

## Kréyolité Lalwizàn: Gid filozofi

(*toujou en progrès*)

par Jonathan Joseph Mayers

Ça fé, pendan Koronaj-la no té gin in ta difikilté pou fé réshærsh konm no sé fé normalmen. Mo té byin okipé avèk plènn projé artistik é mo té p'olé trapé KOVID ni donné kèkènn dan nô kominoté KOVID si mo té gin li nonpli. Mo té fé tensyon a komen mo sé shwazi pou komensé mô projé – ki pa enkò fini akòz mo gin plis travay pou fé enho ça.

Pou komensé, mo shwazi moun Kréyol swa yé parlé kouri-vini, langaj kréyol en danjé a Lalwizàn, swa yé famiy té parlé kouri-vini. Lá, mo parlé avèk yé apré solidarité dan nô kominoté. Mo kèstyon pou yé té inkli: Èské solidarité égzis dan nô kominoté? Si wé, komen ça semblé? Sinon, ça ki té rivé? Pou moun ki parlé kouri-vini, mô mandé yé si yé kwa ça yé trouv konm diférens ent yé kominoté (kréyolofonn) é kominoté mérikinofoonn (nanglofoonn). Noté mo té pa mensyonné yé nom dan mô lékrichi akòz li toujou pa fini.

Moun mo té parlé avèk sòr diféren parwas: Lapwint-Koupé, Lès Baton-Rouj, Sin-Jak, é Sin-Martin. Shak réyiñon té bin diféren ent shak Kréyol. Souven, no té fé nô réyiñon koté yé apré no té sharé enho téléfoonn o Zoom, é parfwa ayœr, konm dan in studjo a rikordé o dèriyè lamézon a yé granmoman.

Pou komensé, mo sharé avèk in Kréyol en koulè ki sòr Léklènn dan Lapwint-Koupé. Sô primiyé langaj çé kouri-vini. Ça çé minm plas aou mô ariyè granmoman té né é élvé, parèy li. Li dan sô katre-vin, mé li té rapélé byin ça li wa kan li té jènn: li té konné jwé ak dèt Kréyol a nimpòt koulè lapo, mé li té défenn pou jwé ak Mérikinyé – moun ki té gin in koulè lapo parèy sochènn minm – akòz yé té pa Kréyol; yé té pa parlé kouri-vini (kréyòl li sé pélé ça), é yé té pa pratiké minm lakilchi. Dé diféren pèspèktiv, dé diféren langaj, dé diféren moun. Pendan in apèl, li spliké mò osit ke li té pœr pou di « *nég* » otour moun mérikinofoonn, ki çé in manyè pou di *boug* o *padna* obin dékri koulè lapo a kèkènn. Nimpòt moun Kréyol kapab sèrvi paròl-çila. Çé pa pejorativ dan kouri-vini, mé mérikinyé ki parlé pa langaj-la tenn ça y'olé tendé: in paròl pejorativ pou moun en koulè. Mé no gin in paròl ki doub tendé pou ça k'olé di dabitid in kayman osit: *kokodri*.

Mishé-la rakonté listwa apré sô moman é kan li té mouri. Sô vwazin-yé té moun blan, Kréyol blan no sé di obin Kréyol san koulè (inventé par Adriyènn Guillory-Chatman), é yé té vini koté sô famiy pou kwi, nétwayé, édé travayé dan dézèb. Ça isit té solidarité li té wa dan sô kominoté dan zané 40 é 50. Plita dan sô lavi apré li té komensé gouvèné, li té rété devan in magazin, té rentré, mé kan li té sòrti, li wa in danm blansh dan sô tròk. Li té gin pou mandé propriyété pou mandé danm-la pou désenn sô tròk akòz li té pœr danm-çala sé mèl li dan traka avèk nonm blan obin polis. A lafin, propriyété té konvink danm-la pou sòrti tròk-la é Mishé-la té kapab kité magazin.

In égzemp kontemporin a solidarité dan lavi a Mishé-la té kan li rékonné ènn Kréyol blansh ki sé fé byin dan in nouvo pozisyon a mizé-la aou li té travayé dépi kèk zané. Lá, li sijéré li pou apliké épi Kréyol blansh-la té gañé djòb-la. Pou Mishé-la, li kwa ça li té wa é èkspéiyensé dan sô kominoté kréyol (kréyolofonn) té myé pasé ça li kwa moun sé gin dan kominoté mérikinyé (nanglofoonn). Ça informé sô lavi, sô pèspèktiv, é sô aprésiyasyon pou sô langaj.

Dézyèm moun mo sharé avèk té mô tant ki sòr Baton-Rouj. Sô primiyé langaj çé mérikin, mé sô granmoman ki té sòrti Léklènn té parlé kouri-vini. Li dan sô swasent é li té rapélé in fwa kan sô famiy té kouri vizité famiy dan Lapwint-Koupé. Yé té rété koté in rèstoran kan yé té sî lari é li séyé rentré. Sô popa té di li pa kapab rentré akòz moun blan pa byinvini; çé té in plas pou moun en koulè. Plitar dan sô lavi, li té gin in zami ki té in nègrès. Li té pa viv tro lwin li, nonpli, é té fèté sô fèt koté li. Mo tant rakonté osit ké sô moman té péyé in fenm en koulè pou édé dan lamézon apré sô mari, mô granpopa, té mouri. Sô moman sé shærshé li, pi ménnin li bæk koté li apré travay. Li té pa kapab di mò si moun en koulè li té konné té Kréyol o pa.

Tròziyèm moun té ènn Kréyol blansh ki sòr Shmin-Nèf. Li té minm Kréyol ki té gañé djòb-la dan mizé-la apré Mishé-la té enkourajé li pou apliké. Pou li, sô vyé famiy té parlé kouri-vini, osit. Li pélé ça kréyol, parèy konm Mishé-la. Li rakonté sô lintéré dan kouri-vini é sô manyè pou édé lokitè-yé aprenn lir é ékri ça. Avèk in zami, in Kréyol en koulè ki sòr Baton-Rouj, yé dé té montré dèt Kréyol dan Lapwint-Koupé komen lir é ékri yéchènn langaj. Apré in boudtem, navé kèk moun dan group ki té komensé kwa fenm-la té laba pou volé yê listwa é pou imprimé ça konm li té sèl otær, ap pélé li jish in akadèmik ki lá pou profité yé. Çé té pa vrémen ka-la akòz fenm-la té sòrti minm kominoté. A lafin, tou yé té arété jwènn ensemb, mé ina særtin ki résté en kontak ak Kréyol blansh-la. Solidarité té égzisté dan lédjikasyon pi évolwé apré ça ki té rivé dan group-la.

Katriyèm moun mo té parlé avèk té in Kréyol ki sòr Baton-Rouj, mô popa. Li linm fé jardinaj é lagrikilchi té kishòj nô famiy té fé dépi jénérasyon-yé. In jou, no t'apé fé jardinaj koté li. Toudinkou li té di mò, « To konné, kan to parlé kouri-vini enho téléfonn avék tô zami-yé, ça raplé apré mô granmoman. Ça semblé parèy sô parlyaj. » Sô granmoman, mô ariyé-granmoman, té parlé kouri-vini tou sô lavi é li sé parlé ça avèk sô famiy. Mô popa té di li sé parlé avèk famiy pendan yê vizit a kabann-la o enho téléfonn dan yê lakizinn. Ça mô popa té di mò jou-çala té étonan. Li té janmé di mò ça kan mo sé parlé françé – é li té spliké mò çé akòz li komprenn ritme é prononsyasyon en kréyol (kouri-vini) té diféren pasé ça trouvé en françé. Li parl pa nô langaj néritaj, mé li té komprenn sô son.

Sinkiyèm moun ki té intérése dan projé-çila té ènn Kréyol en koulè ki sòr Lafayèt dan Lalwizyàn, mé li rès pa lwin Shikago Ozilinwa astè. Dépi kèk zané, no té parlé enho Zoom é travayé enho projé-yé en kouri-vini, mé dan 2022 li té invité mò résté koté sô famiy. Li té rakonté sô lèkspéryans a Shikago: komen li té wa in ta moun ségrégé bokou plis dan vwazinaj-yé pasé ça li té wa dan sô kominoté dan Lalwizyàn. Shak jou no sé parlé en kouri-vini dan gran léspas mérikin é nanglofonn-la... ki té fondé par in Kréyol ki sòr Sin-Doming (Ayiti). Nochènn akt çé té, li-minm, in akt en solidarité ent dé moun Kréyol ki té toushé par Mérikinizasyon. Li té mandé mò si projé-çila té in kolaborasyon o si ça sé montré yink mô nidé-yé apré solidarité dan kominoté kréyol. Çé dan kolaborasyon aou no ka bati kishòj rish. Mo té linmé sô nidé, ça fé projé-çila é réshærsh-çila va évolwé pou réfléshi ça.

In lané çé pa asé long pou komplété mô réshærsh, mé çé té in bon baz pou komensé. Mo sharé avèk dèt Kréyol, mé mo va pa mensyonné plis pasé ça pou astè. Ça sa pou in nòt tem plitar pendan mo travay sî *Kréyolité Lalwizyàn: Gid filozofi*. Solidarité dan kominoté kréyol-la té égzisté é ça égzisté toujou dan in varyété manyè. Çé pa toujou ka-la, mé dan léspas kréyol – léspas-yé aou moun parlé kouri-vini o mèt langaj-la dan sent – no va trouvé plis égzemp a solidarité paski langaj é lidentité ramasé moun ensemb.

## Louisiana Créolité: Philosophical Lodestar

(still in progress)

by Jonathan Joseph Mayers

So, during the Coronage, we had a lot of difficulty doing research as we would do normally. I was very busy with plenty of artistic projects and I didn't want to catch COVID-19 nor give someone in our community COVID-19 if I had it, either. I paid attention to how I chose to begin my project – which is not yet finished because I have more work to do.

To start, I chose Creole folks whether they spoke Kouri-Vini, the endangered Creole language of Louisiana, or their family spoke Kouri-Vini. Then, I spoke with them about solidarity in our community. My questions for them included: Does solidarity exist in our community? If yes, how does it look? If not, what happened? For people who spoke Kouri-Vini, I asked them if they found differences between their Creolophone community and the Anglophone community.

The people I spoke with come from different parishes: Pointe-Coupée, East Baton Rouge, Lafayette, St. James, and St. Martin. Each reunion was very different between each Creole. Often, we had our reunions at their respective homes after speaking on the phone or on Zoom, and sometimes elsewhere, like in a recording studio or behind their grandmother's house.

To start, I spoke with a Creole of color from Lakeland in Pointe-Coupée. His first language is Kouri-Vini. This was the same place where my great grandmother was born and raised, just like him. He is in his eighties, but he remembers well what he saw when he was young: he used to play with other Creoles of any color skin, but he was forbidden to play with Americans – even folks who had the same color skin as his – because they were not Creole; they didn't speak Kouri-Vini (Creole he would call it); they didn't practice the same culture. Two different perspectives, two different languages, two different peoples. During a call, he explained to me that he was also scared to say “*nég*” around Americans as well, which is a way to say *dude* or *podna/podnuh* or even to describe the color of one's skin. Any Creole is able to use this word. It isn't pejorative in Kouri-Vini, but Americans who don't speak the language hear what they want to hear: a pejorative word for a person of color of African descent. Though, we have a word for that which is a double entendre for what more commonly means an alligator or caiman, too: *kokodri*.

The mister recounted a story about when his mother passed away. His neighbors were white folks, white Creoles we would say, or even Creoles sans color (coined by Adrien Guillory-Chatman), and they came to his family's home to cook, clean, and help work in the field. This was solidarity that he had seen in his community during the 40s and 50s. Later in his life after he started driving, he stopped at a store, entered, but when he exited, he saw a white woman in his truck. He had to ask the store owner to ask the woman to get down from his truck because he was worried that the woman would put him in danger with white men or even the police. Finally, the store owner convinced the woman to exit the truck and the mister was able to head home.

A contemporary example of solidarity in the mister's life was when he recognized a white Creole woman who would do well in a new position at the museum he worked at for some years. There, he suggested that she apply and then the woman got the job. For the mister, he believes that what he saw and

experienced in his Creole community (Creolophone) was better than what he believed people would have in American communities (Anglophone). It informed his life, his perspective, and his appreciation of his language.

The second person I spoke with was my aunt from Baton Rouge. Her first language is English, but her grandmother who was from Lakeland spoke Kouri-Vini. She's in her 70s and she remembers one time when her family went to visit family in Pointe-Coupée. They stopped at a diner while they were on the road and she tried to enter. Her father told her she wasn't able to enter because white folks weren't welcome; it was a place for people of color. Later in life, she had a black female friend. She didn't live too far from her, either, and had attended her birthday party at her house. My aunt also recounted that her mother paid a woman of color to help in the house after her husband, my grandfather, had passed away. Her mother would go pick her up, then bring her back home after work. She was not able to tell me if the people of color that she knew were Creole or not.

The third person was a white Creole woman from New Roads. She was the same Creole who got the job at the same museum the mister had worked at. For her, her older family members spoke Kouri-Vini, too. She called it Creole, same as the mister. She recounted her interest in Creole (Kouri-Vini) and her manner of helping native speakers to read and write it. With a friend, a Creole of color from Baton Rouge, they both showed other Creoles in Pointe-Coupée how to read and write their own language. After some time, there were some people in the group who started to believe that the woman was there to steal their stories and to print them as though she was the sole author, saying she was just an academic who's there to take advantage of them. That wasn't really the case because the woman came from the same community. Finally, they all stopped getting together, but there were certain folks who stayed in contact with her. Solidarity had existed through education, then evolved after what had transpired in the group.

The fourth person I spoke with was a Creole from Baton Rouge, my father. He loves gardening and agriculture was something that our family did for generations. One day, we were gardening at his house. All of a sudden he told me "You know, when you speak Kouri-Vini on the telephone with your friends, it reminds me about my grandmother. It seems the same as the manner in which she spoke." His grandmother, my great grandmother, spoke Kouri-Vini for the duration of her life and she would speak it with her family. My father said she would speak with family during their visits to the house or on the telephone in their kitchen. What my father told me was striking. He had never told me that when I would speak French – and he explained to me that it was because he understood the rhythm and pronunciation in Creole (Kouri-Vini) was different from that found in French. He doesn't speak our heritage language, but he understood its sound.

The fifth person who was interested in this project was a Creole of color from Lafayette, Louisiana, but she lives not far from Chicago, Illinois now. For some years, we spoke on Zoom and worked on projects in Kouri-Vini, but in 2022 she invited me to stay at her family's home. She told me of her experiences in Chicago: how she saw a lot of folks segregated much more in neighborhoods than what she saw in her community in Louisiana. Each day we would speak in Kouri-Vini in the large American and Anglophone space... which was founded by a Creole from Saint-Domingue (now Haiti). Our act was, itself, an act in solidarity between two Creole people who have been affected by Americanization. She asked if this project was a collaboration or if it was only going to present my ideas about solidarity in the Creole

community. It's in collaboration that we can build something significant. I loved her idea, so this project and this research will evolve to reflect that.

One year isn't long enough to complete my research, but it was a good base to start with. I spoke with other Creoles, but I will not mention more than that for now. That will be for another time later during my work on *Louisiana Créolité: Philosophical Lodestar*. Solidarity in the Creole community existed and still exists in a variety of manners. Though it isn't always the case, in Creole spaces – spaces where people speak Kouri-Vini or center the language – we will find more examples of solidarity because language and identity bring people together.