# Creoleness and the Soviet Union: An Unmapped Region of Intellectual Exchange / *A crioulidade e a União Soviética: uma região inexplorada de intercâmbio intelectual*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines an exchange of ideas, concerning creole languages, that connected the Soviet linguist Nikolai Marr, the Austro-German linguist Hugo Schuchardt, and a number of writers and thinkers from the Caribbean. It considers emerging discourse around hybrid national identity, which was developed in the Americas, and had a strong bearing on ideas about creole languages. These ideas were received by Schuchardt and in turn transmitted to Marr, thereby establishing an unexpected avenue of communication from the Americas to the Soviet Union.

KEYWORDS: Creole Languages; Mestizaje; Korenizacija; Nikolai Marr; Hugo Schuchardt

*RESUMO*

*Este artigo examina um intercâmbio de ideias sobre línguas crioulas que conectou o linguista soviético Nikolai Marr, o linguista austro-alemão Hugo Schuchardt e vários escritores e pensadores do Caribe. Ele considera o discurso emergente em torno da identidade nacional híbrida, que se desenvolveu nas Américas e teve forte influência nas ideias sobre as línguas crioulas. Essas ideias foram recebidas por Schuchardt e, por sua vez, transmitidas a Marr, estabelecendo assim uma via inesperada de comunicação entre as Américas e a União Soviética.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Línguas crioulas; Mestiçagem; Korenizacija; Nikolai Marr; Hugo Schuchardt*

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From the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards, at a time when the discipline of linguistics was being professionalised and codified, a counter-current existed that opposed the mainstream European understanding of language and its relationship to race and nation. This countercurrent was particularly strongly represented in the Americas, where it was enmeshed in projects of nation building. This article explores the echoes, resonances, and points of contact linking the Americas to another peripheral zone of European power: the Russian Empire, later Soviet Union, and particularly the Caucasus. The view of language from the periphery included a rejection of linguistic classification by genealogical descent and instead foregrounded mixture, exchange, and creolization.

Although speaking of a global intellectual "periphery" runs the risk of simplification, it reflects the existence of an oppositional intellectual tradition in linguistics, which can be observed in multiple locations. Fittingly, given the prominent place of the Caribbean in constructing alternative epistemologies, the Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant made great rhetorical use of the centre-periphery dichotomy, although restated in different terms: European colonisation, Glissant wrote, led to a division between "atavistic" colonial cultures and the "composite" cultures and societies born out of colonial contact (Glissant, 1997, pp. 35-36). Atavistic cultures were preoccupied with pedigree and possessed a mythology of origin that endowed them with an "absolutely legitimate succession" stretching back to Creation. Composite cultures, by contrast, lacked any providential myths of origin:

> The coming into contact of these atavistic cultures in spaces of colonization gave birth to composite cultures and societies, which have not generated a Genesis (adopting instead the Myths of Creation of elsewhere), and this is because their origin is not lost in the mists of time, but is obviously a historical and not a mythological phenomenon. (Glissant, 1997, p. 36)[1]

The historical context most immediately called to mind by this passage is the Americas, and more specifically the Antilles. The description of cultural inception within

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[1] In French: "La mise en contact de ces cultures ataviques dans les espaces de la colonisation a donné naissance par endroits à des cultures et sociétés composites, qui n'ont pas généré de Genèse (adoptant les Mythes de Création venus d'ailleurs), et cela pour la raison que leur origine ne se perdpas dans la nuit, qu'elle est évidemment d'ordre historique et non mythique."

historical time, out of the collision of long-established cultures with a long lineage, calls to mind the emergence of creole societies and languages out of the pressure of conquest, enslavement, and the plantation system. At the same time, Glissant's words could be applied to other zones whose lineage could not be established within the "Noetic" table of descent that linguistics took from scriptural history (Trautmann, 1997, p. 10). The focus in this article will be the Caucasus, characterised, in the words of an eminent Victorian geographer, as a repository of "the remnants or fragments of the peoples who have from time to time been driven into these recesses from the surrounding lands" (Keane, 1896, pp. 370-371). As we shall see, this widespread perception of the Caucasus as a charnel house of heterogeneous ethnic and linguistic fragments would be transformed into a radical new model of culture by one of the region's most prolific scholarly scions, Nikolai Marr.

This article traces a possible vector of communication between the Americas and Eurasia and considers how certain influential writings on language in the early Soviet period echoed an Americanist sensibility to language mixture. The vector comprises the empirical description of linguistic reality, compiled by local observers, which were transmitted by epistolary correspondence to Hugo Schuchardt, an extremely original theorist of language, whose publications were an acknowledged influence on the Georgian-born Nikolai Marr. This particular pathway of influence is partly speculative. Where the thread breaks, we have recourse to a common set of circumstances that fostered certain ideas about language and collective identity, and which predisposed their positive reception in different parts of the global "periphery." The counter-current of linguistic thought emerged in multiple places independently of one another and shared a key central proposition: the rejection of a widely-held but profane version of Darwinism, in which the evolutionary trajectory of languages and language families was thought to have been crystalised at the moment of inception, in the distant past. This same view held that subsequent evolution proceeded in accordance to intrinsic genetic laws, with mixture and hybridization representing a momentary aberration. Instead of this debased Darwinism, the counter-tradition proposed mixture and ad hoc adaptation as the defining features of language growth. Furthermore, the thinkers we will examine tended to follow a certain intellectual journey. The journey began with a Romantic nationalist veneration of indigeneity as a counter to modernity but led eventually to more universally applicable

theories which tamed and then subsumed modernity, rather than treating it as an antagonist.

In various parts of the global periphery, a conception of national identity took hold towards the end of the nineteenth century. It sought to mobilise multiple segments of society, held apart from one another under the previous regime of racial discrimination, in the common cause of liberation from colonial oppression. In the Americas, this programme was known as *mestizaje*, and it offered a powerful alternate means of accessing modernity from a peripheral, non-European perspective:

> Mestizaje permitted Latin American thinkers to claim for their countries the racial unity of a nation as conceived of in European thought. Mestizaje or, better said, the discourse of mestizaje, thus became a way for the three numerically dominant races living in the Americas–white, Amerindian, and black–to become incorporated into the same national project: they would commingle to form a new mestizo race (Castro, 2002, p. 19).

To be sure, the adoption of nationality policies informed by mestizaje has had severe consequences. It has typically led not to the emancipation of indigenous peoples but to their silencing, or at best the co-opting of their voice. Afrodescendants have also typically been excluded from national life, more by design than by accident, in attempts to forge mestizo nations or, as in the case of Brazil, to pre-emptively proclaim a frictionless "racial democracy" (cf. Andrews, 2004, pp. 110-115). Mestizaje inspired an array of biopolitical projects aimed at shaping the somatic composition of the body politic, which included the exclusion of certain groups from franchise or the preferential recruitment of European migrants to the Americas. However, mestizaje gave rise to original ideas about nationality and was a necessary first step towards more widely emancipatory projects, such as *créolité* (creoleness). Crucially, the mestizo project of nationalism incorporated hybridity as a means of reconciling different ethnic groups and bringing the most historically oppressed into the fold of the nation. The positive reassessment of hybridity, shorn of negative associations with degeneration, bolstered the case for national self-determination of peoples whose lineage did not stretch back to Genesis, but who arose out of the modern, in situ fusion of heterogenous elements.

Soviet linguists, ethnographers, and policymakers, for their part, faced the realisation that they had inherited a state comprising a daunting array of peoples who were

not integrated into national life in the way that the comparatively Europeanised populations of the former empire were. One conclusion was that the "backward" or "downtrodden" *narodnosti* [folk, people], be they peasants or "tribes" speaking a non-Slavic language, needed to be induced to climb the "universal ladder of culture." Thereby closing the unnerving developmental gap separating the empire's core and periphery (Hirsch, 2005, pp. 43-45). An alternative perspective initially more typical of avant-garde intellectual and artistic circles saw this internal cultural and economic difference not as an embarrassing deficit but as a resource for achieving a new vision of the future. The "primitive" peoples did not possess the material trappings of modernity, but their languages deserved to be viewed on a par with dominant written languages (Clark, 1995, p. 215). Nikolai Marr, as we shall see, went further still. He not only made the case for equal rights for linguistic minorities but hailed them as the vanguard of a revolutionary process set to sweep along all segments of Soviet society. Primitive peoples, Marr believed, maintained an unbroken bond to the distant past. Their languages, living repositories of the past, exhibited a degree of phonological and semantic complexity that over time had been stripped away from more "advanced" languages, but which would come into its own in the not-so-distant future. According to Marr's theories, a future fusion of primitive and modern languages was an inevitable outcome of the ubiquity of mixture within and between languages. In short, all languages were mixed; they had been ever since their inception, and they never lost their potential for forming new linguistic combinations in response to changing circumstances. Marr correctly identified mixture as a property of language that had been largely overlooked by mainstream scholarship. The prominence he gave to mixture reflected his own experience of linguistic realities in the Caucasus. It also made him receptive to theories of language that an acquaintance with the linguistic situation of the Americas had inspired in certain exceptional individuals.

The connection between nation-building projects in the Americas and the Soviet approach to emancipating downtrodden peoples remains under-explored. This article traces an unlikely connection that enabled ideas about the racially mixed nation and its creole language to be transmitted from the Americas to the early Soviet Union by way of Central Europe. The Americas themselves, it must be said, were not active participants in this exchange. The raw linguistic source material was collected in some cases by writers

from the Americas, but its theoretical elaboration occurred in Europe before it reached Marr. Nonetheless, as we shall see, indigenous theories of linguistic mixture were articulated in the Americas in parallel to Marr, and the comparison that this invite is highly suggestive of the workings of "composite" as opposed to "atavistic" culture.

## 1 The Discourse of Indigeneity in *Mestizaje* and *Korenizacija*

In the latter parts of the nineteenth century, various political movements emerged around the world that argued for the greater inclusion of indigenous peoples in national life, and indeed that their existence should form the basis of national identity. This phenomenon occurred in the global "periphery," where European modes of colonialism, which had justified the marginalization, extermination, and forced assimilation of indigenous peoples due to their perceived lack of advancement, did not hold sway. Examples of positive indigenous reappraisal could be found in many parts of the Americas but also in revolutionary Russia. In both cases, the revolutionaries were tasked with transforming societies that were stratified across class, language, and ethnicity into something new and cohesive. European countries in the age of nationalism could cultivate the illusion of monolingualism and descent from a mythologized past. By contrast, nation-building in revolutionary Russia, the Americas, and other peripheral countries, was from its inception forced to embrace hybridity. Forging a nation under these circumstances meant reconciling heterogenous social castes that had been thrown together by fate and required the grafting of modernity onto the primordial indigenous bond to the soil.

In one of the most frequently cited works of Americanist thought, namely the article "Nuestra América" of 1891, the Cuban independence leader José Martí exhorted his fellow countrymen to lay aside racial prejudice in the name of overthrowing the dominant criollo class whose legitimacy derived from their pure Spanish descent: "In America the natural man has triumphed over the imported book. Natural men have triumphed over an artificial intelligentsia. The native mestizo [*el mestizo autóctono*] has triumphed over the alien, pure-blooded criollo [*criollo exótico*]" (Martí, 2002, pp. 290). Martí advocated an accommodating definition of patriotism that embraced the authentic national community, with all its internal differences, but excluded a ruling class, in thrall to European modes of thought, that had alienated itself from the native soil: indeed, the

etymology of "autochthonous" means "sprung from the land," a clear contrast to the exotic, which in this case refers not to the American "savages" of the European literary imagination, but to the "pure-blooded" European inhabitant of Cuba.[2] Martí celebrated the variegated composition of American nation-states like Cuba – "our feet upon a rosary, our heads white, and our bodies a motley of Indian and criollo we boldly entered the community of nations" (Martí, 2002, p. 291) – because in his view, nationalism in the Americas subsumed and fused all previous modes of identification. Instead of viewing identity as the product of biological race, in the manner of the proudly aloof Spaniard living in Cuba, Martí advocated a new collective identity that was the result of cultural fusion, which was in turn anchored to the soil through the figure of the Indian, and thus endowed with nature's deterministic force.[3] Martí was not an outlier but a representative of broad swathes of progressive thinkers in the Americas who thought that "the future culture (...) ought to rest on a Western technological-scientific basis but should express primarily Indian-derived spiritual values" (Mörner, 1967, p. 144).

This hybrid understanding of nationality, in which modernity is "organically" grafted onto an indigenous root, was not exclusively an American phenomenon. Keen to make a break from the tsarist past, the Bolsheviks wanted to build a new society from the ground up rather than impose their rule on the multiethnic population contained within the Soviet Union. This required them to engage deeply with indigenous and minority culture and led them to promote national identity and create national republics, complete with national language schools, press, and governing cadres. The policy that sought to equip the Union's indigenous peoples (*korennye narody*) with these accoutrements of nationality was known as *korenizacija* (Martin, 2001, p. 11). The name of the policy contained the familiar dichotomy between indigenous peoples bound to the soil and their latter-day exploiters. Indeed, "the coining of the word *korenizatsiia* was part of the Bolsheviks' decolonizing rhetoric, which systematically favoured the claims of indigenous peoples over "newly arrived elements *(prishlye elementy)*" (Martin, 2001, p. 12).

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[2] "[*Autochthon*] is clearly a compound of the words *autos* (either 'same' or 'self') and *chthon* ('land,' 'earth'), which would give the meaning, depending on the sense of autos, of either "from the land itself" (i.e., earth-born) or 'from the same land'." (Roy, 2014, p. 242)

[3] "Moreover, because culture entails an imperative for identity rather than merely a description of it, culture in 'Nuestra América' does the identitarian work of race while seeming to abandon the identitarian ground of race." (Hatfield, 2015, p. 24)

The policy of *korenizacija* aimed to bring about the full participation of all peoples, especially those historically downtrodden, in the political life of the USSR. If the tsarist empire had been the proverbial "prison-house of nations," the Bolsheviks intended their nationality policy to welcome the downtrodden into the embrace of modernity by respecting and even cultivating national difference. Their policies were predicated on the notion of fusion that would eventually lead to a new synthesis within society once all national and tribal elements, held apart under the tsars, had taken charge of their historical destiny. Soviet folklorists, for example, celebrated "cultural hybridization" and decried their German counterparts' treatment of culture as static and "primordial" (Hirsch, 2005, p. 270). While Americanists invoked the Indian as a grounding figure, rooting national culture in nature, the Bolsheviks celebrated the revolutionary potential of indigenous culture, which arguably remained close to primitive communism. The Bolsheviks did not think in terms of the mixing of distinct races in the manner of American mestizaje. Instead, they wanted to bring about a unification of national life within a single polity that encompassed hitherto "backwards" peoples. This had not been possible under the previous regime of oppression and exclusion to which minorities had been subjected. Now, however, indigenous peoples and the former peasantry bore the halo of futurity, their primitiveness being taken as a portent of revolutionary transformation.

A prominent figure shaping early Soviet nationality policy, especially with respect to the status of minority languages, was the linguist Nikolai Marr. Marr had a global theory of language development, which he constantly related to the "primitive" stages of language. Possessing himself an identity not easily pinned down as the son of an emigre Scottish botanist and his (significantly younger) Georgian wife, Marr's career was driven by a desire to put marginal languages like his native Georgian on the map. One of his recurrent strategies was to foreground the ways that such languages preserved grammatical complexity, and the concomitant complexity of thought on the part of their speakers, that had fallen by the wayside during the emergence of today's dominant languages, especially those belonging to the Indo-European family. Marr extolled the contributions that indigenous communities, isolated and marginalized but still cleaving to their native soil, could make to the future of human language once scholars learned to value the precious relics of ancient thought and speech contained within their languages.

The use of gesture alongside speech, still present in rural Armenian and Azeri communities, was one such primitive survival with revolutionary potential (Sériot, 2024, p. 219). Long scorned and overlooked by scholars as, at best, "a diverting curiosity," gestural speech was to come into its own and be justly recognized as a source of "invaluable material" (Marr, 1934b, p. 107) in the promised future synthesis of languages into a unified global means of communication; "a new unified language based on the final accomplishments of both manual and sound languages – a language wherein supreme beauty will merge with the highest development of the mind" (Marr, 1934b, pp. 111-112, *apud* Slezkine, 1996, p. 843).

Marr's ideas have frequently been written off as peculiar expressions of the Stalinist politicization of the sciences. However, that which has been said about his contemporaries in Latin America could equally be applied to him: all were "confronting the dilemma of wanting to be modern and, at the same time, realizing that they were consigned to the fringes of modernity" (Mignolo, 2005, p. 71). Like his contemporaries in the Americas, Marr had to solve the problem of preserving one's own cultural difference while embracing modernity. His answer was to build a unified global theory of linguistic evolution, which was at the same time predicated on maintaining difference and variety. In this theory, all languages across the globe developed in adherence to a universal sequence of stages, beginning with the four basic sound units *sal, ber, yon,* and *rosh*; this initial, elemental unity was lost as phonological differentiation, driven by social stratification, initiated the splitting off of separate languages, some of which would merge together while others branched further apart over time; all languages, though, were destined to fuse in a future synthesis that was set to retain and valorize all surviving "primitive" elements. This process could only reach fruition, Marr maintained, under Soviet leadership because the Soviet Union had overthrown the prevailing bourgeois linguistics, which treated individual languages in isolation and valued pure descent from a mythic past. This way of thinking was exemplified by Indo-European linguistics, the Eurocentric antithesis of his theory, which hypothesised a heroic Indo-European Urvolk that spread its linguistic and civilizational seed widely across Eurasia and whose descendants now lorded their superiority over everyone else, including the Georgians. Marr (1936a, p. 32) lampooned his contemporaries' belief in protolanguages and their futile searches "outside the domain of linguistic inquiry, across hills and dales, for the

homeland of certain nations."[4] The genealogical preoccupation of Western comparative linguistics contradicted Marr's basic tenet that languages all shared the same original underpinnings. Moreover, linguistic purity was only ever an illusion. The constant splitting and merger that characterised language for most of its history meant that such seemingly closed holistic entities as "German" or "Russian" actually contain masses of foreign matter sedimented over centuries:

> Any idea of longevity as applied to a particular language, however consummate that language may be, is as unrealistic as the teachings of modern European science according to which the Indo-European languages derive from a single Indo-European language. Although possibly appealing to children, this fairytale is an inadequate tool for any serious scholarly research. On the contrary, every language, including Russian, should be studied in its paleontological cross-section; i.e. taking into account its successive layers of stratification. (Marr, 2022b, p. 692)

The work of the linguist consisted in large part, for Marr, in excavating downwards to uncover accreted layers of past linguistic borrowings and "crossings" (*skreščeniia*) testifying to submerged elements from the distant past. This geological image is pertinent as it suggests the simultaneous presence of more than two elements, something that the binary biological model could not achieve.

Marr's conception of linguistic "crossing" was shaped by his knowledge of language contact in the Caucasus, although this was not the only sociolinguistic source that he had at his disposal. The impact of theories drawn from observations of sociolinguistic realities in the Americas on Marr has not been explored until now. This is understandable given that Marr devoted only one article out of his substantial oeuvre to the Americas (Marr, 1937) and spoke about the languages there in a speculative way. Such knowledge of linguistic creolisation in the Americas that Marr was able to gain came to him indirectly, with another equally remarkable linguist, Hugo Schuchardt, a naturalized Austrian though German by birth, acting as intermediary. Schuchardt may well have supplied Marr with the theory of universal linguistic hybridity that formed the backbone of Marr's late theory (Sériot, 2024, p. 208). Beyond this, Schuchardt's large body of work contained frequent asides on the nature of linguistic mixture, accompanied

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[4] In Russian: "[O] vne issleduemoj lingvističeskoj credy za gorami za dolami nakhozivšejsja prarodine tekh ili inykh narodov."

by vignettes of sociolinguistic realities in creole societies, which were derived in large part from correspondences with individuals living in these societies. Exposure to this knowledge, via his acquaintance with Schuchardt's work, likely reinforced certain ideas that Marr had already developed; namely, that mixture in languages is perennial and that, in the event of conquest or colonialism, the oppressed or "subaltern" has a more decisive role in the emergent linguistic mix than the colonial overlords. Additionally, Marr's reading of Schuchardt may have helped him to see language as the product of human pragmatism and ingenuity even under adverse circumstances. These insights were spurred by the unique intellectual exchanges, discussed below, that allowed Schuchardt to study linguistic mixture as occurred in real time, not least in the Americas, rather than in the distant past.

## 2 *Créolité Avant la Lettre*

The Americanist version of nationalism articulated by figures such as José Martí, with its fusion of different ethnic elements, rooted in the incommensurate particulars of local context, into something new and self-sustaining (*cubanidad*, in the case of Martí), was reflected in linguistic theories of creolisation. However, this was largely limited to the Caribbean rather than the Spanish Americas. The linguistic variety of the Caribbean, in which geological processes of linguistic change were collapsed into a more human timeframe, attracted the attention of Hugo Schuchardt. In the process of researching Caribbean languages, he was exposed to the ferment of Antillean thought. A century later, murmurings of a positive reappraisal of creole languages would give rise to *créolité*, a civilisational ideal modelled on the just relations between cultures attributed to creole languages. We must briefly trace this epistemic transfer.

The creolized model of the nation, in which indigenous, mestizo, and Afrodescendent strata of society fused to become the revolutionary vanguard of anticolonial struggle, had the potential to bring about national liberation and the enfranchisement of society's most systematically oppressed; this potential, however, was not fully realized either in the short or long term. Additionally, the expansion of the concept of nationality within revolutionary and reformist circles that we have discussed did not necessarily lead to an equally thorough reevaluation of the status and composition

of the national language. Within the Spanish Americas, writers of this period were largely content to preserve the status of the Spanish literary language, albeit with the introduction of modest local colouring. The Nicaraguan Rubén Darío, one of the leading figures of the *Modernismo* movement of the turn of the twentieth century, suffused his poetry with imagery of the Amerindian past (O'Connor-Bater, 2022, pp. 14-15) but was relatively conservative in respect to the status of Spanish. In a programmatic article from 1894, he advocated for developing "the Castilian tongue in America" by retaining its "ancient riches" and simultaneously seeking the "aggrandizement of those same riches in vocabulary, rhythm, plasticity and nuance" (Darío; Freyre, 1967, p. 1).[5] The task was not so to creolize Spanish but to wrest control of it from Spain (Mejías-López, 2009, p. 79).

Where language was subject to contestation, however, was in the Caribbean, a region in which language mixture was a reality and whose intellectuals were willing to extend Americanist ideas of hybrid nationalism to include linguistic creolization. Haiti is a prime example of this development. It would not be until 1987, after the fall of the Duvalier dynasty, that Haitian creole (henceforth *Kreyòl*, except in citations), gained official status within the country. However, efforts towards raising its status began much earlier, even if Haitian intellectuals typically professed allegiance to French culture, which they "linked with the concept of a modernizing society" (Bellegarde-Smith, 2019, p. 121). The pioneers who led the positive reappraisal of popular cultural practices, such as Vodou and *Kreyòl*, were deeply concerned about the cultural gap that existed between the *milat* (mulatto) elites and the rural masses (Smith, 2009, pp. 4, 52). This was the quintessential dilemma of the time, equally relevant to the Caucasus. Faced with this cultural crisis, the Haitian anthropologist Jean Price-Mars thought that *Kreyòl* "might prove redemptive to a people undone by ethnic and class stratification" (Bronfman, 2016, p. 93). In Price-Mars' own words, in a seminal work of 1928, written in French and self-consciously addressed to an elite audience,

> it is thanks to creole that our oral traditions exist, survive, and are transformed, and it is through its mediation that we may one day hope to bridge the gap that makes us and the people two apparently distinct and frequently antagonistic entities (Price-Mars, 1973, p. 66).[6]

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[5] As quoted by Aching (1997, pp. 137-138).

[6] In French: "C'est grâce au créole que nos traditions orales existent, se perpétuent et se transforment, et c'est par son intermédiaire que nous pouvons espérer combler un jour le fossé qui fait de nous et du peuple deux entités apparemment distinctes et souvent antagonistes."

In the context of Haiti, the disenfranchised rural blacks occupied an analogous position to the Amerindians and mestizos in the societies of neighbouring countries. The cultural revival of *Kreyòl* received an added impetus during the period of US occupation (1915-1934). Eventually, the achievements of Haitian *Kreyòl* revival would be celebrated as a forerunner of *Créolité*, a literary movement that argued that the Caribbean embodied a unique civilisational model based in "the *interactional or transactional aggregate* of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history" (Bernabé *et al*., 1993, p. 87). As we can see in its combination of mixture and rootedness, *Créolité* was the final fulfilment of Spanish American indigenist thought, this time making creole language the central pivot for its societal ideal. This synthesis was a long time in the making. Nonetheless, thanks to his methodological openness and globe-spanning network of correspondence, the uniquely talented Hugo Schuchardt was afforded a glimpse of the beginnings of this movement and incorporated what he learned into a bold theory of language.

Hugo Schuchardt had a wide range of professional interests as a linguist but gained lasting esteem for his pioneering work on creoles. A specialist in Romance languages by training (he wrote his dissertation on popular or "vulgar" Latin), Schuchardt studied under August Schleicher, the scholar comparative Indo-European linguistics most known for borrowing the family tree (Stammbaum) model of the evolution of species from Darwin and Haeckel and applying it to languages (Richards, 2009, p. 110; Koerner, 1989, pp. 218-223). Schleicher thought that the model illustrated how multiple "descendant" languages arose from a single common ancestor. The next generation of linguists after him, known as the Neogrammarians, continued his work on the Indo-European Stammbaum but tried to be more scientific in how they explained language change over time. Schuchardt gained notoriety for critiquing the Neogrammarians when they were at the height of their influence. The Neogrammarians held that languages, and specifically their phonetic properties, change over time not because of external factors or the conscious volition of speakers, but as a result of intrinsic sound laws that operate (and this was the Neogrammarians' central claim) without exception upon all the words of a given dialect. Schuchardt formulated his objections in an essay of 1885, in which he strongly criticized the Neogrammarians for neglecting human factors on language change,

for treating change within single dialects and thus disregarding contact and mixture, and for adopting arbitrary criteria to define the scope of validity each individual "law" (Hall, 1963, pp. 12-13). In sharp contrast to the Neogrammarians, Schuchardt devoted himself to phenomena that contradicted the notion of languages existing as closed self-consistent systems, chief among these phenomena being creoles.

In retrospect, one of Schuchardt's great achievements was in linking the study of creoles to such mainstream avenues of enquiry as the history of European languages possessing a solid textual corpus. His first studies looked at Portuguese-based creoles in West Africa, India, and the East Indies, and he corresponded with individuals from those regions as well as the Caribbean. In contrast to his contemporaries like Hermann Paul, who did acknowledge language mixture but viewed it as exceptional and driven by ethnic mixture, Schuchardt saw it as endemic even within languages that are habitually thought of as homogeneous (Mücke, 2013, p. 136). Schuchardt was sufficiently iconoclastic that Marr, in a rare expression of approval of a Western scholar, referred to him as a "lone voice crying out in the wilderness" (Marr, 1931b, p. 174). Throughout his career, Schuchardt remained committed to the position that mixture is endemic, not a mere deus ex machina to be invoked when regular laws fail. As he put it, "among all the questions with which contemporary linguistics is concerned, none is more important than that of language mixing" (Schuchardt, 1884, p. 3).[7] He initially arrived at the study of creoles in order to better understand phenomena within European languages, such as the effects of "pre-Roman languages on Vulgar Latin" (Schuchardt, 1883, p. 236). Schuchardt was following earlier linguists down this avenue of inquiry. Graziadio Isaia Ascoli had earlier attributed the destruction of the linguistic unity of Rome to the action of earlier (e.g. Celtic) "ethnic substrates" over which Popular Latin had been overlaid (Hoyt, 2006, p. 103). Adapting substrate theory to modern-day language mixing, Schuchardt argued that creoles "retain[ed] the inner form of their substrate while adopting the outer form of their lexical source language" (Holm, 2004, p. 32). For example, Cape Verdean Creole borrowed lexical material from Portuguese but owed its inner essence, its "*formbildender Geist*" (Schuchardt, 1882a, p. 915), to the African side of its linguistic composition. As was the case for European languages after the fall of Rome, the subordinate party of linguistic mixture, the substrate, turned out to have been the decisive factor in the

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[7] Quoted in Mücke (2013, p. 131).

subsequent linguistic development. Yet, while the European languages required speculative reconstruction of their past, Schuchardt was able to call upon a host of informers to supply him with living linguistic material to study creoles.

Schuchardt's work on creoles would not have been possible without his informants, who supplied linguistic raw material and insights into linguistic realities that shaped his theories. Although he never travelled to the regions he wrote about and spent most of his life in the splendid isolation of Graz (Wilbur, 1972, p. 79), Schuchardt corresponded with over one hundred individuals across the globe on the subject of creoles (Holm, 2004, pp. 29-30). Typical of the nature of this correspondence was a shopping list of desired source materials–songs, stories, proverbs, riddles, fragments of conversation– from Colombian creoles that Schuchardt sent to Rufino José Cuervo, the country's leading Romanist and lexicographer (Schuchardt, 1882b). Schuchardt had a sustained interest in Haitian Kreyòl, maintaining a correspondence from 1882 to 1903 with Jean-Joseph Audain, a literary figure and leading publicist in Port-au-Prince (Hausmann, 2022). At the start of their correspondence, Audain, a native speaker of *Kreyòl*, sent Schuchardt a copy of his *Recueil de proverbes créoles* [Collection of Creole Proverbs] (Audain, 1877) by way of a linguistic sample. In another letter Audain stressed the importance of not conflating *Kreyòl* with the creoles of Martinique and Guadeloupe. This is a theme that came up elsewhere in Schuchardt's correspondence concerning Haiti, in a letter reporting the astonishment of Louis-Joseph Janvier, a Haitian diplomat and well-known public intellectual, that Schuchardt knew creole and would even be able to write a letter in it: "it could not possibly be the creole of Haiti! He (Janvier) insists that the various dialects of French creole are very different and that he himself can barely understand the creole of Martinique and [the French] Antilles" (Gaidoz, 1882). Such insights into the lack of uniformity even within French creoles may have contributed to Schuchardt's rejection of the monogenetic hypothesis, which held that all creoles share a single common ancestor (Holm, 2004, p. 32). Instead, Schuchardt foregrounded the specificity of individual creoles, even while he outlined generalized processes within creolization, and he remained attentive to the multiple social and historical factors that pertained in their development.

When it came to *Kreyòl*, Schuchardt's letter writing put him into contact with people from Haiti who had a stake in their country's national development. Intellectuals

in Haiti were still not liable to publicly profess admiration for *Kreyòl*. This was true of Janvier, even though politically he was a Nationalist in the Haitian context, seeking populist modes to redress "the constant exploitation of the majority of the black inhabitants by a small privileged *milat* elite" (Smith, 2009, p. 25) in contrast to the opposing faction of elite Liberals. Audain sat in a similar camp, as we can see if we look at his preface to his anthology of *Kreyòl* proverbs. Invoking Greek and Latin examples, Audain affirmed that "all languages have their proverbs, and these proverbs, as a kind of intellectual thermometer, have always served to indicate the degree of life and originality of a people" (Audain, 1877, p. 2). Indeed, Audain has been seen as a precursor to the adoption of *Kreyòl* as a literary language, evident in Georges Sylvain's *Cric? Crac!* (1901) and beginning in earnest after 1915 (Lang, 1997, p. 40). Thanks to his correspondence, Schuchardt caught wind of the first murmurings of *créolité*. His interlocutors were motivated by a desire to reconfigure social stratification and bring the downtrodden into the forefront of national life, in a nation no longer conceived as monolingual francophone but linguistically creole. It is unclear how attuned Schuchardt was to the political concerns of his interlocutors. However, his gleanings from creole life shaped his understanding of the cultural processes involved in modern creolization, demonstrating the versatility of speakers in creating a viable means for communication from the bottom up.

Schuchardt's theory of creoles, which was not expressed in a single theoretical statement but scattered in fragments throughout his work, stressed the agency of speakers in making creative use of the material at their disposal, under circumstances not of their choosing.

Firstly, he dismissed common appeals to racial determinism, evident in accounts of creolization that explained linguistic mixture as the corollary of racial mixture. In reality, "ethnic influence" on language could not easily be determined because creolization took place "within a highly mixed [*buntgemischter*] population" (Schuchardt, 1883, p. 239). This marked a departure from the binary substrate model, which had been predicated on a biological understanding of language mixture. Schuchardt scorned the tendency to borrow ideas from scientific racism when talking about language mixing. Although he employed the terms "mother language" and "daughter language," which were used to describe the relationship between two an older language, like Latin, and the

younger languages that arose out of it, in this example Romance dialects (Körting, 1887, p. 4), this was as far as he was willing to accept the intrusion of genealogical imagery in linguistic classification:

> The genealogical classification of languages has been thoroughly challenged for a considerable time and with good reason; nonetheless, even those who no longer take it seriously are unconsciously influenced by the image of the *Stammbaum*. It even adapts itself to the theory of language mixture. It has quite correctly been said that a language that has a mother may very well have a father too, and it would only be logical to apply the expressions 'Terceron,' 'Quadroon,' 'Quintroon,'to languages based on their degree of mixture. But this would not help us in the slightest (Schuchardt, 1882c, p. 868).[8]

Because they were haunted by the Stammbaum, an images that implies purity of descent for languages and people, most linguists could not help but treat language mixture the same way that race scientists did the mixture of races: as a pollution of the blood that needed to be closely monitored and taxonomized, necessitating such labels as "mulatto" or "quadroon" for people depending on their degree of African ancestry. These terms were particularly resonant of the Americas, as they were instituted by the Spanish crown to regulate mixed marriages in the colonies.[9] It was against this hierarchical system, enforced by *peninsulares* and *criollos*, that figures like Martí rebelled in the name mestizo nationalism. Schuchardt's theory of creolization dispensed with racial determinism: language mixing was caused, so he argued, by social rather than physiological factors, and linguistic habits were not a "heritable" trait (Schuchardt, 1882c, p. 868). Creoles for Schuchardt revealed language to be subject to constant pragmatic reworking, and not an unconscious and inevitable marker of heredity.

Secondly, Schuchart opposed theories of creolization that minimised or negated the influence of the (African) substrate. A contrast can be made with his contemporary, the Portuguese scholar Adolfo Coelho, who wrote extensively on creoles. Coelho argued that all creoles, irrespective of context, were the result of the same universal process. According to him, creoles were developmentally equivalent to the simplified language that adults use to make themselves understood by young children (Holm, 2004, pp. 27-28). Creolization could thus be explained in terms of "psychological laws," with no need

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[8] See Young (1995, pp. 175-182) for examples of blood mixing terminology.
[9] See Young (1995, p. 177).

to pay attention to "the former languages of the peoples among whom these dialects are found,"[10] i.e. the substrate (Coelho, 1881, p. 69).[11] Schuchardt critiqued Coelho's position for its neglect of social factors (Holm, 2004, p. 32). His approach would be defined by attentiveness to particulars rather than theoretical abstraction.

Thirdly, Schuchardt's position on creoles, which he applied to the study of language as a whole, emphasised the role of human creativity and ingenuity. This is summarised by a passage indirectly attacking August Schleicher's understanding of language as an organism driven by its own internal laws of development:

> Hitherto, language has habitually been treated as an independent organism, as a subject, whereas it is merely the product of a subject, and not on one occasion but permanently; it is dependent during all its changes on this subject (Schuchardt, 1882c, p. 868).

Schleicher thought languages underwent "changes" in the form of decay from their initial pure inception. By insisting that languages are produced by their speakers, not once, at the moment of their inception, but throughout their subsequent development, Schuchardt denied the decay thesis. Furthermore, he allowed room for the legitimacy of creoles. If human input was required at every stage of a language's development, and growth did not depend on adherence to the language's composition at its inception, no grounds remained for dismissing creolization as a marginal or negative phenomenon.

Ultimately, Schuchardt's work on creoles led him to a wholly new understanding of languages and language families, one which broke radically with the legacy of Schleicher. Schuchardt's work revealed the limitless possibilities of linguistic mixture. This brought him into conflict with such contemporaries as Antoine Meillet. A significant figure in Indo-European research, Meillet rejected Schuchardt's understanding of "*Sprachmischung*," admitting only the possibility of "borrowings" from one language to another. A language might well contain borrowed lexical elements from another language, but the simultaneous coexistence of two separate linguistic systems was not possible in discourse, Meillet (1925, p. 82) argued: "the speaking subject must always speak a certain language; he has the feeling of speaking either one language or another;

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[10] In Portuguese: "línguas anteriores dos povos entre os quais esses dialetos são encontrados."
[11] As quoted by Holm (2004, p. 27).

and he is unable to mix the morphology of one language with that of another."[12] Schuchardt (1914b, p. 146) countered with a generalized assertion of the ubiquity of mixture: "mixture is the very signature of the life of language." Schuchardt's final, mature view of language mixing, along with his accompanying belief in the centrality of human pragmatism in reshaping language throughout its existence, helped obliterate any normative distinction between creole and non-creole languages. This was to offer an important insight to Marr.

Schuchardt's ideas were also important because they were taken up in Haiti during the period of *Kreyòl* cultural renewal. The first scholarly monograph devoted to the *Kreyòl* language was written by the Haitian anthropologist and folklorist Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain (*née* Sylvain). Born into a family at the vanguard of cultural renewal–her brother Georges, mentioned above, pioneered written literary production in *Kreyòl*–Comhaire-Sylvain was one of the original members of Price-Mars' Institut d'Ethnologie, founded in 1941 (Ramsey, 2011, p. 214). Prior to this, she wrote *Le Créole haïtien: Morphologie et syntaxe* [The Haitian Creole: Morphology and Syntax] in 1936. The book built towards a substratist conclusion highly redolent of Schuchardt, who featured in bibliography alongside Coelho, Audain and other early studies of *Kreyòl*: "we are in the presence of a French poured into the mould of African syntax or, given that we normally classify languages based on their syntactical kinship, an Ewe language with a French vocabulary" (Sylvain, 1979, p. 178). Comhaire-Syvlain's study parsed the various elements of *Kreyòl*'s composition, including borrowings from "Indian" languages, Spanish, African languages, French ("the basis of our vocabulary…dialectal and literary French from the time of the first filibusters and buccaneers and the colonial period, literary French since the nineteenth century") (Sylvain, 1979, pp. 10-11), and English. Comhaire-Sylvain began her study with a description of the sociolinguistic situation of Haiti:

> Haitian creole is the popular and familiar language of the Republic of Haiti, the former French colony of Saint-Domingue, with French remaining as the official and literary language. Every Haitian is more or less bilingual. Your elite Haitian, often raised in Paris, speaks a French that is very pure, sometimes rather *recherché*, but he also speaks creole in close circles; he speaks creole while joking to his wife, his

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[12] In French: "le sujet parlant doit toujours parler une certaine langue; il a le sentiment de parler ou une langue ou une autre ; et il ne saurait mêler la morphologie d'une langue à celle d'une autre."

children, his friends; he speaks creole to his servants and his workmen. Your urban Haitian generally speaks creole; however, as he has attended school for many years and he is constantly in contact with people who speak sometimes creole, sometimes French, he can also express himself in French when the moment arises. The peasant does not speak French, or, if he is a village worthy, he speaks a horribly mangled French; in general adults do not understand more than a few simple phrases in French that are to do with business or religion. A child of 12 or 14 who still attends rural school knows a bit of schoolboy French vocabulary which he will forget later on; for him, as for his parents, creole will one day be his only means of communication (Sylvain, 1979, p. 7).

In this striking social tableau, we hear echoed the Haitian elite refrain, a point of pride for writers such as Dantès Bellegarde and Louis-Joseph Janvier (in his public pronouncements at least) among others, that Haitians have perfect mastery of French, the language of enlightenment and civilisation.[13] This attitude was subtly undercut by Comhaire-Sylvain, whose vignette of Haitian life depicted *Kreyòl* as a truly national language even if it is only furtively enjoyed by elites behind closed doors. Her words evoke an emancipatory process still unfinished so long as the popular, indeed autochthonous linguistic and literary practices remained outside the fold of legitimate national culture. In the next section, we will look at a comparable attempt, in a different setting, to remake society from below by emancipating popular speech.

## 3 Globalising Creoleness

Nikolai Marr, alongside Schuchardt's Caribbean informants, was preoccupied with bringing the culture of the oppressed into the modern era, and this naturally made him receptive to Schuchardt's work. Indeed, Marr developed a conception of linguistic mixture independently of Schuchardt. Where we see that Marr changed his understanding of language mixing thanks to Schuchardt was when he made mixture universal across all language and times, rather than treating it as a specific, albeit positive, attribute of Japhetic languages. This had the effect of lessening Marr's binarism, seen in the contrast he drew between the holistic world of indigenous Japhetites (themselves embodiments of *créolité* avant la lettre) and the militaristic, rampaging Indo-Europeans.

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[13] Cf. Bellegarde-Smith (2019, pp. 121-122).

There was a duality to Marr's thought. One facet of Marr's work was concerned with establishing the "autochthonous" status of individual ethnies of the Caucasus and the Mediterranean (Marr, 1931a, p. 112). Many have seen this as obsessive, a symptom of the mistaken belief that "it is not peoples who change their places but rulers and oppressors. It is the people, the '*khalq*', who are eternally and tightly bound to their 'eternal' and 'sacred' soil" (Fragner, 2001, p. 20). On the other hand, for all his attentiveness to the overlooked and the particular, Marr was equally famous, and just as widely condemned, for his sweeping theoretical constructs.[14] Chief among these was his theory of a single unified process governed by law that determined the development of all languages. At one point in his writings, he evoked the advent of this global theory in terms of a maelstrom of creative destruction:

> With respect to China and the entire Far East, a belief still reigns supreme to this day that this region possesses a primordial centre of independent cultural creation, that it was separated from the Western cultural world at birth and and during its subsequent development by unbreachable walls. Yet the question remains whether these Chinese walls exist in the cultural fabric of mankind or whether they are merely an artificial construct (Marr, 1931a, p. 88).

Here, Marr introduced a note of tension between the existence of a single unified theory and the persistence of distinct and separate cultures. There is an echo in this passage of Marx and Engels' evocation of the bourgeois mode of production, which they saw as simultaneously the harbinger of progress and the destroyer of old organic ways of life:

> The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production (...) In one word, it creates a world after its own image (Marx and Engels, 1978, p. 477).

Marr was indeed wary that the process of inevitable linguistic standardization and consolidation, described by his theory and seemingly on the verge of being put into practice through Soviet nationality policy, would flatten the variety of the world's

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[14] See Brandist (2015, p. 213).

languages. Thus he cautioned against allowing any one existing language to gain supremacy over the others in the name of universality, whether it be Russian or Esperanto. To take the reins and steer the process in a manner that did not respect the "right to cultural self-determination of all nations," would lead to a "cultural catastrophe" (Marr, 1925, p. 1015). In an effort to forestall this horrifying outcome, Marr described the future world language as a recapitulation of everything that had gone before and a return to primitive origins. Marr endowed primitive peoples with the keys to humanity's linguistic salvation, ensuring that this would proceed from the bottom up rather than the top down.

In this section, we will examine a shift in Marr's thinking, which coincided with his reading of Schuchardt, towards treating mixture as ubiquitous and away from an earlier binarism that pitted the Japhetic and Indo-European languages against one another. Prior to this encounter, Marr treated indigenous people–the Japhetites and their modern descendants–as unique beings who embodied the fusion of past and future. They helped him to reconcile his unilinear, indeed Hegelian view of progress and time with the preservation of cultural difference: the summit of history could only be reached by rediscovering the distant past. This would involve, Marr thought, a supreme instance of language mixing, in which all the positive traits of languages from past epochs would be melded into one. Japhetic languages were destined to play a pivotal role in this because of their capacity to form mixtures. Even when they became subsumed by later Indo-European languages, Japhetic languages continued to exercise a covert influence from below as a substrate. In this model, Marr associated the desirable trait of being able to form mixtures with the prelapsarian Japhetic past. The Indo-European languages, perpetual scourge of the Japhetic, were left out. They could be subject to Japhetic influence, especially in "hybrid" languages like Armenian, but they represented a deterioration from an earlier state of affairs. Initially, Schuchardt studied creoles because they were an exotic contrast to European languages. Yet out of this he came to see mixing as a constant process affecting all languages uniformly. Marr came to a similar realisation about mixing, eventually viewing Indo-European languages as equally subject to it. This change of opinion was due in part to his acquaintance with Schuchardt.

Marr's linguistic theories developed over several decades and underwent a series of transformations. They began with the hypothesis that he promoted as a student, much to the chagrin of his superiors at St Petersburg University, that his native Georgian, a

language which had yet to be definitively categorised within existing families, was in fact Semitic and shared the same triconsonantal root structure of Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic. Subsequently Marr modified his thesis by arguing that Georgian and other languages of the Caucasus were distantly related to the Semitic languages but formed their own distinct "Japhetic" family. The choice of terminology was portentous. Marr's Japhetic theory had implications far beyond the Caucasus. It included in its remit Etruscan and Basque among other "primitive," "autochthonous" languages of Europe: they were all offshoots of a wider Japhetic family now mostly confined to "the languages of the indigenous [*korennogo*] population of the Caucasus," a region that was formerly "the hearth of European culture" (Marr, 1931a, p. 82). The prehistoric westward expansion of an initially Caucasian linguistic family, the subject of a 1920 work by Marr that attempted to map the distribution of Japhetic languages in prehistoric Europe, unavoidably calls to mind the Biblical Table of Nations, which relates how the progeny of Sem's brother Japhet spread out to found the original nations of Europe.[15] Within a few years of this, Marr's Japhetic family came to encompass all the indigenous pre-Indo-European languages of Eurasia, ranging over a swathe of territory "from the Pyrenees to Mesopotamia, if not further" (Marr, 1931b, p. 170). Thanks to a combination of opportunism, earnest conviction, and fortuity, Marr came to be one of the loudest voices in the contested field of Soviet linguistic theory and had a direct hand in such government projects as the introduction of a new *Abkhaz* alphabet.

Yet just as Schuchardt's study of the seemingly peculiar phenomenon of creolization, which was thought to occur within geographical and cultural limits, led to a general theory of the universality of language mixing, Marr's initially Japhetic phase, with its antagonism towards Indo-European languages, would eventually give way to a global theory in which mixing was universalized, freed from all temporal and spatial constraints. The vectors of exchange between the two linguists remain unclear, although the pivotal moment of transition in Marr's thinking tantalizingly coincided with his over praise of Schuchardt as a "lone wolf."[16] Yet in the absence of definitive proof as to what

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[15] "Japheth means 'width,' for from him were born the pagan nations, and because wide is the multitude of believers from among the gentiles" (Isidore of Seville, 2006, p. 163). See also Brandist (2015, p. 203).

[16] Marr corresponded with Schuchardt on the subject of Basque and its relationship with other Japhetic languages (Zaika, 2024, pp. 155-157). Although the correspondence (as far as I have seen) does not contain an exchange of ideas about language mixing per se or creoles, both linguists stood on the periphery of mainstream linguistics and contributed to a counter-current of thought.

Marr learned from Schuchardt, a comparable transition could be observed in their respective writings. At the final reckoning, the capacity for new creation that Schuchardt observed in the Americas dissolved the genetic purity of languages with established pedigrees and extant written corpuses, which represented the norm when set against the exceptionality of the New World. In the case of Marr, the Japhetic family began as an alternative to the triumphalist Indo-European model. Japhetic languages preserved, through their mixture, long-lost strata from the distant past. This feature set them apart from the marauding Indo-Europeans and their spiritual descendants in the form of mainstream comparative linguists, who rejected anything that did not fit within their genetic taxonomies. Yet in time this binary opposition was transcended by a global conception of language mixture and the perennial capacity for adaptation and syncretism shown by speaking communities even when faced with adverse circumstances.

Marr and Schuchardt shared a profound disagreement with mainstream comparative Indo-European linguistics. Marr rejected the Indo-European Stammbaum because it implied that language families were governed by genetic relations that existed at inception and then determined subsequent growth. In a Darwinian manner, the *Staummbaum* presented growth in terms of differentiation and specialization, limiting the possibility of convergence and hybridization. It implied that the essence of a language was crystallized at birth and was thus not amenable to intervention at a later date by its speakers. Marr claimed to have turned this model on its head:

> In Japhetic linguistics, the birth, growth and latter (or ultimate) attainment of human language can be pictured as an upright pyramid. From its broad base, which figures a prehistoric stage that was characterized by multiple mollusc-like embryonic languages, human language, passing through a series of typological transformations, surges towards the top, which is to say the single world language. In Indo-European linguistics, with its single proto-language, linguistic palaeontology is reduced to a pyramid standing on its head with its base in the air (Marr, 1934a, p. 31).[17]

Marr's Japhetic theory was structured according to the principle of convergent evolution, in which a single world language arose once the multiple, geographically dispersed languages completed the same progressive stadial evolution and melded

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[17] Also quoted by Allen (2022, p. 749).

together. The alternative 'upended' pyramid represented the way scholars conventionally viewed linguistic evolution: in terms of the descent of related languages from a single (Indo-European, Semitic, etc.) protolanguage, whereby the linguistic descendants inherited ("erebt," in Schleicher's terms) their defining traits from their common ancestor (Schleicher, 1853, p. 786). Despite Marr's characteristic brashness, his attack on the mainstream was not far removed from what Schuchardt (above) had written in criticism of the organicist view of language. Marr's comparisons between seemingly unrelated languages relied on the principle of convergence and the assertion that comparable phenomena could arise independently of one another without implying common descent. Schuchardt expressed a similar idea when denying the existence of a single ancestor for all creole languages (the monogenetic theory of creoles):

> When I speak of Negro-creole dialects, and to be specific five, corresponding to the five great colonial powers (...) I cannot be contradicted on the basis that there is no common Negro-creole from which they all descended. It is true that there is no divergence but parallelism; they are formed from different material according to the same plan and in the same style (Schuchardt, 1914a, p. vii).[18]

Indeed, historians of linguistics have grouped Marr and Schuchardt together in the camp of "dissident" linguists opposed to Indo-European orthodoxy (Abaev, 1960, p. 95).

Also similarly to Schuchardt, Marr supplemented the study of ancient languages with modern spoken languages, especially those that were neglected by scholarship. Exposure to demotic dialects helped Marr to envisage the linguistic unity of the Caucasus. According to one anecdote, while still struggling to get to grips with Armenian, which he was being taught formally by monks, Marr found he could understand the speech of Armenian peasants with relative ease. Their dialect seemed remarkably similar to Georgian, which led Marr to intuit a primordial connection between the two languages that later Indo-European influence over Armenian had managed to obscure (Alpatov, 2004, p. 17). This insight led him to argue that Armenian contained "a basic layer connecting it with the neighbouring Georgian language and influencing (…) the transformation of the undoubtedly strong Aryan layer in it."[19] Marr's view of Armenian

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[18] Also quoted by Holm (2004, p. 32).
[19] Nikolaj Marr, 'K voprosu o zadačakh armenovedenii' [1899], *Izbrannye raboty*, I (1933), pp. 16-22 (p. 19); as quoted and translated in Thomas (1957, p. 21).

had brought him into conflict with the comparative linguist Heinrich Hübschmann. Hübschmann had earned plaudits for his study of Armenian phonology, which led him to classify the language as its own separate branch of the Indo-European family tree, a position that it holds to this day (Schmitt, 1975, pp. 25-27). When they met in Strasbourg in 1894, Marr enraged Hübschmann by questioning his expertise (Thomas, 1957, p. 4). This was a fateful meeting, which may have shaped Marr's subsequent tendency to dismiss the work of linguists, especially those in Western Europe, who lacked first-hand knowledge with the languages they studied but relied on old textual sources.[20] When Marr came to publish his own grammar of Old Armenian, he prefaced it with an attack on the "theoretical abstraction" of comparative linguistics which failed to grasp language in its "local setting" (Marr, 1903, pp. xxx; xxxii). Marr's 1920 article "The Japhetic Caucasus and the Third Ethnic Element in the Formation of Mediterranean Culture" was his definitive statement on autochthonous languages, those most deeply rooted in their local setting. In this sweeping survey of the pre-Indo-European Mediterranean, Marr argued that Basque and the modern languages of the Caucasus were the missing 'Japhetic' link to a submerged and forgotten substrate. The value of those languages was that even as their form changed in response to material circumstances, "the original, psychologically superseded forms never disappeared from their living inventory, but survived up to now as deposits within currently existing Japhetic languages" (Marr, 1931a, p. 101). Marr hailed the speakers of these languages as conduits through time, despite history having obscured their ancestors' achievements:

> Like the mythical hero Atlas, the Japhetites brush the heavens with their head–their linguistic psychology–and are capable of thinking, speaking and creating in a manner commensurate with every epoch of human cultural history, the present day being no exception; with their torso [*tuloviščem*]–the morphological structure of their speech–they never lost contact with the prehistoric soil; on the contrary, they remain firmly grounded in it to this day, their feet have sent down roots, and they retain a bond, via an unbroken chain of transformations across a succession of periods, with the state of language that existed when animal speech first became human (Marr, 1931a, p. 101).

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[20] As one historian put it, "the details of their argument are not known, but it is tempting to see in this confrontation between a German scholar and an unknown native from the fringes of the Russian Empire a clash between a hegemonic German learning and a subaltern non-Western knowledge" (Leezenberg, 2014, p. 102).

The Japhetites preserved an unbroken bond to the distant past precisely because they adapted their languages to suit changing circumstances. Their rootedness to the soil also, as befitting their indigeneity within Europe, turned out to signal not that they were cut off from historical process, but conversely that, out of necessity to adapt and transform, they held the keys to the future. Yet this was also a reductive account, born out of resentment over historical injustices, that attributed certain desired linguistic traits to the Japhetites and denied these to the Indo-Europeans.

Over time, however, Marr modified his view and adopted positions closer to Schuchardt with respect to the ubiquity of linguistic mixture. One of Schuchardt's main innovations, as we saw before, was that he dissolved the distinction between creolised and non-creolised languages. This came about through his refusal to treat linguistic mixture as something peripheral to the 'normal' unfolding of languages. Schuchardt held that even unrelated languages could mix, and he treated linguistic mixture (*Sprachmischung*) as being so ubiquitous that it applied *within* languages ("even within the most homogeneous communicative community [*Verkehrsgenossenschaft*]") when groups of speakers of the same language adopted different forms from one another (Schuchardt, 1884, p. 136).[21] To begin with, however, Marr treated mixing as a Japhetic phenomenon first and foremost. He differentiated between grades of linguistic mixture in a manner that Schuchardt would have likely queried. Marr used an array of terms for language mixing that often seem interchangeable: most frequently '*skreščenie'* (crossing), but also '*gibridnost'* (hybridity), and occasionally '*metisacija,*' a cognate of the Spanish mestizaje. Evgenij Polivanov, himself one of the great tragic figures of this period of linguistics, applied some order to Marr's terminology. In a posthumously published dictionary of linguistic terms, Polivanov wrote that Marr introduced an "artificial" differentiation, assigning "'*gibridnost'* the meaning of crossing between unrelated languages, but the term '*metisacija,*' conversely, came to be used in the sense of the crossing of related linguistic systems (languages and dialects)" (Grigor'ev, 1960, p. 121). Marr did in fact refer to Armenian as a "hybrid Japhetic-Indo-European" language, and he described the crossing between Georgian, Mingrelian, Laz, and Svan "tribes" (all of which were then as now regarded as Kartvelian) as an instance of *metisacija*, stating that it led to the "inevitable crossing of their original tribal languages"

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[21] As quoted by Mücke (2013, p. 136).

(Marr, 2022a, p. 663). Marr dramatised the difference between these kinds of mixture in the 'Japhetic Caucasus' when narrating the end of the prelapsarian world:

> Across the entire known cultural world of the time, from the Caucasus and Asia Minor to the Iberian Peninsula, one language was spoken, the language of the Japhetic family; not yet fully separated from the Semites, the two had begun to diverge. Although the unity of the Japhetic world may have sustained an earlier blow, the blow which finished it off–the coup de grâce–came in the form of the Indo-European invasion, after which mixture and hybridization ensued, along with the birth of new crossed linguistic forms, and mutual comprehension was lost (Marr, 1931a, p. 121).

This absolutist view of Indo-European destruction favoured the harmonious '*metisacija*' of Japhetic mixing over the destructive hybridization of later contact and conquest with a linguistic other.

Within just a few years, however, Marr revised his theory so that Indo-European was no longer the incompatible language of a race of foreign marauders but a subsequent evolutionary stage within the global glottogonic process. This change in his thinking is indicated by a brief notice written in 1923:

> More obvious hybrids, such as, for example, the varieties of Armenian or, to a certain extent, the Albanian language, are not the embodiment [*voploščenie*] of a latter crossing between Indo-European with Japhetic languages, but are representatives of a transitional state at an intermediary stage between pure Japhetic and consummate [*soveršenimi*] Indo-European languages (Marr, 1936b, p. 185).

The 'consummate' nature of Indo-European with regards to Japhetic signalled what was at stake: where previously he had treated Japhetic and Indo-European as unrelated families, separated by genetic difference, Marr was now situating them as subsequent stages in a single evolutionary trajectory. Henceforth, Marr regarded Indo-European as an in situ typological transformation following on from the earlier Japhetic stage of language. The normative distinction between genetically distant and proximate languages, along with the types of mixture they could engage in, ebbed away. Marr signalled his new conception of mixture with two propositions: firstly, that "there is no such thing as an unmixed language," and secondly that an unmixed language would be a "weak being in the struggle for existence, doomed to die out" (Marr, 1931b, pp. 174-175).

The first of these propositions was a restatement *in nuce* of Schuchardt's distinctive position on language mixing.

**Conclusion**

Instead of being sporadic and catastrophic, linguistic mixture came to be understood as endemic and constant by Marr in his later theories. In this respect, he echoed Schuchardt, who was a rare ally from the world of Western linguistics. They each arrived at their positions from different starting points but in response to similar pressures. They were both well acquainted with substrate theory, although Schuchardt came to the realization that linguistic mixture is not always binary more quickly than Marr. For Schuchardt, mixture was not a question of two homogeneous but incompatible linguistic systems colliding, nor was it driven by an equally crude notion of race mixing. Well acquainted as he was with linguistic realities in the Americas and elsewhere, he knew not to draw hasty correlations between language and race. He also learned that it was through linguistic creativity that people transcended the givens of their circumstances. Marr learned a similar lesson, albeit somewhat later. He was committed to the idea that 'native speech' was a vehicle to liberate native populations, which he frequently referred to as embodying a primitive bond to the soil. This at times corresponded to an essentialized vision of them as noble savages. However, two factors mitigated this essentialism. Firstly, Marr thought that the 'primitiveness' of certain marginalized languages was a virtue.[22] Rather than a sign of stasis, of halted evolution, it was a portent of future linguistic hybridity on a global scale. Secondly, and more importantly, Marr's increasingly universalist understanding of mixture, according to which all languages, even those of the erstwhile Indo-European oppressors, were subject to mixture, blurred the lines between primitiveness and progress. The futurity with which Marr endowed the process of linguistic mixture makes him an important precursor to *créolité*. In both cases, it is the spirit of syncretism and ad hoc adaptation that triumphs over the obsession with lineage. The transmission of ideas from the Americas and the Soviet Union remains a topic in need of future exploration. The case of Marr shows that, even when the vectors of

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[22] "C'est de l'archaïsme qu'émane la lumière," in Sériot's formulation (2024, p. 202).

exchange cannot be fully pinned down, a comparable set of positions was articulated in multiple parts of the world that had been rendered peripheral by "atavistic" cultures, to borrow Glissant's term.

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**Research Data and Other Materials Availability**

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

**Reviews**

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [*Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies*] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

**Review I**

The article offers a valuable original contribution to the history of ideas in the domain of philosophy of language and methodology of linguistic studies. The author's command of the relevant data and scholarly literature is excellent. I definitely recommend the article for publication.

The principle subject of the article concerns the conceptual kinship between Nikolai Marr—a highly original and controversial Georgian-Russian-Soviet early twentieth-century linguist and cultural philosopher, and his better-known in the West Austrian contemporary, Hugo Schuchardt. Both thinkers have been acknowledged for their critique of the mainstream approach to language as a structure whose development proceeds according to quasi-natural universal "laws"; both highlighted the mixed character of all languages and nations, in defiance of the dominant ideology that insisted on their organic unity. While the rapport between the two scholars is well known as a matter of principle, the present study adds to it a new dimension that seems particularly important for a proper understanding of Marr's—still much-debated and controversial—ideas. In his studies, Marr operated primarily with Caucasian languages (plus Armenian and Persian), while Schuchardt's data base came primarily from indigenous languages of Central and South America. As the article shows convincingly, it was Marr's encounter with Schuchard's studies that widened the scope of his theory, which hitherto focused primarily on inter-lingual crossings in the Caucasus area.

The overheated ideological atmosphere of the first two decades of the twentieth century was driven by a sharp opposition between the "Western" world and its presumed counterpart, variously construed as "primitive" (Lévi-Brule), "non-European" (Whorf), "Eurasian" (Trubetskoi), or "Japhetic" (Marr). Within this binary framework, its former member was seen as founded on abstract principles of logic and structural patterns, while the latter associated with spontaneous and interactive creativity. As it has been argued in the present article, Schuchardt's influence helped Marr to overcome the antagonistic binarism of his early thought, whereby he claimed the crossings to be a privilege of a "non-Western" world, in favor of a universal vision the total cross-pollination between languages whose tenor was close to that of Schuchardt's principle of "creolization." Certainly, there were other factors that contributed to Marr's development, but the Schuchardt connection, explored in the article, was undoubtedly very important.

My only reservation concerns an issue that is reflected in the article's title. I understand that the topic of the "Soviet learning from the America" has a better chance to attract an immediate interest than a reference to little-known, despite their high historical significance, names and problems related to the linguistic thought of Russian and European modernism. Still, focusing the work this way may do disservice to its substantial content. True, Marr felt inspired by the Soviet program of the national and linguistic built-up and its active implementation in the 1920s and early 1930s. There was, however, bitter irony in the fact that exactly in the the 1930s-40s, at the time Marr's "new teaching about language" was canonized as "the only true" Marxist theory of language, Stalin's national policy gravitated to the unity and uniformity of "national languages" and their "cultures," under the auspices of "the great Russian people" and their language. It was the policy that severely persecuted any traces of what was deemed as "jargons" or local idiolects. Eventually, the incompatibility between what the Soviet "korenization" has eventually turned out (and what it essentially remains till our time) and the premises

of Marr's theory became so glaring as to prompt Stalin's personal intervention that resulted in a prolonged banishment not only of Marr's ideas but of any studies of sociology of language in the SU. When citing the Soviet national policy as a background of Marr's theories, one needs to "mind the gap" between its grandiloquent ideological declarations and practices, that promptly, with the advent of Stalin's time, turned into an unabashed cultural imperialism.

I believe that this issue concerns more certain rhetorical features of the author's narrative than the substantial meaning of his study, which, I reiterate is highly significant and original. I strongly recommend this work for publication. APPROVED.

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## Review II

The successful implementation of the idea of mestizaje through the respectful cultivation of national differences in the Americas and the USSR is an idealisation. That is, the harmonious coexistence of languages and cultures remained only in the realm of ideas. In practice, both in the Americas and in the USSR, indigenous peoples did not enjoy the same rights as the colonisers and found themselves in a culturally and politically marginalised position. Cultural hybridisation led to the silencing and erasure of indigenous cultures and languages. Thus, in Marr's description of Japhetic linguistics, at the top of the pyramid is the universal language that emerges as a result of language mixing. The same idea of a universal language can already be found in Aleksandr Bogdanov's novel *Red Star*. Furthermore, the dialogue between Soviet linguistics and that of the Americas proposed in the title does not hold up, since Marr's main interlocutor (according to the article), Schuchardt, does not represent the linguistic currents of the Americas. [The original title of the article was "What Soviet Linguistics learned from the Americas," *Editors' note*]. APPROVED WITH RESTRICTIONS

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## Review III

The article's proposal – to explore the linguistic theories of the Americas and the USSR, and particularly the theoretical legacy of Nikolai Marr – is both original and necessary. This perspective broadens the understanding of the transnational flows of political and cultural thought in the early 20th century, challenging traditional narratives that often overlook these theoretical strands. The article contributes to the debate on identities and languages, showing how Latin American concepts engage, albeit indirectly, with the thought of Soviet linguists. APPROVED.

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