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Catching the Wind

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Toward the end of his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Díaz writes that one of his main characters, Beli, “embraced the amnesia that was so common throughout the Islands, five parts denial, five parts negative hallucination. Embraced the power of the Untilles. And from it forged herself anew.”¹ In this brief characterization of the Caribbean, Díaz captures the essence of much of contemporary scholarship’s investment in history, memory, and the concept of *creolization* in the Caribbean. These three abiding foci of Caribbean studies—history, memory, and creolization—along with, arguably, collective consciousness, have an interesting (and curious) relationship to each other.

Creolization typically refers to the forms and dynamics of cultural change that develop over time as phenotypically and culturally heterogeneous peoples come into what is still commonly known as *culture contact* or *cultural encounters*, and undergo the acculturation (accommodating or defiant) that such encounters engender or demand. Most contemporary approaches to creolization consider it a product of colonialism, particularly the socially engineered assembling of disparate ethnolinguistic groups under conditions of coerced labor. Yet even allegedly neutral descriptions of these societies recognize their diversity to be somehow imposed from without, lacking—or not needing—an organic, or natural, foundation. Thus, for example, nineteenth- and twentieth-century observations about the Caribbean by European and North American visitors are replete with remarks about the stunning heterogeneity

1 Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Riverhead, 2007), 258–59.

of the place.² Remaining the epitome of this quality is Trinidad, where twenty-first century observers such as Patrick French keep this “imagined pluralism”³ alive. In *The World Is What It Is*, French asserts that by the nineteenth century “Trinidad was uniquely and enduringly ethnically complex.” This complexity included multilingual Africans, Chinese, Venezuelans, Germans, French, Syrians and Lebanese, other Afro-Caribbean islanders (e.g., Grenadians, Barbadians), “residual Amerindians,” black British army veterans, Madeirans, Portuguese- and Spanish-speakers “of uncertain ethnicity,” and free blacks from the United States.⁴ By contrast (yet serving to emphasize this special quality) is the case of Martinique. Its depiction by the *créolité* movement there as “brimming with diversity” both past and present is countered by Richard and Sally Price, who note that “from a broader Caribbeanist perspective, the society of Martinique looks anything but diverse.”⁵

This trope of creolized multiplicity, then, can be ultimately reinforced whether empirically asserted or denied. But there is also another, simultaneous dimension to this understanding of New World cultural creole-heterogeneity, a locational specificity that Díaz reinscribes. I refer to an elemental regional motif, the Caribbean’s “absence of ruins” (to borrow from Orlando Patterson’s novel of the same name), its “shipwreck of fragments” (to borrow from Derek Walcott’s imagery), and its phoenix-like regenerative possibilities.⁶ Fundamentally at issue here is the region’s quantity and quality of culture: how much was allegedly lost by diasporic populations in the Americas, what was the value of the culture each population possessed, and what can be identified as either salvageable or redeveloped?

These basic questions about the way cultures have been defined, transformed, rescued, and allocated (deployed ideologically) revolve around a larger problematic: the unequal relations of power that form the context of these definitions, transformations, renewals, and allocations. Thus the premise of loss, in attempts to typify the Caribbean as a particular kind of place in the world—exemplified, for example, by such imagery as *amnesia*, *denial*, *negative hallucination*, *absent ruins*, and *fragments*—is not simply poetic license. It is a poetic license that essentializes the Caribbean as a site of loss and a site of struggle against that loss, and permeates the creolization concept with shifting discourses of celebration and lament: lament over loss and celebration of creative resistance.⁷ Out of certain social formations, creolization creates the societies in which it occurs; creolization, then, both prefigures and results from a culturally specific location called the New World, and, more specifically, the Caribbean.

2 See, for example, Aisha Khan, *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity among South Asians in Trinidad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

3 Daniel Segal, “Living Ancestors: Nationalism and the Past in Postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago,” in Jonathan Boyarin, ed., *Remapping Memory: The Politics of TimeSpace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

4 Patrick French, *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V. S. Naipaul* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 4–5.

5 Richard Price and Sally Price, “Shadowboxing in the Mangrove,” *Cultural Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (1997): 10.

6 Orlando Patterson, *An Absence of Ruins* (London: Hutchinson, 1967); Derek Walcott, “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory” (Nobel lecture, 7 December 1992).

7 See Aisha Khan, “Journey to the Center of the Earth: The Caribbean as Master Symbol,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2001): 271–302.

The region's trope of cultural loss is, of course, mitigated by emphases on cultural restoration and redevelopment; loss in this discourse becomes refigured as cultural fluidity or as a certain slipperiness of cultural elements. For example, in an interview with Patrick French, the Trinidadian economist, professor, and politician Lloyd Best asserted that the "most important single feature of Trinidadian culture," also "true of the whole Caribbean," is the "extent to which masks are indispensable, because there are so many different cultures and ethnicities [there] that people have to play a vast multiplicity of roles, each of which has got its own mask depending on where they are."⁸ This particular way of knowing Trinidad, and the Caribbean, represents this region as beset by a diversity that necessitates the veritable masquerade that is ostensibly its defining feature. That is, multiple cultures and ethnicities allegedly require role-playing with masks as a means of performing various identities. These identities provide the evidence for cultural and other forms of difference that apparently require a kind of subterfuge in order to promote social cohesion. (Caribbeanists will recall a similar claim made by Daniel Crowley, and note a more attenuated resonance with versions of the "plural society" model.)⁹

The trope of creolized multiplicity, then, ultimately can be reinforced, whether empirically asserted or denied. In the absence of presumptions of loss a kind of slipperiness exists: it seems there is too much culture (when, implicitly, there is not enough), in the form of an overabundance of cultural "difference." This kind of culture is somehow still elusive because of its instability, its subtle or hard-to-pin-down qualities. Yet it seems there is also ostensibly insufficient history, due to the ruptures of normatively unfolding cultural development, ruptures wrought by diaspora, the fading over time of memory, and the conviction (explicit and otherwise) held by locals and outsider observers alike that the silence caused by what cannot be retrieved deafens us to other possible sources of information and understanding.

At the same time that creolization and the multiplicities it earmarks have remained a hallmark of Caribbean and New World diaspora studies, scholarship—in spite of itself and undoubtedly influenced in part by the rhetoric of local twentieth-century ideological projects, notably nationalist ones—tends to follow the contours of ethnoracially defined groups, not the least of which are African and Asian. It is still not uncommon in the current moment to find publications, conferences, and research projects occupying comfortable enclaves that are demarcated by abiding presumptions about affinity. Thus, for example, New World diaspora studies and Caribbean studies tend to be parsed into *African* and *Asian* arenas and explored within ethnoracialized parameters.¹⁰ It seems that the creolization concept is gatekeeping more than itself; it is also safeguarding its opposite: exclusive (or near-exclusive) constituencies tethered, with mistaken precision, to points of homeland origin.

8 French, *The World Is What It Is*, 53.

9 See Daniel Crowley, "Plural and Differential Acculturation in Trinidad," *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957): 817–24.

10 But for some important countervailing efforts, see, for example, Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen, eds., *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting* (Boston: Beacon, 2001); Bill Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004); and Aisha Khan, "Absent-Presences: Interpreting Visibility in New World Diasporas" (unpublished manuscript, New York University, n.d.).

These basic questions about the ways cultures have been defined, transformed, rescued, and allocated (deployed ideologically) revolve around a larger problematic: the unequal relations of power that form the context of these definitions, transformations, renewals, and allocations. As Richard and Sally Price have nicely summed it up, in facing the “challenge of somehow recasting the modernist paradigm of progress, unashamedly triumphalist and Eurocentric,” writers and scholars have sought promising escapes from the premise of no true culture, no historical memory, no progress—in short, an absence of ruins.¹¹ As I have noted, this escape has in Caribbean studies significantly involved models of loss or of fluid or slippery heterogeneity. At the same time, this heterogeneity is also not uncommonly corralled into institutionalized enclosures, such as those of the academy, which appear to be at cross-purposes with models of alterity that suggest epistemological alternatives to, at least conventional, gatekeeping. In a sense, then, one might say that the gatekeeping project is not always deliberate and is always multidimensional, but that gates necessarily lead to corners.

Richard Price, in *Travels with Tooy*, does not paint himself into these corners.¹² A concern with history, memory, and cultural creolization is at the heart of the project of *Travels*, as well as other of Price’s works—*First-Time*, *Alabi’s World*, and *The Convict and the Colonel*.¹³ Proposing a modified version of creolization as rigorously linked to historical moment rather than as broadly (and vaguely) descriptive, and making his case for Africans’ creation of institutions in the New World in collaboration with his colleague, Tooy, Price brings the consummate Caribbean themes of an absence of ruins (history, memory) and creolization (which he also refers to as *additivity*) into a productive and provocative dialogue. Steeped in forty years of immersion in Saramaka lives and histories, Price evinces a strong identification and intimacy with the Saramaka but without the conceit of assuming that no boundaries separate them. Advocacy comes in many forms, and some of the most compelling in *Travels* are the treatment of knowledge and evidence, and the relationship between them.

As a man-of-knowledge, a historian, and a religious leader who plays political and judicial roles as a traditional captain, and as Price’s “fellow intellectual,” Tooy has another kind of relationship to boundaries, as Price informs us: “Tooy loves crossing boundaries, between centuries and continents, between the worlds of the living and the dead, between the visible and the invisible, between villages on land and under the sea. Whoosh!” (xi). Through his life experiences, reflections about the history to which he belongs, and communication with spirits and ancestors, Tooy himself may be viewed as “multisited” and far more richly so than typical methodological commitments to do ethnography in more than one place often are. His time-traveling voyages also transcend Western epistemological conventions about the separations

11 Price and Price, “Shadowboxing in the Mangrove,” 4.

12 Richard Price, *Travels with Tooy: History, Memory, and the African American Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); hereafter cited in text.

13 Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1983); Richard Price, *Alabi’s World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel* (Boston: Beacon, 1998).

between past and present events and relationships; Tooy draws from the past both through his own memories and those of others, and through spirit possession, from which he is able to access the past in a different sort of way than “memory” serves. In a critique of the marginalization and trivialization of “counterevidence” that occurs when the “separate aspects of history are treated in disciplinary isolation” and knowledge is increasingly specialized, Susan Buck-Morss warns us about the ease with which discordant ways of knowing are ignored.¹⁴ She asks, pointedly, “What if every time that the consciousness of individuals surpassed the confines of present constellations of power in perceiving the concrete meaning of [various concepts, such as freedom], . . . what *un-disciplined* stories would be told?”¹⁵ To the Saramaka as a group, knowledge is power—the power to know themselves on their own terms and the power to determine their own futures, as far as it may be possible in the creole- and European-dominated societies of French Guiana and Suriname. To Tooy the individual, knowledge helps him understand who he is and thus deal with a difficult and uncertain world. But he draws on, and traverses, multiple “disciplines”—his own and those of creole society.

But just as interesting as Tooy’s lack of Western boundary-confinement are other questions generated by the argument about creolization that Price is making, in using Tooy’s and the Saramaka’s approach to history and memory. A significant aspect of Price’s argument is about “knowledge” and its relationship to “evidence.” Western educated populations are not alone in being interested in “epistemic validity,” as Michel-Rolph Trouillot phrased it; all historiographies (tutored, untutored, canonical, marginal) are so concerned.¹⁶ Moreover, in having our attention drawn to this we are also asked to think about the ways authority and legitimacy are established and maintained.

In his ongoing dialogue with scholars of the African diaspora in the Americas, Price advises against the position that scholars should focus on discursive traditions instead of seeking to corroborate or verify the past.¹⁷ Yet Price’s divergence from scholarly approaches that emphasize discourse (discursive traditions) is not total—a totality that is, I think, a misconception of some critics. This scholarship argues that rather than being invested in charting continuities and locating authenticity, analysis should focus on the distinctive tropes that deliver certain kinds of messages (a creditable, and not, it seems to me, altogether novel approach in academic anthropology and historiography): in what ways, for example, do local people use concepts such as *Africa* in their narratives about how they see their relationship to the past, present, and future; what makes various discourses persuasive; and how do people embrace certain discourses as part of their identity?¹⁸ In *Travels*, Price is answering these questions—much as Tooy himself is, in his own way—but emphasizing the systemic comparison

14 Susan Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti,” *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000): 822.

15 *Ibid.*, 865 (italics in original).

16 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 7.

17 For example, see David Scott, “That Event, This Memory: Notes on the Anthropology of African Diasporas in the New World,” *Diaspora* 1, no. 3 (1991): 261–84.

18 *Ibid.*

across time and place of the complexities and contingencies of cultural development rather than banking on Africa-centric continuities (66). It is not so much attention to discursive fields that differentiates Price's (or Tooy's) work but something more basic: Price's commitment to the importance, and validity, of empirical research. Notably, dedication to empiricism can, and does in Price's hands, allow for plurals: multiple authenticities and manifold continuities, revitalized and valorized as much by Saramaka historians as Western-trained ones. Through Price's telling, Tooy demonstrates Price's long-held conviction that historical particularities matter and can be unearthed (for example, the documentation of Saramaka resistance, as in one of the rooms in Price's imagined "First-Time Museum," displaying the Saramaka creation, during the "war between unequals," of a new society and culture—religion, economic and political systems, and language—based on collective African knowledge and inter-African syncretism [173]). Learning Tooy's story encourages us to remember that memory and discourse are in a sense historiography, and that historiography can have multiple and unexpected truths, forms of validity, and configurations (transcending familiar epistemological boundaries). Price is able to address unequal relations of power (for example, the Saramaka's historical and current position in creole society) by valorizing Trouillot's call to avoid both the flaccid constructivism that recognizes multiple fictions as subjective equals and the myopic positivism that overemphasizes the alleged objectivity of facts.¹⁹

"Discourse," *Travels* make clear, is not necessarily the best substitute for the study of memory and history, or creolization, for that matter. Price reads Tooy's teachings "as encouraging us . . . to move beyond debates about 'memory' and 'forgetting' in order to explore the complex politics of self-representation and identity through time." We must remain focused on historicization and contextualization (304). Memory and discourse are forms of historiography that are communicated and made meaningful in social relations. Tooy's historiography, his "teachings," agentively combines remembered events, contemporary events, likely some apocryphal events, other people's narratives about what they (think they) remember, and the knowledge Saramaka gain through spirit possession. This is a more nuanced, and more interesting sort of grappling than is a minimal variable approach to cultural continuity and change. When the possession and control of knowledge is a significant part of a communal or personal project, memory is necessarily complicated—multilayered, contradictory, and invested. And emically speaking, Saramaka men-of-knowledge conceptualize the preservation of knowledge in terms of "memories," an active, and political engagement with knowledge—of the past and of oneself.

Given all of this, it is perhaps logical that Price asks rhetorically, and parenthetically, in his description of visiting Tooy in prison: "Who needs Foucault or Goffman to understand what total institutions look like from the inside?" (205). Although it is mentioned as an aside, this comment raises the important issue of privileging (or limiting) theory as applicable and

19 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 4–6.

appropriate only in certain, esoteric fields outside, distanced, divorced from immediate, everyday experience. One could argue, as *Travels* seems to, that theory comes in diverse shapes and places, its significance and meaning emerging accordingly. One could also argue that theory's best place is being accessible on a mass level, where it can do the most effective work—like understanding the hows and whys of the *total* in “total institutions” (prisons, hospitals). Treating theory as belonging to special domains strengthens the divide among different epistemologies rather than, as *Travels* seems to want to do, bringing them into closer recognition and conversation. Price's balance is impressive: the distinction between voices—his and Tooy's—is clear, but each is treated as commensurate and consonant. Thus I found this parenthetical sentence surprising (even if logically emerging from Price's recognition of the institutional indignities of prison and emphasis on emic, idiosyncratic ways of knowing) in much the same way as I found Price's own surprise at finding an intellectual, Tooy, in the Cayenne shantytowns (vii).

As mentioned earlier, Price employs *additivity* as a synonym for *creolization*. He tells us that, broadly speaking, Saramaka culture embraces “additivity, constantly integrating novelties into . . . [an] ever-expanding spiritual repertoire” (126). But, broadly speaking, this is a feature of all cultures, and thus arguably, of *culture*. As important, this claim about additivity raises more interesting questions about boundaries, particularly in the context of our learning about the lack of them in terms of Saramaka religion. The Saramaka do not see their religion as a separable domain of life; in fact, unlike for practitioners of Candomblé, Vodou, and Santería, Saramaka religion has no name. Religion occupies no rubric that brackets it out as some sort of special or unique part of life. Thus it can only be understood by describing and analyzing the articulation of experience, events, social relationships, and the ways these figure in self-representation (429n4).

It is common, as I have found in my own work, for example, that people debate about what kinds of phenomena are permitted to be identified as *religion* (as opposed to *superstition*, etc.). Not only can the boundaries between *natural* and *supernatural* worlds be imprecise, but local interpretations of what goes on in these respective realms is often ambiguous and ambivalent. Thus, debates in Trinidad about what is legitimately *spiritual* and what is illegitimately *spirits*, for example, draw from bodies of knowledge that are created, interpreted, and put to use within social terrains that are unevenly empowered. This uneven empowerment means that Western binaries such as the Manichaeic dualism between Good and Evil are in force yet are complicated by interpretive nuances that link ideas about superstition, heterodoxies that are inadvisably lax, and orthodoxies that are too limiting. This complexity of boundaries and interpretations notwithstanding, practitioners delineate the interlocutors in question at any given moment with some manner of name(d) recognition: authorized dogma and cosmologies (as in canonical Judeo-Christian, Muslim, and Hindu belief systems), popular principles and

cosmologies (as in Rastafari or so-called syncretic religious expressions such as orisha or Kali Mai), or suspect practices (as in obeah).²⁰

It is not common, at least among peoples of this hemisphere in the present historical moment, that an undifferentiated, holistic, bracketless, if you will, approach to social life and relations abides, where something as monumental as religion remains as a not-marked category of experience within the forces of colonial and postcolonial hegemonies—even if those demarcations are not the salient dimension of the existential questions that people ask about cosmology and religious identity. I concur wholeheartedly that religion must be etically understood by describing and analyzing the articulation of experience, events, and social relationships. But given Tooy's own "creolized" healing practices, and given that his clients come from a range of cultural and social backgrounds—which suggests that they are also exercising inclusivity, since they probably are enlisting more than one curative measure involving spiritual or supernatural or religious knowledge and method—it remains a fascinating and rich emic question as to how boundaries are absent, ignored, or denied, and if in their very denial they are being recognized, and what effect this might have on the ways experience is interpreted and culture transformed.

We might take Tooy's rape trial as an object lesson in the unexpected turns that creolization can take—subversive but in a morally ambiguous way rather than as clearly a teleologically optimistic way (that is, possessing an agency that is presumed to be for the good; a self-fulfilling prophecy of beneficial consequences).²¹ We can also take his trial as an instance that points to the difficulties attached to conceptualizing creolization as a model for cultural transformation within unequal relations of power. For example, his accuser, Brigitte put into practice what is arguably a form of creolization emerging from her exposure to formal education. She applied "a French conceptual grid to what were common Saramaka . . . sexual relationships, which at once criminalized them and allowed her enormous personal profit" (193). Other people would doubtlessly eventually catch on that this was profitable practice in Guyane vis-à-vis the French state. At a minimum, the question certainly is, at what point do new ways of knowing eventuate into creolization, or additivity? Another example might be the offense to the *óbia* that Tooy committed "by mixing sex with his curing practices" (214). The latter was more a creole practice, but Tooy clearly crossed that boundary, too. In short, what kinds of boundary-crossings are creolization, which ones are "creolization-like processes" (299), and which ones are something else, some other kind of cultural process not yet labeled or labeled so differently that we do not associate them with the first two kinds? Tooy roams across cultural boundaries, mixing traditional Saramaka knowledge with the tools of creole curing (235). In so doing, he has developed a set of useful practices (income, sexual opportunities, a degree of personal power). Brigitte and her family, we are told, also crossed cultural boundaries, much to their own benefit. In what decade (historicization) and in which particular

20 Khan, *Callaloo Nation*, especially chaps. 3, 6, and 7.

21 Aisha Khan, "Good to Think? Creolization, Optimism, and Agency," *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 5 (2007): 653–73.

milieu (contextualization) do we draw the line? And, as Price rightfully acknowledges more than once, Tooy's various powers are for the most part trumped by those of the secular and hegemonic state. How might we understand the brick wall of hegemonic power in relation to the creolization-like processes among groups and communities? Hegemony is never complete and bricks may be porous, if I may extend the metaphor, but they still constrain the Saramaka.

Recognizing a rather loose use in scholarship today of the creolization concept, Price suggests limiting it to strictly historicized processes occurring in the earliest decades of each New World settlement (299). What follows, in terms of cultural transformation, are creolization-like processes rather than a continuous creolization (*ibid*). Historicizing in this way helps to identify societies that have been "born through creolization," underscoring their distinctive characteristics, particularly that of cultural dynamism. This special quality of cultural dynamism contradicts an abiding presupposition, "as some would have it," that creole societies are "unusually poor" in cultural resources (an absence of ruins?); instead, creole societies, Price argues, are unusually rich in their cultural building blocks and the ways in which these have been recreated into novel forms (299).

Almost a decade ago I posed a question about creolization: when does it begin?²² It can be repeated now another way: even if we grant for the Saramaka a beginning point—their successful break with a racist colony, and self-conscious ideology that emphasizes this separation—when does creolization stop, or morph into "creolization-like processes"? Here, I am thinking again, for example, of Brigitte's use of French law and Tooy's creole-influenced healing. Also apropos is to reiterate another question I asked at that time: if we subscribe to the idea that there are "creole societies," then which are the uncreole ones? How might we measure dynamism and the consequences of unequal power relations among creole and, their necessary corollary, uncreole societies—measurement being implied when such contrasts are made?²³ I remain of the mind that creolization is one, albeit predominant way of knowing the Caribbean, a particular fiction (ideological construct) that, laudably, helps establish this region as a worthy subject of study equal to all others.²⁴ At the same time, I remain discouraged by Price's absolutely correct comment that there are those who characterize creole (Caribbean) societies as culturally wanting, even if only implicitly and with positive (i.e., critical) intent, as in Díaz's "Untilles," a sympathetic and ironic critique of power gone mad. These various images of inadequacy are significantly the reason for the still constant debates about, and denials

22 Khan, "Journey to the Center of the Earth."

23 At the time, I offered as an illustrative example the Swahili Coast of East Africa ("Journey," 283); after reading Joyce Tyldesley's *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt* (New York: Basic, 2008), one could make a similar argument about Ptolemaic Egypt—which obviously suggests that many more geographical places and historical periods could be compared along these lines as well.

24 Recently I discovered that another scholar made a similar argument three years before my own. In *Mythologie du métissage*, Roger Toumson asserts that the mantra of *hybridity* has been used to claim the heterogeneity and mixedness of all cultures, yet it is simultaneously a discourse that signals a particular geopolitical location, identifying particular (postcolonial) cultures and nation-states—thus it should be approached with caution. Roger Toumson, *Mythologie du métissage* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998); quoted in Marwan M. Kraidy, *Hybridity; or, The Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 67–68.

of Caribbean “un-ness,” about the quality of culture there, the quantity of culture there, and the ways that culture and cultural transformation can be both charted and retrieved—through historiographies, memories, traditions, discourses, and forms of consciousness. On the one hand, then, reiterating the cultural richness of Caribbean cultures and societies is an imperative political project (a major reason why these interrogations remain important). On the other hand, because this reiteration involves nothing less than the very way we understand the relationship between power and cultural transformation, ultimately what is at stake in explorations of the concept of creolization is not advisedly reducible to simply making a case for the alleged uniqueness of the Caribbean and Caribbean cultures. For one thing, doing so produces essentialized representations. For another, reiterating the cultural richness of all cultures and societies everywhere is just as indispensable a political project, or at least it should be. But this latter stance still leaves us with the question of epistemological specificity (there are few cultural universals, after all, and if these exist it is because they are socially constructed forms of knowledge) as well as the ideological problematic of Caribbean “ruins,” which is no less significant in the *postcolonial* Americas for being a product of colonialism there. Perhaps despite (or because of) the larger stakes, the answer is that until we move forward in the ways we conceptualize this part of the world and how we approach it, we will need to remain focused on, and ardent in, our assertions of its value (beyond its consumption value, that is). Any way that can be done—with the concept of creolization, with a limited, “strictly historicized” version of creolization, with a model of “creolization-like processes,” with an emically informed understanding of creolization (where Saramaka logic, for example, interprets their centuries of “integrated African-American synthesis” as an “on-going process of discovery” [298]), or without the concept of creolization altogether—should be a part of that agenda as long as the need for it exists. The hope is that the need for a compensatory spirit of value affirmation will not be indefinite. For now, the key is to make absolutely clear how and why we are doing so, to lay bare our assumptions, convictions, and agendas, as *Travels* does in an exemplary, thought-provoking, and exciting way. These transparencies not only advance dialogue and debate about the New World, they allow us to explore why these issues matter there—and to test them in the rest of it.