Disillusioned with Europe

In their literary discourse about migration, Caribbean writers emphasize the recourse to a creolization of cultures as an answer to forced assimilation.

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Introduction

The paper is an abstract of the findings of a research project supported by the Volkswagen Foundation and realized from 1999 to 2001 at the Institute for Latin-American Studies at Berlin's *Freie Universität*. In this context novels and autobiographical narratives of Caribbean authors dealing with experiences of migrants and/or their offspring in the European metropolis since World War II have been analyzed. The findings reveal continuity in the process of rapid cultural change triggered by both migration to the metropolis and the ensuing complications of adapting to European ways. In terms of chaos theory this continuity might be called a „strange attractor", a non-periodic repetition of cultural features creating new hybrid variations of the contacting cultures, as Antonio Benitez Rojo in *The Repeating Island* noted about creolization in the Caribbean. Regarding the Caribbean diaspora in Europe the authors under consideration advocate a strategy of adaptation counteracting the European pressure to either assimilate culturally or be excluded. Blending cultural elements of different origin and thus creating a hybrid identity, they once again take up the concept of creolization. – In the paper, the thesis is that Caribbean expertise in flexible adaptation indicates a way to transform an asymmetrically distorted globalization.

Findings

In my analysis of Caribbean literature about migration to London and Paris in the second half of the 20th century,[1] I considered more than forty texts with the intention to compare the experiences described and the subsequent adaptation to the main centers of attraction to Caribbean migrants in Europe. The period in focus is determined by the fact that substantial migration to London as well as to Paris started after World War II and thenceforward has been reflected increasingly in literature. The analysis focuses on novels and autobiographical accounts because, unlike short stories and poetry, they provide not only a chronological development of the story, but also a more elaborate description of the social context necessary to evaluate the process of adaptation. Obviously the circumstances described reflect not only reality but also the perspective of the writer. The fictional element of composing experiences into literature presents not so much an obstacle as a stimulus to pursue the momentum of the discourse, building ideology. Because my interest in the subject lies in not only the experiences of the protagonists and their individual adaptation but particularly in converging strategies of adaptation being developed in the discourse as well as its divergence with respect to different „global cities". In analyzing the texts I have concentrated mainly on recurrent aspects, comparing what motivated the protagonists to migrate, what are the common experiences in social interaction, and how they react and adjust to the given social conditions.

Migration to Europe

After World War II, London and Paris, both capitals of extensive colonial empires attracted an increasing migration from periphery to center. Before this, only small numbers of the colonial elite made their way to the metropolis; often because, due to centralism, it was only there that they could, for instance, go to university. Campaigns recruiting labor to repair war damages and attend to the needs of burgeoning economies led to a sudden surge in the flow of Caribbean migrants, predominantly from less privileged classes. In both cities, Caribbean minorities of roughly half a million people have established themselves in the course of time - not the most numerous ethnic minority, but a significant 6% of the cities' population.

Caribbean immigration to London stems mainly from the British West Indies (particularly from Jamaica, Trinidad, and Guyana). By the Fifties, the influx had reached noticeable numbers and soon provoked an outcry from the Britons „Keep Britain White!" The feeling among the newcomers that they would be perceived as „the Empire coming home" was rudely shattered: for instead they were regarded as annoying intruders and later even as

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[1] Chris von Gagern, Ernüchterndes Europa: Wie karibische Schriftsteller eine Adaptionsstrategie der Kreolisierung entwickeln (Norderstedt: BoD, 2002)

„the enemy within"[2]. From the early Sixties onward the right of Commonwealth citizens to settle in Britain has been restricted progressively, with the aim of arresting particularly the influx of colored migrants judged unfit for assimilation. In promoting the West Indies to independence, then devaluing the status of Commonwealth citizenship, migration from the West Indies was brought to a standstill as early as the Seventies. But contrary to British intentions, the restrictions caused migrants, originally planning a temporary stay in Britain, to settle permanently. They reckoned that once returned to the Caribbean, they would not be let into Britain again.

Paris attracted mainly the inhabitants of the remaining French colonies in the Caribbean – Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyane – who were naturalized in 1946 rather than being pushed into independence. Instead of a successively devalued commonwealth status, complete civil rights were granted to them, thus erecting no legal barriers to their migration. But the influx had been slower and only reached substantial numbers during the Sixties when London was already imposing the first restrictions. An institution called BUMIDOM played a vital part in the movement to the center. For 20 years it kept recruiting predominantly low qualified laborers and distributed them to industries and households throughout France. This activity was made obsolete by the economic recession of the Seventies, so it was wound up by 1982. Meanwhile, Paris houses the biggest urban agglomeration of Antilleans, a kind of „third island" in steady exchange with the overseas-departments that accommodates one out of three Antilleans.[3] – In addition, a comparatively small number of political exiles from Haiti and Cuba took refuge in Paris. Their affinity arises from the image of the metropolis as the embodiment of democratic liberty and „universal spirit", open for all those, without distinction of race or religion, who embrace French culture and the principles of the Republic. But by the mid-Seventies, French generosity towards immigrants was flawed by restrictions intended to curb the surging influx from overseas. Even though the fear of being invaded was not as obvious as in Britain, racial tension increased especially where non-Europeans outnumbered the native French who reacted against the „siege of foreigners" populating the outskirts.[4]

In both cities, polarization of natives and foreigners has been increasing since the Eighties, foreigners being defined by culture and color In response to racism and marginalization, the second generation of Caribbean descent raised in Europe repudiated integration on unequal terms and resorted to emphasizing their difference by reconstructing an ethnic identity composed of Caribbean as well as African and Afro-American cultural elements.

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[2] David Dabydeen & Nana Wilson-Tagoe, *A Reader's Guide to West Indian & Black British Literature* (1988)

[3] Alain Anselin, *L'émigration antillaise en France: la 3^{ieme} île* (1990)

[4] Gary Freeman, "Caribbean Migration to Britain and France: From assimilation to selection"in The Caribbean Exodus, Ed. Barry B. Levine (1987)

The establishment of a considerable Caribbean diaspora in Europe is reflected extensively in literature. Caribbean writers have adopted migration to London and Paris and the specific experiences that go with it with increasing frequency since the Fifties. By now a prolific discourse has been created about the to and fro between Caribbean and Europe, with its attendant problems and complications, in an ample variety of perspectives. – Texts referring to London are even more numerous than texts referring to Paris. Focal points in time are the arrival of the newcomers after the war and the maturing of a second generation in the Seventies and Eighties. - It is striking that the discourse, which was initiated by almost exclusively male writers, has been taken over more and more by female writers. Inspired by life in the metropolis not only to emancipate themselves but also to express their view on the situation of migrants, they put a different perspective on events. By now their voices predominate in the discourse.

Experience

The recounted social experience of the newcomers is disillusioning, as a rule. Very few of the protagonists are able to realize their aims. Their hopes of participation in a „superior way of life" are mostly shattered. In addition to the general difficulties of gaining a foothold in the metropolis, they become conscious of the handicap of racial difference – even if the rejection is covert, stigmatizing them permanently as outsiders in spite of their attempt to assimilate culturally. Whereas they admit their disappointment hesitantly, doubting themselves rather than the society they are trying to access, they are forced by recurring painful experiences, displayed in great detail and variety in the discourse, to realize that the theoretical equality is fictitious or thwarted in everyday life.

Referring to London in particular, I have not found a text in which the color of skin does not complicate social interaction. Discrimination affects the centers of life: the quest for housing and work[5], the treatment by the police, or public institutions like children's and old people's homes[6], and the relationship with a partner of a different race[7]. Prejudice and resentment all the way to hostility and racist attacks indicate an unbridgeable social chasm and distort the relationship with white Britons. The protagonists feel separated from them by an invisible color bar[8], and contacts with them are turned into an asymmetrical relationship, presuming docile submission on their part whereby they cannot count on any concession or appreciation of their efforts from the other side. The protagonists'

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[5] Emphasized for instance in Sam Selvon's *The Housing Lark* (1965) or Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage* (1985).

[6] Emphasized in Edward R. Braithwaite's *Paid Servvant* (1962), Selvon's *Moses Ascending* (1975), Beryl Gilroy's *Black Teacher* (1976) and *The Boy Sandwich*, and Andrea Levy's *Every Light in the House* (1994).

[7] Delineated e.g. in Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960) or in Barbara Burford's *The Treshing Floor* (1986).

[8] for instance in Edward R. Braithwaite's *To Sir with Love* (1959) or in George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954)

integration is limited to subordinate functions and a humble lifestyle. Marginalization causes them to stagnate on a social level below their capabilities. They perceive themselves as being pushed aside into social niches and doomed to a precariously marginal existence. For social contacts they have to remain with their Caribbean peers in the metropolis as the only means to save themselves from isolation.[9]

In Paris the experience is not fundamentally different. But there, the relation to whites appears to be not as thoroughly imbued with prejudice and xenophobia. They meet unconcealed rejection and open hostility only sporadically. Accordingly, they feel not so much excluded as alienated by the indifference, distrust, and social distance, which they suspect disguises hostility. But they refrain from generalizing an antagonistic attitude, because this occurs mainly when there are conflicting interests. Never knowing what to expect, disorientation and insecurity pervade, obstructing any adjustment, and provoking a constant feeling of mistrust[10]. Nevertheless they don't feel as compelled to restrict their contacts to fellow migrants as in London. Besides in Paris, experiences vary on different social levels. Whereas students, artists or intellectuals scarcely feel seriously affected by sporadic animosity[11], the chiefly female protagonists in subordinate positions – for instance housemaids or nurses – get treated spitefully, contemptuously, or with condescension[12] and correspondingly feel oppressed in an underhand fashion showing them, how insurmountable social differences based on racial identification marks are.

With second-generation protagonists in London or Paris, cultural adaptation is not perceived as a problem. The metropolis is the only home they know, giving them a rightful claim, emphasized because they usually have been deprived by their parents of a connection to the Caribbean. Nevertheless they experience being stigmatized „exotic" as well; for, Europeans inescapably impress the social significance of racial difference upon them. The persisting hierarchy afflicts them at their youthful age even more than it afflicted the generation of migrants, who were prepared for it by remaining colonial features in Caribbean societies.

In London, they experience an almost segregated society in which various ethnic communities have been established but not integrated. They cannot count on support

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[9] outlined e.g. in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Elean Thomas' *The Last Room* (1991), Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985), and implicitly even in V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987).

[10] outlined e.g. in Michèle Lacrosil's *Caju* (1961), Bertène Juminer's *Les bâtards* (1961), Marie M. Carbet's *Au péril de ta joie* (1972).

[11] apparent in Joseph Zobel's *La fête à Paris* (1953), B. Juniner's *Les bâtards* (1961), Jean-Claude Charles' *Ferdinand, je suis à Paris* (1987), Jean Metellus' *Louis Vortex* (1992).

[12] apparent in Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Un plat de porc...* (1967), Jacqueline Manicom's *La Graine: journal d'une sage femme* (1974), Françoise Éga's *Lettres à une Noire* (1978).

from parents who had with difficulty been able to gain a foothold in the metropolis and are now trying to behave unobtrusivly. Conflict rather than solidarity is the rule between generations, integration on unequal terms being the main issue, which is rejected vehemently by the younger.[13] Accordingly, they tend to join peers of the same ethnic community and avoid contacts with the „white oppressor". They experience ethnic consolidation as a source of self-assurance, raising their undermined self-esteem and thus enabling them to accentuate visible difference by cultural means in order to confront a society perceived as hostile. In spite of this, within the ethnic community, they frequently experience a moral compulsion to conform to the community's rules as opposed to those of the whites, an obligation which they gradually learn to perceive as a constriction and a limit to their individualism.[14] Women in particular oppose the tendency to assign them subordinate roles.[15]

In Paris the second-generation protagonists find the relation between ethnically defined opponents less polarized. All the same they suffer from distancing behavior and covert repudiation on the part of the French in a way that shatters their self-confidence and gives them the feeling of being permanently under suspicion.[16] But in the quest for an alternative, they encounter only a poor support in a less organized community of the marginalized, fragmented by generational conflict, social differences, and ethnical competition. Driven back into a „no man's land" between possible identities, they are left to deal with their ambivalence themselves which provokes in them predominantly auto-aggressive forms of protest.[17]

Adaptation

As a consequence of their experience with a wall of more or less covert rejection, the newcomer-protagonists from the Caribbean become critical of the European state of affairs, its supposed superiority marred by the obvious abuse of its vaunted principles of equality. Feeling deceived and distrustful they tend to dissociate themselves from a European society perceived as hostile. But this does not modify their critical aversion to a Caribbean society, still constrained by colonialism. Their ambivalence is tellingly delineated by a catchphrase from Naipaul's *The Mimic Men:* „Hate oppression, fear the oppressed!"

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[13] prominent for instance in Andrea Levy's *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996) and in Alex Wheatle's *Brixton Rock* (1999)

[14] I think e.g. of Sam Selvon's *Moses Ascending* (1975) or Alex Wheatle's *Brixton Rock* (1999).

[15] prominent for instance in Joan Riley's *Romance* (1988).

[16] I think of Michèle Lacrosil's *Caju* (1961) and Gisèle Pinaud's *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996).

[17] examples in Myriam Warner-Vieira's *Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit* (1980), Roland Brival's *No Man's Land* (1986), Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie's *L'autre qui danse* (1989).

In London the generation of immigrants depicted is willing to make sacrifices and tries to adjust to the pervasive rejection. For, even though not much progress in terms of social ascension can be made, the return to the West Indies is not a viable alternative. A new start overseas depends on a certain breakthrough in the metropolis. Dealing with this situation is marked by resignation and unobtrusive behavior, „becoming invisible". But the descriptions take great pains to expose the consequences of this strategy. The social pressure they undergo is shown to have a destabilizing effect on the human relationships closest to them: families break up over confrontation between sexes, children are taken into care, each person struggles for himself, fights desolation, and various protagonists loose their minds.[18]

In Paris, the consequences are pictured less drastically. Disenchantment and disorientation predominate there as well, but at least the educated protagonists manage to accommodate to the situation and live a marginal existence in which they are left relatively unbothered. Even though they continue to feel like strangers in France and frequently also feel alienated from Caribbean culture, they enjoy – more obviously than in London – certain qualities and advantages of the urban environment: as for instance, the freedom to cohabit with a white partner – assessed as nearly impossible in the Antilles – or the liberty to learn and support freely current social criticism – like Marxist theory.[19] Accordingly, their criticism of France appears rather aloof and focuses on the wrongs in their homelands. For, even though marginalized, they do better in Paris than over there. In consequence they opt individually for an adaptation combining a nonconformist attitude to French customs with a recollection of Caribbean culture. But they do not dedicate themselves to an exclusive solidarity with either one of the parties. – But, including the fruitless pursuit of integration by protagonists in subordinate positions who have failed to overcome engrained social barriers, the picture of resignation and despair approaches the one in London.[20] However, the option of returning to the Caribbean is resorted to more frequently, because a return to the overseas-departments is reversible and may be only temporary.[21]

When referring to the adaptation of second-generation protagonists, the discourse shows that resistance and protest against integration on unequal terms is a generalized attitude. In response to discrimination and marginalization, they discover their cultural roots and

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[18] see Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956); Edward R. Braithwaite, *Paid Servant* (1962); Caryl Phillips, *The Final Passage* (1985); Joan Riley, *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987); Elean Thomas, *The Last Room* (1991).

[19] see Joseph Zobel, *La fête à Paris* (1953); Marie M. Carbet, *D'une rive à l'autre* (1975); Jean-Claude Charles, *Ferdinand, je suis à Paris* (1987); Jean Métellus, *Louis Vortex* (1992).

[20] see Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Un plat de porc..* (1967); Jacqueline Manicom, *La Graine* (1974); Françoise Éga, *Lettres à une Noire* (1978).

[21] see Bertène Juminer, *Les bâtards* (1961) and Jacqueline Manicom, *La Graine* (1974).

reconstruct an identity of their own, frequently reverting to selected Caribbean, African, and Afro-American cultural elements. But repudiation of white society and the reciprocal ethnic delineation, the result of negative experience, inevitably poses problems by isolating them in a city marked by daily contacts between, and the overlapping of, ethnic communities, which happens in spite of relative segregation and latent racial antagonism.

In London younger protagonists, united by grim rebellion, gradually realize that antagonism prevents them from making any headway just as much as docility. Withdrawal into an ethnic community and racial exclusivism, though it may restore self-confidence, limits the opportunities for the individual. But the complexity of city life teaches them that a claim for cultural difference may well be matched with the struggle for a place in society.[22] Accordingly, they pursue an ambivalent strategy, combining a selective adaptation to the metropolis with the assertion of a cultural identity of their own. Only both at a time provide a base for the consolidation and organization of the community, simultaneously subverting the structures of ethnic exclusion and promoting a change to a plural society. The hybridism of the concept – adapting some European and changing outdated Caribbean features at the same time - is illustrated by the emphasis the female protagonists put on emancipation.[23]

In Paris the self-exclusion of second-generation protagonists from European society is less explicit (as if rejection was not sufficient to fight a system that grants some privileges). Solidarity and self-organization within the community are shown to be deficient when compared with the black community in London. Correspondingly, the protagonists suffer from being uprooted and disoriented rather than taking to rebellion. In consequence, they revert to either auto-aggressive forms of protest – such as suicide or voluntary incarceration[24] - or to a return to the Caribbean of which they are largely ignorant.[25] – In the climate of clandestine racism, in which they fail to defend themselves collectively, the search for an identity takes even more desperate forms.

A call for hybridization
The texts showed a pronounced consensus on widespread xenophobia, generally concealed by Europeans, which they reveal to be directed particularly at those with an exotic appearance. Even though persistent immigration has converted London and Paris

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[22] see Barbara Burford, *The Threshing Floor* (1986); Beryl Gilroy, *The Boy Sandwich* (1989); Joan Riley, *Romance* (1988); Alex Wheatle, *Brixton Rock* (1999).

[23] see Joan Riley, *Romance* (1988); Millie Murray, *All about Jas* (1990) & *Sorelle* (1998); Andrea Levy, *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996).

[24] see Michèle Lacrosil, *Caju* (1961); Roland Brival, *No Man's Land* (1986); Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie, *L'autre qui danse* (1989).

[25] Gisèle Pinaud, *Un papillon dans la Cité* (1992), *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996), *L'ame prêtée aux oiseaux* (1998).

into „global cities" European xenophobia appears not to have changed fundamentally. As much as the newcomers try to conform to the European insistence upon cultural assimilation as an essential condition for integration, Europeans inevitably will revert to discrimination against the stigmatized as soon as conflicting interests arise. The arbitrary barrier put in effect whenever the need arises proves insurmountable even for the generation raised in the metropolis. Denouncing an ingrained pattern of racial and cultural opposition, and the devastating consequences of suffering marginalization, the writers voice a strong criticism of the situation in Europe. On the other hand, their criticism registers just as forcefully the reactions and attitudes of Caribbean migrants. In the earlier publications it focuses mainly on disdain for Caribbean culture and indiscriminate assimilation to European standards, which the texts point out to be not only fruitless but also self-abnegating. Later on, the categorical divorce from European society in pursuit of radical resistance and an exclusive identity defined by ethnicity is assessed equally critically.

In synthesis, the authors' bifocal criticism concentrates on a concept of social cohabitation, which implicitly rules out the overlapping of ethnically or culturally different groups. On the one hand, the texts indicate that the emphasis on cultural assimilation, frustrated by racial discrimination in daily life, evokes the very tension supposed to be eliminated by allowing only for an unambiguous identity. As a consequence social antagonism, racial polarization, and conflicts between the segregated groups are shown to be enhanced.[26] On the other hand, the writers demonstrate that the prevalent concept of irreconcilable difference is incompatible with the complex reality of the „global city". Because, in spite of all obstructions, cross-cultural overlapping and mixing of the segregated is not only happening but it also constitutes the very attraction of the city.[27] Accordingly, they propose opposition to the hypocritical European tolerance on condition of cultural assimilation, not by means of reciprocal hostility, but by means of subversion: Adapting ambivalently by selecting the features to identify with, while claiming simultaneously the right to differ from an oppressive standard. In this way a complex concept that allows ambivalent classification and hybrid identities is offered rather than the rigid and asymmetrical European idea of globalization. So, in addition to criticism, there is an implicit suggestion on the formation of a pluralistic society.

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[26] I think e.g. of Edward R. Braithwaite's *Paid Servant* where the protagonist's initiatives as a social worker are systematically frustrated, or of Roland Brival's *No Man's Land* where his position between the established parties drives the protagonist to extremes.

[27] Obvious for example in George Lamming's *The Emigrants*, in Joseph Zobel's *La Fête à Paris*, in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, or in Carbet's *D'une rive à l'autre*

Differentiating the emerging convergence of the discourse, it may be noted that writers belonging to the immigrant-generation tend to address European readers, presenting to them the protagonists' human qualities and appealing to their understanding in order to overcome social distance.[28] In contrast, writers brought up in the metropolis are aware that equality will not be volunteered but will, in fact, be systematically obstructed. As a result, they concentrate on addressing their own community, emphasizing the need for solidarity and an identity, in order to cope with the limited acceptance.[29] The suggested double-strategy (both fighting for acceptance and the right to cultural difference) encourages transformation of the former ambivalence of being stuck between two cultures into a hybrid identity, peculiar to the Caribbean community in the metropolis.

However, in texts about Paris, this idea is developed more reluctantly than in London. Even in the more recent texts, the uprooting of protagonists is emphasized rather than their proud self-awareness. The criticism points to deficient or misled forms of solidarity and suggests that in order to find a way out of „no man's land" an examination of Caribbean origins is long overdue.[30] Here the suggestion undermining the imposed choice between either the European or the Antillean identity is mobility – to travel back and forth between Paris and the overseas-departments. In contrast, the texts about London advocate a hybrid identity, specific to blacks in the metropolis and comprising overlapping and mingled cultural influences.[31]

Theory

Though literary fiction is not necessarily limited to representing circumstances objectively, the main observations and arguments emphasized by repetition and correspondence between writers are confirmed by sociological studies. Precise and subtle reflections of the situation of Caribbean migrants in Europe, they qualify for casting light on some blind spots in European self-perception.

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[28] for instance Edward R. Braithwaite in *To Sir with Love* and Beryl Gilroy in *Black Teacher* or Bertène Juminer in *Les bâtards*, Michèle Lacrosil in *Caju* or Marie Magdeleine Carbet in *Au peril de ta joie.*

[29] think of Gisèle Pinaud's *L'exil selon Julia* or Alex Wheatle's *Brixton Rock.*

[30] In addition to Roland Brival's novel *No Man's Land,* Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie's *L'autre qui danse* would be an example.

[31] I think e.g.of Beryl Gilroy in *Boy Sandwich,* Andrea Levy in *Never far from Nowhere,* or Sam Selvon in *Moses Ascending.*

Everyday racism

Contrary to the prevailing European image of themselves as having overcome racial inequality with the loss of their colonies, the accounted experiences of Caribbean migrants make it clear that social interaction with the racially or culturally stigmatized is charged with xenophobia, even in global cities. This is confirmed by Philomena Essed's sociological investigation into everyday racism[32] which makes the literary representation seem far from exaggerated when portraying the numerous variations of discrimination and their consequences: ranging from undermining self-confidence to provoking outright hate. According to Essed's study, cultural pluralism involving the overlapping of various traditions is supposedly tolerated but secretly boycotted in order to perpetuate Eurocentric convictions. Equality and cultural blending is subtly but efficiently thwarted. Although discrimination generally occurs more subtly than in the Caribbean under European domination, patterns developed in colonial times aimed at preserving European dominance and privilege continue, even though this presumption of superiority causes ethnical conflicts in the metropolis. Not only did the pattern of sharp ethnical distinctions survive in a disguised form thus subliminally eroding cross-cultural relations, but in correlation with globalization and immigration of non-Europeans which is widely perceived as a threat it seems even reinvigorated and appears in an increasingly open form – thus increasing ethnical polarization and social segregation.

In the texts racism in London is described as comparatively obvious and in response rouses a marked resistance in the Caribbean diaspora driven to self-organization, whereas more concealed resentment in Paris drives the protagonists to despair. Conversely this illustrates eloquently Essed's thesis that the denial of racism has itself become part of an optimized racist strategy.

A City is not a Tree

As a consequence of the quoted social inequalities Caribbean authors criticize but constructively. The persuasiveness of the texts is intensified by the fact that they refrain from denouncing exclusively European shortcomings and emphasize equally critical self-reflection focusing just as much on obedient assimilation as on reciprocal ethnical exclusivism in response to European xenophobia. In more general terms, the criticism relates to a way of thinking aimed persistently at organizing a complex and at times chaotic ethnical diversity in the global cities according to a simplistic structure easy to handle and to control. In mathematical terms, this way of organizing a collection of sets is

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[32] Philomena Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*. London: Sage, 1991.

referred to as a „tree" characterized by excluding overlap of the defined sets of elements, as Christopher Alexander explained in an exemplary fashion in his article „A city is not a tree"[33]. He contrasts the „tree" with another structure of a collection of sets called a semi-lattice. This allows for overlap of the defined sets and therefore contains ambivalently categorized elements. The two of them do not exactly form a pair of opposites, because a semi-lattice is potentially a far more complex structure in comparison to which the tree appears trivially simple. „Whenever we have a tree structure, it means that within this structure no piece of any unit is ever connected to other units, except through the medium of that unit as a whole. – The enormity of this restriction is difficult to grasp. It is a little as though the members of a family were not free to make friends outside the family, except when the family as a whole made a friendship."

The analyzed texts picture the relations between ethnical groups in the metropolis while complex and overlapping, are nevertheless impaired by an imposed concept of opposition, which erodes them and leads to ethnic polarization and segregation. Alexander explains the seduction of a mental device, which offers such a simple and clear way of dividing a complex entity into units. The limited capacity of the human mind cannot achieve the complexity of the semi-lattice in a single mental act. Conversely the mind shows a marked predilection for intuitively accessible structures and only conceives as neat and orderly what can be identified clearly as a „tree". His conclusion nevertheless emphasizes the necessity to pursue the semi-lattice as a vehicle of thought, particularly when „receptacles of life" are at stake – be it the architecture of cities or of the „global societies" inhabiting them. However appealing, by ruling out or restricting overlap, we not only trade structural complexity for a conceptual simplicity alien to metropolitan life, but also foster antagonism, conflict, and segregation. – Alexander's conclusion coincides with the tenor of the discourse, which suggests a subversive strategy of dealing with the hostile circumstances by selective and ambivalent adaptation of different traditions creating not only cultural variation but also hybrid identities.

Globalization and Ethnicity

When I revert to mathematical terms for the interpretation of the notable tendencies of the discourse I am following the suggestion of Caribbean cultural theorists. The references to chaos and set theory are explicitly stated by Antonio Benitez Rojo and Édouard Glissant and – as I intend to show – implicitly by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. Sharing an affinity to postmodern philosophy, they nevertheless base the conception of a culturally pluralistic

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[33] Christopher Alexander, „A City is not a Tree" in *Design* (*Journal for manufacturers and designers*). London: Council of Industrial Design. Nr. 206, 1966

social architecture – implicitly or explicitly – on mathematical reasoning. Paul Gilroy even criticizes explicitly the postmodern emphasis on a vague periodization, which conveys the impression of taking cultural pluralism for granted as rather prophetical.[34] The seemingly contradictory correlation of current tendencies of globalization and simultaneous revival of ethnicity, which Stuart Hall understands as a form of local resistance against a barely concealed imperialism, leads him to distinguish an old concept of ethnicity from a new one.[35] The old one showed features of a defensive exclusivism clearly connected with the mental device of the „tree", no matter whether it claimed to defend a presumed homogeneous *Britishness* against an invasion of non-European migrants or whether migrants themselves responded by reverting to a fundamental cultural difference in order to resist a decreed assimilation which they knew would not put a stop to discrimination. The new concept of identity advocates transculturation in order to subvert an asymmetrical cultural standardization imposed on globalization by Euro-American dominance. By encouraging overlap the concept inspires the structure of a semi-lattice. Hall illustrates the new concept by referring to the West Indian diaspora in England. Hall details a defensive reaction against xenophobic hostilities at first which then develops into militant resistance from African, Caribbean, and Asian stigmatized united under a common „Black" identity. But radical polarization (of black versus white) threatened to internally reproduce the rigid structure resisted as „white oppression". Exclusivism patronizingly imposed conformity with an imaginary Afrocentric ideology and provoked opposition from „brothers" and particularly „sisters". However, gradually a transcultural strategy of adaptation has evolved promising to overcome ethnic exclusivism by advocating a hybrid identity combining the search for Caribbean roots with an identity as Black British.

The analyzed texts depict this process in detail focusing on conflicts within the ethnic community: gangs of juvenile delinquents, fundamentalist religious sects, and militant political parties. All alike are portrayed as abusing the conspiratorial solidarity they advocate.[36] In their turn, female authors draw attention to sexist oppression and take the

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[34] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Double Consciousness and Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1993), S. 43-45.

[35] Stuart Hall, „The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity" und „Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities". In *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity.* Ed. by Anthony D. King. Binghampton, State Univ. of New York: Macmillan, 1991.

[36] for instance in Sam Selvon's *Moses Ascending*, Roland Brival's *No Man's Land*, Alex Wheatle's *Brixton Rock*.

opportunity to emphasize female self-determination. In pleading simultaneously for borrowing from European culture they undermine the search for authenticity.[37]

Modernity and Double Consciousness

At this point Gilroy's objection that a potential transition to more complex patterns of organization is not likely to come about as easy as adherents of postmodern philosophy suggest is pertinent. He claims that Eurocentrism, so characteristic of modernity, shows no convincing signs of voluntarily yielding to cultural pluralism. On the contrary, prompted by the controversy about immigration to Europe, ethnicity regains strength with whites and blacks alike. His warning that an attitude defined by the – in mathematical terms – rigid principle of the „tree" threatens to split social cohesion into irreconcilable differences is directed principally at a diaspora newly indulging itself in ethnicity. He notes that even those suffering the consequences of racial exclusivism for so long are nonetheless tempted to simplify the complex structure of globalized realities. Accordingly, he urges critical self-examination with regard to the gradual imitation of the restrictions ascribed exclusively to white oppression fostered by fighting it militantly. Besides, he suggests emancipation from prevalent Afro-American influences proposing to reverse the given balance of power rather than to transform it. In the face of radical Afrocentric demands for racial purity and the branding of cultural hybridization as illegitimate, he feels obliged to defend double consciousness and transculturation. Citing examples of crossover in music and literature, he points out that neither cultural peculiarities nor the hard-earned self-assurance of blacks were in danger. In fact this was an opportunity to enrich them. His plea for double consciousness and cultural ambivalence as the appropriate answer to racism (because thus the concept of race would not be confirmed but transformed) converges with the strategy of Caribbean writers whose narrative discourse proposes the idea of hybrid identity and subversive blending of cultures as appropriate to life in the metropolis. The fact that they feel they have to create an awareness and persuade their readers indicates, of course, that a development of that kind is not guaranteed in the Caribbean diaspora in either London or Paris.

Le monde entier se creolise

Édouard Glissant sees more in the cultural hybridization suggested by Caribbean writers[38]: he connects it with Caribbean traditions of syncretism and interprets it as

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[37] for instance in Dracius-Pinalie's *L'autre qui danse*, Riley's *Romance*, Levy's *Never far from nowhere*, and Millie Murray's *Sorelle.*

continuing the process of creolization which he grants an essential importance in pioneering symmetrical globalization. According to the principles of creolization, cultures are not forced to adjust to a common standard set by the hegemonial powers, but may overlap and influence each other thus producing new varieties acceptable to members of various cultures instead of the dominant ones assimilating or obliterating the others. For the emerging global network of cultures in the process of creolization, he proposes a structure, which he metaphorically terms a rhizome, but which outlines nothing else but the structure of a semi-lattice.

The term creolization accurately refers to the strategy of adaptation advocated by Caribbean authors who thus in advance comply with Glissant's criteria of a *poetique de la relation*. For, in the suggestion of a return to Caribbean traditions in combination with a selective and ambivalent adaptation to a covertly xenophobic situation in Europe, we can recognize a continuation of creolization. Conceiving cultures to be reconcilable, and recomposing cultural elements of different origin, may appear subversive only in so far as it undermines a prevalent conception which does not allow for overlap of the defined racial and cultural categories and insists strictly on cultural assimilation of foreign communities. The texts illustrate in great detail that the advocated ideas of overlap, ambiguity, multiplicity of aspect, and the semi-lattice – as unpredictable as the resulting diversification and hybridization of culture may be – are not less orderly than the rigid tree, but more so, because they represent a thicker, tougher, more subtle and more complex view of structure appropriate to the social realities in the metropolis.[39]

Conclusion

The literary discourse about migration to Europe hints at Caribbean writers as advocates of and indeed experts in the reconcilability of different cultures whereas from their accounts little or a dubious European affinity to racial and cultural difference is to be derived. From a diachronical viewpoint the texts reflect the difficult search for adaptation and cultural identity in process: regarding the first generation of migrants the discourse mirrors primarily disillusionment about their hostile exile and resignation to its inaccessibility; regarding the second generation in the seventies it reflects a return to African roots and militant resistance prompted not least by the Black Power movement in

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[38] Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poetique du divers.* Montréal: Pr. de l'Université, 1995; and *Traité du Tout-Monde.* Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

[39] I think for instance of Jean-Claude Charles' *Ferdinand, je suis à Paris* or Jean Métellus' *Louis Vortex*, but also of David Dabydeen's *The Intended* and Barbara Burford's *The Threshing Floor*.

the US; but at the latest since the eighties the tendency prevails to favor transcultural adaptation and hybrid identities. Relating to creolization their writings stimulate cultural hybridization in Europe and a more complex, pluralistic concept of social organization. The continuity addressed in the headline therefore consists in a perpetuation or reinvention of Caribbean traditions – not so much in the form of a strict traditionalism or in the search for African roots (for the authors prove to be skeptical towards any exclusivist identity) but rather faithful to the principles of creolization – combining cultural elements of different origin thus creating cultural variation. It is a continuity that allows for, and even encourages change. (The analogy to a strange attractor in chaos-theory which, represented in phase-space, symbolizes a self-similar though never identical repetition seems evident). For adjusted to the metropolis not only transcultural adaptation and hybrid identities result from the overlap of different traditions but also new, creolized cultural varieties.

The quoted theorists – prompted by the recent development of *global cities* and a Caribbean migration tending to a circular movement reflected in a proliferation of nomadic lifestyles alternating between cultures – coincide with the analyzed writers in approving the overlapping of cultures and the resulting increase of cultural variation. Conversely they discredit concepts of irreconcilable antagonism. Moreover, especially Gilroy and Glissant ascribe a global significance to transculturation and creolization as they perceive them as a way to transform an asymmetrically distorted globalization. On the other hand they perceive arising ethnical polarization to confirm and reinforce a structure that severs or rules out overlap. In this context I consider essential Alexander's comparison of tree and semi-lattice endowing a collection of elements with structures differing in the fact of either containing or lacking overlap among their subsets. His emphasis that the semi-lattice should be our vehicle for thought – particularly when „receptacles of life" are concerned – constitutes a common denominator, as it were, (notwithstanding the difference of the theoretical approaches).

The approach to transform a rigid way of thinking about ethnic identity (the impact of which has become apparent in Europe) by creolizing opens certainly more hopeful perspectives than does the polarization of cultural differences with the subsequent social segregation and militant confrontation of ethnic groups. – During the discourse, the representation of Caribbean migration to Europe appears to evolve from a perspective of concern about the problem of cultural uprooting to emphasizing its position as a pacemaker of a creolization influencing both European and Caribbean societies.

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