

O brave new world.

by Maryse Conde

Globalization often has negative connotations and is often associated with Americanism. Third world countries, especially those in the Caribbean seemed most concerned that the homogenization will suppress their culture since they lack economic and political power. However, less developed nations should use globalization to their benefit perhaps to experience revitalization.

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The word "globalization" is sometimes equated with Americanism or Americanization, as James Ceaser puts it in *Reconstructing America* (15), and calls to mind negative images. It is supposed to have the effect of suppressing authentic culture and subsuming everything into one vast, boundless mass. It is, as Heidegger puts it in reference to Americanism, "the emerging monstrousness of modern times." It is regarded as homogenization, one-dimensional life, the effacement of difference. For some extremists, like Alexandre Kojève, it will be the end of history. The countries of the Third World, especially the Caribbean countries, seem to be the most concerned with this future since they lack political and economic power. They make headlines only when there is a hurricane, an earthquake, or other catastrophe. Little Montserrat in the Caribbean, unknown to the majority of Westerners, emerged from obscurity when it was threatened by the volcanic eruption of the Soufriere. Rwanda, when there was a genocide and a counter-genocide. The Congo, when there was a civil war and when a dictator was deposed.

I don't quite share these negative opinions. Globalization does not frighten me. For me it means reaching out beyond national and linguistic borders both in actual exchanges and transatlantic influences and in the expressive imagination of diasporic black communities. A certain measure of globalization was in fact initiated after the Second World War when black America, Africa, and the Caribbean came into close contact in Paris. For many reasons, Paris had become the ideal space for exchange and communication. The part played by Paris in the rediscovery of Africa is no small paradox. Paris was the capital of a great colonial empire. A place where French officials supervised the subjugation of millions of black Africans. However, this did not prevent the Dahomean Kojo Touvalou from depicting Paris as the Promised Land of the "race of Ham." In a speech entitled "Paris, Heart of the Black Race," later published as an article in *Les Continents*, 1924, he asked that the capital become the

Babel of the Black World. French colonialism and primitivism paradoxically combined to foster a vision of Pan-African unity. In Paris, as we all know, literary personalities as diverse as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, Dr. Jean Price-Mars, young Césaire and Senghor, the African activist Tovalou-Houénou, and René Maran, the colonial administrator in Central Africa, met. We know that the Trinidadian George Padmore, the father of Pan-Africanism, spent many years in Paris and rubbed shoulders with the Sudanese Garan Kouyaté, the editor of *La Race Nègre*. Alan Locke, through René Maran, met the younger generation of francophone students in Paris. In December 1927 Jane Nardal, a Martinican student at the Sorbonne, wrote Alan Locke at Howard University in Washington, DC, requesting permission to translate his 1925 collection of essays, *The New Negro*, into French as *Le nouveau noir*. She had proposed the project to the well-known Parisian publisher Payot and noted that her sister Paulette, who had a degree in English from the same Sorbonne, would be the translator. Locke responded favorably, even offering to write a new introduction for the French version. Unfortunately, the project was never carried out. In spite of this failure, Paulette Nardal became the most important cultural intermediary between the Harlem Renaissance writers and the francophone university students who were to become the core of the Negritude movement. Together with her Haitian friend Léon Sajou she founded *La revue du Monde Noir* (1931-32), a French/English bilingual literary journal that became a focus point for African diasporic arts and the growing movement of African and Caribbean intellectuals in Paris. It is a great pity that the major roles of Jane and Paulette Nardal in the globalization of black culture are unduly forgotten in literary history. Brent Edwards reminds us in "Black Globality: The Intellectual Shape of Black Intellectual Culture" that Paulette complained bitterly in a letter to Jacques Hymans: "Césaire and Senghor took up the ideas tossed out by us and expressed them with more flash and brio. We were but women. We blazed the trail for men" (168).

I consider these diverse elements, René Maran's and Alan Locke's friendship, George Padmore's and Garan Kouyaté's relationship, Jane's letter to Alan Locke and her numerous articles in *La Dépêche Africaine* (1928-32), as some of the first acts of a certain positive globalization.

O brave new world.

Back then, black people had no intention of solving individually the problems of their specific countries but looked towards the transnationalization of black culture as a solution. As Jane Nardal put it in *La Depeche Africaine* (1928): "In the post-war period, the barriers that had existed between countries are being lowered or are being pulled down. Will the diversity of frontiers, tariffs, prejudices, customs, religions and languages, ever allow the realization of this project? We would like to hope so.... Negroes of all origins and nationalities with different customs and religions vaguely sense that they belong, in spite of everything, to a single and same race."

What was Negritude, what was Pan-Africanism if not forms of globalization, the implied project of a complete identity and an active solidarity among the black peoples? At the time, all voices were unanimous. The only dissenting one was Fanon's who stated in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1973): "There are no two strict identical cultures..... The Negroes of Chicago only resemble the Nigerians or the Tanganyikans insofar as they are all defined in relation to the whites."

But nobody paid attention to his warning and Race was declared sacred. In fact, Fanon was right. The notion of Race is, in fact, a legacy of 18th- and 19th-century pseudoscientific theories. Buffon, de Raynal, and later the illustrious count of Gobineau divided mankind into its different subgroups, using color or race as the initial criterion for the classification. For colonial reasons, the Native American, the black man, the African were placed at the bottom of the human family. There was even some discussion as to whether the black man should be categorized as belonging to the species of the ape or the human race.

Such involvement with Race did not mean that the black intellectuals of that time were indifferent to the influences of their host country. On the contrary. What would Claude McKay's *Banjo* (1929) be without reference to Marseilles? What would Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* be without the references to Copenhagen?

In the same way, Marxism, embraced enthusiastically by the majority of the black intellectuals, was little else but the dream of a world without borders whose foundation was no longer Race but Class. The lower class, the oppressed, should unite. So, during the first quarter of the 20th century, the minds of the black intellectuals, Caribbean, African, and American alike, were haunted by dreams of internationalization and globalization based first on color, then on a common exploitation of their people. It is the political evolution of the African colonies which shattered these efforts. Around the 1960s, the majority of the African countries gained independence. A good many intellectuals

who were a driving force in the cultural life of Paris, like Leopold Sedar Senghor, returned home to occupy prominent political positions. Each country retreated behind its borders. Each focused on its individual development and the preservation of its culture. The only notable exception was Kwame N'Krumah, the first president of Ghana, who remembered Marcus Garvey's Africanism and gave his country a three-colored flag: yellow, black, and green. He even invited W. Du Bois to live in Accra as his second country. In the Caribbean, the situation was more complex. Cuba seemed to achieve a victory over imperialism. The English-speaking islands became independent, one after the other. They tried to pursue the dream of unity, but their Federation of the West Indies collapsed in 1962. As for the French-speaking islands, in 1946 they were termed French Overseas Departments, which meant in reality that their colonial status did not change. Departmentalization, as it was called, deepened France's cultural, economic and political hold over the islands. For all these reasons, Pan-Africanisms could no longer be the order of the day. The Africans nations as well as the Caribbean islands fought for the rehabilitation of their traditional cultures, their traditional languages, and their traditional religions. All these endeavors which seemed necessary can, however, be regarded as so many barriers to transnational unity. As a consequence, over the years one could perceive the decline of the all-powerful notion of race and its replacement by the notion of culture. Today, the Martinican literary movement of Creolite is the illustration of this marginalization of the image of Africa in a Caribbean culture and the focus on the plantation as the birthplace of a Caribbean society.

Maybe globalization is a way to return to a shattered dream of unity? The demographers inform us that throughout the world, migration is the dominant factor at the end of the millennium. The causes of this mass phenomenon are multiple. Some flee dictatorship and genocide at home. Others, poverty and starvation. Yet others, religions fanaticism. Caribbeans as well as Africans no longer migrate towards their traditional metropolises. They settle in any country where their survival is guaranteed. We shall not engage here in a semantic discussion regarding the term "diasporic" to designate these migrant communities. We agree with Stuart Hall when he says that the notion of diaspora implies places where new hybrid or syncretic identities as well as multicultural spaces exist. "Diaspora," writes Stuart Hall in *Culture, Globalization and the World System*, "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"

O brave new world.

(52).

Migrations have caused a major increase in the number of families being formed on foreign soil. This in turn has resulted in what is usually called the second generation, that is to say, people born outside of the places of origin of their parents and who cannot fully identify with them. It is unfair to see, as is usually the case, all migrant communities as dysfunctional communities, living in limbo, having no roots and no means of expressing a confused identity. As Marie-Celine Lafontaine, a Guadeloupean critic, puts it in *Les Temps Modernes*, those communities are summarily imprisoned in a binary opposition: "They appear either as servile imitators or as mere keepers of heritage" (2126-73).

I maintain, on the contrary, that migrations could be a cause for enrichment. That the migrant communities can be the seat of an extraordinary creativity. Everybody would agree, for example, that Caribbean music has been revitalized by Caribbean immigration in New York, Paris, and London with the emergence of salsa, zouk, and ragga. In recent years, the Fugees have made their mark. This does not apply only to music. Gloria Anzaldua wrote in an essay entitled *Borderlands*: "The Aztecas del Norte compose the largest single tribe or nation of Anishinabeg (Indians) found in the United States today.... some call themselves Chicanos and see themselves as people whose true homeland is Aztlan, the US Southwest" (1). The US-Mexican border, she continues, is a place where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds: "And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country" (3). A recent survey in *The New York Times* revealed that an ever-increasing minority of men and women refuse the strict US classification of Black versus White and see themselves as belonging to mixed races. This means that metissage and miscegenation, which in the days of slavery, in the days of colonial control, were regarded as the ultimate evil, are now valorized. The metis is no longer seen as an inferior being, a disorder both in the order of society and Nature, but as the pool of many cultural values. The Mexican philosopher Jose Vasconcelos in *La Raza Cosmica: Mision de la Raza Ibero-Americana* is opposed to the policy of racial purity that white America practices and envisages "una raza mestiza," a cosmic race, a fifth race, as he puts it, embracing the four major races of the world (78). Now, we must remember Leopold Sedar Senghor. He warned us that metissage and miscegenation are not only matters of blood or ethnicity and coined the expression "Metissage culturel" in *Liberte* 1 (116). At the time his message was not welcome. However, we now realize that he was right and that culturally, we are all metis. On the other hand, a new school of scientists keeps repeating that they have no idea

what race is. In 1950, a group of the world's leading scientists came to the conclusion: "Biological studies lend support to the ethic of universal brotherhood." Therefore, maybe it is high time that we abandon an obsolete vocabulary and look for new definitions of human collectivities.

The people termed as second or third generation, i.e., the "metis culturels," are making their appearance on the literary scene. In France, in England, in Canada, in the US, writers, brought up outside of the country of their parents, like Caryl Phillips from St. Kitts, Neil Bissoondath from Trinidad, Edwige Danticat from Haiti, Cristina Garcia from Cuba, to name but a few, are expressing themselves through fiction. Other writers like Edouard Glissant, Olive Senior, Emile Ollivier, Antonio Benitez-Rojo, or myself have deliberately chosen to live far from home. What we notice through their writing is first of all a widening of horizons as the setting of their novels shuttles between different world locations. Secondly, the characters that they portray are as diverse as the settings of their novels. Sometimes they are not even black. In *The Nature of Blood* (1996) Caryl Phillips's main character is a Jew. Thus, under the pen of a Caribbean writer, the Holocaust is equated with the Middle Passage. *Tout-Monde* (1997) as goes the title of Edouard Glissant's last book, which is a treatise on what he calls the creolization of the world. In my last novel, entitled *Desirada* (1997), I portrayed three generations of Caribbean women. The grandmother never leaves her home. She was born and is bound to die on her tiny island of La Desirade off the coast of Guadeloupe. The mother migrates to Paris in the '70s at the height of the French Caribbean migrations to France. The daughter, brought up in the dismal Parisian suburbs, in turn migrates to the US and settles in Boston. Those three women illustrate the evolution of the Caribbean people: from a secluded, easily classifiable community to a nomadic people, creating a world of its own wherever it finds itself. Maybe to be a Caribbean or an African is no longer a matter of the place where one is born, the color of one's skin, and the language that one speaks. The major contribution of this new generation of writers living in exile is to eliminate the opposition between "colonial language" and "mother tongue." Up to recent years, the essentialism of language, like the essentialism of Race, was a widely held belief. Everybody had in mind the celebrated advice given by the Bishop of Avila to Queen Isabella of Castile in 1492: "Language is a perfect instrument of empire."

It used to be a commonplace of Romantic thinking that "each language embodies a view of the world, particularly its own." Therefore, it was thought that to impose a language upon a people resulted in inflicting an indelible trauma through an intimate aggression. Researchers like Mikhail Bakhtin in *Dialogic Imagination*, on the contrary,

O brave new world.

had advanced the theory of the hybridity of language. "What is hybridization?" he writes. "It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated by one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by any other factor" (270). In other words, Bakhtin describes how any language is double-voiced. Edwige Danticat, Cristina Garcia by deliberately choosing to write in English, instead of French, Creole, or Spanish, illustrate this hybridity of language, this power of any language to model itself according to gender, ethnicity, and personal history. At the same time, these writers may well put an end to the endless debate which has been raging in the Third World countries for so many years. In the French Caribbean, what is the language of an "authentic" fiction: Creole or French or Creolized French? We know that for some writers the answer is Creole. One of the main criticisms facing Aime Cesaire is the fact that he never wrote in Creole and even seemed to despise this language. In Africa, what is the language of an "authentic" novel? The former colonial language or one of the African languages? Is it really important? All the writers living outside of the countries by freely choosing their mode of expression raise another important question. What is the meaning of the word "authentic"? Maybe, there is no authentic fiction. Maybe, all fictions are authentic since they are the reflection of an author's inner self.

They force us to question the nature of identity itself. What is identity, if it is not defined as we have said, by the place of birth, the color of the skin, and language? One wonders if an identity is not simply a matter of choice, of a personal decision based on the possession of certain inner values: a certain image of women, a belief in the family, a certain relationship to oneself, to others, and to the invisible world around as well as an attitude towards death.

I can hear your objections. Mine is an idealistic viewpoint. Today's globalization is very different from what I dream of. It is not exactly what the black intellectuals of the beginning of the century intended. It is not the abandonment of certain prejudices and narrow concepts. On the contrary, it brings into forced contact technologically advanced countries and communities with less developed nations. To take the example of the USA, the relationship between the migrant communities and the American population is unequal. Too often the migrant communities are economically deprived. They are sometimes badly housed, surviving with difficulty in the poorer districts of the big cities. They suffer from racism, loneliness, and marginalization. They are an easy prey to despair. Under such circumstances, for how long can they preserve any cultural specificity or create new cultural forms since culture may be regarded as a luxury for those

whose material needs are satisfied? For now long can they resist complete assimilation or annihilation? I am not trying to convince anybody. My answer is based upon an individual faith. The face of Africa is changing. Stronger powers are emerging, especially in Central Africa, and the visit of President Clinton is a sure sign of this wind of change. "If Africa changes," said Malcolm X, "the fate of the black man throughout the world will change." It is changing under our very eyes. Globalization can not only be controlled but used to our benefit. It may become the creation of a universe where the notions of race, nationality, and language, which for so long have divided us, are re-examined and find new expressions; where the notions of hybridity, metissage, multiculturalism are fully redefined. I see the mapping of a new world, a brave new world, to quote Miranda in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. I don't foresee the end of all conflicts and tensions. I don't believe naively that the world will be one. However, I am convinced that with the help of the creators, writers, musicians, and dancers, backed by a new generation of politicians, it will be possible to overcome the challenge of the future.

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O brave new world.

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