

## INTRODUCTION

### The Second-Generation Caribbean Diaspora

In a 1985 public lecture in Toronto, Canada, the Barbadian-born George Lamming told the crowd, “Wherever you are, outside of the Caribbean, it should give you not only comfort, but a sense of cultural obligation, to feel that you are an important part of the Caribbean as external frontier.”<sup>1</sup> Lamming’s off-center Caribbean, this extendable Caribbean frontier resulting from a postcolonial and global era of geographical porousness, is today not a new concept. Suffice it to say that Little Haiti in Miami, the Antillean Sarcelles in the Parisian suburbs, and the Haitian diasporic community of Flatbush in Brooklyn attest to the viability of a Caribbean world outside of the archipelago. This book, however, does not address the external frontier of the Caribbean diasporic community of, let us say, Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* or of Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*. The goal of this study is rather to bring attention to a new, more controversial voice from the Caribbean diaspora: that of the Caribbean *individual* writing outside of both the internal and external Caribbean frontiers. *Creole Renegades* looks at immigrant writers who had to—more or less controversially—leave their native environment and, as a consequence, relate to their community from a questionable distance as they reassessed the assumed cultural obligation imposed by their Caribbean, and more broadly, black diasporic cultural background.

The concept of diaspora, in the context of the black diaspora, suggests today a sense of diffraction, which goes against the ancestral use of the word evoking a centripetal compulsion through a desire for reunification. *Diaspora*, the Greek for “scattering,” initially referred to Hellenistic Jews severed from Palestine and living in exile. In the seventeenth century, the word extended to the exiled condition of the Huguenots, the Armenians, and the Palestinians. From the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, the Middle Passage

initiated the black African diaspora, which consisted of Africans involuntarily shipped to the New World as part of the triangular slave trade. *Diaspora* traditionally implied a binary perspective: the land of asylum on the one hand and the home left behind on the other. The longing to return “home,” which is inherent in most initial diasporas, offered a teleological and homogeneous perception of migration. But with time, in the case of the black African diaspora, the first (transatlantic) wave of migration gave way to a second wave primarily located in the United States, and the result is a stratified diasporic community. As Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur point out:

This early transatlantic African diaspora resulted in numerous fractured diasporas in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century, as black Africans migrated from south to north in North America and across the Western hemisphere—from Port au Prince to Montréal, from Kingston to London and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1990s, scholars started to focus on the exponential growth of the black diaspora, “scattering” gradually becoming synonymous with “seeding.” In much the same process, diaspora has grown—to use Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s terminology—“molecular,” engaged as it is in a process of becoming and heterogeneity. Stuart Hall draws attention to the fact that diaspora must be defined, not as “an essence of purity,” but rather as “the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity.”<sup>3</sup> As diasporic phenomena become increasingly scattered, the idea of unity in spite of, and certainly because of, primal uprootedness turns out to be obsolete. To put it simply, in its newly perceived diffractive nature, diaspora is, paradigmatically, tantamount to creolization. As Gilroy says, diaspora means “like a number of other key concepts that have been deployed to do parallel work—hybrid, border, creolization, *mestizaje*, and even locality.”<sup>4</sup> More recently, Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur have confirmed Gilroy’s view writing that “like the critical terms *rhizome*, *créole*, *creolization*, *hybridity*, *heterogeneity*, *métis*, and *métissage*, then, diaspora has emerged as an internal critique of . . . binarisms.”<sup>5</sup> The emergence of an ever-growing second-generation diaspora—what Braziel and Mannur refer to as “fractured diasporas”—complicates the idea of home. In his 1994 article “Diasporas,” James Clifford viewed the erosion of memory as a contributory factor to the loss of a sense of connection to the past home. “This sense of connection must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing.”<sup>6</sup> But the connection to the homeland and the pressure of not forgetting the original home are anti-

quated assets when the diasporic home itself is said to be diffractive, unsettling, and creolized. Initially severed from Africa, and more recently moving toward northern destinations in America, the modern black diaspora in the New World necessarily holds a stratified perception of the “prior home.”

Though arguably diffractive, the Caribbean diaspora has also been engaged, paradoxically enough, in a slow process of territorialization over the course of the twentieth century, which has grounded once dispersed peoples into rooted communities in spite of the lingering effect of colonization. The second-generation Caribbean diaspora works as a counterforce to the reterritorialization of the prior generation. The second-generation diaspora, as it needs to be understood within the context of this book, is the one that is currently molecular; it *always already* pushes delineated—both interior and external—frontiers. The traditional sense of diaspora is connected to *minority*, two concepts that presuppose the idea of people from a common background sticking together in a situation of geographical and cultural estrangement. Hannah Arendt, who coined the word *minority* back in the 1950s, wrote that post–World War II European minorities “never reached the stage of national freedom and self-determination to which colonial peoples already aspired and which was being held out to them.”<sup>7</sup> And indeed, unlike minorities in nation-states, the first-generation Caribbean diaspora today evokes some sense of national freedom, self-determination, and territorialization. As the Barbadian Edward Brathwaite says, “Creolization (despite its attendant imitations and conformities) provided the conditions for and possibility of local residence.”<sup>8</sup> Even when it comes to the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, despite an enduring sense of alienation initiated by their departmentalization (1946), the two islands have reached a relative sense of archipelagic domiciliation.<sup>9</sup> No doubt, the Caribbean identity is still deeply shaped by the slavery that initiated its diasporic history, but it is safe to say that it has become, on some islands more than others, a domiciliated diasporic identity. Uprootedness is still a pertinent topic today, particularly in literature, but it applies more accurately to the second-generation Caribbean diasporic subject who lives alone, both outside the archipelago and outside Europe. When it comes to Caribbean literature, one tends to overlook the fact that Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire chose to reside neither in the Caribbean nor in the *métropole* while writing their monumental political testaments. Fanon’s 1961 *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 2001) was written in Tunisia, while Césaire drafted his 1939 epic poem *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, 2001) in Dalmatia, Croatia. The writers at the center of *Creole*

*Renegades* have made similar choices in their context of enunciation. From a decentered location, they write against new types of binarisms: neither the Caribbean nor Europe, neither the ex-colony nor the *métropole*, neither the periphery nor the center. This book gathers writers who share a similar intention to speak outside of any sedimented diasporic frontiers.

Maryse Condé was born in 1937 in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, a French island located in the Lesser Antilles. She studied in Paris, worked in then soon-to-be-independent West Africa, and then moved to the United States, where she has been living on and off for more than thirty-five years. She is currently professor emerita at Columbia University and the author of numerous novels, essays, and plays. Dany Laferrière was born in 1953 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in the Greater Antilles. He left Haiti at the age of twenty-four during the Duvalier regime and found a new home in Montreal. Since arriving in North America, Laferrière has lived in both Miami and Montreal. He is today the author of close to twenty books, all of which were published in North America.<sup>10</sup> Edwidge Danticat was born in 1969, also in Port-au-Prince. She left Haiti at the age of twelve to join her parents in Brooklyn. She attended Barnard College in New York and earned an MFA in creative writing from Brown University. She currently lives in Miami and is the recipient of various awards, including the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Genius Award. Jamaica Kincaid was born in 1949 in Antigua, in the Lesser Antilles. She moved to the United States at the age of seventeen and worked various jobs before becoming a full-time writer. Most of her books deal with the colonial past of her native island, as well as her conflicted relationship with her family in Antigua. Her main residence is in Vermont, but she also lives in California, where she teaches at Claremont McKenna College. Anatole Broyard was born in 1920 in New Orleans. He is the offspring of a Louisiana Creole family whose ancestors came from France and Haiti (formerly Saint-Domingue). As a young child, Broyard moved to Brooklyn with his family. He held a number of teaching positions, including at the New School for Social Research, New York University, and Columbia University. He is mostly known today for having been one of the most acclaimed literary critics for the *New York Times*. During his lifetime, he was often said to be working on an autobiographically inspired book, which he never completed. After his death, others wrote the story of his life.

Though all these Creole figures have received international acclaim for their work, they also all share a noticeably ambivalent relationship with their background, which, literally speaking, is the ground on which they allegedly turned their backs. Their communities (broadly defined) have accused them,

in one way or another, of being traitors, sellouts, or simply opportunistic writers who are oblivious to their origins. In Edouard Glissant's theory of the Caribbean cultural rhizome stretching out to the world, Patrick Chamoiseau's praise of Creole heterogeneity encompassing cultural diversity, and Benítez-Rojo's "cultural meta-archipelago without center and without limits,"<sup>11</sup> it may be surprising to realize that the expatriate, this decentered figure living outside of the native Caribbean, is not necessarily a welcome figure in the Caribbean. The modern Caribbean diasporic author is a ragamuffin of a sort, a street renegade no longer fitting within a traditional and surprisingly sedentary ideology of Caribbeanness. With its tradition of postcolonial deconstruction and its important "contribution to the deconstruction of old systems of thought,"<sup>12</sup> the Caribbean diasporic culture is in need of fracture in order to create oppositional molecules that can deconstruct its totality.

### Creole Renegades and *Isolatoés*

Antilleans use a subtle taxonomy of cultural categorizations to identify one another. In the Antilles, there is a special way to walk, to talk, and to laugh. This is the reason why Antilleans have recourse to a specific terminology to identify those who do not belong. *Néropolitain*, *negzagonal*, *débarqué*—the French Antilles are not at a loss for words when it comes to pinpointing those who do not belong. *Néropolitain* is a combination of *nègre* (Negro) and *métropolitain* (from metropolitan France) and refers to black Antilleans who show French genotypical characteristics due to having lived a long time (presumably too long) in the French *métropole*. *Negzagonal* is similar in its neological construction, made up as it is of the words *nègre* and *hexagonal* (the hexagonally shaped metropolitan France) and describes black Antilleans from France. The *negzagonal* is usually born of Antillean parents, but, unlike the *néropolitain*, is born in the *métropole*. As for *débarqué*, it is an old version of *néropolitain*. Frantz Fanon, in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967), devotes a whole section to this unpopular cultural figure. The Martinican author describes the *débarqué* as an Antillean-born subject who, after some time spent in France, has freshly landed back in Martinique or Guadeloupe and flaunts disgraceful signs of French acculturation. All these words that originate from a sedentary Antillean perspective carry unpleasant undertones. They convey an uncanny sense of *Entfremdung*, a particular feeling of estrangement with the native land after an extended geographical separation.<sup>13</sup> *Entfremdung* is a current phenomenon in French overseas de-