

# Globalization and Diaspora

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"O Brave New World ..."  
Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

As James Caesar highlights in *Reconstructing America*,<sup>1</sup> the word "globalization" seems sometimes to be synonymous with "Americanization" or "Americanism," evoking negative images. Globalization may bring indigenous cultures to their death and cause national individualism to disappear into a shapeless muddle. On Americanism, Heidegger declared that it was "the future monstrosity of modern times." This would be homogenization, the rubbing out of cultural specificity, life in one universe, one dimension. Extremists like Alexandre Kohève take it further still. It would be the end of history. Third world nations, particularly the Caribbean countries, would be predestinated victims of such an order, without power in political or economic realms, only making the front page of newspapers during cataclysm and natural catastrophes like Hugo, George, and Mitch. The tiny island of Montserrat, never before known to the West, rose to international fame when its volcano *La Soufrière* began to erupt. Rwanda would be known for genocide, and the Congo for a civil war and the assassination of its leader.

I do not wholly share such strict pessimism. I do not fear a certain type of globalization. In the best case scenario, it means that the natural and linguistic borders of black communities across the world could expand. For many reasons, Paris has become a forum for communication and exchange. This paradox warrants some explanation. Paris was the capital of an immense colonial empire, a place where colonial functionaries undertook the carving up of Africa and the subjugation of millions of Africans. That did not, however, prevent Dahomean Kojo Touvalou-Quenum from designating it as the promised land of the children of the *Cham* race. In a

speech entitled "Paris, cœur de la race noire" [Paris, Heart of the Black Race], published in 1924 as an article in *La Revue des Continents* [Review of the Continents], he expressed his desire for the French capital to become the Babel of the black world. French colonialism and primitivism combined strangely to bring about a vision of black unity. It is well known that in Paris, literary personalities as famous as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Claude MacKay, Dr. Jean Price-Mars, the young Césaire, Senghor, and René Maran would meet. It is also known that the Trinidadian George Padmore, future father of Pan-Africanism, spent long years in Paris and met Sudanese Garan Kouyaté, editor of *La Race Nègre* [The Negro Race] (1931/32). Alan Locke, with the help of René Maran, discovered the younger generation of francophone students there. As a student in December 1927, Jane Nardal wrote to Alan Locke, then a professor at Howard University, requesting permission to translate his 1925 collection of essays, *The New Negro*, under the title *Le Nouveau Noir*. She had suggested the project to well-known French publisher Payot and proposed that her sister Paulette, an English student, be responsible for the translation. Locke agreed and even offered to write a new introduction for the French version. Unfortunately, the project never materialized. Despite this failure, Paulette Nardal became the most important cultural mediator between the writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the francophone students who would eventually form the core of the black movement. With her friend Dr. Léo Sajou, she founded *La Revue du Monde Noir* [The Black World Review] (1931/32), which became the center of black cultural activity in Paris. It is unfortunate indeed that the crucial roles played by Jane and Paulette Nardal in the first efforts at black culture globalization have now been forgotten. A young American researcher, Brent Edwards,<sup>2</sup> reminds us that Paulette Nardal complained bitterly of this marginalization in a letter to Jacques Hymans: "Césaire and Senghor took our ideas. They expressed them with a lot of panache and brio. We were just women. We showed the men the way."

That is the very marginalization that Suzanne Césaire endured a few years later. Despite her brilliant contribution to the journal *Tropiques* (1940/44), critics minced no words saying that she was merely expressing the ideas of her husband.

I consider these different relationships, the friendship between René Maran and Alan Locke, the relationship between Padmore and Kouyaté, the letter from Jane Nardal to Alan Locke and her numerous articles in *La Dépêche Africaine* (1928/32), as the first waves of a positive globalization. At the time, the black peoples were not attempting to solve their problems individually. Quite the opposite – they were pushing for transnationalization of the black culture as the sole solution. As Jane Nardal wrote in *La Dépêche Africaine* (1928): “In our time, the barriers that existed between countries are falling. Is it the diversity of the borders, customs duty, prejudice, customs, religion, and languages that will bring on the realization of this dream? We hope so. Negroes of all origins and nationalities feel that, somewhere, in spite of their differences and everything else, they belong to one single race.” What is Negritude? What is Pan-Africanism? If they are not forms of globalization, they were certainly a project for the black peoples to assume their full identity and active solidarity. At that time, all voices were unanimous. Only Frantz Fanon<sup>3</sup> showed any reservation: “There are no two cultures alike ... The blacks in Chicago only resemble those in Tanganyika in the measure that they are defined with respect to whites.”

But no one paid attention to this warning and the black race was declared sacrosanct. However, Frantz Fanon was right. This notion of race that was so blinding was in fact a legacy from the pseudo-scientific theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Buffon, Raynal, and, later, the illustrious Comte de Gobineau had divided humanity into subgroups, using color as the essential classification criteria. For colonial purposes, the Indian and the African had been placed in the last ranks of the human family. There were even discussions to determine whether the black man was an ape or a human. This did not prevent the black intellectuals, in their exile or their travels, from being open toward their host countries: what would Claude MacKay's *Banjo* (1929) be without its references to Marseilles? Or Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) without its references to Copenhagen? Similarly, the Marxism that so many black intellectuals embraced so devoutly was only the dream of globalization of a world without borders, without race, but class, as its foundation. Calling the oppressed of all

nations to unite! Thus, during the first quarter of the twentieth century, the intellectuals of the Caribbean, Africa, and America were obsessed with dreams of transnationalization and globalization. It was the political evolution of the African nations that put an end to their aspirations. Around 1960, the majority of African countries had gained independence. Many intellectuals, like Léopold Sédar Senghor, who had been the driving force behind Parisian cultural life, returned to their homes to take on key roles. Each country retreated behind its borders, every one thinking of individual development and preservation of its culture. One exception, Kwame Nkrumah, remembered Garvey's Africanism and bestowed a tricolor flag on his country: yellow, black, green. More importantly, he invited W.B. Dubois to live in Ghana, offering it to him as his second nation. In the Caribbean, the situation was much more complex. Cuba seemed to be victorious over imperialism. The anglophone islands became independent. They attempted to pursue the dream of unity, but the Federation dissolved in 1962. As for the francophone islands, they became overseas departments in 1946, signifying an increase in economic, cultural, and political dependence on France. For all these reasons, the dream of Pan-Africanism died. Africans fought for the rehabilitation of their traditional cultures, languages, and religions. However, all their so-called necessary efforts can be considered as barriers to transnationalization. Consequently, certain sections saw the erosion of the notion of race in favor of that of culture. Today, the Martinique movement toward Creolity is a good example of this separation from Africa in a diasporic culture and emphasis on the plantation as a birthplace.

Globalization in the Third Millennium is perhaps a means of reviving the lost dream of unity. The migration trends provide foreshadowing. Demographers tell us that migration is the dominant tendency at the end of this century. The causes of this global phenomenon are numerous: some are fleeing dictatorships and genocide; others, poverty and misery; others, still religious fanaticism. West Indians and Africans no longer move only toward the colonial metropolis. They move to any country where they have hope of surviving. I refuse to embark upon any discussion of semantics. Must these migratory communities be called "dias-

pora"? I concur with Stuart Hall's declaration that the concept of diaspora includes new hybrid and syncretic identities, as well as new multicultural spaces. Stuart Hall writes: "Diaspora does not refer to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must return at all costs. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew through transformation and differences."<sup>4</sup>

Migration is the cause of the growing number of families that have come together on foreign land as a result of the second generation, composed of individuals born outside their parents' homeland and unable to identify with it. It is unfair to consider, as is done too often, the migrating communities as dysfunctional ones, living in no man's land, without roots and embodying a total confusion of identity. As Marie-Céline Lafontaine sums it up, these communities are summarily imprisoned in a binary opposition: "They seem to be either imitators or guardians of their heritage."<sup>5</sup>

I maintain, however, that migrating communities are a place of enrichment and the source of extraordinary creativity. The music of the Caribbean was revived in New York, Paris, and London. This observation not only applies to music. In her essay *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes: "The Aztecas del Norte compose the largest single tribe or nation of Anishebeg (Indians) found in the United States. Today, some call themselves Chicanos and see themselves as people whose true homeland is Aztlán, the U.S. Southwest. The U.S.-Mexican border is a place where the third world grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of the two merging to form a third country."<sup>6</sup>

A recent study in the *New York Times* revealed that an increasing number of men and women refuse the strict black/white American classification and see themselves as belonging to a mixed race. This signifies that the value of miscegenation, or racial interbreeding, that was considered during the time of slavery and colonial rule to be the worst form of evil and disorder in the natural social order, has been reasserted. A métis is no longer perceived as an inferior being, but rather the crucible of a thousand cultural values. Mexican poet and philosopher José Vasconcelos rejects the doctrine of a

pure white American race and envisions “una raza mestiza,” a cosmic, fifth race embracing all of the so-called races of the world.<sup>7</sup>

Just consideration must be paid to Léopold Sédar who was so disparaged during his time. He drew our attention to the fact that racial interbreeding is not simply a biological fact and that through colonialism, we “had all become cultural métis.”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, today’s scholars, taking an opposite tack to the questionable, elaborate theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, affirm that they do not know how to define race. In 1950, a group including some of the world’s greatest scientists arrived at the following conclusion: “Biological studies support a universal ethic based on fraternity.” It is perhaps time to renounce such an obsolete vocabulary and seek new definitions of humanity.

The individuals who are part of the second generation, the cultural métis, are coming on the literary scene: in France, Canada, and the United States, writers like Caryl Phillips from St. Kitts and a remarkable profusion of novelists, Edwige Danticat from Haiti, Cristina García from Cuba, Esmeralda Santiago and Rasario Ferré from Puerto Rico. Other writers – Édouard Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo from Cuba, Émile Ollivier from Haiti, Olive Senior from Jamaica, and myself – have chosen exile for reasons that are not wholly their own. In the fiction they write, there is a certain widening of the referential frame through the representation of several places. The characters are as diverse as their referential frames. In some cases, like *The Nature of Blood* by Caryl Phillips (1996), the characters are not black. The hero of the novel is a Jew and Caryl Phillips dares to draw a parallel between *Middle Passage* and the Holocaust. It is far from the period when Jean Metellus shocked his readers by situating the intrigue of *Une Eau-forte* among the Swiss. Édouard Glissant’s novel entitled *Tout-Monde* (1997) is a lyrical treatise on the creolization of the world. In my first novel, *Desirada* (1997), I describe three generations of women. The grandmother, Nina, never leaves Désirade, the tiny island where she was born. Her daughter, Reynalda, emigrates to Paris during the time of the *Bureau de Migration des Départements d’Outre-Mer* (BUMIDOM, The Overseas Department Immigration Bureau). The granddaughter grows up in the sad confines of the Parisian banlieue, emigrates to the United States, and settles in

Boston. These three women illustrate the evolution of the Caribbean peoples. Yesterday, miniscule communities surrounded by the sea, isolated island dust, and today, nomadic people recreating the land of their origins wherever they can. Being a Caribbean or an African is perhaps no longer a question of geographical origin, ethnicity, language, or color. The main contribution of the writers of the second generation is the elimination of the binary opposition between “the outside country” and “the inner country,” the “colonial language” and the “maternal language,” that are raging in third world countries. Until a very recent time, the essentialism of language was a credo – like that of race. Every one had in mind the famous phrase that the Bishop of Avila addressed to Queen Isabelle of Castile: “Language is a better tool than an Empire.” It was commonplace to believe that a language contains a specific vision of the world and thus, to impose a language upon an individual or a people, would bring terrible consequences. The work of Mikhail Bakhtin brought the theory of the hybridization of language to light. He wrote: “What is hybridization? It is the mixture of two social languages at the heart of one enunciation, between linguistic consciousness separated by periods in history, social classes or other factors.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, Bakhtin teaches that all language is polyphonic. Edwige Danticat and Cristina García deliberately chose to write in English rather than French and Creole, illustrating this hybridization, polyphony, the power every language has to be a model of ethnicity, personal history, and the speaker’s gender. They bring the debate on the authenticity of a novel’s elements to a conclusion. In the French Antilles, the language of authenticity is certainly known to be Creole. One of the criticisms made about Aimé Césaire deals with his real or supposed contempt for Creole. By the same token, the Kenyan Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o calls for the English language to be dropped in favor of African languages.<sup>10</sup> Is this debate worth pursuing? What does the word “authentic” mean? There is no authentic fiction since fiction is never more than the representation of the world by one single individual. Or perhaps all fiction is authentic since it translates the complexity of the speaking subjects.

More seriously, novelists question the very nature of identity: what becomes if it, as I say, no longer rests on the solid pillars of

language, color of skin, or land of origin? Is it not simply a matter of choice dictated by certain subjective values? The image and place of women, relationship to invisibility, and conception of death?

I am fully aware of certain objections to globalization. For now, the globalization of the Third Millennium has nothing to do with what black intellectuals dreamt of at the beginning of this century. It does not mean that the prejudice and complexities that lie right at the expansion of the world's borders will be abandoned. Rather, it is the confrontation between the technologically advanced and the less developed. It will be the imposition of values by the first on the second, or a complete absence of values, a rerouting of the weak who were unable to preserve their cultural values.

The face of Africa is changing imperceptibly and, as Malcolm X once said: "If the face of Africa changes, the condition of blacks around the world will change." Despite terrible difficulties, in central Africa, Mozambique, South Africa, new powers are emerging. Even in western Africa, regimes are growing less dictatorial. In the Antilles, Martinique – a bastion of colonialism – has elected its first independent deputy. Provided that we are able to contribute, globalization will perhaps signify the arrival of a more open world, where the concepts of race, nationality, and language that have divided us for so long will be defined in other terms, and concepts of hybridization and interbreeding will take on new signification. Globalization can perhaps be equated to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. I do not believe naively that all our problems will fade and that, according to the words of John Lennon, "the world will be one." But I am convinced that with the help of our creators and intellectuals supported by a different generation of politicians, we will succeed in overcoming the challenges of the future.

*Translated from the French by Jill Cairns*

## Notes

1. James Caesar, *Reconstructing America* (New Haven, 1998), p. 15.
2. Brent Edwards, *Black Globality: The International Shape of Black Culture* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1997), p. 168.
3. Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris, 1961), p. 173.
4. Stuart Hall, *Culture, Globalisation and the World System* (London, 1991), p. 52.
5. Marie-Céline Lafontaine, "Le carnaval de l'autre," in *Les Temps modernes* (Paris, 1983): 2126-73.
6. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands - La Frontera* (San Francisco, 1987), p. 1.
7. José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica : Misión de la Raza Ibero-Americana* (Mexico, 1961), p. 78.
8. Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté I* (Paris, 1964), p. 16.
9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, 1981), p. 270.
10. See *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London, Nairobi, New Hampshire, 1981, 1986).