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Introduction: The Trace of Sexual Difference

Throughout his work, Édouard Glissant rigorously describes the process of *creolization* in the Caribbean and beyond. His later work in particular considers creolization through the planetary terms of Relation, “exploded like a network inscribed within the sufficient totality of the world.”¹ As his philosophical importance rightfully grows, many note the dual risk of overgeneralization and abstraction haunting continued expansion of his geographical and theoretical domain.² In light of that danger, this essay examines how questions of *the ontological nature of embodiment* as raised by feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray ground, both implicitly and explicitly, processes of creolization. Narrowly speaking, such a reading of Glissant suggests the possibility of a richer understanding of creolization as a historically lived process and its emancipatory promise in the present. More generally, the linking of Glissant and Irigaray begins a larger project bringing together theorists of decolonization and sexual difference at the intersection of struggles against phallogentrism and racialization, perhaps nuancing some decolonial critiques of the value of Irigaray’s (and her interlocutors’) thought.³ Thus, the investigation begins with a concrete question of historical interpretation that stages the embodiment of cultural contact.

The *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (1609) is a vital text in the colonial history of Latin America. Written by Garcilaso de la Vega, known in his day as “El Inca” because of his Incan mother, the *Comentarios* represented the authoritative text on indigenous Peruvian culture for centuries. Written while he was in Spain, El Inca describes a childhood spent with his maternal relatives in Peru. It is this fusion of multiple perspectives, times and places that makes the *Comentarios* so important for considering the philosophical implications of racial and cultural mixing: a child born from a Spanish conquistador and Incan royalty leaves for Spain at twenty-one where he

articulates an elite version of his people's history by translating the oral tradition of his Quechua-speaking family into Spanish.

What becomes clear throughout this amazing text is how El Inca tries to negotiate the two sides of his identity through a dialectical sleight of hand. Caught linguistically, emotionally and spatially between Spain and Peru, he puts his proud Incan heritage at the service of a broader identification with the Spanish and Christian imperial project. That is, the Incas represented a crucial intermediary step in the cultivation of civilization that the finally perfected Spanish bring to fruition. So he dedicates his work to the empire of Christendom, "by whose merits and intercession the Eternal Majesty has deigned to draw so many great peoples out of the pit of idolatry..."⁴ The Inca are partially aligned with the Spanish in his version of their origins, then, because they brought at least a modicum of civilization to the various beastly peoples they conquered. While he laments the loss of some of the glories of Incan culture, and at times overtly wishes the Spanish would show the natives more respect, the monumentalism of Spanish teleology wins the day. He undertakes the task of writing about his love for his native country to displace flawed conceptions of its history at the same time dedicating his work to the discursive formations that ineluctably engender such violent misrecognitions. Thus, a pervasive part of his narrative is to render the animalistic and idol worshipping pre-Inca Indians as a common enemy of the Incas and Spanish.

At least *prima facie*, then, it seems evident this narrative does not represent the radical shock of creolization "allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open," but instead captures cultural mixing "in the thought of an empire."⁵ While a lengthier treatment of the text might point to a multiplicity of factors, here it serves as a point of departure to suggest one explanatory possibility for the frustration of creolization: the suppression of sexual difference. This claim is, for now, not a causal one but merely to say the capture of creolization by empire can be traced like a shadow through the constitutive darkness of sexual difference in the text.

What Pheng Cheah calls "the trace of sexual alterity"⁶ marks the *Comentarios* both in its content and its material production. First, women's bodies are the connective tissue in the dialectical sublation of Incan civilization to Spanish empire. In Chapter XIII, Garcilaso describes the dress of the Indians and shows heightened concerns about the indecency of women. "The women went in the same dress, naked...But out of proper respect for our hearer, we had better keep to ourselves what remains to be said...they resembled irrational beasts, and it can be imagined from this bestiality in adorning their persons alone how brutal they would be in everything else."⁷ The women of a population as gatekeepers of domesticity and virtuous modesty repeatedly become metonymic for the whole state of a society. In settling the new villages of the Inca Empire, for instance, Incan ruler Manco Capac sounds rather close to a European colonizer in his

attempt to teach the “dictates of reason and natural law” to heathens. Women again figure prominently: “He enjoined them particularly to respect one another's wives and daughters, because the vice of women had been more rife among them than any other.”⁸ Proper modes of domesticity, measured primarily through women, are crucial to the civilizational narrative established by Garcilaso. In Book VIII he describes the torturous beauty practices of Incan women who desire long black hair. Wondering at how ridiculously severe such a treatment appeared, he notes, “However in Spain I have ceased to wonder, after seeing what many ladies do to bleach their hair by perfuming it with sulphure...I do not know which treatment is more injurious to the health, the Indian or the Spanish...This and much more will the longing for beauty induce people to undergo.”⁹ From his perspective, given here as more of a funny aside, the disciplining of the female body—however ridiculous—is a *sine qua non* of any claim to civilization.

Even more glaring is the suppression of the maternal body. El Inca Garcilaso's absorption of Incan culture into Spanish teleology structurally parallels how the repression of sexual difference framed his cultural identity: given the ideas about hereditary lineage prevalent then, he would assume that his paternal Spanish heritage dominated his maternal Inca heritage. His maternal lineage is subsumed in this model. El Inca Garcilaso is able to join the patriarchal economy of the father's name since a Spanish conquistador declared in court: “...he is my natural son and as such I name and declare him.”¹⁰ The repression of the maternal body from which he came is doubled in the production of the *Comentarios*, transcribed by El Inca Garcilaso's illegitimate son born from a servant who is now but a legal footnote in imperial Spanish history.¹¹ The female servant haunts this complex account of a mixed identity, indexing the unspeakability of sexual difference under phallocentrism even within the supposedly radical potential of geographical and racial hybridity.¹²

Based on the embodied questions raised here, the remainder of the article tries to further systematize the claim that irreducible sexual difference is a constitutive feature of processes of creolization and, conversely, that the suppression of sexual difference represents a particularly pernicious capture of creolization's radical potential. To this end, both Édouard Glissant and Luce Irigaray confront the metaphysical power of the One through a radical poetics. They overlap particularly in their focus on the force of fluidity to overturn temporal stasis and spatial balkanization in how we conceive identity and relation. Juxtaposing them reveals how Glissant's theory of creolization can obscure the ontological significance of sexual difference in the production of previously unimagined socio-cultural formations grounded in the creativity of the natural body, even as his theory acquires its force at least in part from the power of such an ontological formation. Thus, this paper is the first step in the development of a sexual difference theory of

creolization that contributes to the struggle against phallogentrism in all its manifestations, not least of all racialization.

Creolization through the Mechanics of Fluids

Édouard Glissant's oeuvre theorizes the irreducible cultural and geographical specificity of the Caribbean in terms of an open multiplicity he calls a "poetics of Relation." His challenge in general philosophical terms is to express how "every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other."¹³ The Caribbean is the epicenter of this rhizomatic mode of identity he calls Creolization, held in contradistinction to the European model of filiation: "Relation rightfully opposes the totalitarianism of any monolingual intent."¹⁴ Creolization for Glissant is not only the descriptive recognition that pure origins and monolingual insularity are illusory, but also the revalorization of the unpredictable and creative effects of cross-cultural encounters.

The Martinican landscape suffuses Glissant's many works. In his fiction and his theoretical tracts, he focuses on the beaches of his homeland—caught between the mountains and the sea—as the revealing knot for his view of identity extended through the other. The mountains are the historical home of the Maroons who escaped slavery to set up their own society; the Caribbean Sea is the island's opening onto the rest of the world. He privileges neither setting on its own terms, cautioning against the romanticizing of a mythic past as well as the fantasy of an unencumbered future. A Caribbean consciousness as the embodiment of a poetics of Relation cannot arise from either a narrow reclaiming of an authentic origin or a naively postmodernist view of unrooted identity. Thus, Glissant draws them together through Martinique's *Lézarde*, the snaking river that cuts through the island as it descends from the hills to the open water, "[linking] the mountain, as 'the repository of Maroon memories,' with 'the unfettered sea' and therefore [linking] the tradition of the Maroon repudiation of the plantation to a new future..."¹⁵

The river is central not only because it suggests a complex rapprochement between the reclamation of the past and a radical openness to the future, but because its very geophysical dynamics are suggestive of an identity in Relation. Describing how the Other destabilizes without annihilating, Glissant writes: "This is an aesthetics of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance. The other of thought is always set in motion by its confluences as a whole."¹⁶ The fluvial dynamics of the I-Other and cross-cultural relationship are described here as flows undergoing confluence with unpredictable results, even for those flows that begin in a laminar state.

Creole linguistics, for Glissant, are a concrete example of turbulent flow. “An idiom like Creole, one so rapidly constituted in so fluid a field of relations, cannot be analyzed the way, for example, it was done for Indo-European languages.”¹⁷ He is interested in the dynamic process of Creolization, as opposed to a study attempting to fix Creole in place (render a regularized written language) or articulate it as merely the sum of certain constituted languages. The creative possibility of Creole, in turn, brings into relief the ways celebrations of stasis or universality are merely fantasies built on the suppression of difference. So the standardization and imposition of a supposedly universal French language, for instance, mask a long-history of internal differentiation and struggle behind seemingly neutral rules of usage. Glissant sees two common pitfalls in approaches to Creole: the essentialist celebration of Creole as an authentic identity with origins in Africa that is superior to decadent and corrupted European identity (the Negritude of Senghor, for instance); or the assertion that Creole has sedimented enough that it should be considered on par with European languages in demarcating a foundational creole identity and range of cultural expression (the Creolité of Raphaël Confiant, Jean Bernabé and Patrick Chamoiseau).¹⁸ Neither of these approaches actually challenge the structural condition of monolingualism, which divides the world into neat and hierarchically distributed geographic and linguistic root identities: the former flips the hierarchy while the latter flattens it, but each leaves in place the boundaries that constitute the Oneness of cultural identity.

The metaphysical comfort of the root is not easily escaped, however. While creolization never stops, according to Glissant, its radical potential is diffused by the hegemony of European filiation:

One can imagine language diasporas that would change so rapidly within themselves and with such feedback...that their fixity would lie in change...This linguistic sparkle, so far removed from the mechanics of sabirs and codes, is still inconceivable for us, but only because we are paralyzed to this day by monolingual prejudice.¹⁹

Until Caribbean thinkers find a way to articulate an imagination beyond this “monolingual prejudice” and to live the embodied radicality of creolizing identity, they will remain in the trap of a Eurocentric world where the only horizon is to become the New Europe or Europe’s equal. Or, as Fanon puts it, “Let us decide not to imitate Europe and let us tense our muscles and brains in a new direction. Let us endeavor to invent man in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving.”²⁰ Fully living the aesthetics of turbulence – what Glissant calls the *chaos-monde* – by giving oneself up to a confluence with others makes possible the move from the totalitarian root of identity to the rhizome submerged in the open sea.

What is not always clear in Glissant’s work, however, is the source of this transversal confluence. Or, in other words, if illusions of fixity and stasis

break into turbulence when irreducible but connected entities meet in Relation, how is their meeting initiated and embodied. I have already suggested in the introduction that women's bodies are a crucial gateway in narratives of cultural encounter, as sexual difference marked an exemplary text in form and content through the trace of the repressed maternal body. Glissant himself articulates how his view of the rhizome over the root arose from a network of formative feminine figures:

Pour notre culture, héritée des Africains, la famille est beaucoup plus étendue. Ce n'est pas seulement ma mère qui m'a élevé, mais aussi ma grand-mère, mes tantes, mes sœurs aînées, et même les voisines, une vaste famille très féminine, comme un matriarcat collectif dont la mère serait la figure centrale. Le père, lui, n'est jamais là. Le mien gérait des habitations, toujours en déplacements...La figure de ma mère, quand j'étais tout petit, reste donc associée à cette multiplications de visages féminins, à ces *das*, celles qui portent les bébés, nourrices, marraines et autres.²¹

What is notable here is that the multiplicity of the world, the privileging of the rhizome over the root, and the valorization of difference against the flattening out of Eurocentric globalization are all expressed through the body of the mother without being reducible to it. In this sense, the body of *la mère* works in the same way as the body of *la mer* for Glissant, since his creolizing poetics are grounded in a corporeal landscape that is simultaneously the point of relation to the unpredictable chaos of the world. He argues, for instance, "La mer Caraïbe ...est une mer ouverte, une mer qui diffracte...Ce qui se passe dans la Caraïbe pendant trois siècles, c'est littéralement ceci: une rencontre d'éléments culturels venu d'horizons absolument divers et qui réellement se créolisent."²² In some sense, Glissant takes the force of fluidity for granted, detailing its historical power to envelop totalitarian boundary fantasies and scramble illusions of purity but never quite analyzing the ontological source of its effectivity. Far from accidental, however, *la mer(e)* in Glissant's work points to the way phallogocentrism organizes materiality and identity. Turning now to the work of Luce Irigaray will bring into relief this fundamental if incipient relationship between creolization and sexual difference.

In her challenging essay "Mechanics of Fluids," Irigaray maps science's "historical lag in elaborating a 'theory' of fluids" onto psychoanalytic discourses of desire. Why is it, she asks, that fluids can only be thought in terms of a teleology of solidification? And furthermore, how does a "complicity of longstanding between rationality and a mechanics of solids alone" enforce and maintain the centrality of the phallus and the phallic economy?²³

While this essay is often read only as a critique of scientific rationality, it is clear that Irigaray primarily targets the Lacanian theory of desire. Lacan

argues for instance, “The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack.”²⁴ Upon entering the symbolic order – which means entering the psychic economy of the phallus²⁵ based on acceptance of the name of the father, or the big Other – the subject’s desire is based on a constitutive lack because they are cut off from unmediated access to the real. To compensate for this lack, desire attaches to partial objects or *objet a* that, as Lacan says in the above quote, serve to demarcate boundaries of the subject and mark traces of the founding relationship to the Other. The exemplary case is feces precisely because it comes from within but is ultimately externalized, articulating the inside/outside boundary through the severing of an intelligible object.

For Irigaray, this hierarchy of solids over fluids (or the teleological absorption of fluids into solids, such as the sperm-fluid always represented as the future child in psychoanalytic models of desire) is one way the centrality of the phallus is shored up in the face of the excess of fluidity. The penis is the literal model for this hierarchy, the rigid *res extensa* that contains fluidity within determinate borders in a visibly apprehended volume. As a result, “The sex of the woman is an absence of sex, and that she can only have one desire: to possess a penis...It’s an attempt which constitutes the female sex as the complement and the opposite necessary to the economy of the male sex.”²⁶ The excess of fluidity against which the phallus works is a feminine desire not founded on lack, indexed by the morphological possibility of an autonomous female sex: “These two lips of the female sex...return to unity, because they are always at least *two*, and that one can never determine of these two, which is one, which is the other: they are continually interchanging.”²⁷ Irigaray is suggesting, in turn, that the phallus and the penis collapse into each other for Lacan: psychoanalysis and science are beholden to and reinforce a rationality founded on the mechanics of solids because language itself – the entire Western project of representation – stems from a model of desire in which there is only one value, the penis, promising access to the phallus. The various metrics of that value – extension, visibility, solidity, oneness – become the markers of the legitimate subject and authoritative locus of enunciation.

On this idea, both that the Western project is founded on a binary of value and lack and that the mechanics of fluids disrupts the underlying metaphysics of this rational consensus, I believe Glissant and Irigaray are closely aligned. He looks to the chaos of the turbulent sea for how it destabilizes the political and scientific articulations of identity that rely on insularity, impenetrability and purity. Creolization constructs a subject in which discrete quantities of racial identity are blurred through the creativity of cross-cultural poetics such that the history of human interaction is no

longer centered on the model of the genealogical tree but in the chaos of the sea's many currents, swirling eddies, and spiraling gyres. Political identity, moreover, spatializes these supposedly pure identities through the trope of the bounded and homogenous island: the territorial nation-state is like the insular island protected from penetration, contamination, or relation. For Glissant, the fluid movement of the sea undermines the fantasy of isolation through the submarine unity (to paraphrase Edward Kamau Brathwaite) of archipelagic thought. The Caribbean Sea distinguishes (without rendering distinct) and connects the islands it envelops and, by extension, brings the whole world into relation as it opens onto the uncontainable flows of the global water cycle.

Thus, in terms of the philosophical, geographical, and scientific meaning of fluids, Glissant and Irigaray both highlight the way turbulent flow challenges the organizing principle of oppression on which they respectively focus. The preceding suggests that Glissant implicitly registers the power of sexual difference insofar as we take seriously Irigaray's theorization of fluidity. In this regard I break from the important work on Glissant's literary output that tends to compartmentalize his theoretical-philosophical corpus as "under the guise of gender-neutral universalism."²⁸ At its most richly conceived, such as the preceding discussion of *la mer(e)*, Glissant's idea of creolization draws strength from precisely what it shares with Irigaray's feminine theory of fluids. That is not to say, of course, that Glissant should unproblematically be read as a feminist or collapsed into Irigaray's project. While they both register the challenge of fluidity to formally similar philosophical conventions such as nature/culture, body/environment, or subject/object, they have different political horizons: for Irigaray, the mechanics of fluids disrupt a phallogocentric economy of desire founded on lack; for Glissant, turbulent confluence undermines the "totalitarian root" of pure racio-cultural identity and its spatialization in the nation-state. In the next section, I want to further examine these different horizons to see whether Irigaray's critique can map onto Glissant's and, in turn, to consider how the discourse of creolization is sometimes rendered complicit in the silencing and invisibilization of the maternal body.

Creolization, the Absent Maternal Body and Nature's At-Least-Two

While Glissant's creolization proves very similar to Irigaray's initial diagnosis of the science of solids, there is a second part of her argument—the reason why a psychic economy organized around the phallus might rely on solids—that reveals a problematic tension in his privileging of fluidity. In short, the containing of fluidity in the form of a solid is a prerequisite for a patriarchal economy of exchange. As Irigaray bluntly and effectively puts it, "The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women. Without the exchange of women, we are told, we would fall back

into anarchy (?) of the natural world, the randomness (?) of the animal kingdom.”²⁹

For women to be exchangeable requires the ossification of feminine desire into equivalent, discrete and so substitutable units. In “Mechanics of Fluids,” she highlights feces as the paradigmatic case of the *objet a* for this reason, because Lacan locates the child’s giving of the feces as an originary gift marking entry into the exchange economy. Lacan writes, “The anal level is the locus of metaphor—one object for another, give faeces in place of the phallus...Where one is caught short, where one cannot, as a result of the lack, give what is to be given, one can always give something else.”³⁰ In other words, relating to the articulation of the partial object in the previous section, the lack at the heart of the phallic economy requires substitutability to work because, having entered through the symbolic only through the severing power of constitutive lack, the subject can never fully give back to the phallus. Hence the *objet a*, a partial object that simultaneously compensates for that lack and indexes its ongoing force, must be bounded and externalizable. So the subsumption of fluids by solids, and with it the at-least-two of sexual difference by the One of the phallus, is crucial to the smooth functioning of a system of exchange ruled by men.

In “Women on the Market,” from which the earlier quote about the exchange of women is taken, she considers that insight from Claude Lévi-Strauss but pushes it further to examine how he naturalizes such an operation. Lévi-Strauss asserts the biological “scarcity” of desirable women produced by the innate tendency of man to polygamy explains women’s status as units of exchange; Irigaray instead tries to highlight the social production of the woman’s body as always reducible to “men’s business,” tracing out this “unknown infrastructure of the elaboration of that social life and culture.”³¹

So the production and discipline of the desirable female body in the El Inca Garcilaso story, for example, would be read slightly differently by Lévi-Strauss and Irigaray, with profound implications. For Lévi-Strauss, as for Garcilaso, the organized and collective exchange of women marks the move from nature to culture. Together they might say the Incas count as a redeemable civilization because of their strictures on the female form. Irigaray would agree with this idea, but simply add “under patriarchy” to their argument, suggesting that there is a socio-cultural *process* here based on asymmetrical power distribution and its mode of reproduction. While Lévi-Strauss, and Irigaray after him, is primarily working within a single society’s horizon, the exchange of women also mediates cultural mixing. Even in a cross-cultural encounter, a third term is necessary (the woman’s body), through which men establish their relationship. The Incan ruler Manco Capac and the other indigenous people of Peru forge their bonds first through the disciplining of daughters and, once brought to the level of the

civilized, their exchange through marriage sanctioned by the name of the father.

According to Irigaray, there are essentially three social roles for women in this patriarchal economy: mother, virgin and prostitute. In the example above of Manco Capac, the virgin as the site of “pure exchange” is at work: the daughters of one culture, presumed to be virgins, become decorporealized as they represent only the “sign of relations among men.”³² Indeed, imagine if the indigenous communities encountered first by Inca kings had no daughters: there would be no cross-cultural exchange to speak of and the less powerful tribe of men would simply be slaughtered. The possibility of men’s relation hinges on the virgin as the site of their hom(m)osexual consummation.

It is through the penetration of the hymen and the deflowering of the virgin that woman becomes mother. As mother, she no longer has exchange value but instead must be isolated in the home as private property. “As both natural value and use value, mothers cannot circulate in the form of commodities without threatening the very existence of the social order.”³³ That is, the power of the father’s name dissipates if the mother’s body is not spatially contained and possessed, monopolized by one patriarchal lineage. So-called cultural “hybridity” only becomes intelligible, such as the historical persistence of El Inca Garcilaso’s text, if it is put into circulation by the name of the father. In other words, despite the similar models of fluidity proposed by Irigaray and Glissant, there is a risk Glissant’s cultural turbulence still depends on the solidification and reduction of feminine desire when he fails to address sexual difference.³⁴

While she is elliptical in her criticism, I believe the Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé’s engagement with Glissant produces a similar argument. She proclaims: “‘Myth,’ writes Édouard Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse* (1989/1997), ‘is the first state of a still-naive historical consciousness, and the raw material for the project of a literature.’ No, retort the women writers in their own individual way. We have to rid ourselves of myths. They are binding, confining, and paralyzing.”³⁵ There are two aspects of this argument worth exploring. First, she refuses the idea of a self-styled Francophone Caribbean consciousness grounded in the imaginary of epic myths as a notably masculine project. Her language choice—binding, confining, paralyzing—points to the issue of embodiment, namely how women writers articulate the burden of bearing a national consciousness differently from the men who abstractly proclaim the birth of a new people. Second, and less explicitly, I think she is uncomfortable with how myth is projected as a higher-order of self-understanding that smuggles back in a subtle version of the nature/culture divide, which has historically (as Irigaray’s engagement with Lévi-Strauss shows, along with the story of El Inca) mapped onto women.

On the first point, it concerns Glissant's metaphorization of birth in his description of the Caribbean's historical predicament. He describes the middle passage as a constitutive abyss transforming fragmented African groups into the people of the Caribbean. In this founding act of violence, this forced diaspora, exist the generative resources for new modes of living together. Thus, he describes the slave ship in the following passage directly addressed to the original bearers of the legacy of slavery:

[I]n your poetic vision, a boat has no belly; a boat does not swallow up, does not devour...Yet, the belly of this boat dissolves you, precipitates you into a nonworld from which you cry out. *This boat is a womb, a womb abyss*. It generates the clamor of your protests; it also produces all the coming unanimity. Although you are alone in this suffering, you share in the unknown with others whom you have yet to know. This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death.³⁶

In this striking image, Glissant tries to hold onto the centuries of death and oppression inflicted on black bodies without becoming what Fanon calls "a slave to Slavery," that is to ground Caribbean identity solely in a traumatic past.³⁷ And so with death and suffering there is the language of pregnancy and generation. Victims of the slave trade are not only "dissolved" into the hold of the ship, but precipitated in a yet-unknown form; the ship "generates the clamor of [their] protests," producing, in other words, new modes of resistance and political grammars; initially solitary, new relationships and communities form in the crucible of shared suffering.

While beautifully compelling, one might ask in light of Irigaray's critique in "Women on the Market" where the actual female body resides. The trace of sexual difference is marked in two absences. First, the slavery economy's constitutive need to control female bodies is never discussed. Historical studies of nineteenth-century transatlantic slavery make clear that the valuation of female slaves based on their reproductive potential became the crucial engine of the plantation economy.³⁸ As countries increasingly banned the continuing importation of slaves in the early 1800's, slave owners poured resources into studying the female body and maximizing fertility to ensure the reproduction of their work force. Marie Jenkins Schwartz writes, "Women's childbearing capacity became a commodity that could be traded in the market for profit. During the antebellum era the expectation increased among members of the owning class that enslaved women would contribute to the economic success of the plantation not only through productive labor but also through procreation."³⁹ The institutionalization of slavery and the racialization of society it precipitated came to rely on control over the female body and its reproductive capacity. While Glissant uses the metaphor of the womb abyss, Schwartz shows that the initial importance of the Middle Passage only led to a diasporic people

insofar as literal wombs could be alienated and coerced into carrying future slaves. In other words, the poetic rendering of the ship as the womb matrix of slavery obscures sexual difference by decorporealizing birth, suggesting all enslaved peoples equally experience the trauma of coerced reproduction.⁴⁰

Historically speaking, then, Irigaray's controversial claim that "the problem of race is, in fact, a secondary problem—except from a geographical point of view"⁴¹ takes on a more complex tenor than simply a hierarchical mode of ranking oppressions. Her point in this context means one cannot struggle against the Manichaeism of racial difference without simultaneously attending to sexual difference. It is not a question of prioritization for its own sake, but an ontological argument showing the way the suppression of sexual difference to an economy of the One is the "unknown infrastructure" upholding the violently demarcated boundaries of other socio-cultural differences. To fight against racial difference in a manner that replicates the patriarchal order's suppression of feminine desire (in this case, the reduction of the female body to its reproductive capacity in the service of maintaining the plantation system) cannot create a radical new mode of collective life. This concern is at the heart of Condé's declaration that West Indian women have had enough of myth: where Glissant is saying that the historical void left by the violent birth of the Caribbean people can only be filled by a new (masculine) poetics, Condé is reasserting the way women not only share in this historical erasure but also *were singularly coerced into producing and reproducing it corporeally*. So politically speaking, the suppression of sexual difference through the metaphorization of the womb allows Glissant to retrospectively assert a masculinized Caribbean identity that can birth itself in the contemporary moment.

Of course, in proposing here a sexuate creolization, it is equally urgent to begin the reciprocal work of creolizing sexual difference. I do not mean to imply, in other words, that Irigaray's relationship to race—and the historical institution of slavery in particular, omitted as it is in her discussions of the exchange of women—needs no investigation. My hope is that the affirmative reading strategy pursued in this article—reading the power of sexual difference as immanent to theories of creolization—makes possible a conceptual latticework built by Glissant and Irigaray together that moves beyond debates over prioritization and provides a creative solution to the challenge of philosophizing along colonial cartographies. In particular, two issues here demand caution to avoid the pitfalls of simply "correcting" Glissant with French theory: the geopolitics of intellectual history and the danger of "woman" becoming a false universalism. While the full extent of each concern is well beyond the scope of this paper, acknowledging their importance is crucial in articulating the confluence of phallogentrism and racialization.

What I have elsewhere called the “political economy of scholarly influence”⁴² in a discussion of Glissant’s relationship to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari takes on an even more fraught valence in the case of bringing European feminism to bear on a Caribbean theory of racialization. That is to say, persistent asymmetries in philosophical work on the Caribbean and global South, which relegate non-European thinkers to the status of either derivative or illustrative (for example, Glissant read as a second-order Deleuzo-Guattarian or as an applied “example” of their work), might compound perniciously with ideological deployments of feminism as justification for imperial violence and demarcations of “modern” subjects.⁴³ As Glissant makes clear, however, establishing clean borders between properly European and authentically Caribbean thought merely reifies the power of colonial fantasy by obscuring the dense knots of intertwined history and conceptual exchange that hold together the poetics of Relation.

That is, of course, not to dissolve geographical specificity into an undifferentiated mass where interconnection means indeterminacy. To the contrary, Glissant insists on the “itinéraire géographique” of reason and a rigorous mapping of the landscapes through which creolization expresses itself.⁴⁴ Hence, following Glissant—and Wynter—and Wynter as well who, perhaps more than any philosopher, has worked through the spatialization of ontological statements—one might respond affirmatively to Irigaray’s provocation about the secondary status of race “except from a geographical point of view”: just as creolization actualizes through sexual difference, the force of sexual difference (and a key axis of its suppression) is lived geographically in a world where the “color line” has determinate power over the politics of being. To articulate a politics of sexual difference, in other words, the geographical point of view is all we have because ontology is inevitably mediated by “ontologism,” as Wynter puts it, or the drive of particular statements about white, European man to colonize the generic category of the human on a global scale.⁴⁵ Recognizing the historical impact of colonial cartographies suggests two avenues for creolizing sexual difference. First, it pushes back against either prioritization or category collapse by insisting on the ontological importance of sexual difference without reifying a particular experience of it. As Saidiya Hartman writes in the context of US American slavery:

Can we employ the term 'woman' and yet remain vigilant that 'all women do not have the same gender?'...How can we understand the racialized engenderment of the black female captive in terms other than deficiency or lack in relation to normative conditions and instead understand this production of gender in the context of very different economies of power, property, kinship, race and sexuality?⁴⁶

Thus, insisting on the importance of sexual difference is not a final answer but actually an embrace of the condition of possibility of a future and a jump

into a shifting field of power relations. And second, it follows that the political drive to take up the force of sexual difference in the face of phallogentrism—to assert the power of the maternal body and the sexuete nature of life itself—requires attunement to precisely those bodies rendered liminal by racialization. Colonialism and slavery work to strip the ontological weight from those caught at the blurred edge of Western ontologism, leaving them with no “ontological resistance” in Fanon’s terms.⁴⁷ Hence, Irigaray’s onto-political project must be made to speak precisely from a geographical point of view.

Returning to the second point from Condé now, Glissant’s new poetics remains “masculinized” insofar as he relies on a heroic vision of the cultural producer to manifest rhizomatic creativity against the idea of a neutral and inert nature. I realize this argument will seem implausible to many supporters of Glissant who rightly appreciate the ways he puts bodies and their landscapes into a reciprocally affective constellation. I do not want to diminish those parts of his text, but it is important to highlight how an omission of the ontological importance of sexual difference creates a fissure in his work such that the force of this body-landscape connection becomes the limited domain of a masculine poet. His definition of creolization is based on a distinction from mere *métissage*: “Parce que la créolisation est imprévisible alors que l’on pourrait calculer les effets d’un métissage. On peut calculer les effets d’un métissage de plantes par boutures ou d’animaux par croisements...[m]ais la créolisation, c’est le métissage avec une valeur ajoutée qui est l’imprévisibilité.”⁴⁸ These lines are striking for how severely they diminish the creative power of sexual difference in nature, contending as he does that the genetic mixing of animals or plants is entirely predictable, calculable, and without political possibility.⁴⁹ It only takes on radical possibility, he says, when the added value of unpredictability is imposed on a neutral and mechanistic nature. What makes this celebration of a second-order poetics disconcerting is how it links up with the already mentioned problem that Glissant omits how the policing and suppression of irreducible sexual difference (that is, ensuring fluid feminine desire is teleologically reabsorbed into bounded and rigid units of a phallic economy) is the mechanism by which patriarchal cultures come to interact and intermix. Together, these two points suggest what his privileging of a cross-cultural encounter over nature’s suppressed sexual difference looks like in practical terms: the male gatekeepers of society entering into a relationship of cultural exchange that relies implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, on the degradation of the female body. Thus, he recapitulates the Lévi-Straussian view of a founding nature/culture divide mediated by, at the very least, the invisibilization of the female body.

Is it possible to embrace a sexual difference theory of creolization that relies instead on Irigaray’s observation, “The natural is at least two: male and female...nature is not one.”⁵⁰ When Irigaray says at least two, she

certainly does mean the irreducible sexual difference that is the natural engine of life. But, at the same time, it is important to realize that, in the wake of her “Mechanics of Fluids,” we must understand “at least two” beyond the economy of counting set up by the phallic economy. To say the natural is at least two, male and female, is not simply to add another discrete element to the quantifiable identities at play in the world: it is to begin from an entirely different ontology of life that reconceptualizes the relationship between bodies, languages, and landscapes in terms of a *naturally* unpredictable and dynamic poetics.

For this reason, only a sexual difference theory of creolization can possibly realize Glissant’s vision of an “aesthetics of turbulence.” If theories of creolization only take place within the parameters of a phallic economy of counting—or more simply, if creolization is always articulated in a patriarchal grammar—it becomes the most banal form of multiculturalism celebrating the entry of a new group of men into the global elite. Cultural mixing can be exchanged on the global market by way of women’s bodies as well. Through Irigaray, theorists of creolization have the conceptual resources to articulate feminine desire beyond constitutive lack, to reinsert the female body into the narrative of the literal birth of a new people, and to fight the solidification of identity into a knowable and countable form. This theory of creolization reinvigorates the radical connections between landscapes, bodies and history by focusing on the ways sexual difference makes possible and mediates the affective force of Caribbean cultural identity. Maryse Condé reminds us, “In a Bambara myth of origin, after the creation of the earth and organization of everything on its surface, disorder was introduced by a woman...In a word, disorder meant creativity.”⁵¹ The *chaos-monde* starts with irreducible sexual difference.

¹ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 29. Because *Poetics of Relation* is translated in its entirety, I will use the English version in this essay. Works by Glissant that remain untranslated or only partially translated, namely *Le discours antillais*, appear in the original French.

² See Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet, “Introduction: The Creolization of Theory,” in *The Creolization of Theory*, eds. Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2009), 1-33, cf. 20-32; Max Hantel, “Rhizomes and the Space of Translation: On Édouard Glissant’s Spiral Retelling,” *Small Axe*, 42 (November 2013): 110-112.

³ For critiques, see Maria Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender,” *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise* (Spring 2008): 1-17; Sylvia Wynter, “Afterword: Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s Woman,” in *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean Women and Literature*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), 355-372.

- ⁴ Garcilaso de la Vega, *Royal Commentaries of the Incas, and a General History of Peru*, trans. Harold Livermore (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 4.
- ⁵ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34/28.
- ⁶ Pheng Cheah, "The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell," with Elizabeth Grosz, *Diacritics* 28.1 (1998): 28.
- ⁷ Vega, *Royal Commentaries*, 38.
- ⁸ *Ibid*, 53.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, 507.
- ¹⁰ Castanien quoted in Jonathan D. Steigman, *La Florida del Inca and the Struggle for Social Equality in Colonial Spanish America* (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 29.
- ¹¹ John Grier Varner, *El Inca; the life and times of Garcilaso de la Vega* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 274 and 375.
- ¹² In beginning with El Inca Garcilaso, I do not mean to collapse respectively Caribbean and Latin American debates about the nature of creolization and *mestizaje*. I merely find his work a useful point of departure for considering the limits and promises of scholarship surrounding cultural heterogeneity. While helpful for my investigation of a Francophone Caribbean concept here, El Inca is at the center of discussions within Latin American studies around the ambivalent status of Creole subjects (with Creole having a precise historical meaning). See for instance Jose Antonio Mazzotti, "Mestizo Dreams: Transculturation and Heterogeneity in Inca Garcilaso de la Vega," in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2000), 131-147.
- ¹³ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, 19.
- ¹⁵ Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles," *World Literature Today* 63.4 (Autumn 1989): 638.
- ¹⁶ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 155.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, 96.
- ¹⁸ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphael Confiant. "In Praise of Creoleness," trans. Mohamed B. Thaieb Khyar, *Callaloo* 13 (1990): 886-909; for Glissant's most concise distinction between creolité and creolization, see Edouard Glissant, "L'imaginaire des langues: entretien avec Edouard Glissant," with Lise Gauvin *Etudes francaises* 28.2/3 (1992): 11-22.
- ¹⁹ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 98.
- ²⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 236.
- ²¹ Édouard Glissant, "Ma mère," in *A Ma mère: 60 écrivains parlent de leur mère*, eds. Marcel Bisiaux and Catherine Jajolet (Paris: P. Horay, 1988), 173.
- ²² Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 14-15
- ²³ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 106-107.

- ²⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), 112.
- ²⁵ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, 110.
- ²⁶ Luce Irigaray, “Women’s Exile: Interview with Luce Irigaray,” trans. Couze Venn *Ideology and Consciousness* 1 (May 1977): 53.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.
- ²⁸ Valérie Loichot, *Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-John Perse* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007) 38; also see Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2010), 24. While these two landmark studies are vital to a larger project on decolonization and sexual difference, their specific focus on Caribbean literature remains beyond the scope of this paper. In particular, Loichot’s reading of Glissant’s novels ground his relationship to feminism in terms of the agency of female characters and the similarities between his narrative form and the “écriture féminine” of Hélène Cixous. These are important but ultimately separate questions from the ontological register of sexual difference in his theoretical essays, although I would not deny absolutely a connection to his literary output.
- ²⁹ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, 170.
- ³⁰ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 112.
- ³¹ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, 171.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 186.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 185.
- ³⁴ See Tinsley, *Thieving Sugar*, 177-178 for a specific discussion of female desire in *Le discours antillais*, particularly the section “Plaisir et jouissance: le vecu martiniquais.” While she does not directly link Glissant’s discussion of sexuality to the question of creolization, she helpfully points to the heterosexism and masculinism that undergirds his assessment of Martinican women’s “sexual indifference,” a problem that persists even as he critiques the reductionism of Oedipal theories. Also see Alexandre Leupin, “The Slave’s Jouissance,” *Callaloo* 36.4 (2013): 891-901. Taken together, Tinsley and Leupin point to the need for a more sustained engagement with the psychoanalytic implications of Glissant’s work, particularly as a way to deepen the understanding of his relationship to Fanon.
- ³⁵ Maryse Condé, “The Stealers of Fire: The French-Speaking Writers of the Caribbean and Their Strategies of Liberation,” *Journal of Black Studies* 35.2 (November 2004): 163.
- ³⁶ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 6, emphasis added.
- ³⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 205.
- ³⁸ See Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990).
- ³⁹ Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 10.
- ⁴⁰ Glissant does address specifically *sexual violence* in *Le discours antillais*—“la femme africaine subit la plus totale des agressions, qui es le viol quotidien et répété”—concluding from this that,

“la femme a sur l’homme un inappréciable avantage: elle connaît déjà le maître” (510). Focusing on the particulars of sexual activity and the individualized psychological results for women however, Glissant still fails to consider a more fundamental importance for sexual difference. As Irigaray makes clear, the issue is not just omission at the level of representation as much as obliteration through metaphorization. See Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 503-519.

⁴¹ Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity within History*, trans. Alison Martin (New York: Psychology Press, 1996), 47.

⁴² Hantel, “Rhizomes and the Space of Translation,” 101.

⁴³ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Education, 1988)

⁴⁴ Glissant, *Le discours antillais*, 17.

⁴⁵ See Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003): 257-337.

⁴⁶ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 99-100.

⁴⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90; cf. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” *Cultural Studies* 21.2/3 (2007): 240-270.

⁴⁸ Glissant, *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers*, 18-19.

⁴⁹ In his defense, Glissant does not always oppose métissage and creolization so neatly. In *Poetics of Relation*, for instance, following another discussion of “mere” métissage, he writes: “creolization seems to be a limitless métissage” (34). Perhaps future research, particularly concerning Glissant on questions of political ecology, might investigate limitless and captured métissage as more interesting, non-oppositional modes of articulating creolization.

⁵⁰ Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 35.

⁵¹ Maryse Condé, “Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer,” *Yale French Studies* 97 (2000): 160.