is ensuring for as many people as possible the material, symbolic and intellectual conditions for exercising that freedom.

Notes

1. In French, *Antillais*. The equivalents, 'French West Indian', 'French Caribbean', are clumsier and less accurate.
2. 'France', unless otherwise stated, means continental or 'Metropolitan' France, without the Overseas Departments.
3. In speaking of these strategies I shall re-use parts of a research project carried out

with Claude-Valentin Marie and other colleagues on *Les stratégies socio-politiques de la communauté antillaise dans son processus d'insertion en France métropolitaine* (see Giraud and Marie 1987) and of a more general summing-up extracted from it (see Giraud 2000).

4. One sign of this preference was the proliferation of Antillo-Guyanese societies during the 1980s. The registration figures published in the *Journal Officiel* are a good guide. Official registrations in 1980 were three times what they were in 1975. The annual figure of new notifications in the 1980s averaged about fifty (even reaching one hundred in 1986 and 1987). In 1987, the government agency in charge of Overseas Territory and Department migrants (*Agence Nationale pour l'Insertion et la Promotion des Travailleurs d'Outre-Mer* – ANT) counted 826 associations of Overseas inhabitants, 80 per cent of them being Antillese.

5. Such recognition can also give association leaders a personal 'leg-up' enabling them to exert greater influence in the host society; following which, they can strengthen their hold within the 'community' by means of clubby handouts of material and symbolic privileges.

6. *Rapport du Groupe de travail pour l'insertion des ressortissants des départements d'Outre-mer en Métropole.* (The working group had been set up at the request of the Secretary of State for Overseas Departments and Territories. It was headed by Michel Lucas, Director of the General Inspectorate for Social Affairs at the Ministry for Social Affairs and National Solidarity.) The report was handed in on 16 May 1983.

7. One observer of Antillese migration commented, 'France's Antillese immigration policy, although dressed up in the republican rhetoric of national solidarity and macro-economic equilibria, acts in fact as a political regulator in the sending societies' (Constant 1997, p. 101).

8. In 1990, 52 per cent of Antillese workers in France (as against 34 per cent of continental French nationals) were employed in the French or Territorial civil service.

9. As a result, in 1990, against a backdrop of severe unemployment, the jobless rate among Antillese settled in France was much the same as that of the local French population (11.5 and 11.1 per cent respectively), while that of foreigners was significantly higher (19.9 per cent). It is worth noting that, over the employment crisis period 1982–1990, Antillese workers in France maintained their job level. In 1990, their unemployment rate was slightly lower than it had been in 1982 (13) whereas that of the metropolitan population rose (from 8 per cent in 1982) and foreigners (from 14 per cent in 1982) by nearly half. This was simply the consequence of most Antillese being employed in the public sector. As for the rest, in particular two-thirds of the most recent arrivals and a large proportion of the younger generation, unemployment ran high and job security was low. In 1990, '(. . .) some twenty per cent of new arrivals were unemployed (. . .)' (Condon and Ogden 1996, p. 41) and '(. . .) the unemployment rate among young people from the DOM-TOMs (26.1 per cent) was markedly higher than that of the local French young (sixteen per cent); it lay closer to that of foreigners in the same age group (26.6 per cent)' (Marie 1993b, p. 10). Since the proportion of Antillese working in the public sector in France is currently declining, it may be expected that the latest census data (2000), now being analysed, will confirm the growing exposure of Antillese immigrants to unemployment.

10. However, one should beware of too categorical statements in that area. As the Ministry of Education does not distinguish between pupils from the DOM's and those from Metropolitan France in their statistics, we do not have comprehensive data concerning the former ones.

11. For an Anglo-French comparison on the issue of housing for Caribbean immigrants, see Condon 1993 and 1994.

12. For the alleged reason that they are 'noisy' (parties, visits, . . .) and 'too numerous': It has not been rare to observe that housing has been denied, because of an 'excessive' number of Antilleans in a certain building, even to solvent families. This happened to a young woman from Martinique, a civil servant, married, and the mother of a boy, whose application for housing had been submitted by the prefecture. The lease argued that her

application was denied in accordance with the POPS [Protocoles d'Occupation du Patrimoine Social], a system meant to ensure that the different populations of a region live in various locations, set up by the town of Sainte-Geneviève-des Bois, the number of Antilleans living in the building concerned being too high (translated from Christian Renoir, manager of the ANT branch in Essonne, 'L'insertion dans l'impasse' (interview), *Alizés*, January-February-March 1994, 2, p. 5).

13. Study mentioned in Marie 1993: 10–11; concerning hiring discrimination (but also housing discrimination), see also studies by Jean Galap and researchers from the Centre de Recherche et d'Etudes sur les Dysfonctions de l'Adaptation (for instance, Galap 1993a).

14. We have here a 'law' that extends well beyond the particular case of France, as can be seen from Stuart Hall's comment on the case of England: 'One of the main reactions against the politics of racism in Britain was what I would call "Identity Politics One", the first form of identity politics. It had to do with the constitution of some defensive collective identity against the practices of racist society. It had to do with the fact that people were being blocked out of and refused an identity and identification within the majority nation, having to find some other roots on which to stand'. (Hall 1991, p. 52).

15. The growth of nationalism in Guadeloupe and Martinique over the past thirty years has also probably played a part in the Antillese assertion of their identity in France, even though, as will be pointed out later, this assertion remains largely separate from developments in the Caribbean.

16. A perfect example of this invention is the renewal of Caribbean music – with the appearance of new styles of salsa, reggae and zouk – in such centres of West Indian immigration as the cities of New York, London and Paris.

17. Which explains the curious fact that immigrant associations, despite their claims of burnishing the image of their home culture's identity, do not, for the most part, maintain close relations with the home country's organizations and associations. They seldom receive subsidies from local bodies in the Antilles.

18. In this way they underscore the common nature of the problems encountered by Guadeloupean and Martiniquese immigrants in France. To meet these problems they need to muster all the social and cultural resources of both countries of origin without distinction.

19. A twofold development attested by the sharp decrease, from one census to another, in the growth of the number of Antilleans living in Metropolitan France: it grew by 88 per cent between 1968 and 1975 and by 58 per cent between 1975 and 1982, whereas it grew by only 16 per cent between 1982 and 1990. As regards Antilles-bound return migration, calculations based on the 1982 and 1990 census data show that 20,746 Antillese resident in France in 1982 had, by the time of the 1990 census, gone back to live in their home Department (see Guengant 1993, p. 31). It is not possible, however, to tell how many of these re-embarked once or more for France between the two dates and, *a fortiori*, after 1990.

20. Word derived from the French '*à l'envers*' (the wrong way round), to describe a form of speech in which the syllable order of certain words is reversed, e.g. 'Ripas' for Paris, 'tigen' for 'gentil'.

21. In many of the Paris region's urban areas, adolescents of various races and colours can be seen wearing the same woollen bonnets, bandannas, back-to-front baseball caps, jeans (preferably baggy), padded windbreakers, T-shirts adorned with University and sports club logos or American basketball champions (like Michael 'Air' Jordan), unlaced Nike or Converse sneakers, as those once or still worn by American ghetto youths. They saunter and gesture provocatively in exactly the same way. In appearance, the *mores* are the same but, in fact, they have been reappropriated in depth by their borrowers to serve as insignia or marks of recognition. The proof lies in the startling success of French rap music or the launching of a new clothes style by a young migrant-born entrepreneur who is beginning to work his way up in the Paris 'rag trade'.

22. Aimé Césaire's famous exclamation from a text written more than fifty years ago (see Césaire, 1944, p. 10), in which he outlined the 'principles of a sound Antillese policy'.

23. 'The term "diaspora" has slipped into the vocabulary of social science and history

in a non-theorized way or, at least, inadequately theorized. It seems to be used today in a fairly vague manner to refer to any community in the world which lives far from its home country. A "diaspora" then, is but the result of continental and international migrations' (Cohen 1993, p. 61).

24. More analytically, Robin Cohen says that an essential characteristic of a diaspora is 'an idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity' (Cohen 1995, p. 8).

25. The tendency of many North American scholars (e.g. Sutton 1987 or Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992 or Duany 1994) to look upon the 'trans-nation' simply as a 'deterritorialized nation' strikes me as being an impoverishment. They treat it as an extension of the nation in a diaspora context, whereas that is the least (if most widespread) representative instance of the trans-nation. They furthermore reduce trans-nationalization to 'the spread of national forms that are largely divorced from territorial states' (Appadurai, 1993, p. 421). It is an impoverishment because it clings too tightly to the national, not to say nationalistic, view of what the trans-nation really is: a beyond the nation, an after-nation condition, a 'place' where the national paradigm comes through as the remembrance of a past less and less equated to present-world reality.

26. On the growth of 'differentialist racism' in France, see the work by Pierre-André Taguieff (in particular, Taguieff (1988, 1995).

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