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Celia M. Britton

Small Axe, Number 30 (Volume 13, Number 3), November 2009, pp. 1-11 (Article)

Published by Duke University Press

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Between the publication of *Le discours antillais* in 1981 and *Poétique de la Relation* in 1990, Glissant's work undergoes a marked change: of focus, of mood, and of political position.[1] Whereas he had previously concentrated his attention mainly on his own island of Martinique, in the 1990s he broadens his vision to the whole world. The pessimism of *Discours* is replaced by exhilaration, and the anticolonial struggle that dominated the earlier texts, in which the *isolation* of Martinique was an important factor, gives way to a view of the world—influenced by chaos theory and the "nomadology" of Deleuze and Guattari[2]—as a dynamic totality of interacting communities, all aware of each other and all constantly changing.[3] *Poétique* and the subsequent *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (1996) and *Traité du Tout-monde* (1997) invent a variety of more or less synonymous names for this phenomenon: *creolization*, *chaos-monde*, *Tout-monde*.[4]

Another name for it is *Relation*, a concept that has always been central to Glissant's thinking but whose implications now change somewhat. Originally it was an anti-imperialist

1 Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981); translated into English by J. Michael Dash as *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989). Hereafter cited in text and notes as *DA* and *CD*; citations are to the English edition, though at times the corresponding location in the French text is noted. Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990); hereafter cited in text and notes as *PR*.

2 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980).

3 "For the first time, the semi-totality of human cultures are wholly and simultaneously placed in contact and in effervescent reaction with each other." Edouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 23; hereafter cited in text as *TTM*.

4 Edouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996); hereafter cited in text and notes as *IPD*.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

small axe 30 • November 2009 • DOI 10.1215/07990537-2009-022

project, countering the West's imposition of its pseudo-universalist values on the rest of the world with an insistence on diversity and an antiessentialist, relational conception of human existence: in *Discours* he writes, "Sameness requires fixed Being, Diversity establishes [Relation]. Just as Sameness began with expansionist plunder in the West, Diversity came to light through the political and armed resistance of peoples" (*CD*, 98; translation amended / see DA, 190). Colonized peoples had to "enter into Relation" as part of their struggle for liberation (see *DA*, 29). Now, however, Relation has become a global *reality*; every culture in the world is "an active relay in Relation" (*PR*, 191), and it is no longer a question of "entering into" it.[5] But Relation was always also a *value* in that it was antiessentialist and antiracist, and it defined identity in relational terms rather than as the "root-identity" that fueled colonial conquest and still fuels sectarian politics. This dimension persists in the Tout-monde, which includes not only the contemporary world but also our consciousness of it—"Our changing universe . . . and, at the same time, the 'vision' that we have of it" (*TTM*, 176)—and this consciousness of the Tout-monde preserves the relational diversity and respect for the other, the rejection of fixed ideological positions, that has not yet been fully realized in the Tout-monde qua objective reality. Because, although Glissant's enthusiasm for it may at times suggest otherwise, he is in fact clear that the Tout-monde has not eliminated oppression, inequality, and racism: "Relation is not virtuous or 'moral' . . . a poetics of Relation does not presuppose an immediate or harmonious end to domination" (*IPD*, 106).

It has, however, increased the chances of their elimination, in various ways. First, Glissant emphasizes how global mediatization means that even local conflicts now resonate around the world: "We are now willing to listen to the cry of the world, and in listening to it, we understand that *from now on everyone hears it*" (*TTM*, 17; italics in original). Second, the *unpredictability* that, given the huge number of variables involved, is one of the main features of the "chaotic" Tout-monde ("The *terra incognita* facing us is the inexhaustible field of the variations arising from contacts between cultures" [*PR*, 69; italics in original]), makes it harder for domination to become entrenched (*IPD*, 104). Third, Glissant claims that although oppression continues in the Tout-monde, the movement away from "root-identity" has destroyed the basis of the claim to *legitimacy* which bolstered colonialism, for instance (*IPD*, 68, 77).

Conversely, other aspects of Glissant's later work would appear to problematize the possibility of political action in a globalized world. It is not just that his optimistic tone contrasts disconcertingly with the embattled stance of *Discours*; more substantively, his writing often gives the impression that this chaotic, dynamic totality is not susceptible to deliberate intervention. Change happens constantly but, as it were, automatically, through "the unstoppable [*indémontables*] mechanisms of Relation" (*PR*, 234). This, together with the devaluing of ideological positions that its ethical relativism requires, might seem to suggest that in the Tout-monde political commitment and action have become irrelevant, that in turning from

5 "One does not first enter into Relation, as one might have entered into Religion" (*PR*, 186).

Martinique to the world as a whole Glissant has also turned his back on politics. In the final section of this article I will argue that this is not in fact the case. But because this phase of his work coincides with his becoming much better known, particularly in the United States, I want to approach the issue via the reception of Glissant in the world outside Martinique by discussing two North American critiques that compare the early and late stages of Glissant's work and evaluate them very differently.

Chris Bongie's *Islands and Exiles* is a wide-ranging study of colonial and postcolonial texts that takes Glissant's concept of creolization as the "central theoretical point of reference" of its enthusiastically postmodern analysis of "post/colonial" literature.[6] For Bongie, both colonialism and anticolonial struggle belong to the modernist era of belief in essentialist identity and historical progress toward liberation that has now been superseded by postmodernism. Postmodernism has deconstructed the opposition between colonialism and decolonization, revealing them to be virtually identical ("the colonial project and its anticolonial double" [*IE*, 13]); the slash in *post/colonial* expresses the lack of any clear distinction between the colonial and the postcolonial. Within this framework, Bongie presents Glissant's trajectory from anticolonial engagement to worldwide Relation and creolization as a journey of enlightenment. The early Glissant was caught up in the delusion of the struggle for national independence for Martinique; this was followed by a period of pessimism in the 1970s (*Malemort*, *La case du commandeur*, *Le discours antillais*), which led in turn, with *Mahagony* and *Poétique de la Relation*, to a rejection of his previous ideals in favor of a postmodern "creolizing" stance that accepts the world as it is—a world to which ideological conflict is irrelevant.[7]

However, just as the colonial is still present in the postcolonial, so, in Bongie's deconstructivist view, the new intellectual positions are unable in principle to break completely free of the earlier positions that they oppose; therefore, traces of early Glissant remain in his later work. For Bongie early Glissant is simply wrong and the persistence of the theme of resistance in his later work merely regrettable ("Glissant's work is, from start to finish, committed to any number of ideological errors made in the name of structuring resistance" [*IE*, 143]), albeit inevitable (*IE*, 68–69). His analysis of Glissant is concerned "with the way that this vision [of creolization] is inextricably tangled up with other ideological commitments" (*IE*, 137), central to which is "a Fanonesque politics of national identity and anticolonial resistance—an ideological position to which . . . Glissant once seemed wholeheartedly committed" (*IE*, 138), and Bongie asks how this can "fit in with the anti-ideological poetics of *inter*national creolization that he has so productively pursued . . . especially over the course of the last decade" (*IE*, 138; italics in original).

6 Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 7; hereafter cited in text and notes as *IE*.

7 Edouard Glissant, *Malemort* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); *La case du commandeur* (Paris: Seuil, 1981); and *Mahagony* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

Bongie is therefore keen to emphasize the extent to which Glissant has "recanted" his commitment to anticolonial resistance (*IE*, 135). But, even allowing for the ambiguities inherent in its inevitable persistence, his argument suffers from a scarcity of textual evidence and leads him into what are in my view misreadings of the later texts. For instance, he claims that Glissant's depression in the 1970s stems not only from Martinique's continued dependence on France (as is amply attested throughout *Discours*) but equally from his disillusionment with the new nation-states that had been established through decolonization elsewhere (*IE*, 150); but he produces no evidence at all for this view. Similarly, he interprets *Mahagony*'s attack on the single, authoritative narrative voice (in which Mathieu, a character in the earlier novels, intermittently assumes the role of narrator to criticize the author's previous representations of him) in very narrow terms (*IE*, 174–79), as Glissant distancing himself from his earlier anticolonial exhortations, while at the same time "skeptically" reaffirming them.[8] But *Mahagony*'s undermining of narrative authority is never linked to attitudes toward decolonization; its shift from the collective "we" of *Malemort* and *La case du commandeur* to the singular "I," which is the only evidence Bongie adduces (*IE*, 174), is hardly conclusive. More generally, while in his later works Glissant does, certainly, at times state that anticolonial struggle required the "root-identity" that he now rejects, to give these occasional comments the prominence that Bongie does and thereby to imply that these texts are *primarily* an (ambivalent) rejection of decolonization is a serious distortion of their overall thrust.[9] Relation and creolization constitute a critique of essentialist notions of identity in general, and their principal target is the West rather than newly independent third world nations.

On the question of whether *any* kind of political action is possible in this creolized postmodern world, Bongie is more equivocal. On the one hand, he argues that postmodernism is not a simple disengagement from ideology; rather, it "distances" it in a way that permits an ambivalent, problematizing, relativizing, skeptical reengagement with it—"the (dis)engagement of the postmodern" (*IE*, 172). On the other hand, elsewhere, while he recognizes that there are still political battles to be fought, he implies that fighting them goes against the tenets of postmodernism: it places "limits" on the "relational thinking" of creolization (*IE*, 142). In this view, postmodern reality excludes any notion of radical difference, either between social groups or between the present and the future; it therefore rules out both the "taking sides" that is basic to political action and the possibility of a revolutionary future that will be radically different

8 "The Glissant of *Mahagony* is committed both to relativizing and affirming those beliefs of his that have been put into question by the historical trajectory of 'national disenchantment,' the collapse of that radically different and truly post-colonial future to which the modernist literature of decolonization looked forward" (*IE*, 180).

9 For instance, Bongie runs together two quotations from *Poétique de la Relation*: "'Most of the nations that liberated themselves from colonization,' [Glissant] points out in the *Poétique*, 'have tended to form themselves around the idea of power, the totalitarian drive of the single root, rather than in a founding relationship with the Other' (pp. 26–27). 'Identity for colonized peoples,' he continues, 'will in the first place be an "opposed to," that is to say at the outset [au principe] a limitation.' 'The real work of decolonization,' he concludes, 'will have been to go beyond this limit' (p. 29)" (*IE*, 61–62; Bongie's translations, with his page references to *PR*). But the first quotation occurs in the middle of a paragraph that is primarily about the force of the "root-identity" in Western nations and—as evidence of this force—their ability to impose it upon their colonized subjects even after decolonization; and the second quotation, in contrast, makes an explicit distinction between the root-identity of *colonized* peoples, and the work of decolonization, precisely, in moving beyond this.

from the present.[10] Political action therefore necessitates the adoption of Spivak's "strategic essentialism," which Bongie appears to endorse.[11] But when on the last page of his book he cites Glissant doing exactly this, it is in tones of patronizing disapproval:

> Glissant blandly informs us that "blacks in the United States *naturally* need Afrocentrism in order to struggle against their condition, and one cannot ask a black homeless person in New York to rise up in the name of creolization" [*IPD*, 105; Bongie's emphasis]. If yet further proof were needed that, as Glissant himself once put it, there are no guarantees against the "many mistakes that resulted from the old ideological ways of thinking," then this anxiously "commonsensical" remark would supply it. (*IE*, 434)

While Bongie at one point asks, "Are there not different ethicopolitical arguments that might take us *beyond* community and identity as it has been traditionally defined?" (*IE*, 415; italics in original), he does not pursue this possibility. Nor does he comment on the fact that the quotation from *Introduction à une poétique du divers* that prefaces his main section on Glissant, and which he uses to instantiate Glissant's rejection of the politics of decolonization, begins with the statement: "I think that in the context of globalization the modalities of resistance *will change*" (*IE*, 134; emphasis mine/see *IPD*, 106). It is precisely the possibility of such new modes of resistance that is central to my argument here, and I will return to it in the final section of this article.

Peter Hallward's *Absolutely Postcolonial* reproduces Bongie's characterization of early and late Glissant, but reverses Bongie's evaluation of them. For Hallward the early anticolonial phase of commitment to national independence is positive, and the later Tout-monde is negative because, he claims, Glissant now abandons any kind of political commitment. In Hallward's terminology, Glissant moves from a "specific," grounded engagement with a dialectic of national liberation to a "singular"—that is, self-sufficient and nonrelational—vision of the world as an immanent totality, impervious to conscious political intervention.[12] Late Glissant is, in Hallward's view, typical of postcolonial theory in general, with its fondness for hybridity and ambivalence and its suspicion of clear-cut oppositions (*AP*, xiv).[13]

Hallward produces a philosophically sophisticated account of both these stages in Glissant's trajectory. But he never squarely addresses the question of *why* the shift from the specific to the singular happens. The key text here is *Le discours antillais*, and Hallward's positioning of it is somewhat confused. That is, he splits Glissant's theoretical texts into two groups,

10 "Lacking the grounds for a belief in radical difference, the postmodern sensibility is unable to accredit . . . the possibility of a truly revolutionary future: it locates us in a confusing and complicitous present in which differences have become (un)likenesses" (*IE*, 410).

11 "Provisional affirmations of identity are often politically necessary, notwithstanding the fact that they are theoretically 'unviable' (to echo Gayatri Spivak)" (*IE*, 11).

12 Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 5; hereafter cited in text and notes as *AP*.

13 In this sense postcolonial theory is perfectly exemplified by Bongie. Hallward's conception of late Glissant also seems clearly influenced by *Islands and Exiles*; although Hallward, curiously, does not mention Bongie, the Glissant he is attacking is the Glissant whom Bongie created—and who, I argue, has never really existed. In a further twist, Bongie has recently adopted Hallward's position on Glissant; see Chris Bongie, *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/Colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), chap. 7.

"early" and "late," with *Discours* assigned unambiguously to the early phase (*AP*, 69). The novels, however, are—as in Bongie's formulation—divided into *three* phases: "*La Lézarde* (and *Le Quatrième Siècle*) as affirmative of the initial national programme, *Malemort* and *La Case du commandeur* as more or less despairing of it, and *Mahagony* and *Tout-monde* as broadly affirmative of the new, post-national or 'chaotic' alternative" (ibid.).[14] But if *Malemort* in 1975 is already "despairing" of the national project, it is hard to see how in 1981 *Discours* could still simply "affirm" it; and indeed, the "dialectical energy" of *Discours* mutates, further down the same page, into *Discours* as illustrating and diagnosing "the dialectic *en panne* [broken down]" that sums up *Malemort* (*AP*, 87). In other words, *Discours* cannot fit neatly into Hallward's periodization of Glissant's theoretical work because it is in fact a deeply *ambiguous* text. But Hallward's reductive reading of it cannot acknowledge this—perhaps as a consequence of his general intolerance of ambiguity, which he associates with postcolonialism's desire to sideline opposition in favor of complacently free-floating ambivalence. But the ambiguity that is fundamental to *Discours* is of a very different kind. Far from being the expression of a *choice* not to take sides, it is the result of an extremely constrained, compromised situation in which political resistance is drastically limited; it is ambiguous because it both campaigns for independence and analyzes, in depth, the obstacles that make independence virtually impossible.

Hallward, however, does not adequately recognize this.[15] He comments on the "abjectly passive form of neo-colonial dependency" (*AP*, 87) afflicting Martinique in the 1970s, but does not identify this as the reason for Glissant's abandoning of the national project. In particular, he ignores the importance of departmentalization[16] in creating a "blocked" political situation in which those who might otherwise fight for independence are bought off by an illusory equality with France; and yet this is the problematic that dominates *Discours*.[17] Hallward refers to departmentalization only to say that it has ruined the local economy (ibid.)—and while this is true, departmentalization also in fact brought to Martinique a higher standard of living than that of the independent Caribbean islands, thus providing a further reason not to seek independence. It encouraged Martinicans to identify with France (Glissant's "mimetic impulse . . . a kind of insidious violence" [*CD*, 18/see *DA*, 31]), camouflaged the distinctions between colonizer and colonized, and was thus responsible for the ambiguous situation to which *Discours* responds. Throughout this text, Glissant emphasizes the difficulty of resisting domination that is not local and brutally obvious but operates at arm's length, in a "concealed" fashion.

For instance, it is in this context that his concept of "detour" must be understood. A detour is a confused, often desperate, sometimes irrational form of resistance: it is "the

14 Edouard Glissant, *La lézarde* (Paris: Seuil, 1958); *Le quatrième siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1964).

15 For instance, Hallward cites a passage on collective consciousness expressing itself through a projected national theatre (*AP*, 76; see *DA*, 397), but omits the next paragraph, in which Glissant emphasizes the extreme difficulties underlying the project, "the traumatic conditions under which the Caribbean was settled, structures (based on taboos) of the slave's world, self-repression provoked by depersonalization, etc." (*CD*, 197/see *DA*, 397).

16 In 1946 certain French colonies were awarded the status of *départements d'outre-mer* (overseas departments), in other words, ceasing to be colonies and, theoretically, becoming part of France.

17 See in particular the introduction to *DA*, 11–22.

ultimate resort of a population whose Domination by an Other is concealed" (*CD*, 20/see *DA*, 32).[18] But Hallward sees it very reductively as a type of folklore, as "primitive" (*AP*, 79–80), and above all as a simple evasion of responsibility.[19] The detour, he claims, is a mere "obstacle to be overcome in the constitution of a *national* consciousness," and Glissant is "generally dismissive" of it (*AP*, 71). While Glissant does indeed regard it as a transitional stage in the dialectic of national liberation, it does not follow that his view of it is dismissive or condemnatory.[20] Calling it an evasion of responsibility implies that other, more valid, choices could be made, but the detour is "the ultimate resort" of people who have no other choice open to them; and in a situation in which possibilities for political action are severely limited, those that do exist, however inadequate, cannot simply be rejected. Equally, if as I have argued Glissant abandoned the project of national independence for Martinique because of his growing conviction that the forces of assimilation and departmentalization were such that independence was not a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future, then his move into "singularity" was itself wholly "specific," in Hallward's sense of a determinate response to real external factors, and this in turn implies that Glissant has not necessarily rejected other kinds of political action.

But for Hallward this is impossible because he believes that the *only* vehicle for progressive politics is the nation-state—which late Glissant abandons. Hallward cites campaigns for national liberation led in the past (*AP*, 128) and argues vigorously that only the nation, "made up of all those who, whatever their cultural origin or 'way of being,' collectively *decide* to assert (or re-assert) the right of self-determination" (*AP*, 127; italics in original), can transcend cultural particularities to enact change based on general principles of justice, equality, and liberty. This in itself is a persuasive argument, but Hallward's attempts to defend it against the obvious objection that it is no use extolling the virtues of the nation if globalization has rendered it powerless are less convincing. Those oppressed groups who do not yet have a state of their own may indeed want one, as he remarks (*AP*, 131), but his next sentence contradictorily reveals that having one is actually no safeguard against dispossession by external forces.[21] In a world of multinational economies and US neoimperialism, gaining national independence does not guarantee freedom from oppression; Glissant's later texts repeatedly argue that the nonlocalized "invisibility" of the multinationals, situated nowhere and everywhere, eludes conventional resistance and requires us to find new ways of opposing them.[22] Moreover, national liberation is far more difficult to achieve in the first place in a globalized world: the Palestinians, whom

18 I give a fuller description of this in Celia M. Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 25–29.

19 "Detour per se merely encourages evasion of a national responsibility" (*AP*, 80); "The result, once again: *détour* and irresponsibility" (*AP*, 92).

20 In an interview given on the publication of *Discours*, Glissant emphasizes that "the use of the Detour does not in any sense mean an escape from reality. In the Caribbean, one of the traditional forces of opposition in complicated situations is the ruse." See "Assimilation ou antillanité?" *Afrique-Asie* (no. 245), 3 April 1981, 46–47.

21 "Having a state of one's own still seems to matter a great deal to those who don't have one. And as often as not, the cause of the eventual reversal or corruption of progressive state-sanctioned change in places such as Guatemala (1954), Chile (1970) and East Timor (1975) has been less the fault of the state *per se* than the violent intervention of another, more powerful state" (*AP*, 131–32; italics in original).

22 See, for example, *IPD*, 102–3.

Hallward cites as currently engaged in such a struggle (*AP*, 128, 131), would have a far better chance of success if their enemy were solely the nation of Israel and not also the supranational hegemony of the United States. And Hallward's claim that globalization has not diminished the sovereignty of "already-powerful nations" because "what international business has long pursued and now mainly achieved is clearly not so much an end to the state *per se* as 'a weak nation-state in relation to capital and a strong one in relation to labour'" (*AP*, 132)[23]—that is, a state that is subservient to the multinationals and oppresses its own workers—will be of little comfort to supporters of the egalitarian democratic nation that he is promoting.

It is this refusal to envisage any kind of progressive political action not based in the nation-state that leads Hallward to accuse late Glissant of reneging on the author's commitment to political change. Since national independence has not been realized in Martinique, the Tout-monde cannot constitute a *subsequent* stage in a dialectic whereby the national moment is surpassed in a movement onto the international plane: "Rather than surpass a dialectical process *through* its resolution, as required in the early work, his later work simply changes criteria" (*AP*, 120; italics in original). In other words, Glissant is guilty of just giving up on national politics, and of—opportunistically—converting a "problem" into an "opportunity": "It is precisely that problem which frustrated a national reconciliation in *Malemort* which now provides the opportunity for the newly global post-national reconciliation" (ibid.). I have argued that the reasons for Glissant's shifts are anyway far more cogent and objective than Hallward can admit, but in this passage he even claims that late Glissant ends up *celebrating* dispossession: "Glissant's critique of dispossession risks conversion into an elective affirmation of dispossession (however 'positively' affected)" (ibid.). This latter is presumably the Deleuzean deterritorialization that has indeed influenced the articulation of the Tout-monde; but to define it as dispossession again reveals the limitations of Hallward's position that, politically, only the collective possession of a national territory counts for anything.[24]

The question is, then, does late Glissant's view of the world really exclude political action per se? Hallward's characterization of it as a self-constituting, self-sufficient totality[25] is entirely accurate: this late form of Relation does not relate to anything outside itself. But it does not necessarily follow that it excludes conflict and opposition between its internally related elements—that it is, as Hallward also claims, a "pre-established harmony" (*AP*, 123). In fact, Glissant emphasizes the equal prominence of conflict within Relation; the page of *Poétique* from which Hallward quotes to support his assertion that "related singularities are . . . necessarily compatible, for all express the same totality and nothing else" (*AP*, 124) actually

23 The quotation is from Immanuel Wallerstein, "Post-America and the Collapse of the Communisms," *Rethinking Marxism* 51 (1992): 99.

24 One of Hallward's main examples of Glissant converting a problem into an opportunity is the "economy of disorder," which he misreads as the *goal* of the Tout-monde in general (*AP*, 119), but the passage of *Poétique* that he references in support of his interpretation clearly defines it as a tactical response to the specifically Martinican problem of economic dependence on France: "To be capable at any moment of changing speed and direction without however changing nature, intention, or will: that was perhaps the optimal principle for an economic system like this. The changes in direction would depend on a rigorous analysis of the real" (*PR*, 141; my translation).

25 "*La Totalité* become sufficient to itself, immediate to itself, one and the same as end and means" (*AP*, 105).

starts by defining *Relation* as "the reverberations of cultures, in symbiosis or in *conflict* . . . in *domination* or liberation" (*PR*, 145; emphasis mine).

The main problem that Glissant himself identifies concerns the unpredictability of globalization, which, although it can upset oppressive regimes, also problematizes planned action against them: "If unpredictability rules in the relations between human cultures, will we not lapse into a totally destructive pessimism or nihilism? . . . If it's unforeseeable, why act?" (*IPD*, 85). We can neither predict nor control the future of the world (*PR*, 138). But at the same time, "Relation does not imply or authorize any kind of ecumenical detachment" (*PR*, 45), and Glissant's answer to his own question is to develop a new conception of political action. This depends upon a distinction between two types of action, which he begins to elaborate in *Poétique*. While "no *generalizable* strategy of action can be developed in Relation" (emphasis mine), reactive interventions in *local* situations are both possible and necessary: "That is why an intervention 'in Relation' can only really be made 'in one place'" (*PR*, 192). The unpredictability of globalization precludes long-term campaigns to establish political systems or "grand ideological structures" (*IPD*, 132), but these in any case conflict with the values of Relation; local interventions respond immediately to particular existing situations, and so can more easily keep pace with the unpredictable changes of Relation as reality, and they do not invoke substantive ideological convictions other than a defense of human rights and opposition to deprivation and inequality.

But local action must be carried out with an "imagination of the totality" (*PR*, 170), a consciousness of the equality and interrelatedness of all the world's communities (*IPD*, 56); in defending a threatened minority language, for instance—a prominent theme in these texts—one must do it in the name of all the other minority languages in danger of disappearing, not as an identitarian battle to promote one's own particular community (*IPD*, 40–41). Glissant argues eloquently that only this global consciousness of Relation can prevent local action from degenerating into sectarian violence, as happened in Rwanda and Bosnia (*IPD*, 90–91). He praises the campaigns led by Nelson Mandela in South Africa and the Roma in Sarajevo: faced with white racism, the African National Congress did not assert a countervailing black identity but worked together with "Coloureds," Indians, and whites, thus learning "the meaning of Relation" (*PR*, 218). Glissant also cites long extracts from the letter written to the mayor of Sarajevo by the Roma victims of ethnic conflict (*IPD*, 64–66), in which they proclaim their faith in "a free and multi-ethnic Sarajevo" and define themselves not as Roma but as "all those who are fighting for a multi-ethnic democracy" (*IPD*, 64).

The new form of political action in the globalized world, in other words, is to combine local action with global consciousness of Relation—summed up most recently in the slogan "Act in your locality, think with the world."[26] The importance of local action—"There are concrete campaigns of resistance that must be fought. In the place in which one is" (*IPD*, 107)—is

26 Edouard Glissant, *Une nouvelle région du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 150.

emphasized with specific examples: Mandela and the Roma, the defense of endangered languages, and an ecological project for Martinique in which Glissant himself has been actively involved. The latter is outlined in a speech given to the Association for the Protection of Martinique's Heritage, in which Glissant campaigns for the development of the local economy, restricting imported goods, and educating people to appreciate local produce (*PR*, 155–71); he returns to this project in *Traité du tout-monde*, extending it to issues of education and social policy (*TTM*, 226–33).[27] These reactive interventions are not, in fact, necessarily limited to one place; Glissant also describes the creation of the International Writers' Parliament in which he was involved in the late 1990s with Wole Soyinka, which set up a network of "refuge towns" where writers persecuted by their governments could live (*TTM*, 247–52). He is quite unequivocal on the general need to defend the oppressed in particular situations.

Overall, however, the "global consciousness" dimension of this synthesis receives rather fuller development in his writing. In defining it as an "*imagination* of the totality" (emphasis mine), Glissant stresses its creative, transformative potential: it is not merely an understanding of the present state of affairs but a vision of the force of Relation as a principle that combats the mentality of the "root-identity." While it remains sterile unless "implicated" in a concrete situation ("We must however not just imagine the totality . . . and not just approach Relation through a shift in our thinking, but also implicate this imagination in the place where we live" [*PR*, 212]), it is also, conversely, the necessary condition for any particular action to succeed: "No solution put into practice can afford to . . . ignore or underestimate the movement of this totality, which is Relation" (*PR*, 217). All these later texts reiterate his belief that all political progress depends, beyond intervention in local situations, on the long-term development of this transformative consciousness of totality—depends, in other words, on "changing mentalities": "These cultural and political struggles . . . are embedded in a global context such that we must, at the same time as we engage in this kind of struggle, . . . contribute to changing the mentality of human beings, abandoning the 'if you are not like me you are my enemy, if you are not like me I have the right to fight you'" (*IPD*, 56); "Our actions in the world are cursed with sterility if we do not change, as much as we can, the imagination of the humanities that we constitute" (*TTM*, 29–30).

This idealist position—Glissant believes that consciousness determines social existence rather than the reverse—correlates with the greater emphasis that he places on cultural oppression as distinct from economic oppression; his fundamental opposition of "root-identity" and "relation-identity" defines the struggle in cultural, that is, identitarian, terms, and

27 Nick Nesbitt sees this particular project as evidence against Hallward's assertion of the apolitical nature of late Glissant: "Were one to stop reading Glissant with *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, we could perhaps join Peter Hallward in detecting an increasing disengagement and aestheticism in Glissant's work. And yet, without returning to the violent engagement of *Discours* and *Malemort*, I think that Glissant's surprising yet convincing call to turn Martinique into a biological nation in *Traité du Tout-monde* (1997) not only recovers a political and ethical dimension seemingly lost in his later thought but is fully coherent with Glissant's life-long project of enlightenment and striving for an intersubjective totalizing consciousness of the *Tout-monde*." Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memories: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2003), 184.

he tends to see racism rather than deprivation as the basic form of oppression: "Masses of Negroes are endangered and oppressed because they are black, Arabs because they Arabic, Jews because they are Jewish, Muslims because they are Muslims, Indians because they are Indian, and so on through the infinite diversity of the world" (*TTM*, 21). To see the world as made up of cultures rather than nations not only reflects the postnational realities of globalization but also (as Hallward points out [*AP*, 126]) privileges the cultural over the economic.[28] But this does not mean that late Glissant is apolitical; antiracist politics (which, in simple terms, defines Relation) is very different from no politics at all.

Moreover, Glissant's most recent work adopts a markedly less optimistic position on globalization: *La cohée du lamentin* (2005) introduces a distinction between *mondialisation*, that is, globalization in its negative form as "the reign of the multinationals, standardization, unregulated ultra-liberalism on the world markets," and *mondialité*, a new name for the Tout-monde.[29] Globalization is now seen as responsible for creating massive numbers of immigrants and refugees, whose suffering is described in *Une nouvelle région du monde* (2006)[30]—and this topic is given a very directly political form in *Quand les murs tombent* (2007), cowritten with Patrick Chamoiseau, which consists of an attack on President Nicolas Sarkozy's new ministry of immigration.[31] Finally, *Mémoires des esclavages* (2007) campaigns for the creation in France of a "national memory" of slavery that will, Glissant argues, require the French to overcome the racism that prevents them from acknowledging their historical participation in slavery and embeds this in the concrete form of a projected national center.[32] Lack of space prevents me from discussing these recent texts in any detail, but they clearly signal Glissant's return to a more overtly militant political perspective, based now on the "place" of France rather than Martinique, but, crucially, still on the principles of Relation, creolization, and so on that he developed in the 1990s. And this in itself is surely evidence that these principles can form the basis for a viable new form of political action in a globalized world.

28 More recently, Glissant has given a more balanced formulation of the relation between the two: "The principal reasons for these conflicts certainly appear to be economic in nature, it is almost always a case of exploiting a community, but another dimension is added to it, a kind of mystery of the relation between diverse humanities, an inexplicable state of intolerance and sectarianism" (*Une nouvelle région*, 205).

29 Edouard Glissant, *La cohée du lamentin* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 15.

30 See Glissant, *Une nouvelle région*, 82–86, 122–23, and 145–46.

31 Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau, *Quand les murs tombent: L'identité nationale hors-la-loi?* (Paris: Galaade/Institut du Tout-monde, 2007).

32 Edouard Glissant, *Mémoires des esclavages: La fondation d'un centre national pour la mémoire des esclavages et de leurs abolitions* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).