

Discuss the relationship between modernity and tradition in french-caribbean creole...

[Art & Culture](#), [Music](#)



Discuss the relationship between Modernity and Tradition in French-Caribbean Creole culture In order to address the question, we should first fully understand the terms modernity and Creole culture and then analyse how the two intertwine, and then decipher to what extent there is a relationship. The definition of Modernity used in this essay will be that modernity is 'the quality of being current or of the present'. Whereas for Creole culture we have more difficulty, Creole culture can be the people, the language; however as the essay is dealing with their tradition we will use their search for an identity as the basis for their culture. Caribbean identity came not only from the heritage of ex-slaves, but was equally influenced by indigenous Caribbeans, European colonialists, East Indian and Chinese coolies (indentured servants)' (Ormerod, Beverley, 1998). Therefore it was the joint search for a cultural history that led to their identity, and as they were all uprooted from their original homes they were unable to share in a single culture, so they shared in the joint search. This became the basis for their Creole culture.

Within this essay one will see how there has always been a relationship between modernity and tradition, and that it is more prominent now than it ever has been. Immediately through their cultural identity one could conclude that French-Caribbean Creole culture was created by the modernity of its time. One could argue that the Creole culture was only recently created through their uprooting and search for an identity. There was a demand for slaves and these Africans became the answer. Therefore one could argue that modernity created Creole culture and that there is a very strong link and relationship between the two. However it is a lot more

complex than this and within this essay I will attempt to show this relationship, firstly by looking back and showing that it was originally there in their homelands of Africa. I will then show the differing opinions and how some think they should embrace the relationship and others think the complete opposite. I will then show how through misinterpretations many think there is not a relationship, through the rise and decline of negritude, then the clear relationship between modernity and tradition through the rise of 'Creolite'.

I will then conclude that there is a relationship, that they are embracing it, and then show how their culture is very similar to that of the westerners despite what both might think or say. Despite the many contrasting issues, one cannot deny that there was a relationship even back in Africa. One would think 'lorsqu'un viellard du village meurt, c'est toute une bibliothèque qui disparaît', but we know that this wasn't the case. Stories and moral lessons were always passed on, a new 'Viellard' would emerge and tell the same stories and lessons however each put a more modern spin on it so the next generations could relate. In this way there is a clear relationship between modernity and tradition, even from the beginning. Through their many narrative devices and uses of rhetoric, such as Krik-Krak, repetition and rhetorical questions, the audience would be tested so they were paying attention and the lessons would be forever passed on. The viellard was more than a library he was a social and moral code of behaviour.

The viellard was the head of society and so-called leader; therefore we know that there is a serious relationship between modernity and tradition if their

leader sees the importance in the use of a modern spin, and the continuation of the old morals through modern mediums. There are many misinterpretations about Caribbean-creole culture, which has dramatically affected the views towards the relationship of modernity and tradition. Many view Césaire 'as the absolute authority as though his work and thought were one monolithic whole' (Rosello, 1995, 52). However one should properly understand that Césaire had nothing to do with the creole language, he could not and did not use it. Césaire once said, 'I have talked about the Martinicans' cultural backwardness. One specific aspect of this cultural backwardness is their level of language, of creolity if you will which is extremely low, which has remained stuck - and it was even more obvious at the time - at the stage of immediacy, incapable of expressing abstract ideas' (Leiner, 1993 116).

Due to this statement many think as Césaire said it, creole culture could not modernise with time and remained 'stuck', and that is the end of it.

Unfortunately some people see fit to take his anti-creole position out of its historical context and to use it as a piece of timeless Caribbean wisdom' (Rosello, 1995, 52). However thanks to many other prolific creole writers this affirmation is rubbish. 'Now that well known authors like Maryse Condé, Simone Swartz-Bart and Patrick Chamoiseau let French and creole co-exist in their texts, now that Raphaël Confiant or Jody Bernabé have demonstrated that one can write and perform in creole, now that linguists have started studying creole as a language, the terms of the debate have shifted' (Rosello, 1995, 51). The initial movement of Negritude, led many to

believe there couldn't be a relationship between modernity and tradition in Creole Culture. ' Negritude is a literary and political movement developed in the 1930s by a group that included the future Senegalese President Leopold Sedar Senghor, Martinican poet Aime Cesaire, and the Guianan Leon Damas. The Negritude writers found solidarity in a common black identity as a rejection of French colonial racism. They believed that the shared black heritage of members of the African diaspora was the best tool in fighting against French political and intellectual hegemony and domination'.

Many though through this rejection of anything French and colonial, immediately conclude that there is not a relationship between modernity and tradition. Again problems arose like with the view towards Cesaire, many concluded that this is the be all and end all. However through the emergence of ' Creolite' we have evidence of the newer generations of writers rejecting the old thoughts of negritude and creating their own form of ' Creolite' that embraces modernity and uses it to benefit. The authors of Eloge de la ' Creolite' describe ' Creolite' as " an annihilation of fake universality, of monolinguisism, and of purity. (La ' Creolite' est une annihilation de la fausse universalite, du monolinguisisme et de la purete).

(Bernabe, Jean, Chamoiseau Patrick & Confiant Raphael, 1993. Pg 28) ' In particular, the ' Creolite' movement seeks to overturn the dominance of French as the language of culture and literature in the French Caribbean. Instead it valorizes the use of Antillean Creole in literary, cultural, and academic contexts. Indeed, many of the creolistes publish their novels in both Creole and French'. Therefore by embracing the relationship of

modernity they can continue to pass on their heritage and tradition. When analysing the views of the modern and famous Creole writers we are given two contrasting views, firstly I will give the few of Bertene Juminer, who believes that modernity is ruining the tradition of creole culture and believes there shouldn't be a relationship at all. In his essay ' La parole de Nuit' he talks of the problems Creole culture has faced due to modernity, he asks questions such as, ' Ou sont les grands-parentsd'antan, dont la tendresse bourrue etait si formatrice, les recits et contes fantastiques si troublants autour de la lampe du soir? Juminer, pg 146-7)' He also asks the question ' Ou sont les enfants d'anatn don't le premier devoir etait le respect des adultes? (Juminer, pg 146-7)' These dramatic changes he blames on the modern television culture, Juminer believes that were it not for modernity, the traditions of Creole culture would remain. Juminer takes a traditionalist, moreover protectionist view towards Creole culture and fails to see the benefits that can come of the relationship with modernity.

This leads us to ask the question why does he take this stance and why does he think there shouldn't be a prosperous relationship? In one sense Juminer is absolutely right; certain aspects of Creole culture have been lost due to its link with modernity. Relationships between father and son, grandfather and grandson have dramatically changed. There is less of an authoritarian relationship there, and many would argue that this is for the good. Gone are the days where one learnt of their Creole tradition and history through an old fashioned, ' contes'. However what Juminer misses and what in my opinion Chamoiseau understands perfectly is one should not fight the new aspects of

modernity has on one's traditions and heritage. One should embrace and exploit them for the good. Chamoiseau has a more progressive view to the relationship between modernity and tradition, he believes one should exploit this new TV culture and use it for the same results they did when they used to have a village 'viellard'. By embracing the new methods of modernity, their heritage and traditions can continue forever. One could argue now that it was the particular way of passing on their history and heritage that was the major part of their culture and heritage.

Therefore to embrace new mediums to educate their new generations would be to forget tradition. However I think Chamoiseau has the right idea in the way he describes that their culture will bring its own spin on the new mediums, and it has. One only needs to look to the rap music and culture. Here we are given a modern day version of their village storyteller. In the lyrics of the song we are given the lesson while with the music we are made to continue to pay attention.

Exactly the same as the storyteller, who gave us an important message whilst at the same time using many narrative devices to keep us listening and entertained. This gives us a clear example of how there is a relationship between modernity and tradition in French Caribbean Creole culture, and to how prominent it is. Rap and Hip-hop has become the most popular music genre in France and this can be namely due to the French Caribbean Creole culture trying to continue their tradition. 'The progress of rap in France is associated with the postcolonial relationships founded with former colonies of Africa and the Caribbean.

Therefore, the definition of Africa according to French ideas, and the nature of racism in French society is crucial to understanding the reason for the hip hop and rap sensation in France. ' Rappers are overwhelmingly of African descent, and in tackling the issue of their invisibility in French society and declaring their origins, they redefine their identity and defy French notions of race and citizenship' (Helenon, Veronique. 89) thus healthily using the relationship of modernity and tradition to great effect. However when analysing the previous thoughts of the use of language and the importance to remember ones tradition and heritage, we are witness to many similarities between Caribbean Creole culture and that of the western cultures of today. In our western culture we worry and fight over the same problems as the Caribbean. They worry that their culture and heritage will not be remembered as the Creole language is not being used as much as they would like, as this represents much of their heritage. However we only need to look at recent news in France where there has been exactly the same controversy. Nowadays in France it is a legal requirement that 35% of music played on their radio has to be in French.

As we can see they are afraid of losing their identity and heritage to other cultures in exactly the same way, therefore the notion that there is not a relationship between modernity and heritage within French Creole culture is absolutely false. Another clear example of the similarities in the way both cultures react to the danger of losing their heritage is in France's recent reaction to their Eurovision song contest entry. French musician Sebastian Leger has been picked as this year's entrant however the lyrics of his song



are in English. Like it would in the Caribbean it has caused uproar in France over the fear of losing their heritage. Divine, is written in English and not his native tongue, which has angered politicians in France ahead of the annual competition featuring countries in Europe competing in a musical contest.

Politician Francois-Michel Gonnot says, " Our fellow citizens don't understand why France is giving up defending its language in front of hundreds of millions of television viewers around the world. But Marc Teissier du Cros, Tellier's producer, insists, " Sebastien Tellier sings in English, French and even in Italian according to his inspiration. This year, half the Eurovision candidates are singing in English and I don't think that singing in French is the best way to make oneself understood by the whole world. " Clearly both cultures suffer from the same problem, here we see like the Creole culture, France having issues in whether to succumb to modernity and express themselves through a different language so more can understand, or to stick to one's roots and follow tradition. Therefore when discussing the relationship between modernity and tradition in French-Caribbean Creole culture we can conclude that despite the differing views there is a clear relationship. When analysing from Africa before being uprooted we can conclude their traditions were embracing modernity.

Their ' storyteller', as generations went on would adapt their same morals with a modern spin, helping them to evolve. We see this in their use narrative techniques, which has evolved to such an extent that nowadays we are witness to rappers and musicians who behave in the same way. The new rappers and musicians tell similar stories of their history and tradition

through more modern mediums. We can also relate this to the developments in their literary movements, originally we are given Negritude that despite trying to reject everything French and colonial and not embrace their forced upon culture and customs, we see there is a development and therefore a relationship between tradition and modernity. Then “ Creolite” develops which openly embraces the idea of tradition and modernity working in tandem to help maintain their tradition and heritage. Creolite’ gives us the view of Juminer and Chamoiseau, who both agree that there is a relationship.

Juminer believes that this relationship is ruining the tradition and history of his culture; he believes that they are becoming dependent on the so-called ‘ TV culture’. Whereas Chamoiseau thinks they should embrace this new medium like they would have done in their old cultures in Africa. Clearly from all the evidence discussed in this essay, all the points lead to the same conclusion.

The conclusion is that there is a relationship between modernity and tradition, however it is up to the individual to decide whether they want to embrace it or not. Which is exactly the same in the modern western cultures, still many think that their traditions and customs are being destroyed by modernity and again the individual has to decide to what extent they want to embrace it. France as a country wants to embrace modernity but at the same time keep some traditions; this is the reason for their radio law. Therefore the relationship between Modernity and Tradition in French-Caribbean Creole culture is ever present, it just depends on the individual to what extent. Ormerod, Beverley (1998), “ The Martinican concept of “

creoleness”: A multiracial redefinition of culture”, Mots Pluriels Bernabe, Jean, Patrick Chamoiseau & Raphael Confiant (1993).

Eloge de la creolite Paris: Gallimard. p. 28. Helenon, Veronique.

“ Africa on Their Mind: Rap, Blackness, and Citizenship in France. ”