

***Identity, Political Freedom, and Collective Responsibility: The Pillars and Foundations of Global Ethics* by Eddy M. Souffrant, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.  
245 pp, hardcover, \$79.99, ISBN: 978-1-137-36582-8.**

by Kenneth W. Stickers

Eddy Souffrant sets out a very timely but ambitious project: to offer an understanding of global justice grounded in an ethic of collective responsibility. Moreover, he turns to the Caribbean, Haiti in particular, as “a positive model that can be replicated globally”: “the Caribbean is an exemplary site for the development of a conception of justice that is also global in scope” (1).

The argument is nuanced, extensively developed, and well-informed by a wide range of relevant and important works concerning global justice, upon which it builds and to which it responds thoughtfully. Especially prominent in his analysis and discussion are the works of Annette Baier, Judith Butler, Édouard Glissant, Robert Goodin, David Held, Martha Nussbaum, and Iris Murdoch Young. While the content is quite dense at times, the prose is nonetheless smooth and the work highly readable.

To begin his project, Souffrant sweeps aside, many of the traditional Western notions of individual and cultural identity. These notions are grounded in fixed, static essences and structures, which are reactive, hegemonic, and exclusive, such as those rooted in language, race, history, and nationality: they define identity in relation to and against excluded ‘others,’ and they are used normatively (17). What is necessary, especially in our present age, are notions of individual identity that are collective, rather than singular, and contextualized within historical, cultural relationships, and notions of cultural identity that are fluid, creative, and pluralistic.

Here Souffrant turns to the Caribbean, as “an incubator of innovative approaches to meet conditions lived universally by peoples the world over” (60), and to Créolité, as a positive, constructed identity, “formed out of the fragments of selves shaped by the conditions of oppression, exclusion, slavery, alienation, and so on in the Caribbean and, more specifically, in the Francophone Caribbean.” (37) It is a “composite identity” that is not merely reactive against the cultures of the colonizers and seeking to recover some precolonial condition. Rather, créole identities “underscore the significance, impact, and influence of the former colonizers” and demonstrate that “voices of communities plagued by the legacy of colonization are truly liberating ones.” (53) “Africans exiled to a savage and brutal world of colonization and slavery were not passive within the condition. Their activism is informed, and guided, by a historical trace that mines the hegemonic policies of the colonizers.” (57)

Drawing especially from Glissant, Souffrant describes Créolité as a “diasporic identity” to “counter an essentialist or unique hegemonic and exclusionary determination of identity” (56) and to describe the composite, transactional identities of people in transition and undergoing reciprocal transformations as they engage with other cultures: “In the Caribbean, individuals from divergent atavistic cultures are made to share a common space. In that space, a composite culture has emerged.” (56) What developed in the Caribbean, though, is not altogether unique to that region but rather is, in a concentrated way, “reflective of the continuously transitory aspect of the human experience” (58), increasingly so in the present age.

Since traditional Western notions of democracy and responsibility rest upon forms of individual and cultural identity that Souffrant criticizes and replaces, they too must be rethought, and such a rethinking is the focus of Part II. Democracy is conventionally thought of in terms of formal, legal structures of the nation-state, viewed as the primary center of collective agency and responsibility. Thus, global democracy is conventionally conceived as the expansion of nation-state-based democracy and an increase in the number of nation-state democracies. Collective identities, however, are transient and composite, and hence they overflow national boundaries. This is revealed especially by immigration: “Immigrants have always challenged the strength of the principles of liberal democracies here and abroad. They have challenged those democracies’ will to inclusion.” (6) What is needed for a vibrant global democracy, therefore, is a conception of democracy that transcends the formal structures of the nation-state and sees the nation-state as but one of multiple, diverse centers of collective agency and responsibility. Souffrant terms such a democracy “informal democracy”: “Global democracy is informal because of the nature and diversity of its constitutive agents.” (86)

For Souffrant, “democracy is in its base sense the interaction of equally valued members of a group aiming to arrive at an agreed-on institution of governance” (85), and he defines “informal democracy” specifically as “the prospect of an environment wherein are contained nontraditional actors with influential powers that are held to the scrutiny of moral theories or to the scrutiny of the principle of mutual responsibility.” (75) Not being tied to the formal norms of nation-states, informal democracy is rooted in a transnational ethic of mutual responsibility. “The concept of ‘informal democracy’ is premised on there being global agents of many types and implies that there should be a principle of mutual responsibility that engages these global agents.” Moreover, it “takes for granted that in global affairs, nation-states are not the sole primary actors”—they also include “individual citizens, focus groups, traditional NGOs, [and] corporations”—“and that all agents, whether individual or institutional, are naturally bounded by a shared global condition” (101).

Part III elaborates on this ethic of mutual responsibility, which provides the normative framework for global informal democracy. Consistent with his criticism of modernist notions of identity, as singular and essentialist, Souffrant seeks a morality that is collective, fluid, contextualized, and cosmopolitan. The complexity of multiple, varied

centers of agency and responsibility entailed in informal democracy, increases unpredictability. Responsibility does not belong immediately and directly to individuals, but rather individual responsibility stems from one's membership in a group and the cohesiveness of the group. Group responsibility is responsibility felt or held fundamentally as collective: individuals feel and assume responsibility by virtue of their belonging to the group, and groups assign and individuals feel responsibility for action on the basis of the individual's distinct position in the group. As Souffrant says, quoting Virginia Held, "Group responsibility ... is undertaken by individuals volitionally 'not as individuals but as members of the group.'" (165) Moreover, responsibilities within informal democracy must be assigned to both individuals and collectives within the larger group, and one of the greatest challenges of informal democracy is the development of principles for such assignment of responsibilities to both individuals and groups.

The main shortcoming of this book, in my judgment, is that most of its discussion remains on a highly abstract, theoretical level, and it could benefit from more concrete examples to illustrate its central ideas. I, thus, welcomed the chapter on "Examples of Collective Responsibility in Practice," focusing upon collective responsibility for health insurance generally—an excellent example for this point—and Walmart's health care benefit program in particular. Additional concrete examples of this sort would be very helpful and enrich the book's analyses and discussion.

Part IV aims to bring the analyses of the previous sections and especially Souffrant's vision for global ethics, rooted in collective responsibility, to bear on contemporary circumstances of both natural and human-made disasters and "to resolve the problem of articulating the relevant principle of collective responsibility for agents with fluid and multiple identities." (10) Toward this end, Souffrant returns to the Caribbean.

Souffrant observes that, despite the persistence of modernist theorizing, with its atomistic conception of individual identity and its location of collective agency and responsibility in the nation-state, the current movements toward globalization and cosmopolitanism foster de facto the informal democracy that he envisions. The development of the Caribbean illustrates this tendency. Hence, how to cultivate the diffused and varied collective responsibilities entailed in informal democracy, is not an issue: current globalizing, cosmopolitan tendencies are already doing that. (186-87)

The bulk of Part IV centers around Anthony Bogue's notion of Africana cosmopolitanism, according to which "the uniqueness of the Africana intellectual's response to these conditions [of natural and human-made disasters] consists in her ability to add to her critical analysis conditions directly related to her categorization as an outsider, her radicalism. This otherness informs her critical approach to conceptions of justice, equality, civil society, and in general, political thought. They are, according to Bogue, all improved by her revelation of exclusionary practices." (187) Souffrant agrees with the bulk of Bogue's notion but disagrees with him regarding the inherent

radicalism that he attributes to Africana cosmopolitanism. Souffrant argues his criticism with the example of Frederick Douglass's service as an American diplomat. Although Douglass possessed all the other unique qualities that Bogue attributes to the Africana intellectual, Douglass defended much of American imperialism in the Caribbean: placed in the position of a diplomat representing and advancing the interests of the United States, his Africana cosmopolitanism gave way to liberalist nationalism.

Souffrant largely achieves his goal of providing a new conception of global justice. That conception does "not depend on an established [formal] global democracy." (219) Rather, it is rooted in a moral sense of mutual responsibility that emerges out of transient, developing, and composite individual and collective identities that increasingly characterize our age. Moreover, as Souffrant persuasively demonstrates, the Caribbean provides rich examples of cultures that have, to a large degree, developed such identities, which are not merely reactive to their colonial pasts but creative, dynamic, fluid identities that embrace their composite nature, including Africana elements as well as ones from the European colonizers. Souffrant's book is thus very valuable in helping us to imagine what a democratic and just world looks like, and accordingly it is an important contribution to the struggle for global justice.