

Colonial Migration and Theoric¹ Awakening: An Antillean's Voyage of Discovery

Silvio Torres-Saillant
Syracuse University

*Yo,
un hijo del Caribe
precisamente antillano...
nacido justamente, y pobremente,
en suelo quisqueyano...
vengo a hablarle a Walt Whitman,
un cosmos,
un hijo de Manhattan.*

*I, a son of the Caribbean
Antillean to be exact...
born precisely, and poorly,
on Quisqueyan soil ...
I come to speak to Walt Whitman,
a kosmos,
son of Manhattan.
Pedro Mir 1952 (1993: 47)*

¹ I would like this adjective to carry the same meaning as 'theoretical,' as it frequently did in older usage. I employ it with the intention of stressing its association with 'public access' so as to render less self-evident, etymologically at least, the widespread acceptance of an equation between turgid density of expression and speculative depth. I find it significant that the ancient Greek word *theoria*, while conveying the idea of contemplation as a mental engagement, invariably denotes the act of looking at reality concretely with one's physical eyes.

Knowledge in My Father's House

When I was a child I thought like a neocolonial child about human culture. Early education in subordinate, neocolonial Caribbean society taught youngsters to locate real humanity in a world existing away from home. Maturing in that context meant primarily for learners to develop the mental prowess necessary to place themselves in the midst of humanity by reconfiguring the world in a manner that contained their home. Kamau Brathwaite has referred to his maturing as a 'de-education,' a process that for him entailed a period of 'self-education' which led gradually to a 'whole sense of being Barbadian, Caribbean' (1992). Growing up intellectually for me meant unlearning the lessons that had taught me to view book learning innocently. My father had instilled in me the sense that intellectual cultivation mattered for its own sake while at the same time helping you rise above those around you. 'Read for two hours everyday,' he would dare me, 'and in two years you will not be able to stand the company of the loafers you hang out with on the corner.' I never heard my father brag in haughty pride about anything but scholarly possessions: his command of the Spanish language, historical erudition, and world sapience.

The word 'theoric' most often referred to the viewing of public spectacles, including religious functions and solemn embassies. Derived from the neuter *theoricon* and its plural *theorica*, the term came to name specifically an Athenian fund 'raised by way of tax on the people' for the purpose of defraying 'the expenses of theatrical representations and other spectacles.' A law promulgated by Eubulus, as chief commissioner of the fund, prohibited the application of the theoric money toward any other use, including war, as the British encyclopedist Ephraim Chambers (1680-1740) recorded in his successful *Cyclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1728), a publication whose first edition earned its author a seat in the Royal Society and eventually became foundational for the *Encyclopédie* launched by the French *philosophes* Denis Diderot and Jean D'Alembert. Most importantly, the Theoric Fund, since Pericles established it in 450 B.C., covered admission costs for all citizens who could not afford to pay the price of seats at the theater and public spectacles (Wilson and Goldfarb 1983: 25; *Webster's New Universal* 1983: 1893). A contemporary approximation of the Athenian politics of access could be Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble whose performances the working class could afford to see because of substantial subsidy by the East Germany government. I find the interpenetration of speculative thought and democratic access to the matter to look at, which is so explosively submerged in the story of the *theoricon*, deeply illuminating as I ponder on the intellectual market today, and, more relevantly still, on how I fit within the pigeonholes of that market. I draw from this a simple lesson: that intellectual hight should never ignore the social ground beneath the feet of the intellectual worker involved. In the end, somebody has to pay the bill. The totally

ethereal inevitably yellows into banality. Ideas impress me if they matter. I read to learn about the world and how best to locate my position with respect to the other members of the species. I lack patience for reading works whose sole justification for existing seems to be that they make a 'contribution to the field' by 'further problematizing' an already encumbered and not particularly earth-shaking contention propounded by one of the thinkers recognized by the market as theorists. The pages that follow narrate the story of how I reached that state of mind. They recount my theoric awakening, providing justification for my discursive demeanor (including the absence in my bibliography of some references often judged obligatory) in the second and third sections of this project, that explore the difficult rapport of Caribbean discourse with Western human sciences.

During frequent rounds of drunken wakefulness, Silvio Sr. would quote Shakespeare, recite the Lake Poets, and recall moments illustrative of the wisdom of the ancients. He would call to mind that Sophocles once lamented to a fellow playwright that for three days he had failed to come up with the right hexameter line for a tragedy then in progress. Instead of sympathy, his plaint elicited this swagger: 'But Sophocles, in three days I can write three whole plays,' to which our sage retorted, 'yes, I know, and then they last but three days.' In his youth my father had shown above average aptitude in baseball, the American sport that had become the national pastime following the years of U.S. military rule of the Dominican Republic from 1916 through 1924, and he remained a passionate fan all his life. When I once teased him about his coincident taste for an entertainment of the uncultured masses, he pulled out from his mental knapsack a literary legitimation. He pointed out to me that a good deal of the Homeric epithets actually name sports activities: the archer or he who strikes from afar, for Apollo, or the javalin or discuss thrower for this or that Achaean warrior, and so on. After his linking his sports interest with erudite textuality, he felt the defense could rest.

Coming from a family in which Greek and Roman first names abounded (Sixto, Cástor, Augusto, Silvio, César, Porfirio, and the like), my father spoke about ancient Hebrew history with a particularly telling sense of connection. He would evoke Saul's sensitivity to music, explaining how a harpist's Lydian melody would swing the king's mood in one direction while a Lybian tune would reverse the effect. He judged David a great ruler and castigated Salomon for ruinously mishandling the glorious kingdom his father had left him. As a result of the frequency with which our father would plunge into learned narrative, the names of philosophers, statesmen, sanctified Western authors, as well as past and present rulers in the most central parts of the globe triggered a familiar resonance in our ears. My sisters and I did not need to wait until we entered school to become acquainted with difficult to pronounce multisyllabic names such as Aristophanes or Thucydides. We went to see Federico Fellini's *Satyricon* when the film arrived at the Teatro Colón in Santiago, and the

recognition seemed comforting especially when it came to the episode featuring the widow from Ephesus, a story we had heard recounted by our father, an ardent reader of Petronius. We knew before leaving home what people went to do in school. This pre-empted awareness was enhanced by our mother Aida, who took it upon herself to teach us how to read before we began the first grade. Aida's operatic name was a reminder of the urban middle class aspirations of Chea, her own mom. Overpowered by the seductive thrill from the city's siren's song, Chea had left her rural hometown of Guayubín in La Guajaca, in the country's Northwest, for the din of the capital city of Santo Domingo, forsaking husband, children, and all.

We, Aida's children, did not have enough contact with Chea to develop the affection that grandmothers proverbially evoke. We called her Mama Chea but the name entailed no endearment. Perhaps we intuited that some of the dreams which Aida could not pursue had to do with her mom's choice to pursue hers, however indefinable those may have been. Aida married Silvio Sr. when she was only fourteen, arresting her education though she evidently had the brains for it, and desisted from the idea of training to become an operatic singer though the voice she lured us with seemed worthy of the finest stage. Despite her uncaring mother, an inconsiderate and often abusive spouse, the burden of seven children, and lacking a formal education, Aida not only forged ahead, but in all matters of consequence she was the primary parent. That included, oddly enough, matters of schooling. Her insufficient learning did not diminish her desire to help us learn. Silvio Sr. may have influenced us through his customary display of erudition within hearing range of us, but it fell upon our largely unschooled peasant mother to materialize the necessary logistics such as getting us admitted into the public school or teaching us our first letters. A devout Christian, she found solace from the harshness of ordinary life in her reading of the *Bible*, which she often brandished as a weapon against our father, whose assiduous drinking, ineptitude as a provider, and frequent disparagement she credited to the 'iniquity' of his spirit.

The sight of my mother quoting the holy scriptures to fend off the aggression of her 'iniquitous' spouse powerfully reinforced the idea that book knowledge had weight, a message I habitually received from my father. The message, on the whole, hinged on a sharply differentiated idea of knowledge, one that left little room for diversity of heritages. Cultivation of the intellect meant merely the pursuit of familiarity with the cultures that make up the narrative of the Western tradition, namely Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and the achievements of Christian Europe. Neither my father's phenotypical blackness nor his ancestral link to Haiti, the Caribbean country with some of the most unadulterated expressions of African cultural survival in the region, had any mitigating effect on his radically Eurocentric understanding of human culture. His paternal grandfather had in the nineteenth-century crossed over to the Dominican side of the island of Hispaniola, where he settled, formed a Dominican family, and

contributed to intellectual life in the City of Santiago as one of the founding members of Alianza Cibaeña, then the only local public library. Not atypically for his generation, my father evinced a neglectful regard for the implications of his uncritical embrace of the view that equated humanity with the West. He thus overlooked the extent to which the narration of humanity based on such an equation inevitably nullified him as a black Haitian-descended Dominican in the midst of a specifically Caribbean occurrence of the human experience.

Invasion and Two-Way Mobility

Two years ago I came across a photograph of my father in which, a teenager, he appears sitting at a table playing dominoes with two of his older brothers. Sitting in the middle, facing the camera, is Pedro Augusto, a stout young man whom the family would later distinguish for his irascible character and his sportsmanship. He would later become an ace first base for the Santiago baseball team Las Aguilas Cibaenas. To Pedro's right - - camera left - - is Luis Tomás, the eldest, who would in adult life become important in local government, serving at one point as the Mayor of Santiago. Across from Luis Tomás sits my father, dominoes in hand, looking askance to his left in the direction of the camera, showing an adolescent's face not older than 14 years of age. This estimate of my father's age in the picture would place the scene in 1924, the year when the marines left after eight years of direct U.S. military rule in the country. The picture captures a daytime scene and one assumes the three boys' father, Don Pedro Saillant, the civil court judge, to be at work. Their mother, Doña Delfina Fernández de Saillant, a respected *dressmaker*, might be similarly occupied. But depending on the exact dates, Don Pedro and Doña Delfina, the paternal grandparents I never met, may be an ocean away. U.S. immigration records show them both entering through Ellis Island on August 29, 1923 as visitors. They came to see their wayward son Delfin, who had arrived in the United States as far back as 1919 via Cuba and who would remain here for the rest of his life (AFIHC 2002). The presence of my paternal grandparents in the United States in 1923 speaks to their relative economic well being since they could afford to travel abroad. They would later send their only daughter María Amparo to a private high school in Philadelphia. But their presence also speaks to the bilateral mobility that colonial domination forges. When an imperial nation holds a dependent one in its mighty grip - - whether the tool of conquest involves an army or the banks - - channels of communication between the two countries ordinarily open. Their asymmetry notwithstanding, the connectedness that links the director and the directed societies moves people inevitably in both directions.

This bidirectional mobility dates at least from before the founding in 1844 of the Dominican Republic, the second so-called independent State in the Caribbean. Prior

to becoming a founding father, the ideological architect of the Dominican nation Juan Pablo Duarte spent time in New York (Duarte 1994: 40). William L. Cazneau, a veteran of the Texas and the Mexican wars, had himself appointed envoy to Santo Domingo in 1853. Once there, he and his partner Joseph W. Fabens gave vent to their entrepreneurial impulses, acquiring generous plots of lands from the Dominican government to build a colony for U.S. citizens who wished to relocate to the Dominican Republic. They operated the American West India Company, which, among other things, sought to promote interest in the Dominican soil among people in the United States. Concomitant with their enterprise, several books appeared that depicted the small Caribbean country as a 'new Eldorado,' luring American readers with descriptions of the 'vast mineral, agricultural, manufacturing and commercial resources' of the land, and further stressing the 'scarcely credible' fact 'that such vast wealth, and especially mineral wealth, should have lain there so easily attainable, for so many years and almost within the suburbs of our great commercial cities, without exciting at least the cupidity, if not the enterprise of the Yankee' (Courtney 1860: 9). Fabens and Cazneau's transnational real estate project did not yield the fruit they had desired, nor did their picturesque scheme to import camels to the Dominican Republic with the purpose of improving transportation options in the country, but the two crafty adventurers continued to deploy their business and political maneuvers until mid 1871 when they finally 'removed themselves from the Dominican scene' (Welles 1966: 400-01).

A pivotal year, 1871 marks the end of the U.S. government's formal attempt to annex the Dominican land. The interest in adding the Dominican side of the island of Hispaniola to the U.S. territory had gained momentum during the James K. Polk administration and continued intermittently to surge and wane until after the Civil War, when President Ulysses S. Grant took it up with obstinate passion. The formidable opposition he encountered both in the U.S. Congress and in the most intransigent faction of the Dominican nationalist movement thwarted Grant's annexationist plan, but while it seemed feasible a good many U.S. politicians and entrepreneurs traveled to peruse the country and ascertain its ripeness for annexation. In the last resort, Grant secured congressional approval to send a commission of inquiry to the country to gather the necessary data to help him make his case. Made up of Senator Benjamin B. Wade, Senator Samuel G. Howe, and Senator Andrew D. White, who would subsequently go on to serve as founding president of Cornell University, with the ex-slave and now prominent abolitionist Frederick Douglass as secretary, the commission arrived in Santo Domingo on January 16, 1871. Though their findings established 'the physical, mental, and moral condition of the inhabitants of Santo Domingo' to have been 'more advanced than had been anticipated,' they did not help Grant promote his case before congressional opposition (*Report* 1871:13). Speaking before Congress on April 5, 1871, not without longing, he invoked the report to support his unwavering belief that 'the

interests of our country and of Santo Domingo alike invite the annexation of the Republic' (Welles: 400).

That the annexation did not take place does not mean that U.S. interests failed to shape Dominican society, which fell progressively deeper into the sphere of influence of the director society to the North. Nor did the bipolar flow of people diminish. That explains the presence in New York on February 19, 1901 of Pedro Henríquez Ureña upon completing his high school in the capital city of Santo Domingo. In time he would become an internationally renowned philologist, a first rate scholar of Hispanic literatures, deserving of such honors as an invitation to occupy the prestigious Charles Elliot Norton Visiting Professorship at Harvard University during academic year 1940-1941. The lectures he gave as part of that engagement became a book that Harvard University Press published under the title *Literary Currents of Hispanic America* (1945). The inside flap of the book cover carried a biographical error in referring to the 'real milestone' of 'these lectures by a South American scholar.' I can't help musing that the oversight of calling Henríquez Ureña 'South American' stemmed from the inability of Harvard folks at the time to imagine Dominicans as literary beings, familiar though they were as political subordinates (Torres-Saillant 2000: 263).

When Henríquez Ureña first came to this country at the dawn of the twentieth century, he found a considerable number of his compatriots living here already. In recalling that first visit, his diary describes 'the hotels and houses that lodged the Dominicans who came to New York for their summer vacation, whose number increased every year' (cited by Roggiano 1961: xxviii). He describes the Manhattan neighborhood where he and his brothers lived as one that 'teemed with Dominican exiles who now increasingly headed for New York' (xxxi). Around 1918 Pedro and his sister Camila both pursued graduate studies in Spanish literature at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. He had completed a master's degree and now worked on his doctorate while she was finishing her M.A.. As their father had been serving as interim President at the time of the U.S. military takeover of their country two years before, they must have had to cope with embarrassing moments. A suggestive passage in the novel *In the Name of Salomé* by Julia Alvarez evokes 'the difficulties he encountered because of his color and accent' and the irony - not overlooked by a student newspaper on campus - - that they seemed to condone the occupied status of their homeland by coming to an American university to advance their scholarly pursuits (2000: 234-35).

Foreign Domination, Native Identity

The United States invaded the Dominican Republic in 1916, when my father was only six, which means that the formative years of his public socialization from childhood through adolescence occurred under foreign domination. When the Americans left in 1924, having disarmed the civilian population and conferred upon the Guardia Nacional, they had created a monopoly over violence, Dominicans had learned to see U.S.-style institutions as indispensable. American consumer products dominated their market, American baseball had replaced cock-fighting as their national pastime, and the population's taste buds had been weaned into U.S. flavors. A character in the novel *Cuando amaban las tierras comuneras* by the late Pedro Mir explains the meaning of the phenomenon to a child by drawing a parallel between the occupation and the shift from going about barefoot to first wearing shoes. Before, your feet could cope with the roughness of the uneven, harsh, and bumpy ground, but once you learn to walk in the protection that shoes offer, your feet grow tender, delicate, easily hurt, and you have to wear the protection forever (Mir 1978).

Raised in a society where the logic dictated by the U.S. occupation reigned supreme, my father probably lacked the analytical distance required for discerning how stridently his own national experience discredited the supposition of the Western heritage as a paragon of human value. The most rabidly Western of all nations in the Christian-capitalist world system, the United States came to the Dominican Republic to civilize an underdeveloped people. At the very start of the twentieth century, in a speech that became known as expressive of a 'corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine, President Theodore Roosevelt asserted the right of the United States to intervene in the internal political and economic life of any country in the hemisphere deemed insufficiently proficient in managing its affairs to the satisfaction of the international community (Munro 1964: 77). My father did not seem to have grasped the sad irony of thinking highly of a civilization that held him in very low esteem in so far as it viewed his nation as inept.

In a letter to Joseph Bucklin Bishop on 23 February 1904 Teddy Roosevelt, faced with the prospects of intervening in the country, claimed to have 'been hoping and praying that the Santo Domingans would behave so that I would not have to act in this way. I want to do nothing but what a policeman has to do in Santo Domingo (Bishop 1926: 494). Nearly a year later, in a special message to Congress submitting a treaty that would authorize the U.S take-over of Dominican finances, Roosevelt called 'attention to the urgent need of prompt action on this matter,' stressing that the 'protocol' proposed offered 'a great opportunity to secure peace and stability in the island' while affording 'a practical test of the efficiency of the United States Government in maintaining the Monroe Doctrine' (Bishop: 495-496). Later, in his

Autobiography (1913) Roosevelt would recall with some resentment the attitude of those legislators who, though agreeing that Dominicans 'of course must be protected and must be made to behave,' had at the time opposed his manner of accomplishing the feat (1925: 580).

The entry on the Dominican Republic appearing in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, published the year of my father's birth, gives an idea of what the West saw when it looked in the direction of his Caribbean homeland. The entry, entitled 'Santo Domingo' in keeping with colonial usage, speaks of 'a state in the West Indies,' occupying two-thirds of Hispaniola, that has 'the finest lands.' It praises the country's fertility by saying that there: 'tobacco and cacao flourish; the mountain regions are specially suited to the culture of coffee, and tropical fruits will grow anywhere with a minimum of attention.' The article recalls the gold and silver that the Spanish extracted from the land annually during the early years of the colonial conquest. Describing present resources, the article points to the riches that remain: 'Platinum, manganese, iron, copper, tin, antimony, opals, and chalcedony are also found. In the Neyba valley there are two remarkable hills, composed of pure rock salt. Only an influx of capital and an energetic population are needed to develop these resources.' The encyclopedia makes it clear that the 'energetic population' necessary 'to develop' the country's natural resources did not live there. The energy had to come from elsewhere. The disparaging tone of the following characterization would seem to suggest that the encyclopedia did not even conceive of the natives as possibly able to read the entry written on them: 'The people are mainly mulattoes of Spanish descent, but there are a considerable number of negroes and whites of both Creole and European origin. Politically the whites have the predominating influence. People on the whole are quiet, lazy, and shiftless, but subject at times to great political excitement' ('Santo Domingo' 1910: 194-195).

The *Britannica* entry mentions in passing the receivership that put Dominican fiscal life, the collection of customs and other revenues, in the hands of U.S. agents, the native population of the country having apparently proved untrustworthy in the handling of its own financial affairs. First, 'an American company,' meaning a private firm, that managed the securance of bonds until 1899, 'defaulted in the payment of interest,' at which point the U.S. government took direct control: 'In 1905, to forestall foreign intervention [by European creditors] for securing payment of the State debt, President Roosevelt made an agreement with Santo Domingo, under which the United States undertook to adjust the republic's foreign obligation, and to assume charge of the customs houses. A treaty was ratified by the United States Senate in 1907, and an American citizen is temporarily receiver of customs' (194). Perhaps one should not fault the *Britannica* author's lack of prescience for failing to intuit that American hands would not loosen their grip on Dominican fiscal affairs until 1940, when the depraved dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo declared the

country's 'economic independence.' Nor perhaps did the writer have a way of foreseeing that a U.S. military invasion would become necessary after all, the mere receivership having apparently proved insufficient for Washington to accomplish its civilizing goal in the country.

Washington's decision to relinquish the collection of Dominican customs into the hands of Trujillo in the tyrant's tenth year of continuous hold of ruthless political power points to a partnership between the U.S. democracy and the Dominican dictatorship that further framed my father's lifespan socially, politically, and existentially. By 1924, the putative year of the afore-mentioned photograph and the American military disoccupation, Trujillo had risen to visibility on the political arena. Empowered with key American contacts, having excelled as the highest achieving of the officers trained in the U.S.-formed Guardia Nacional, it would take him no more than six years to get himself elected President of the Republic (Vega 1992). He used to advantage his rank as chief of the armed forces, which, with the success of civilian disarmament, now enjoyed exclusively the power to intimidate. Incarceration, murder, and psychological terror made Trujillo *presidenciable*, especially after masterminding the overthrow of his protector President Horacio Vasquez, who had to resign and go into exile.

In 1930, the year when Trujillo's thirty-year-long reign of terror began, my father was a twenty-year-old man with a poetic gift and a flair for crisp journalistic prose. I cannot tell whether my father had occasion to formulate in his mind a clear position on the cultural policies of the dictatorship, but he never verbalized it. The Trujillo regime's obstinate and well-funded promotion of a notoriously Eurocentric view of Dominicanity looked to the Spanish conquerors and colonial settlers to find the ethnocratic foundation of the nation while prophylactically excising any cultural form evidently associated with the African heritage (Torres-Saillant 1995: 128-29). I have no memory of my father's articulating in my presence any position of black self-affirmation other than his occasionally recalling, with detectable satisfaction, the comment an acquaintance of his had made about his family: 'The Saillants are the only blacks in this country who don't suffer from a complex of inferiority.' Nor do I remember his ever attaching any significance to his Haitian ancestry.

But my father displayed no insecurity about his own worth. Though we always lived in poor neighborhoods and meals occasionally skipped our table, he undertook to convince us that we were not nobodies. Poverty did not reduce us to the level of those whose condition we shared. We were 'the children of Silvio Saillant,' a rank that even to this day one or two of my siblings would feel comfortable pulling. He despised Trujillo because of the morbid pleasure the dictator derived from his humiliation of people. Trujillo, who liked to be called 'El Jefe' (The Chief), once called my paternal grandfather, then a civil court judge, to reprimand him for

something or other, and my father never forgave him. When he became a columnist for the newspaper *La Nación*, he swore never to put Trujillo's name in print, and he didn't, not, of course, without repercussions. In a country where the capital city bore the name of Ciudad Trujillo, where people learned to add 'and Trujillo' when thanking God for any small blessing that came their way, and where sycophant praise of the ruler occupied the energies of all media, the absence of any reference to Trujillo in my father's articles glared too brightly in the eyes of the regime's commissars. He ended up in the notorious Nigua Prison. Mario Vargas Llosa's recent novelization of the Dominican dictator's last years in power gives a credible portrayal of the horror of Trujillo's prisons (Vargas Llosa 2000). When my father luckily came out of prison, he no longer had a career in journalism. Nor was his literary calling so compelling that he could compensate by seeking refuge in his poetry as did so many in his generation who carved a niche of concealment in the obscure beauty of metaphors whose primary goal was to avoid friction with the awful density pervading the political climate.

When the dictator finally bit the dust on May 30, 1961, a flurry of assassins' bullets having reached their up to that point unimaginable destination, my father had reached his fifties, which made him practically an old man by Caribbean standards of four decades ago. His time had passed: for poetry, for journalism, for meaningful life in the public sphere. Ironically, the members of his generation, who had mustered the necessary resourcefulness to navigate the regime's voracity for servility, seemed to have aged considerably less than he. He withdrew into himself, cultivated his garden of private honor, suffered privation rather than genuflect, and drank himself into oblivion. Still, one could scan in him the sparks of a resistive spirit even if the outer man as sociopolitical animal was crushed. He may not have asserted his African heritage nor otherwise protested the incongruence of the prevailing Western cultural discourse with the ethnoracial and cultural reality of his country. But he named his first child Melania, a word whose Greek etymology (μ_{as} , μ_{av} = black) evinces an approving recognition of her very dark skin. A machista fellow, the predictable product of a phallocratic social order, he nonetheless encouraged my three sisters to value themselves highly, become self-sufficient, and avoid dependency on their spouses. He even insisted that they should learn to hold their liquor so as not to be at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their male counterparts when they went partying.

The regimes that crushed my father's possibilities did not manage to flatten his human complexity. What he salvaged from the rubble of his sociopolitical annulment I regard as the most valued inheritance he bequeathed to his children. Concomitantly, from my mother, who came from lowly, peasant origins, I treasure the example of hard work and her stomach for coping with adversity. My father never once gave the impression that the thought one should bow to people with power or authority. Though we always lived in marginal *barrios*, our house would always stand out in

the neighborhood because of the occasional visit of notable personages, intellectuals, and politicians who were friends from his childhood or youth. The crafty Joaquin Balaguer, Trujillo's heir in the autocratic control of the Dominican State, came to the house when I was a child. Juan Bosch, the democratically elected president who was deposed by a U.S.-backed military coup in 1963, also came to the house for a chat. All of his children were already settled raising families and building lives in New York when the news reached us in 1983 that President Salvador Jorge Blanco had made a stop at our father's house during a trip to Santiago. These presidential visits to a sociopolitically defunct old friend who lived in dismal conditions speaks to the kind of *cadre* my father had belonged to in his youth. I particularly cherish the recollection I have of my father's demeanor during the visits of those powerful acquaintances. He displayed no excessive gratitude for their deigning to enter his humble abode, no overflow of reverential admiration for their accomplishments, no abject prostration - - simply courteous cordiality. He had them sit on the mahogany chair that he assigned to visitors, located directly across from his. He did not give up his seat, which was invariably the best kept piece of furniture in the living room. Though they ruled the whole country outside the door, he left little room for doubting who retained authority in the private sovereignty of his house.

My father believed in God, but he eyed the Catholic clergy with utmost suspicion. He did not instill in his children a submissive, unquestioning respect for the institutional mandates of the church nor for the sanctity of the prelacy. We did not keep up with the timely observance of the sacraments. I was already in my teens when I had the holy waters of baptism poured over my head. In fact, my mother, fearing the ultimate consequences of letting her children continue to live out of the grace of God, made the unconventional but practical move of assembling and dragging us all to church for a collective baptism, with her brother Pompo standing as *padrino* and his mother-in-law Filleya as *madrina*. It was she also who ensured that at least some of us had our first communion. But, on the whole, my father felt no particular compulsion to comply with the steps dictated by the church for the salvation of our souls. Although he never renounced Catholicism, the default religion of any person born in the Dominican Republic since the country defines itself officially as Catholic, my father displayed greater sympathy and tolerance - perhaps even appreciation - toward non-Catholic Christians who would come to our door offering the 'word of the Lord,' and voicing the good tidings that the kingdom was 'at hand.' He would at times lend a courteous ear to the spiritual lobbying of Jehovah's Witnesses or Seventh Day Adventists. I believe he respected in them their conversion, their conviction that the Lord had revealed Himself to them, in short, their sense of a personal engagement with the faith they professed. The institutional ranks of Bishops, Archbishops, and Cardinals did not impress him, but he did not easily disdain an individual who, scriptures in hand, came to him as an impassioned

believer.

Child Labor, Invasion and Migration

I was in the third grade when my mother apprenticed me to the shoe-making sweatshop owned and operated by her brother Pompo, much to the chagrin of my father who probably resented what my initiation into child labor might tell others - and most importantly him - about his inability to provide consistently for the family. However, in due time he not only grew to accept the idea that I would be a worker, but as years passed he came to appreciate the fact that having a job, being able to support myself, grounded me in a much firmer reality than that of the other youngsters with whom I would otherwise hang out on the corner. He himself pointed this out to me one day he saw me greet a distant cousin named Lucas, a man then some fifteen years my senior, by asking first about his family and then about his job. The serious substance of my brief exchange with Lucas truly impressed my father. Though he did not expand on the matter, what he regarded as psychological growth must have made up in his mind for any loss I may have suffered as a result of my premature entrance into the adult arena of the workforce. My sisters have often said, not without a measure of pity, that I had no childhood, and I have invariably shrugged off their lamentation by retorting that they subscribe to too bourgeois a model of what childhood should be.

I did have a childhood, but one of a certain kind. As an apprentice to a master leather cutter in the sweatshop, I quickly became an adept assistant whose services mattered to the overall operation. It soon became necessary for me to put in longer daytime hours on the job, meaning that I had to switch to night school, the educational structure designed to address the learning needs of grown ups. The first half of the academic year in the third grade, whose second half I completed at night, would be my last daytime classroom experience until my final semesters at Brooklyn College many years later. This meant in fact that for the rest of my childhood and through adolescence I spent my days at work and my nights at school interacting mostly with adults. I recall with amusement an older army man who would buy me candy in exchange for help with his homework. Perhaps I ought not to have missed my chances of playing rookie or running off to the river in pursuit of mischievous delight in keeping with a given desirable form of roguish childhood. But I may also have garnered abundant recompense in that I did not have to undergo the mental regimentation that went on in the schoolyard to instill in the young an uncritical acceptance of the ideological and cultural biases of the State. I did not have to join my peers in the daily incantation of the national anthem or in the routine worship of the flag. Night school students were presumed adults and as such were spared the rituals that the State devices to instill obedient patriotism in its future soldiers, voters,

parishioners, and consumers. I have the suspicion that the lack of such socialization makes it easier for people to become genuine citizens - - the kind for whom love of country never precludes demanding that the country adheres to norms of equality, social justice, and human dignity.

I remember being at work on the morning of 28th April 1965 when, thanks to the political Parley of grown-up shoemakers around me, I learned that an American military occupation had occurred. An eleven-year-old, I was five years older than my father had been when he lived his U.S. invasion 49 years earlier. The Lyndon B. Johnson administration resorted to a military intervention in order to prevent 'another Cuba,' which meant, in effect, that U.S. soldiers came to fight the *constitucionalistas*, the liberal movement that had taken up arms four days earlier seeking to restore the constitutional order. A year and a half before, democratically elected President Juan Bosch, the winner of the cleanest elections the country had witnessed in the century, was overthrown by a right-wing faction of the military that frowned on the democratizing policies implemented by the new government. A military junta took over and the revered liberal president went into exile. Seven months of a democratic experiment had proven too suffocating for the ruling elites that followed Trujillo in the control of the State. The corporate leadership, the Catholic prelacy, and the military officers that had served as the dictatorship's praetorian guard orchestrated the coup, with CIA support, on the justificatory grounds of Bosch's presumed leftist leanings.

A triumvirate followed the military junta, and the new government dealt harshly with political dissidence. A small guerrilla movement that rose in protest against the unconstitutional ruling structure suffered a grievous defeat, with the armed forces killing the rebels even after they had surrendered. The state of social upheaval continued intermittently until 24th April 1965, when a liberal faction of the military declared itself in favor of a return to the Constitution, rallying massive support in the civilian population. A civil war broke out with clearly delineated flanks: the government forces and the conservative military who defended the status quo created by the *coup d'état*, on the one hand; and the liberal constituencies (civilian and military) committed to bringing back the deposed president and the democratic order, on the other. After three days of battle, the *constitucionalistas* had practically defeated the coup leaders, and just as they began to prepare a declaration of victory as prelude to restoring the interrupted Bosch government, U.S. soldiers came, sided with the coup leaders, the oligarchy that the Trujillo dictatorship had spawned, and reversed the outcome.

The *constitucionalistas* obviously lost. Since the occupying forces were no fans of Bosch, rather than restoring the deposed president, they merely set out to promote new elections in which they had a favorite whom they called in from his exile in

New York. They brought in Joaquín Balaguer, who had served as Trujillo's puppet president until he had to escape the people's indignation in 1962, and put the resources of the State at his disposal for use in his campaign. They then allowed Bosch to return as a mere participant in the election but offered him no protection from the State-funded right-wing aggression that the Balaguer camp launched against him. Vowing to shoot Bosch wherever they chanced upon him, the military murdered hundreds of Bosch supporters without earning even a reprimand from the U.S. forces that ruled the country. Bosch had to campaign without leaving his home (Moya Pons 1995: 390). Predictably Bosch lost, and the highest achieving of Trujillo's henchmen became President of the Republic, now in a system that called itself democratic because undeniably an election had taken place. The country in safe, right-wing, Trujillista hands, U.S. marines could now disoccupy it again.

Ironically, thousands of Dominicans too began to disoccupy their homeland mostly because of a shortage of matter to dream about. After thirty horrendous years of bloodletting and humiliation under the Trujillo dictatorship, they had dared to indulge in democratic aspirations. They took to the streets enthusiastically to cast votes for a president who promised them a climate of human decency, and a military coup thwarted their yearning for social change. Then they took up arms, obstinately believing democracy a thing worth dying for, but the mightiest military and economic power on earth would turn against them and side with their foes. They had to give up their dreams of determining their own political future. Back in the National Palace, Balaguer would prolong his presidency to 12 consecutive years by resorting to graft, intimidation, police brutality, personal use of State resources, incarceration, electoral fraud, murder, and other unorthodox means that *The New York Times* acknowledged but still thought highly enough of him to regard him as a 'prudent' leader in a 1970 feature article on his successful rule ('Prudent Dominican' 1970). Hardly any doubt exists that with the consolidation of the antipopular regime, the people's hope received a deadly blow. The poet Pedro Mir's sequence 'Concerto of Hope for the Left Hand' opens with lines that interpret with poignant pathos the prevailing atmosphere of defeat: 'The rollers fell on the cobblestones. And/dawn as she danced became a cloud of dust. /Oh, everything was left reduced to dust: Dust/' (Mir 1993: 141).

Hopelessness fueled the instinct to escape. Emigration began in unprecedented numbers, reaching unforeseen proportions. Balaguer's economic restructuring, which curtailed employment options for the masses, closed doors at home. The new immigration law passed by the U. S. Congress in 1965 opened them abroad. The migratory flow that started would remain unabated for the next four decades (Hernandez and Torres-Saillant 1996: 3). Bereft of the will to put up a fight with the forces of adversity, my father became a passive witness to history. He watched from the viewing stand of his powerlessness how young anti-government activists would

appear on sidewalks, their mouths full of flies, murdered by paramilitary death squads. Sometimes police officers or army soldiers themselves would barge into the house of a marked revolutionary and shoot him right there in the presence of mother, spouse, siblings or offspring. He did not harbor oppositional feelings against the Balaguer regime perhaps because he remembered the President as a childhood friend. He failed to see the regime systemically, stemming naturally from the dictatorship that had rendered him irrelevant. Perhaps too, the product of a conservative social order, he genuinely felt no sympathy for the plight of leftists.

My father passively witnessed, as my mother, suffocated by his lack of economic resourcefulness in the face of the pressing basic needs of seven children, was dragged by the migratory flow to the United States in search of material survival. After settling in a Brooklyn apartment, cruising the garment factories, and peddling Avon products to Hispanic customers, she sent for the children in two stages. I arrived with the first shipment on 3rd April 1973, at the age of eighteen, a sociopolitical product of the 1965 U.S. invasion and the right-wing Balaguer regime that followed, just as my father had been socialized by the 1916 U.S. military occupation and the devastating dictatorship that ensued. I believe I owe it to my early induction into the ways of grown-up life as well as to my having a specialized skill to sell to the job market that I made the crossing to a relatively productive existence without grave, discernible trauma. Because of my working experience in the shoemaking trade and my uninterrupted interest in academic pursuits, my dual occupation as an aspiring scholar and an income-producing worker helped me continue a relatively familiar life. Throughout the 1970s I sold my services to some of the shoe factories that had not yet vanished from New York in the transformation that eroded the city's former industrial economy to make way for the dominion of the service sector. I also held on to my routine of going to school at night, and when I graduated from Brooklyn College in June 1979, I could earnestly say, with greater veracity than that of Richard Nixon in the 'Checker's' speech, that 'I worked my way through college.'

Power, Authority, and the Resistive Spirit

Until after graduate school in the Comparative Literature Department at New York University I did not have occasion to develop a language with which to articulate my sense of pause vis-à-vis intellectual power brokerage. But the diffuse teachings of my father's mixed signals, the awareness that his desire to instill erudite leanings in me fructified only because my unschooled peasant mother fought against enormous odds to secure her children's material survival, and the eminently terrestrial outlook that working for a living from primary school onward seems to have fostered in me, all combined to make me less uncritical of the whole institution of scholarship and

knowledge production than I recall my graduate school peers being. When I took my first European history, classics, and art history courses at Brooklyn College, I thought of humanistic knowledge and the words that are used to transmit it as totally impartial endeavors. Like the Native American writer Betty Louise Bell, I regarded words as 'neutral, without political or personal affiliations, as equalizing in their availability as death' (Bell 2000: 32). But soon some of the words of the great minds of the West began to reveal themselves with a degree of offense whose virulence I only wished my father had warned me about when he regaled us with his Eurocentric erudition at home in Santiago four decades ago.

A recognition of the endurance of the racial imagination suggested to me that if you are a non-white who have traveled to the republic of Western letters as a colonial migrant, especially if you belong to one of the ethnic or racial groups which Western discourse has assiduously undertaken to inferiorize, you cannot uncritically inherit western intellectual developments irrespective of how enticingly progressive they might feel. I now more than ever think it dangerously unwise to cease asking the question: In exactly what way does this particular Western notion - which was not conceived with me in mind - have to do with me?

Inequity in the Market of Ideas

After reading Roland Barthes at NYU in the early 1980s I discovered to my amazement the privilege that Western academics had when it came to substantiating their claims about history, knowledge, truth or the human condition. They could forgivably restrict their scholarly references and literary illustrations to authors from their own country. Their provincialism did not diminish the authority of their postulates. The discovery that Western narratives of humanity could afford to ignore the historical experience of people from backgrounds similar to mine made me suspicious of their accuracy. I remember distinctly that this thought cohered in my mind in the Fall of 1982 when, after a brief conversation with the instructor, I made a decision about dropping a course for which I had just registered. It was a genre course entitled 'The Historical Novel,' and the reading list included the likes of Victor Hugo, Sir Walter Scott, George Eliot, Benito Pérez Galdós, Honoré de Balzac, Giuseppe di Lampedusa, and Leo Tolstoi. Since I had already read what Georg Lukacs had to say on the subject and the authors listed tickled my appetite, I signed up enthusiastically, thinking also that the course would offer me the opportunity to write a research paper that looked at two Dominican historical novels, *Enriquillo* (1880) by Manuel de Jesús Galván and *La sangre* (1912) by Tulio Manuel Cestero, with the hope of determining how these Caribbean specimens of the form compared with the European ones on the reading list as well as to ascertain how they measured up to the generalizations about the genre put forth by Lukacs. When the professor

categorically informed me that he would accept only papers dealing with the novels on the list, I immediately extinguished my enthusiasm for the course. I had already understood that any look at any aspect of human culture that advertises itself as having panoramic pretensions ('the historical novel') but chooses its evidence in a culturally narrow way is annoyingly deceptive.

I cannot help sensing a sort of connection between the foregoing incident and another that took place at the start of my first semester in graduate school in the Fall of 1979. I had to go to a classroom on the fourth floor of the Main Building, located on Waverly Place right across from Washington Square Park, for the first of a two-part seminar on literary theory and criticism. We had begun with Plato and would continue through Dryden. The following semester the excursion would take us from Alexander Pope through the post-structuralists. At any rate, on this particular evening, as I was approaching the classroom door, a white, corpulent security guard stopped me to ask what I was doing on that floor. When I explained my business there he sternly demanded that I show identification. His incredulity addressed, he let me go on my way. Until that moment I had not seen nor would I see anytime thereafter a guard so verify the identity of another student on the floor. Symbolically, a parallel has insinuated itself into my mind between the professor who didn't allow my Dominican novels into his classroom and the security guard who didn't see an NYU graduate student when beholding me.

Subsequently I taught the Humanities core course as an adjunct for NYU's General Studies Program, covering Homer to Italian opera in one semester and Milton through Picasso in the other. It must have taken at least two months before the staff at the entrance door of Bobst Library became familiar enough with my face to be able to stop squinting their eyes to look more closely at my ID card everytime I presented it, the uncertainty most likely caused by the apparent discrepancy between my racial visage and the faculty status that my card displayed. I believe these incidents stem from the same predicament. My physical presence, my body did not seem to belong in the role of a graduate student strolling spryly on the fourth floor of the Main Building anymore than it did in the elevated status of the NYU faculty. The presence there of folks who looked like me defied the norm that was familiar to the staff just as for my professor permitting the entrance into his classroom of my two Dominican novels would have meant having to step outside the realm of the familiar. The bodies of people and the bodies of knowledge they produce often suffer a common antipathy when they hold the losing end of the colonial rope.

Circumstances in graduate school conspired to keep me reminded of my difference, and I came to regard that self-awareness of alterity as a good thing. I owned to my ontological self-recognition as a worker and a colonial migrant in the way I read books and interacted with the systems of significance they promoted or embodied. I

discovered I had a perspective. In that discovery, I differed radically from my father who never reached a point of ethnoracial and cultural self-awareness enabling him to require that to be valid definitions of human culture had to include him or to fight those definitions should they exclude him. My perspective sensitized me to the possible horror of succumbing to suicidal reasoning; a thought process whereby colonial peoples deny themselves epistemological self-sufficiency. Suicidal reasoning is fostered by the imperial imagination, whose spell causes us to see the citizens of the colonial powers as the only producers of valid meaning.

A healthier, more self-loving stance would seem to encourage the colonial migrant to affirm the opposite, to affirm, for instance, that Antillean people harbor all of humanity's complexity no less than the French, the Chinese, or the Iroquois. Their experience has what it takes to illuminate the drama of the whole species. They contain the stuff of the universal as well as any other branch of the human family. Self-protective reasoning rejects outright the logic that construes its notion of humanity on the basis of preferred powerful nations, against whom the rest of the world's population is expected to measure itself, relegating everybody else, that is, to a secondary ontology. Owing to my colonial difference enabled me to resist the impulses of the imperial imagination, distancing myself from other minority scholars who have allowed themselves to be coerced into self-effacement, losing, therefore, the moral ascendancy to marshal any cause on behalf of their community.

Western Education and Colonial Alterity

The novelist Senci3n says that luck is a historical category, and I count myself lucky for the circumstances of my colonial mobility. I came to the Western academy not as a foreign student from the colony whom the Metropolis picked for special treatment. I came to the United States as a labor migrant. I had occasion to recognize myself as an ethnic minority and gradually developed a deep sense of kinship with constituencies whose conditions of social marginality I shared. I had my mother's legacy of endurance and my father's rare sense of self-worth as beacons to mark my path in the struggle for survival.

I lived in the Dominican enclave of Washington Heights, in Northern Manhattan, during my NYU graduate school years. While I could perhaps complain that the neighborhood did not provide me with erudite interlocutors with whom I might discuss my interest in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* during a seminar on the Italian Renaissance, my meticulous line-by-line examination of the ancient Greek original of the *Philoctetes* for a Sophocles course, or my master's degree thesis on the French, German, Spanish, Italian, and English contributions to the Arthurian Romance, I experienced no severance of communal ties. The topics of my small talk

changed when I took the train from Washington Square up to Washington Heights, but the neighborhood did not lack material to engage me in conversation. Once the community identified me as a scion who was into books and learning, who was pursuing the intellectual accreditation of a doctoral degree, it made me responsible for contributing to neighborhood advancement projects, cultural events, and political causes. I became a desirable invitee to membership in committees of various sorts. Community organizations would often call on me to deliver lectures on myriad topics without regard for the specificity of my field of expertise. They overestimated what I could do because they needed me, and I had to respond accordingly by often going to the library for a few days to give myself a crash course on the subject of my commission in hurried preparation for the upcoming lecture. In short, I received enough clues to understand that my graduate school training did not matter only to me. Two separate receptions coordinated by community organizations to celebrate the completion of my Ph.D. degree further accentuated that understanding.

Instead of becoming estranged, therefore, my ties to the community grew stronger. As I possessed the high literacy that so many in my community could never hope of acquiring, I had the feeling that the people in the community had entrusted in me the portion of their struggle that corresponded to the academic trenches. While other community activists advanced the cause of the collective in areas dealing with issues such as housing, employment, voter's registration, and health, it seemed to fall on the likes of me to attend to the areas of symbolic politics, epistemological recognition, and fair cultural representation. Thus far my published writings have screamed against 'world literature overviews' that omit most of the Third World, have argued that the Caribbean has produced metadiscourses of its own to speak about its own complexities, have protested the exclusions that Dominicans have perennially suffered in the U.S. as well as in the Latin American academy, and have promoted the insertion of the U.S. Hispanic experience in national constructions of Americanness. I have found my place in the academy in the realm of epistemological warfare, as a strategically cantankerous advocate fending off exclusionary narratives of humanity, of nation, of citizenship.

I realized it behooved me to read as an ethnic if I wished to circumvent suicidal reasoning. Reading as an ethnic meant one had to stay alert about the tendency of Western discourse to leave large portions of the planet's population out when speaking about the species. One had to remain vigilant about one's exclusion from the account in question, so as to, when necessary, validate one's experience as ground to contest the said account. Reading as an ethnic meant one refrains from uncritical acceptance of any paradigm, worldview, or critical lexicon coming from England, Germany, and France as marking a stage of knowledge that supersedes preceding ones and automatically applies to our condition though we are not Brits, Germans, or French. It means you invariably ask yourself whether you may already

have autochthonous concepts that already provide explanation for the problem at hand, that is, whether native intellects had already given names to the issues in question or had provided perspectives to deal with the given human complexity under perusal, thus making the adoption of the Western input less urgent.

The ethnic reader that I envisioned and wished to emulate is an emancipated intellect who recognizes his colonial upbringing, the preponderance of Western notions in his own formation, but who does not buy into the epistemological monopoly of Eurocentric formulations. She has not given up on the potential of alternative knowledges coming from precolonial systems of significance - if she is Amerindian, African, or Indian - or syncretic thought born of the cultural fusion of the colonial transaction - if she is Antillean. The ethnic reader, therefore, has the power to overcome the compulsion to update his or her critical vocabulary regularly in order to incorporate every new usage that the industry makes current especially if the matter under study remains more or less the same: society, culture, equity. The language that the ethnic reader uses to speak about his or her community does not change with every neologism or lexical innovation contained in the latest critical theory book that comes on the market.

Reading as an ethnic, I find it insufficiently compelling to incorporate the term 'habitus' in my critical lexicon, all due respect to the late Pierre Bourdieu notwithstanding. But I find nothing denoted by the term that we did not already recognize in existing terminology prior to the French sociologist's decision to make use of his knowledge of Latin. I am mindful of Cervantes's exposing of scholarly postures to lend intellectual respectability to one's words. In the 'Prologue' to his *Don Quixote* (1605), the author refers to the advice he received from a friend to help him raise the level of authority of his writing. Among other strategies, the friend recommends this: 'you have to make use of those scraps of Latin that you know by heart or can look up without too much bother' (Cervantes 1949: 13). The word 'simulacrum' comes into the language of many colleagues through a particular contact with Jean Baudrillard's discussion of the contemporary moment as dominated by a hyperreal society of simulation (Baudrillard 1994). But for a Spanish speaker who has grown up hearing the word 'simulacro' in ordinary speech the term would not automatically trigger an engagement with French critical theory. In my case, the term evokes memories of the song 'Teatro' by La Lupe played often by radio stations in my childhood. The song opens with these lines: 'Teatro, lo tuyo es puro teatro/falsedad bien ensayada/estudiado simulacro.' I am told by German speakers that the same can be said of a perfectly ordinary word like 'cathect' which has now become loaded with postmodern intertextuality. The question of what words or whose words one chooses to convey one's meaning matters enormously.

The intellectual industry of the West has the capability of appropriating, resignifying,

and giving currency to or withholding it from words in a very asymmetrical fashion. The Caribbean critical term 'creolization' cannot hope of achieving the global dissemination that a comparable term accepted into the Western critical lexicon such as 'hybridity' has attained. The recognition of that asymmetry can cause the ethnic minority scholar to suppress autochthonous terminology and replace it with the language that the Western academy will more easily recognize.

Commitment to Theory and Ethnic Predicament

To avoid the risk of epistemological obliteration that suicidal reasoning fosters, the ethnic scholar must overcome the temptation of living intellectually in constant pursuit of an elusive cutting edge whose lead remains the exclusive province of Western academics in England, Germany, and France. A self-protective stance would encourage the ethnic minority scholar to remember at all times that Western academics too read as ethnics, except that they can afford to assume that their findings apply equally well to all other ethnics. Conversely, inquiries into the human experience of Africans, Latin Americans, Asians or Antilleans by native scholars are never assumed to contain the cross-cultural explanatory power necessary to account for the Western portion of humanity. The unequal status of Third World knowledges vis-à-vis their Western counterparts spawns an arrangement whereby English, French, and German thinkers, even when they have made their name by launching a radical and revolutionary critique of Euro-North American imperialism, become automatically the intellectual masters of non-Western thinkers. As no self-respecting ethnic minority voice can feel satisfied with that subservient status, which is sustained by unequal relations of force between a center and its margins, the rapport of the non-Western intellect with the *a priori* epistemological authority of the West should be one of suspicion and distrust.

Reading as an ethnic, then, means for me to recognize my obligation to subvert the *a priori* authority of my theoretical masters. I do not mean here to incur the 'damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged,' an error brought to our attention by Homi K. Bhabha, who refutes the contention that the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Eurocentric archives of 'an imperialist or neo-classical West' (1994: 19). Bhabha, more rhetorically than inquisitively, asks the following: 'Are the interests of "Western" theory necessarily collusive with the hegemonic role of the West as a power bloc? Is the language of theory merely another power play of the culturally privileged Western elite to produce a discourse of the Other that reinforces its own power-knowledge equation?' (20-21). Whatever one might say in response, it seems,

in light of the foregoing discussion, that the answer is less unproblematically negative than the Sussex University professor would wish us to think. But even if we simply chose not to accept the terms of his questions in order to avoid binarisms and to show that polemics does not require polarization, one might still wish to consider whether the tools for codifying 'that Third Space of enunciations' that Bhabha has 'made the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference' could not possibly hinge on the authority of some Caribbean, African, or Indian truth-claim rather than on Western critical knowing (38). In other words one could wonder about exactly why it is that the codification itself, the actual theory - not just an illustration of the idea in a passage from the fiction of Naipaul or a particular tributary insight from an essay by Wilson Harris - could not come from a non-Western intellect. I, for instance, feel unattended in my curiosity regarding whether Bhabha definitely had to have recourse to Jacques Lacan to develop his notion of mimicry and that there was nothing in the vast history of thought production in his native India that could provide a comparable clue to the concept (Bhabha 1994: 85). Benítez-Rojo one might recall admitted that he could have found in Cuban Santería the conceptual resources afforded to him by chaos theory had he chosen to make use of them.

Nor does it seem to me sustainable for an Indian or Antillean scholar to construe the category of thought production called theory as one devoid of its own cultural specificity. The Western academic market uses the term theory to refer to a certain kind of discursive intervention, which constitutes a peculiar way of organizing knowledge. In the humanities and the social sciences the word theory does not designate, as it does in physics or biology, a systematic ideational scheme of broad scope based on empirical observation or relying on experimentation, regularity of findings, and testing of a working hypothesis to arrive at sound explanations of phenomena. Literary scholars, cultural critics and sociologists are not committed to the task of constructing 'a complete unified theory of everything in the universe,' which Stephen W. Hawking tells us is a fixation with physicists who long for a scheme that would make possible 'the unification of physics' (Hawking 1988: 154). Subject to revision or replacement if they fail to hold in light of pertinent data known to be true, theories enable scientists to make predictions. When their theories prove to have no use for that purpose, they normally discard them (Hesse: 405-08).

In the republic of letters theory normally refers to a particular reading of society, humanity, or given texts and its currency does not depend on confirmation or explanatory value but on its appeal to consumers on the intellectual market. Similarly, its waning seldom comes as a result of a vigorous refutation that proves it false, but rather through the loss of luster that comes with overuse, especially as another more exciting theoretical intervention, offering a more dynamic array of expressive possibilities, gradually wins the favor of the scholarly market. The hoax played by Alan Sokal on the cultural studies journal *Social Text* (46-47

[Spring/Summer 1996]: 217-52) would seem to suggest that merely emulating a particular diction and quoting the right people - those recognized by a particular coterie - can give an intervention the required 'theoretical' bent and earn admission into the pertinent fora (Sokal and Bricmont 1998: 269). Colleagues in their monographs and their conference presentation use the word theorize as a transitive verb, meaning often no more than 'expand on.' You leave a point 'undertheorized' if you fail to flesh it out. The prevailing assumption, of course, is that a formulation's theoretical value lies in its general applicability, which presupposes a level of abstraction that transcends the explanation of the specific phenomenon on which it was deployed.

I could, for instance, analyze the Dominican Revolution of 1965 in a manner that highlights principles that operate in the genus of events that the episode represents, revealing coordinates that others might wish to apply in their examinations of revolutions elsewhere. But recognition of theory does not occur in a geopolitical vacuum. It requires a context and normally entails an act of faith. Readers recognize the element of theory in a text when they can identify its author as an intellect who possesses the status of theorist. Theory, then, consists of the utterances of a theorist. Given the scenario of epistemological asymmetry described above and the unequal relations of force that sustain it, we cannot in the academic industry boast of having an intellectually leveled field. Historical events affecting the lives of people in the Dominican Republic, for instance, cannot muster the weight of symbolic irradiation necessary for readers to regard any lesson therein contained as useful for shedding light on the European occurrence of the human experience. Since in the prevailing academic imaginary the West represents humanity while places like the Caribbean yield meaning of merely local significance, the content of Dominican events remains trapped in the status of 'cases,' commanding solely illustrative value. The content of events in France, on the other hand, can easily acquire a paradigmatic worth. A truth claim voiced by Dominican speakers about the 1965 events will therefore appear inherently to have less theoretical value irrespective of the modicum of abstraction they may have thrust into their formulation. The marginality of their subject matter in the context of the academic market internationally will render their interventions less desirable for citation. Quoting them will not provide anxious young scholars the security of intellectual legitimation. At this point, only by translating their autochthonous bodies of knowledge and ways of knowing into the axes of analysis and terminologies of the Western academy can Antillean or Indian scholars hope to earn induction onto the fellowship of the theoretical ring. As the geopolitics of academic work currently stands, non-Western speculative inquiry has no easy walk to attaining the rank of theory.

Nor should we underestimate the most obvious reason for the widespread association between theory and Western discourse, namely that the intellectual histories of

culture areas such as Latin America and the Caribbean do not have a spot of authority and prestige reserved for authors who trade primarily in the deployment of paradigms. The most cursory glance at thought production in these regions will show that the greatest intellectuals there have invariably achieved their prominence on the basis of the articulateness of their analyses of situations in their respective societies. They advance knowledge and provide engaging interpretations of differentiated social realities. The most important intellectual interventions in the regions involved, including José Martí's 'Nuestra América,' Jean Price-Mars' *Ainsi parla L'Oncle*, Frantz Fanon's *Peau noires, Masques blancs*, Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Pedro Mir's *Tres leyendas de colores*, José Luis González' *El país de cuatro pisos*, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogia do oprimido*, Roberto Fernández Retamar's *Calibán*, Eduardo Galeano's *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*, and George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*, came into the republic of letters as finite discussions of specific historical, social, cultural, political, and existential problems. At no point do the schemes of thought employed by these authors attain ontological autonomy or rise above the worth of the content of their inquiries. They achieve their eloquence in the intimacy they show with the concrete reality under perusal. They write as insightful commentators on their societies, histories, and cultures, addressing identifiable problems and hoping to contribute to effectuating change. They do not restrict their address to their peers in the scholarly community, and, as such, do not limit their ambition to making a contribution in the republic of letters by moving the implications of a particular truth claim a few steps further than where a previous discursive intervention left it and go conceptually beyond the confines reached by the preceding theorist.

Lacking a sense of themselves as theorists, primarily authors who view their paradigms as their main subject, the Latin American and Caribbean writers cited above exhibit no expertise in the linguistic mannerisms and rhetorical trademarks of the scholar who's intent on cultivating a theoretical garden. They do not stress unduly the coinage of terms so as to stave a particular social field with their own verbal insignias. They do not make their signification dependent on the reader's erudite expertise in the family of texts in which they wish to place their own. They, for instance, would most likely not publish a sentence as intertextually overburdened as this: 'If we contest the "grand narratives," then what alternative temporalities do we create to articulate the differential (Jameson), contrapuntal (Said), interruptive (Spivak) historicities of race, gender, class, nation within a growing transnational culture?' (Bhabha 1994: 174). Nor do they insist on alerting the reader as to their paternity of terminology or particular perspectives on issues by means of such mnemonically self-referential phrases as: 'This is what I have called...'. They, in short, fail to display the rhetorical demeanor and verbal strategizing whereby Western authors tend to promote the theoretical status of their speculation. As such, they make fewer gestures to enable the reader to recognize their utterances as theory.

A Latin American or Caribbean scholar, of course, can undeniably have the possibility of attaining the status of theorist should he or she abide by the Western rules of the game. Demonstrating dexterity in the application of Western critical innovations to Third World texts and social realities, even if one took the liberty of slightly subverting the director texts by noting implications not articulated by their authors, one certainly can, *ceteris paribus*, penetrate the circle of prestige of the theorists. But if that procedure should too closely resemble the practice of giving in to suicidal reasoning, one might wish to undertake to explore alternative ways of upholding one's 'commitment to theory.' For me, an Antillean native whom the bipolarity of colonial migration has brought to the corridors of the U.S. academy, theoretical expertise becomes first and foremost a matter of professional necessity.

I need to become conversant in what the academy calls critical theory in order to make communication with my peers possible. Learning it enables me to understand their references and follow their meaning. I might even be called upon to teach a theory course, and my training should enable me to comply. But I do not necessarily and immediately become an adept convert, a devout believer whose worldview gets updated by every new publication 'in the field' that draws me closer to the cutting edge. In that respect, reading the works of authors like Jacques Derrida and Jean François-Lyotard becomes primarily an important effort of cultural literacy which contributes to my professional development and enables me to show competence on the job, but that competence does not in-and-of-itself satisfy the urgency of my search for intellectual self-protection. I still feel obligated to uphold a 'commitment to theory' that does not outright disqualify non-Western voices that are informed by their autochthonous bodies of knowledge, cultural systems, and forms of knowing. The idea ultimately is to resist the formidable monopoly of the Eurocentric imaginary in the definitions of humanity promoted by the intellectual industry in the West and to seek to restore the epistemological validity that non-Western thought production has been denied in the academy.

Ethnicity at Siege in the Global Society

At present the effort to affirm the intellectual legacies of non-white ethnic minorities faces a particularly grievous challenge given the advent in U.S. and British universities of influential trends in the organization of literary and cultural knowledge that favor a movement away from the ethnic, the national, the local, stressing rather the crosscultural, the transnational, the global. Again influenced by developments in Western critical theory, chiefly postmodernist perspectives, and specifically the British cultural studies movement that began at the Birmingham Centre, critics variously associated with subaltern and post-colonial studies,

including some prominent figures who are phenotypically non-white, have embraced the latest advances in the profession and have advocated expansive understandings of the field. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) would seem to disavow even the formulation of the otherwise familiar notion of Africa-American literature, insinuating that such a manner of tabulating the cultural products of U.S. blacks fails to account for the rhizomatic ties that link those artifacts to African, European intellectual history, and the Caribbean, ultimately fomenting nationalist approaches to the study of literature and culture. Instead, Gilroy prefers the social field he calls 'the black Atlantic,' a designation that emphasizes diasporic mobility, cultural formations that have connected the black experience to all three sites of the triangular trade, and black culture as an integral part of Western modernity. The 'image of the ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean' serve for him as an organizing principle of the 'rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation' he calls 'the black Atlantic,' which transcends 'both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity' (1993: 4, 19).

Given the success of Gilroy's intervention, as is witnessed in that some U.S. universities and cultural institutions have already incorporated Black Atlantic Studies among their bona fide fields of inquiry, one may have reason to fear the deleterious effect that the highly appealing desire to liberate the study of blacks from "the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity" may have on the survival of ethnic studies initiatives, which in the U.S. academy came into being as a result of a social and political struggle. The creation of these academic initiatives sought to remedy centuries of exclusion of the human experience of non-white ethnic minorities from the standard narrative of the American nation and to rectify the model of humanity upon which the narrative was built. It might therefore become necessary to justify their existence once again by declaring that the national specificity of the word 'American' in the compound gentilitial designations African-American, Asian-American, or Native American to describe bodies of writing does not necessarily entail an espousal of extreme nationalist ideas of literature, and it does not subscribe the programs in question to the idea of American literature propounded by the architects of the national canon prior to the 1960s. The Civil Rights, Women's Rights, and other social movements over the last five decades have had a transformative impact on what we do in the classroom, especially in the human sciences. Those events - far more than any development in French or British critical theory - have brought about a rethinking of traditional notions of citizenship, national belonging, and Americanness. It seems at this juncture necessary to remind ourselves of the enduring significance of various sorts of borders which make justifiable and indispensable the continued existence of national literary studies and of ethnically inflected analyses despite our aspiration to transcend them in the future.

I see no direct connection between our use of the gentilial designation 'African American' or Asian American or U.S. Hispanic for a given ethnic corpus and the deployment of 'narrow nationalist perspectives' incurably committed to 'the spurious invocation of ethnic particularity,' to use Gilroy's dismissive characterization of the unnamed ideologues whose positions his book sets out to prove wrong (Gilroy 1993: 29). This is not the place to pass judgment on the validity of Gilroy's proposed metaphor, the degree of academic rigor evinced by his argument, the source of his extreme faith in the explanatory power of his phraseology, or the ideological atmosphere that explains the celebrity of his book precisely within the national confines of the United States. But even the evidence that he himself adduces in his discussion of nineteenth-century black American thinkers (i.e. his insistence on the European paternity of their ideas) could serve to dispel the fear that the specificity implicit in 'African-American' might irremediably foster the examination of black culture without regard for the world outside the geography of the United States. I actually do not see how, in studying the black cultural and literary experience in North America one could remain oblivious to the subject's rhizomatic links to Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, American Indian societies, and the various differentiated segments of the US population across the land's multiplicity of histories, knowledges, and cultural forms.

During a visit to the Schomburg - a branch of the New York Public Library named significantly after a black Puerto Rican who distinguished himself as a historian of the African heritage and who excelled among the luminaries of the Harlem Renaissance - I purchased a book of photographs of African-American men and women of letters. The book's cover, which featured the face of novelist and short fiction writer Edwidge Danticat, gave me some food for thought. Danticat came to the United States from Haiti, knowing no English, when she was a young girl. Her gracing that cover as a bona fide member of the community of authors therein assembled indicates to me that the designation African-American is not devoid of its measure of elasticity. Even a compilation as recognizably mainstream as *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., could suffice to illustrate the inexorably cross-cultural, inter-lingual, and transnational complexity of the body of utterances known collectively as African-American literature.

By including Equiano's slave narrative, for instance, the *Norton* transgresses geographical boundaries since the author, a native of North Africa, lived his 'American' experience largely in the West Indies, before ending up in England. The inclusion of slave narratives itself is significant. The anthology does it without demoting the genre to the realm of the 'non literary world,' as Cleanth Brooks, R.W.B.Lewis and Robert Penn Warren do with the work of Frederick Douglass and other 'informal' writings in their 'American literature' compendium (1973: 1016-

17). One cannot accuse the compilation by Gates et al. of upholding traditional (purist) ideas of literariness. The same goes for the selection of Negro spirituals, blues lyrics, and samples of black oratory. But to return to the 'dogmatism' that so horrifies Gilroy's fancy, the serious study of the black American experience makes it very hard for literary scholars to commit the sin of narrow nationalism.

The writings of such authors as Victor Séjour, Eric Walrond, and Paule Marshall, all anthologized in the *Norton*, would simply not allow it. The text by Sejour is an English translation of a French original, French being the literary language of many African-descended Louisiana Creoles in the nineteenth century, which alerts us to the linguistic complexity in the literature of the United States. Walrond's book *Tropic Death* (1926), which was published in New York City in the wake of the Harlem Renaissance, draws on the author's experience as a black British subject who was born in 1898 in Georgetown, Guyana, spent his childhood in Barbados, and went to school in the Panamanian city of Colón, in the Canal Zone, prior to arriving in the United States on June 30, 1918, where he would play an active role in the black cultural life of New York City. Finally, the inclusion of Paule Marshall, whose writings are fueled mostly by Caribbean history and West Indian immigrant life in New York City, implicitly recognizes the ample breadth of the very idea of African-American literature. The works of Marshall, along with those of Toni Morrison and Gayl Jones, have received attention precisely with a focus on their 'inter-American links' in the book *Bridging the Americas* (1995) by Stelamaris Coser.

I have no intention of pastoralizing the open-mindedness of Gates and the other colleagues who compiled the *Norton*. I merely wish to stress that the appellation African American literature and culture names a field of study that is inherently traversed by an experience that is black diasporic, which renders it naturally amiable to cross-cultural, transnational, and multi-lingual examinations. One must remember that this area of inquiry, consistent with the other domains of knowledge within the larger field of ethnic studies, came into existence precisely in response to exclusionary formulations and homogenizing articulations of national culture in the United States. As such, it is intellectually poised to challenge rather than promote 'narrow' nationalisms. The emergence of ethnic studies perspectives has contributed to our widening the lens as we consider the cultural forms and bodies of writing that merit inclusion in the field of American literature. They have almost invariably endeavored to subvert the paradigms deployed by those seeking vigilantly to patrol the borders of the canon.

A similar case can be made to show that Latino literature, while existing within the confines of the United States, has little patience for confining definitions of the country's culture. For instance, one needs to know Spanish and English to read the writings of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, a native of California who in 1885

published *The Squatter and the Don*, a novel dealing with the political and socio-cultural effects of the Anglo occupation of the Southwest. Tomás Rivera, a Texan born in Crystal City, wrote his first novel in Spanish, and the South Texas poet and cultural icon Gloria Anzaldúa combines Spanish and English in her texts. The rapport of Spanish and English - complicated at times by the use of words and phrases from the indigenous Native American languages of the Southwest - is a constant feature of Latino literature, one which contributes to the opening of the American mind by foregrounding the too long neglected fact that the country's literature speaks many different languages. One could invoke the Yiddish and other non-Anglophone survivals to make plain that the literary use of languages other than English has occurred among whites as well.

Perhaps Gilroy's extreme confidence in the explanatory power of his black Atlantic metaphor over the paradigms coming from African-American studies hinges on a mindset that regards any configuration of cultural experience within a national framework as retrograde and inadequate. This militant anti-nationalism has problems of its own. The evangelists of transnational dynamics and the heralds of the global society speak as if they in fact believed that we as a species have already left the nation-state behind. They see the world presently going through a stage of historical evolution characterized by a state of affairs in which world systems now serve the functions formerly served by particular polities, differentiated cultures or individual societies in shaping people's world-views and immediate realities. They quickly dismiss social movements that do not articulate their cause in planetary terms as efforts that are stymied by the quagmire of filiopietistic affiliations to imagined communities. Our national or tribal identity having become obsolete, we are urged to think of ourselves as global beings. A problem the evangelists of the global society would need to address, though, is the strange coincidence between their views and the arguments of the agencies of world capitalism such as the IMF that seek to persuade Third World rulers and business leaders to desist from the idea of developing national industries and achieving economic self-sufficiency. The imperial mega-banks would advise that at this stage of the game the thing to do for the sake of local populations is to remove economic barriers to foreign investors so that international capital can move unencumbered. The documentary film *Life and Debt* (2001) by Stephanie Black beautifully and painfully illustrates this predicament as it relates to Jamaica's dependent economy. I do not know of one country where loss of economic autonomy in the name of participating in the global economy has brought about enhanced material well-being, justice, and equality for the population.

Capital always knew how to transcend national boundaries. Decades ago the institutional vehicles through which capital pursued the business of accumulation globally were called multinational corporations. From the conquest of America, to the scramble for Africa, to the contemporary spread of Free Trade Zones throughout

the Third World, Western capitalism has yearned to transcend boundaries, cross over cultures, erase distances, and remove all the impediments that might obstruct or slow down the process of planetary domination and global accumulation. Border crossing is a primary occupation of empire. As such, Western empires have competed fiercely among themselves for hegemony over the process of redistricting the globe. Learned observers of the transformations that follow from imperial mobility have at various junctures proclaimed the advent of a new world. The European war of 1914-18 produced considerable cartographic shifts. Isaiah Bowman's 1922 book *The New World*, surveying the outcome of post-war restructuring, asked several questions, including these: 'How much of the old world is left? What kind of people composes the new states? Will the new democracies survive - in Poland and Yugoslavia and Austria, for example - or are some of the experiments in self-government likely to fail? Will the strong states administer their colonies and protectorates in the interest of the natives? Has the day of deliverance come for the oppressed minorities of the earth? Will strong nations continue to struggle for trade privileges, raw materials, and economic zones, with the prospect of war between them?' (Cited by Short 1998: 5-6).

When George Bush père in the 1980s announced the arrival of a new dawn in human history, calling it 'a new world order,' his speech echoed a long tradition in the rhetoric of empire. But perhaps we need to emphasize here that the newness in question, the historical freshness enunciated in the pronouncements of imperial town criers, seldom matches the perception of those whose condition remains as bad as they had known it prior to the proclaimed rearrangements. The politically and economically disinherited throughout the world do not have their reality transformed necessarily by every stylistic change in the form of international domination. I find it comforting that Habermas' musings on 'the post-national' in a recent book on the subject center specifically around the member countries of the European Union, which he calls 'societies of well-being' (Habermas 1998:98). That is as it should be. Still too many communities on this planet inhabit a world which for them has remained too much like it was for their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. The indigenous population of Brazil still does not enjoy the status of citizenship under the law. The children of Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic are not recognized as Dominicans, despite the principle of *jus solis* embraced by the country's constitution, which means that they do not receive the birth certificate that would qualify them to enter school, benefit from standard social services, and fend off deportation. Similarly, Palestinians still yearn for a place that they can call their own, where they can, in the words of Edward Said, 'rebuild their culture and their national identity' (Interview, c-span's book notes, 2001). In other words, partaking of the succor that a fair nation-state might offer still remains a goal to aspire to for too many people around the world.

The Enduring Significance of Borders

For ethnically differentiated minorities in the United States and elsewhere, especially those that have endured duress on account of their difference vis-à-vis a cultural and political center of power, the nation-state still has some promises to keep and miles to go before one can permit it restfully to retire. That's one way of putting it. Another is that the disempowered have nothing but the nation as a structure within which to fight for material improvement, equality, and justice. Only the nation at this point provides them with a political forum - sustained by constitutions, the law, and the occasional influence of 'the international community' to demand respect and assert their rights, including the right to redefine the nation. So-called communities of color in the United States have for many decades now fought in various ways to attain full citizenship. Their effort has yielded considerable fruit. Witness the fact that lynchings and Jim Crow prohibitions no longer figure in the menu of sorrows that blacks have to endure. We cannot deny the areas of tangible progress before us. The nation has indubitably come closer to living up to the true meaning of its creed. We still have serious challenges that cry for urgent redressing: alarming numbers of black males in the state penitentiaries; overrepresentation of black children among the unschooled, the unfed, the hopeless; and severe under-representation of black adults in the faculty of universities throughout the country, to name only a few of them.

There is no planetary, post-national, post-ethnic, and cross-cultural tribunal where U.S. blacks can go to file a complaint and seek to correct these social ills in their community. Like Latinos, Asian Americans, and even - albeit problematically - Native Americans, African Americans need the nation-state to confer a logic and a logistics to their struggle for human dignity. They need to assert themselves as Americans, and in so doing they do not incur in the myopia of narrow nationalism. Rather they help to free up Americanness from, on the one hand, the rigidity of Eurocentric ontologies and, on the other, the spatial confinement that border patrols specialize in securing. Whether one has been brought into the Union by the social death of slavery (blacks), by territorial dispossession (Native Americans), by conquest and regional domination (Latinos), or by imperial bridging of vast distances (Asian Americans), the major non-white ethnic minorities in the United States share an experience of common diasporic uprooting and a hypermnesic sense of the presence of the dyad *elsewhere/yoretime*. I see that hypermnesic sense as a deterrent against narrowly conceived ideas of nation. The works of some major Latina writers like Julia Alvarez could be read as continuous exercises in counting the multiple valid ways of asserting Americanness without the encasement of narrow nationalism. Alvarez, for instance, constructs her American identity by constantly deambulating within the polarities of Hispanic and Anglo symbols, values, and forms.

For reasons that one might wish to term dialectical, people at the margins often precede their mainstream counterparts in recognizing the pitfalls of rigid formulations of citizenship and nation. Speaking in 1906, a time when Italians had not yet ascended to whiteness in the United States, the secretary of the Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants Gino Speranza argued for an 'international citizenship' to rescue us from the ambivalence fostered by the situation that 'makes a man an American while here, and an Italian while in Italy' (cited by Foner 2000: 169). Speranza sought to draw attention to the complex political location of a large part of the US population that felt a dual allegiance to here and there: 'We may have to bring ourselves to the point of recognizing foreign 'colonies' in our midst, on our own soil, as entitled to partake in the parliamentary life of their mother country' (169). These transnational dilemmas are inescapable for people who have a history of diasporic uprooting which their present disempowerment causes them to remember. Ethnically differentiated and racialized communities in the United States did not begin to think about the porosity of borders, liminality, margins, interstices, in-betweenness, displacement, periphery, hybridity, and crossings when prompted by critical theory. They did not have to wait until the Western intelligentsia, managing to reassert its epistemological predominance through such successful projects as cultural studies and postcolonialism, made these terms part of its nomenclatural arsenal. The experiential sites, situations, and positions that those terms connote correspond tangibly to the stressful ways in which those communities have lived their history.

When the writers, the literary scholars, and the cultural critics from racialized ethnic minorities in the United States think of American literature they tend at once to display two dissimilar but not mutually exclusive intents: to assert their rightful place in the national corpus that the designation names and to challenge the sociocultural framework that first went into its naming. Suffice it to glance at the project of 're-writing American literary history' evinced by the authors included in *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology* (1991) edited by Hector Calderón and José David Saldívar, to name only one such intervention. The work of Toni Morrison, for instance, is heavily invested in scrutinizing the remnants of an African cultural survival which accounts for the distinct diction of her ethnic community, but that intercontinental exchange coexists in the author's mind with the desire to assert the neglected centrality of the black experience to the national American literature and culture. She observes in her 1992 essay *Playing in the Dark* that 'American means white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen' (Morrison 1993: 47). By the same token, the young American writer of Dominican descent Angie Cruz, author of the novel *Soledad*, which evokes life in the New York City neighborhood of Washington Heights, is very much rooted in this country. She

knows there can be no material home for her in the Caribbean homeland of her parents, *but as an elsewhere/yovertime* it inevitably informs her cultural world in the United States. When I interviewed her at the Public Theater in New York City on July 13, 2001, I posed this question: 'Do you remember consciously deciding at one point that your characters would be Dominican?,' to which she quickly and unhesitatingly responded: 'No, I just never thought they would not be.' And her work is no less American than Mark Twain's.

In sum, since from the perspective of ethnic studies the national context presupposes neither a rigid understanding of Americanness nor a narrow conception of the nation, it would seem appropriate to grant that promoting African-American literature as a body of writings that occurs in the United States specifically does not automatically place us into disquieting complicity with any retardatory intellectual projects that we might wish to distance ourselves from. At the very least, we will not incur a more grievous fault than we would if, in the name of a presumed theoretical currency, we wholeheartedly embraced the approach and vocabulary dictated by an Afro-Saxon scholar speaking about the correct way of studying the US black experience from the intellectual authority of the British academy. Siding with proponents of the black Atlantic could bring us into a perhaps much deeper folly since we might help to perpetuate the practice of telling racialized minorities that there is an external 'we' in privileged possession of a more reliable discernment of the logic of their history than they could possibly learn via their entrenched native perspectives. Would this not entail our persisting in 'the assumption that "we" can survey the world, redraw the boundaries, give sanction to (or withhold it from) *some* histories, languages, voices, experiences,' as Said would wonder? (Said 2001: 67).

Nobody in his or her right mind would obstinately oppose current critical challenges to the employment of 'traditional frameworks' in the study of literature. Contemporary literary theory has raised very incisive questions regarding the validity of the idea that literary artifacts exist within a national sphere or of the assumption that works of literary art exist in some sort of stable form that makes their identity unarguably distinct from other manifestations of verbal expression. But our recognition of the value of the questions raised does not immediately endow us with indisputably correct answers. We live in a very complex world, and an awareness of that reality has made me weary of thinkers who seem overconfident of the paradigms they deploy or the metaphors they devise to pronounce the last word on the structure of life, culture, history, and society throughout the entire globe. As a result, I have come to apportion my intellectual respect mostly to humble luminaries, folks, for instance, like Said, who believes unwaveringly in the existence of 'an autonomous aesthetic realm,' yet, despite his vast erudition, has the wisdom to admit ignorance concerning exactly 'how it exists in relation to history, politics, social structures, and the like' (Said 2001: 64).

The bodies of knowledge produced, gathered, unearthed, and disseminated by ethnic studies ventures in the US academy have spawned paradigms, emphases, and analytical perspectives formerly unfamiliar to our industry. Shelley Eversley of the University of Washington notes that African-American literary scholars 'offer our criticism as a means to explore the terms and implications of race, not just blackness, but race and its imposition on the various aspects of art, identity, narrative form, culture and, yes, history' (Eversley 2001: 21). This and other legacies indeed provide us with the wherewithal to cultivate the study of African-American literature and culture as well as American literature generally in a way that would not replicate older exclusionary nationalist paradigms. Said has asked whether one can at this point formulate 'a theory of connection between part and whole that denies neither the specificity of the individual experience nor the validity of a projected, putative, or imputed whole' (2001: 68). I would respond, definitely, yes. We can. And that is so, in the American case, because of the intellectual groundwork that generations of ethnic studies scholars have laid which has transformed the state of knowledge in the human sciences. Because of its ties to agendas involving the demand for full citizenship by racialized minorities existing within discrete polities, the ethnic studies perspective shows acute awareness of the importance, as Said insists in reminding us, not always of 'synthesis or the transcendence of opposites but of the role of geographic knowledge in keeping one grounded, literally, in the often tragic structure of social, historical, and epistemological contests over territory - this includes nationalism, identity, narrative, and ethnicity - so much of which informs the literature, thought, and culture of our time' (2001: 68).

Needless to say, the deployment of ethnic differentiation within a national framework in the study of literature and culture can boast no inherent virtue, having merely a predicamental value. When all segments of the population have achieved full citizenship, and the cultural field has been leveled, and the racial imagination has totally lost its power to confer or deny worth to intellectual achievements, such a differentiation will become superfluous. That will happen when literary curricula are automatically inclusive, i.e., accurately representative of the diversity of talent in the entire population without the teacher having to make a conscious effort to achieve fairness, and when a 3rd year English major in my class will not say of Amy Tan that her work is not American literature because 'she's Asian' (I say, 'well, ethnically, but she was born in California, and her books cover strictly American experiences,' and she insists, 'yeah, but she's Asian!'). I envision then no longer having to spend time demonstrating that Latinos have been a part of the United States for ages, meaning, that there is nothing foreign about a novelist named Américo Paredes whose characters have Spanish surnames. At that time US publishers will not wonder whether there are enough readers in a particular racialized community before accepting a manuscript by one of its authors, the book industry having already

stepped out of the schemes of thought responsible for persuading them that the sorrows of Twain's young Huck Finn (the 'human' experience) speak to all of us, whereas the conflicts of Sandra Cisneros' Esmeralda (the 'ethnic' experience) matter only to readers in the author's particular group. That day a dear friend of Toni Morrison and brilliant white American writer will no longer introduce her by saying, in a spirit of highest praise, that he doesn't think of her 'as black writer or a woman writer, but simply as a writer' ('you mean, a white male writer?,' she gorgeously retorts) (Interview with Bill Meyer). These futuristic evocations describe the advent of an era when social equality and justice have reached such plenitude that ethnic minorities will not suffer any consequences whatsoever on account of their difference. The ethnic and national differentiation evident in the designation African-American will lose then all meaning except as a neutral descriptor. At present, however, disdain for that designation would seem premature. Things being what they are rather what we hope they will become, it behooves us for now to take advantage of the worlds of knowledge, symbols, and forms in the vast field of African-American literature and culture, which rhizomatically connects regions and traditions, experiences and times.

Intellectual Self-Defense in Caribbean Thought

The epistemological disadvantage of U.S. ethnic minorities in relation to the mainstream cultural discourse in the United States compares meaningfully, I believe, with the plight of Caribbean peoples vis-à-vis the Western thought production industry. As a native of the Dominican Republic brought by colonial migration to the corridors of the U.S. academy, having, of course, passed the existential probation that stems from exilic uprooting, I happen to belong in the ethnic compartment apportioned in this country to Latinos as well as in the cultural platform of the Antillean who must, for the sake of intellectual self-respect, recognize his contradistinction to the West. The Antillean's rapport with the Western tradition cannot strip itself of the formidable complexities that lie at the core of the colonial experience. We can hardly refute the claim by Puerto Rican sociologist Angel (Chuco) Quintero Rivera at a panel in the 'Gran Cuenca del Caribe' bookfair in Barranquilla on May 9, 2002 that 'we too are the West' just as we partake of African and Amerindian heritages. Indeed, syncretic cultural formations do not have the option of excising any of their constituent elements.

To de-Westernize radically seems neither feasible nor desirable for the Antillean person. Despite how much one might still grieve over the cruelty of the colonial transaction, the bloodshed and the dehumanization perpetrated by the Western

encroacher, the fact remains that we are civilizational mixed-bloods, the cultural offspring of the conquerors and the vanquished. We are stuck with the parents history gave us. The insistence here on closely scrutinizing the implications of passively receiving the successive stages of Western discourse - whether it involves postmodernist thought or its dark-skinned, postcolonial manifestation - cannot rest on a yearning for lost origins. There isn't a point to which one might wish to return. In the Caribbean the language of instruction in the schools, the organization of society, and the forms of development espoused by the ruling elites all have Western parentage. The Antillean is an heir to the Western tradition. But at least one must recognize oneself as an ambivalent heir, one who accepts the inexorable kinship without ignoring the repository of harm lodged in that inheritance. Unlike normal heirs to the tradition, Antilleans have the delicate task of imagining the story of human culture in a manner that promises to safeguard their creativity from the encroaching might of the West, to which they nonetheless are bound by blood ties.

The West is both internal and external to the Caribbean. Western discourse construed the Caribbean as a site of lesser humanity, as a location outside the confines of history proper. It stigmatized the feeling and the thinking of the Caribbean mind. As such, an Antillean cannot embrace intellectual development in the Western tradition without at least showing self-awareness of a difficult relationship with it. One might praise a Caribbean intellectual achievement by highlighting the archipelago's thinkers' adaptive dexterity, their promptness at catching up with advances in the Western academy. One might, for instance, praise Edouard Glissant's idea of Antillanité, his 'vision of global creolization,' as one that conceives the Caribbean 'as a sea exploding outwards, not concentrating inwards,' so as to report that the Martinican thinker thereby 'fully enters the arena of postcolonial theory' (Dash 1995: 148). But one might also, perhaps more self-respectingly, consider Caribbean intellectuals as providers, rather than recipients, of the paradigms that the Western academy has marketed as 'postcolonial theory.' Roman de la Campa has aptly observed that 'Mapping of Caribbean culture has always conjured images of hybridity, mimicry, syncretism, and transculturalization,' reminding us that Antillean writing 'gave meaning to such categories' long before the advent of 'postmodern troping' (Campa 1997: 87).

Caribbean discourse, if it is realistically to aspire to cultural authenticity, must remind itself that it does not belong in the same chronology that Western critical theory assumes. Contemporary Western discourse exists in a post-Fordist, post-industrial era, but one easily infers that the actual places that serve as unspoken referents for those terms are Euro-North American technocratic societies. Clearly, industrial capitalism does not really disappear when it seems to vanish from the sight of the Western percipient. The factory, the sweatshop, the assembly line, the abusive foreman, and the meek, disempowered worker may have become rare in New York,

London, Paris or Berlin, but in the Caribbean they continue to be part and parcel of the ordinary human drama. Sometimes a factory leaves New York precisely because it knows it can find more auspicious capitalist conditions to continue to exist in the free zones of, say, an economically dependent nation like the Dominican Republic. Antillean intellectuals must beware of inadvertently subsuming the narrative of their people and places under a temporality that is forged by the experience of somebody else elsewhere. They must insist on building chronologies by looking at their own historical clocks.

Ultimately the challenge for Antillean intellectuals is to pursue the task of identifying and affirming autochthonous meaning. This will often entail a perhaps inevitable loss of scholarly glow since one may have to speak outside the realm of the existing debates in the profession. To the question 'who are you in conversation with?', which aims to locate each scholar's theoretical positionality within the dialogues that the academy recognizes as valid, one may have to summon the temerity to say 'nobody,' and perhaps demand that conversations become places like the Caribbean, thus truly global. At a conference on Brathwaite in the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies on January 11, 2002, the scholar Oyèrónké Oy_wùmí spoke emphatically about her conviction that Brathwaite's concept of 'nation language' can help elucidate cultural, social, and linguistic realities in Africa. She thus evinced a refreshing understanding of the utility of a Caribbean paradigm to speak meaningfully about humanity in other parts of the globe. Her intervention reassures me that the knowledge spawned by the human experience in the Caribbean can conceivably muster explanatory power sufficient to shed light on the drama of the species within and beyond the archipelago and its rimlands. The legacy of Brathwaite and others points to the necessary search for native meaning, autochthonous metadiscourses, and indigenous systems of significance to save Caribbean minds and bodies from being reduced to mere fodder to feed the theoretical voracity of contemporary Western discourse. Such legacy exalts the leadership that Antillean intellectuals can exert to disobey the Western dictate that would confine them to the back of the bus of theory. They promote a decolonizing approach to our reading of human culture. They offer me a lesson about knowledge and book learning that my father, erudite as he was, lacked the ideological wherewithal to teach me, namely, the need for intellectual self-defense.

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