

# CRITICAL EXCHANGE

PUBLISHED BY



*Spring 1986*

*Number 21*



**Critical Exchange is published by The Society for Critical Exchange, a not-for-profit corporation organized to encourage cooperative research in criticism and theory.**

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Oxford, Ohio 45056**

**Funding support from the English Department and the College of Arts and Science of Miami University for the publication of this issue is gratefully acknowledged.**

**THIRD WORLD THEORIZING  
CRITICAL EXCHANGE #21: SPRING, 1986**

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## NOTE

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Randolph L. Wadsworth Jr. for his contributions to *Critical Exchange* as Managing Editor. Beginning with *CEx 15*, Professor Wadsworth completely redesigned and reformatted the journal. Recently, we changed computer equipment and Professor Wadsworth has again spent many hours redesigning and reformatting *CEx*. He is leaving *CEx* to be Managing Editor of *VOCAT*. We are all in his debt.

At this time, I would like to welcome three new members of the *CEx* editorial staff: Andrew Lakritz, who will take over as Managing Editor, Susan Jarratt and Arthur Casciato who will assume the responsibilities of Associate Editors.

James J. Sosnoski  
General Editor

## INTRODUCTION

Barbara Harlow

Most of the gestures toward "opening the canon" of western literature to hitherto excluded groups of works and writers, gestures which have marked a specific and important practice within the United States academic and disciplinary system, have thus far been directed largely to the domain of what is commonly referred to as "literature." Publishing and the translation industry bear witness to this phenomenon. Novels, poetry anthologies, short story collections are beginning to be made available in sufficient abundance to allow for curricular implementation of courses on "third world literature" and even African literature or Latin American literature in translation. Very little, however, in the way of "theoretical production" from the non-western or non-hegemonic world has been made similarly available and the literary works become as a consequence the raw material for the theory factories and manufactures of first world critics. "Theory," that is, still remains in some way as if the proper domain of the western critic and intellectual.

The papers introduced here were originally presented at a panel under the aegis of the Society for Critical Exchange at the annual meeting of the MMLA held in Saint Louis in November 1985. Although each paper examines a different geo-political arena, each of them raises the critical question of the relationship between theory and practice, but poses as well the further challenge of the complications to such a relationship introduced by the distorted relationships of power in the contemporary historical context. Mary Layoun in "Indigenous Third World Cultural Criticism(s)" suggests the general discrepancies and inadequations elaborated in the variant textual practices of writers and critics from both first and third worlds. Marilyn Jimenez, in turn looks at the "hesitations of theory" in the

work of Edouard Glissant and his insistence on the need to acknowledge the historical specificity of Caribbean theoretical practice. It is this specificity which Neil Lazarus examines in his paper "From Nationalism to National Culture: Intellectuals and Social Responsibility in Postcolonial Africa." Lazarus focuses on the social contradictions and ideological dilemmas faced by writers in the newly independent African states.

All three papers demonstrate importantly the internal dynamic of theoretical questions in the third world and their global context, suggesting perhaps that the very formulation of "third world theory" may itself be too polarizing. Is there in the "theorizing" a different agenda, different priorities, a different sense of urgency from those which impel theoretical developments in the West? Here it may be necessary to speak of "strategy" rather than of "theory."

It is hoped that this preliminary foray by SCE into the question of "third world theorizing" will provoke further critical attention to these issues and continued challenge to the "theoretical" dominance of western criticism in the global arena of intellectual practices. It is in this context that SCE will sponsor two panels at the 1986 meeting of the MLA in New York City on the topic of "Theory and Strategy in the Third World."

Barbara Harlow  
University of Texas at Austin

INDIGENOUS THIRD WORLD CULTURAL CRITICISM(S):  
AGAINST HEGEMONY OR A  
NEW HEGEMONY?

Mary Layoun

Using language to deprive another of language  
is the first step in legal murder.

Roland Barthes  
*Mythologies*

In constructing a starting point from which to discuss the problematic of "third world theorizing," I'd like to cite, in addition to Barthes' provocatively thoughtful statement above, two frequent, if slightly less thoughtful, questions. Actually, they are declarative statements disguised as questions:

Does the third world produce any *real* literature?

and:

Is it possible to discuss these texts in terms of a critical theory--isn't description all you can do?

In fact, these pseudo-questions suggest what is at issue in any consideration of theory in and of the "third world." That is: hegemony and the ideological construction of "real literature" and the refusal of theoretical or critical (though not *literary*) legitimacy for works outside the Western canon. The inevitability of description for what is then bracketed as exotica is almost as blatant an ideological statement of prejudice as is the assertion and maintenance of an

isolated category of "literature" itself--"real," "third world" or otherwise. And so, there will be no arguments presented here for the legitimacy of yet another field of intellectual and literary study, another object of desire--"third world" literature.

On the contrary, what I would like to suggest is that we should not necessarily only be about the task of legitimizing third world texts (and cultures, societies, and nations) by arguing for their inclusion in the Western academic canon. In fact, I think we should remain rather distinctly skeptical of what we *are* doing in American academia by teaching "third world" literature or some variation thereof as a separate field of academic study. For I have more than a few doubts about the cultural recuperation<sup>1</sup> of the third world as text for the (first world) reader. Instead, the question is whether and how we can avoid creating an objectified (and moribund) "area of study," setting up the literature and culture of the Other (the third world) as a field of knowledge for the hegemonic (intellectual and political) play of the subject. For what does it mean to "know" a culture from the outside? Is it, of necessity, to dominate it? If this sounds suspiciously like an argument for the validity or necessity of the native informant, that is not what I mean to suggest. But it is a suggestion that our intellectual endeavors and our relationships to knowledge aren't innocent and pure.

How, then, can we formulate and practice a methodology which doesn't utterly objectify, doesn't make a spatial and temporal network of relationships into a petrified site for intellectual and political domination? Parenthetically, I assume the connection between the political and the intellectual or cultural is not any longer considered to be a leap of intellectual faith--not after Edward Said's provocative study of the workings of orientalism,<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault's elaborations of the relationship between power and knowledge,<sup>3</sup> Terry Eagleton's suggestive polemics on criticism, literature, and ideology,<sup>4</sup> or Fredric Jameson's considerations of the narrative as a socially symbolic act.<sup>5</sup>

For what is our "object" of study or contemplation anyway? What is the "third world" and its culture about which we theorize? In fact, in relation to such questions, there is a nicely ironic ambiguity in the title of the panel for which this paper was written--"third world theorizing." The subject of the theorizing is unspecified. Who is that subject--the third world itself? Is it us, as, for the most part, members of academic institutions rather distinctly outside the third world, in spite of national or ethnic affiliations and

origins? Is the theorizing *from* the third world or *about* it? If we demarcate third world culture as a separate category and disassemble or deconstruct texts, societies, cultures, nations, continents, or globes into tiny (linguistic) pieces, presumably to better understand them, when and for what purpose and by whom are those tiny bits re-assembled? Unlike the wealth of scholarship on Western Europe, England, or America in which studies of and theories about culture predominate, there are relatively few cultural studies of the third world on which to draw and those that do exist have been, at least until recently, more descriptive case studies than anything else. But there are suggestive attempts that have been and are being made in economic, political, or sociological studies: the work of people such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Eqbal Ahmad, Samir Amin, Johannes Fabian, Anwar Abdel Malek, Nikos Poulantzas, or L. S. Stavrianos. For all the frequently cited limitations of dependency theory or of structural Marxism from which many of these writers draw, their emphasis on global interrelationships rather than isolated area studies is useful and provocative. Works such as these also suggest the urgency and potential in crossing over the narrow confines of disciplinary boundaries. The work of these writers, as well as the work of the more "literary" thinkers referred to above, traverse the boundaries of history or philosophy, of the literary or the political, in a similar fashion as the literary texts with which we deal exceed national and cultural boundaries.

Six months ago when, in a rather decidedly uninspired moment, I came up with the title of this paper, "Indigenous Third World Criticisms: Against Hegemony or a New Hegemony?," I intended to present the situation of cultural and literary criticism in the Japanese, Arabic, and modern Greek context. The plan was to present a mostly descriptive negative critique of both first world and third world critical theory on the third world novel. So I outlined something of the problematic of cultural criticism in this country as it confronts the text (critical or literary) of the Other:

--the resistance of a good deal of that criticism to the challenge presented by, among other things, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (in spite of the limitations of some of Said's formulations);

--the persistence of what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his introduction to *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, calls the

"anthropological fallacy" that deems texts not much more than anthropological testaments and as such literarily (literally?) transparent;

--the recuperation of certain select texts, authors, and perhaps even cultures, into the Western canon, a process which entails, by definition, the attempt to neutralize, to negate, those texts as oppositional, as Other to a dominant cultural order;

--the insistence, already referred to, that non-Western texts can only generate description but not a legitimate literary or cultural theory.

And there are, on the other hand, the various situations of criticism outside of the first world, which aren't much less problematic:

--the difficulty of conceptualizing a framework, cultural, critical or philosophical, other than the reproduction of that formulated by the first world;

--the insistence on the reduplication of traditional cultural characteristics like orality or the narrative structure of the folktale (particularly in the African or Arabic novel) as some sort of an alternative or solution to the contradictions of that transplanted genre;

--the measure of literary/textual value by the correctness (however that might be defined) of the perceived political or social solutions a text proffers;

--the insistence on authorial autobiography, on the author's account of his/her own history, as the final measure of a text (particularly in the case of the Japanese writer/novel);

--the suggestion of some kind of innocent purity possessed by native critics (i.e. the implication that it is primarily women that should deal with women's literature, Palestinians that should deal with Palestinian literature, black Africans that should deal with black African literature and so on. . . .)

Next was a description of the initial and to some extent persistent contradictions of the modern novel as an immigrant genre: the problematic notions of the primacy of the individual bourgeois subject, of the assumption of a linear narrative trajectory, of the concept of an authoritative narrative voice, of the presence (or absence) of history in the text, of the valorization of national literature (and frequently the realist mode of the novel in particular) as the embodiment and validation of national identity and aspirations.

And, finally, a brief discussion of specific novels as examples of the contradictions of the migrant genre and/or as illustrations of the attempt to deconstruct and re-define the novel of the Other; to create an alternative and meta-individual Subject from within (and without?) the novel; to re-situate the boundaries of the text and its relationship to history, to intervention, and to power. So, in the novel, *Men in the Sun*, by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani,<sup>6</sup> the negative critique of, and textual foreclosure on, the isolated and fragmentary memories and impotent and equally isolated narrative present of its four migrant workers exiled from Palestine, suggests, if implicitly, a re-definition of the individual, of national identity, of social interaction. This is done not just through the story of the novel, though the text does that quite movingly, but through the very shape of the novel itself. The four Palestinians of Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* are not just metaphorically trapped in a past which they can only partially re-call, which they can only partially understand; they are textually trapped as well in the episodically separate chapters of the novel. There is no passage between one character and another, between one chapter and another, between past and present, that might by extension generate a future. There is only episodic narrative juxtaposition. The narrative structure of *Men in the Sun* exerts an almost rigidly determining influence on its content, on the textual fate of its characters. The text creates an opposition between individual subjects--their memories, dreams, and fears--and a narrative form which isolates and separates them and, while not condemning them, decisively kills them off. This textual insistence on the power of a structural force (here the structure of the novel itself) in determining content suggests itself as a textual metaphor for (a displaced fear of) the position of the individual subject in the "determining" structure of history. One of the narrative's clear, if implicit, projects is precisely to suggest the urgent necessity for the construction of a new subject which can

become an active agent of or in historical structure. And in a clearly utopian gesture for a people deprived of a nation, the text suggests that "new subjectivity" as a trans-individual and trans-national one.

There are other examples, too many to detail in such a short space but no less interesting. And they are all marked, to a greater or lesser degree, by similar attempts: to come to terms with history and the subject and to attempt alternatives to certain individually and structurally defined conceptions of nation, society, and self. There is Emile Habibi's *The Strange Life of Sa'eed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist*,<sup>7</sup> in which ironic fantasy attempts to create a narrative space to speak, or gesture towards, forbidden desire--that which a hegemony, decidedly more dependent on state force than civil alliance, would efface. Or Dimitris Hatzis' *The Double Book*,<sup>8</sup> in which constant narrative movement across the temporal and spatial boundaries within the text becomes a metaphor of sorts for the similar movement of the novel's narrator(s), a Greek migrant worker, across national boundaries. It is a metaphor that gestures rather explicitly beyond the hegemonic confines of dominant notions of the self, the other, and the nation. Or *Football in the First Year of Man'en* by the Japanese novelist, Oe Kenzaburo,<sup>9</sup> a text which, in its particular fabrication of narrative meaning, exposes the contradictions and impossibilities of such textual (and extra-textual?) fabrication.

But the issue didn't quite end itself there. Obviously, the framework of the initial argument hasn't been abandoned since I have just run through it. But I'd like to shift the focus a bit to a few ideas that underlie the argument outlined above but that aren't quite explicit in it. One is Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony as, not just the exertion of dominance by force, but as a system of alliance, and compromises that (through intellectuals such as ourselves among others) continually re-affirms the dominance of a particular class.<sup>10</sup> Another is Fredric Jameson's tracing of the utopian impulse in narrative.<sup>11</sup> And finally, there is Louis Althusser's elaborations, after Marx, Lenin, and Lukacs, of the workings of ideology.<sup>12</sup> To a certain extent, the concepts of hegemony and ideology as they are used here are congruous and overlapping. Both are "world views," formulations of value, which attempt to impose an interpretive network of meaning over the "material" or "real" world, securing and maintaining, at the same, time real power for a specific group or class. The process as a narrative one is suggested by Althusser's

formulation, with distinct Lacanian overtones, of ideology as the "representation of Imaginary relations to the Real." But these totalizing narratives (of hegemony or ideology) are, in fact, not so much the site for a tremendous homogenization process as they are the site of continual contradiction and struggle. There is then a utopian impulse that can be seen to underlie the movement of hegemony and/or ideology. It is that sense in which hegemony can be seen as an attempt at utopian wish fulfillment, as the utopian desire to establish a representation of collective unity, of collective agreement on meaning and value, of an agreed-upon definition of identity, and, of course, of a quite real power.<sup>13</sup> This notion of the utopic thrust of hegemony (or ideology) is implicit in the delineation of hegemony itself as the very site of struggle, of conflict and contradiction. It is a conflict not just within the dominant schema itself, not just among contradictory definitions within a dominant (and seemingly complete) framework of meaning and value, but as well among competing and contradictory schemas that always remain incomplete and fluid. It also implies the extent to which a radically re-situated or re-defined hegemony could conceivably be constructed on broadly-based, collective agreement.

In this respect, one of the most crucial aspects of Gramsci's definition of hegemony is that it describes the dominant power of a specific class, not only through its ability to threaten and employ force, but through a strategy of agreement, alliance, and compromise, however limited. Clearly, then, hegemony is not only that which the ruling class exerts when it rules, it is also the more-than-passive involvement of the classes or groups structurally locked out of decisive power themselves. Nonetheless, within variously defined boundaries, a hegemonic class maintains its own dominance but allows certain limited gains or reforms or compromises to the classes and/or groups which it dominates. The workings of this system of alliance and compromise that at the same time maintains one class's dominance are effected through the educational and civil apparatus of the state as well as through the activities of the presumably independent intellectual strata. It is in this sense that I suggested earlier the possibility, in fact the high probability, of our own complicity in a discourse of hegemonic power which we might, at least theoretically, actually oppose. It is, for example, the limitations of challenging the myopia of Western liberal humanism in the terms of humanism itself. Limited concessions or reforms might be conceded by the dominant

discourse, but its own hegemony remains. To give a rather pedantic example, within the liberal and humanist atmosphere of a university, it is possible to teach a large survey class in literature that incorporates (or recuperates?) what we call third world literature, but an entire educational system which perpetuates the dominance of a canon of "great works of the Western world" in opposition to third world literature is scarcely challenged, let alone altered, by the limited inclusion of third world literature as another area of study. On the other hand, given the implications of Gramsci's theory, hegemony has the potential to become a truly democratic force, securing consent to a collective will in which various groups within society unite. (That is clearly a utopian desire.)

In the meantime, critical play in the realm of literary signs, the appropriation and analysis of, the theorizing about, texts will continue to have rather distinct implications, implications that aren't always just literary. Intentionally or not, we, like the texts we trade in, take part in a broader (ideological and hegemonic) discourse of dominance and power and of resistance and alternative construction. But we have no pure and innocent language, no pure origin from which to set forth in the construction of a pure and innocent methodology. We are always already *in* language as, in a rather similar double bind, we are always already in history. We are stuck with what is at hand (although we can broaden its boundaries somewhat), in a historical, linguistic, and cultural situation that, to borrow a phrase, is not entirely of our own making.

And so, given that situation, in suggesting that the construction of a new (literary) hegemony is worth theoretical consideration, and perhaps even practical application, I'd like to reiterate that sense of hegemony suggested earlier as distinctly provisional and fluid, as the site of struggle and contradiction (as, in fact, hegemony is described in Gramsci's original definition), and finally as based on a (utopically) broad democratic consensus. But then, ideology and hegemony are both utopian in the sense that they propose a collectivity, a shared identity and system of meaning and value that are "no where"--utopia. It is the definition of that collectivity, identity, and value (and of that literary canon?) that is the issue.

To return to the realm of the more specifically literary, I would like to close with another quotation, one that is precisely about the unspeakable or inconceivable utopia(s) in and outside of the narrative text. It is from Gabriel Garcia Marquez' acceptance speech,

on receiving the Nobel Prize for literature a year or so ago, in which he spoke of:

... a new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they will die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to 100 years of solitude will have at last and forever, a second opportunity on the earth.

Mary Layoun  
University of Wisconsin, Madison

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Theodor Adorno's development of this concept of recuperation in "Cultural Criticism" in *Prisms*, trans. by Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979).

<sup>2</sup>See *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon, 1978 or *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>"The Order of Discourse" in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>4</sup>Most obviously in *Criticism and Ideology* (London: New Left Books, 1976), but even more provocatively in *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1981).

<sup>5</sup>*The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) and the equally excellent *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>6</sup>Ghassan Kanafani, *Rijal fi ash-Shams (Men in the Sun)* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Abhath al-'Arabiya, 1975).

<sup>7</sup>Emile Habibi, *al-Waoa'i' al-Ghariba fi Iktifa' Sa'id Abu Al-nahs al-Mutasha'il (The Strange Events in the Disappearance of Sa'id, the Ill-Fated Pessootimist)* (Haifa: 1974).

<sup>8</sup>Dimitris Hatzis, *To Diolo Vivlio (The Double Book)* (Athens: Keimena, 1977).

<sup>9</sup>Oe Kenzaburo, *Man'en Gannen no Futtoboru (Football in the First Year of Man'en)* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1971).

<sup>10</sup>Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Hoare & Smith, translators and editors (New York: International Publishers, 1971), especially the sections on "Intellectuals" and "Education" and pp. 416-18.

<sup>11</sup>See note 5 above.

<sup>12</sup>Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971).

<sup>13</sup>But to the extent that it is an allegorical position, a symbolic expression of the unity of a collectivity, hegemony/ideology is not utopian in itself. It remains only camouflaged or repressed desire. See Jameson's conclusion to *The Political Unconscious*, especially p. 289.

#### FROM NATIONALISM TO NATIONAL CULTURE: INTELLECTUALS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

Neil Lazarus

It is now more than twenty-five years since the first African colonies gained their political independence from the Western colonial powers. In the years between then and now, proclamations of independence have issued from national capital after national capital throughout the continent. Today, only South Africa and Namibia do not yet celebrate an Independence Day.

Yet in winning independence, what exactly was it that the various populations of Africa won? What was it they managed to prise from the reluctant grasp of their colonizers? The more time passes, the stronger becomes the temptation to answer these questions with the single word "nothing." Such an answer would represent an exaggeration, of course, but not, it seems--and this is the point--a radical inaccuracy. For it is certain that independence has gained the many peoples of Africa neither freedom from external domination nor even the right of self-determination. Twenty-five years ago, Frantz Fanon observed that if power in the post-colonial African world fell to the indigenous national middle-classes, the whole momentum of decolonization would be derailed, since this social fraction seemed to have taken on the task of turning itself into a "transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the masque of neo-colonialism."<sup>1</sup> Intended to play an admonitory role by their author, these words today sound uncannily like a prophecy. For the mission that, according to Fanon, the nationalist elite was fated by history either to fulfil or betray, it has fulfilled so successfully that the tentacular reality of neo-colonialism is no longer even questioned by today's African intellectuals. Not for nothing does Ngugi wa

Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer, choose to speak of independence as "flag independence," and to describe it as "a situation where a client indigenous government is ruling and oppressing people on behalf of American, European and Japanese capital."<sup>2</sup>

When Fanon's classic essay, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," first appeared in the early 1960s, its pertinence and implications were curiously misrecognized. Clearly, the essay offered a scathing critique of the ideology of bourgeois nationalism, that is, of the nationalist elite poised, in territory after territory, to ride to power on the coattails of the departing colonials. Bourgeois nationalism, Fanon argued, stemmed indirectly from the acute separation of the African middle-classes from the masses of the African population. This separation was determinate: it was the consequence "of the mutilation of the colonized people by the colonial regime."<sup>3</sup> Because of their alienation from the masses, the African middle-classes were incapable of mobilizing and maintaining popular support. Yet, for a variety of reasons, they needed not to see this incapacity as an incapacity. They needed, rather, to develop what Fanon called a "neo-liberal universalist"<sup>4</sup> ideology, a rhetoric that would enable them to present themselves as the most progressive social strata, hence the most fit for leadership, regardless of mere popularity. The ideology that served this function was nationalism. It was promoted as representing "the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people."<sup>5</sup> Yet it was far from being so. For although its exponents claimed to speak in the masses' best interests, Fanon showed convincingly that they had their own, very limited, social agenda. They called for nationalization, he bitinglly observed, but "to them nationalism quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period."<sup>6</sup>

Quite transparently, Fanon's critique of national consciousness represented a critique of the social philosophies that sustained the explicitly Eurocentric and reactionary political programs of such figures as Felix Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast and Kofi Busia of Ghana. What was missed at the time, however, was the extent to which Fanon's critique was directed not only at these figures--obvious targets, in any case--but also, and indeed more urgently, at such avowedly radical figures as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Jomo Kenyatta, and Kenneth Kaunda, politicians and intellectuals who liked to identify themselves as the

architects of and spokespeople for "African Socialism," and who, though they called themselves nationalists, would have winced to hear themselves called "bourgeois." It is in this context that the remarkable thrust of Fanon's critique makes itself manifest: for the effect of his commentary is to throw into question the very integrity of middle-class progressivism. Even in its most progressive avatar, Fanon seems to be suggesting, even at its best, in the guise of an Nkrumah or a Nyerere, that the African middle class has little to offer the revolution: their progressivism notwithstanding, even these leaders, at the time they came to power, were still middle-class actors, and still at odds, hence, despite their best intentions, with the aspirations of the mass of their compatriots. So it is that towards the end of the 1960s, we find a number of radical intellectuals beginning, in the spirit of Fanon's problematization of progressivism, to mount critiques of African Socialism. To these new critics, revealingly, African Socialism emerges as the expression, not of any brave new world of African Liberty, but of the inherently contradictory social position of its advocates, caught, as middle-class nationalists, between the aspirations of the masses on their left and the protocols of capital on their right.

Of course, Fanon did not leave the matter here. There is, indeed, no way, even on the level of personal biography, that he could have. For if Nkrumah and Nyerere were members of a privileged elite within African society, how much more so was Fanon, foreign-born, foreign-educated, and--at least at first--a psychiatrist in colonial Algeria? We can say more: a hallmark of Fanon's thought is its suppleness and reflexivity. It is inconceivable that a theorist as alert to the sinuosities of history as he would have embraced a static conception of class-inscription, in terms of which one's ideological affiliation would be immutably fixed by the circumstances of one's class background. No: if it was the historical mission of the nationalist elite to offer the nation to capital as a mere raw resource awaiting exploitation, then it was the historical mission of the dissenting intelligentsia to align itself with the popular masses in resistance. In his essay "On National Culture," accordingly, Fanon moved beyond his critique of national consciousness to a positive consideration of the role of the revolutionary intellectual in the liberation struggle.

At the head of this essay, he placed a citation from Sekou Touré, first President of independent Guinea, and himself a revolutionary:

In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity.

Of great importance here is Touré's appeal to the radical intelligentsia to identify itself wholly with the masses, that is, to commit "class suicide," as a precondition for effectivity. The intelligentsia is being asked not merely to side with the masses, but to unclass itself.

This same call to intellectuals to unclass themselves in committing their energies to the anti-colonial struggle is sounded over and over again in the writings of the revolutionary figures of recent African history. One encounters it, obviously, in Fanon and Touré, but also in Patrice Lumumba and Agostinho Neto, in Eduardo Mondlane and Amílcar Cabral. So important does the conscious rejection of class origins seem to these activists, indeed, that it figures in their theories as a *sine qua non* of revolutionary commitment. In the absence of such a rejection, all action undertaken by leftist intellectuals remains mere progressivism.

In his book, *Nation and Revolution*, Anouar Abdel-Malek coins the term "nationalitarianism" to describe what earlier had had to be labelled as "revolutionary" or as "radical nationalism." This new term is unwieldy, it is true, but its concept is valuable, for it enables Abdel-Malek to suggest that while there is still a nationalist impetus within nationalitarian activism, the practical intent of this nationalism is to be distinguished starkly from that of nationalism proper. The "nationalitarian phenomenon," he writes, "has as its object, beyond the clearing of the national territory, the independence and sovereignty of the national state, uprooting in depth the positions of the ex-colonial power--the reconquest of the power of decision in all domains of national life. . . ."<sup>7</sup> As an intellectual, we can surmise,

one can move across the divide between nationalism and nationalitarianism only by unclassing oneself. Phoenix-like, the intellectual as revolutionary is to rise from the ashes of his auto-destruction as nationalist. And is this not precisely the course followed by such figures as Nkrumah and Nyerere--though not, significantly, by Senghor, Kenyatta, and Kaunda--as their careers unfolded? In Nkrumah's case, we can argue that it took his own ouster as President of Ghana to disabuse him of the illusions of progressivism; in Nyerere's, we can see the famous Arusha Declaration of 1967 as his own public statement of radical rebirth. In each case, however, what is clear is that between the early champion of African Socialism and the later, more principled advocate of revolution or nationalitarianism, there is a wide gulf. One would not have found the early Nkrumah, writing, as does the later, that

Intelligentsia and intellectuals, if they are to play a part in the African Revolution, must become conscious of the class struggle in Africa, and align themselves with the oppressed masses. This involves the difficult, but not impossible, task of cutting themselves free from bourgeois attitudes and ideologies imbibed as a result of colonialist education and propaganda.<sup>8</sup>

Nor, by the same token, would one have found Nyerere in his early years as leader maintaining, as he does after the Arusha Declaration, that,

We have to be part of the society which we are changing; we have to work from within it, and not try to descend like ancient gods, do something, and disappear again. A country, or a village, or a community, cannot *be* developed: it can only develop itself. For real development means the development, the growth, of people.<sup>9</sup>

At this point I would like to pause briefly and change the focus of our discussion in an attempt to explore some of the implications of what has already been said for a cultural--and particularly for a literary--practice in postcolonial Africa. Specifically, I would like to suggest that in one of the most distinctive literary voices of the first decade of independence--that of the Nigerian novelist and cultural critic, Chinua Achebe--there is to be found the cultural analog of

that contradictory middle-class progressivism that underlays African Socialism.

Few of Achebe's writings are as revealing of the contradictory nature of his position as his critical essay, "The Novelist as Teacher." In this essay, Achebe reflects thus on the responsibility of the writer in the immediate post-colonial era:

Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse--to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet. For no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul. . . . I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past--with all its imperfections--was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.<sup>10</sup>

This is an extremely well-known passage, whose fame is at least partially a testament to its effectiveness. In it, Achebe economically and eloquently espouses a literature of commitment, one devoted to the progressive trans-formation of African society. Yet let us look closely at what is revealed in Achebe's rationalization of "teaching" as a fit vocation for the novelist. Notice that Achebe himself declares that there is a need for such "teachers"; that *he* determines that what is "taught" should relate to cultural retrieval; that *he* stipulates who stands to gain from his "lessons"; that *he* finds himself qualified to "teach." His stance here is presumptuous and uncritical, even if it is not necessarily authoritarian--even, as a matter of fact, if it is actually *progressive*. Too much rests on his mere presumption that in what he outlines, "my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet." When we hear these words, it is impossible for us not to recall Fanon's bourgeois nationalists, promoting their programs as the identity of their beliefs and "the innermost hopes of the whole people."

My point is that it is not only the case that the separation between Achebe as progressive intellectual and "the whole people" is wide. Also of fundamental importance is the fact that Achebe does not see this separation as an alienation, reflecting the divergence

between his social aspirations and those of the masses, but only as a distance, something that, with the right training, the masses could reduce and ultimately make disappear. There is a strain of arrogance in Achebe's assumption that the substance of his progressivism does not stand in need of verification at the hands of the masses. To him, the mountain needs absolutely to move to Mohamed, not Mohamed to the mountain.

It was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who first drew attention to this strain of class arrogance in Achebe's writing. (And remember that we are focusing on Achebe here primarily in his capacity as one of the most articulate and sympathetic voices on the post-colonial scene.) In a wonderful critique of Achebe's fourth novel, *A Man of the People*, Ngugi recalled Achebe's essay on the novelist as teacher and asked what it would take to transform such a novelist into "a man of the people." His answer was most instructive: "The teacher no longer stands apart to contemplate. He has moved with a whip among the pupils, flagellating himself as well as them. He is now the true man of the people."<sup>11</sup>

This answer is significant because it is so redolent of Fanon's depiction of the revolutionary artist as "an awakener of the people."<sup>12</sup> No doubt it will immediately be protested that Achebe, too, sees the writer as an awakener of the people. This is true. He does. But notice Fanon's insistence that in order to become such a force among his people, the intellectual needs first to recognize how alienated from them his intellectualism has caused him to become. "He cannot go forward resolutely unless he first realizes the extent of his estrangement from [the people],"<sup>13</sup> he writes. Nowhere can I find evidence of Achebe's having come to this realization.

What is true in this respect of Achebe, however, is not true of Ngugi. For like Nyerere and Nkrumah in the political realm, Ngugi in the cultural came increasingly to appreciate the need to unclass himself in order to ground his commitment to his people. He came, indeed, to see this act of consciously repudiating his class of ascription as the indispensable precondition for his legitimacy as a writer. We can identify three stages in the movement of Ngugi's unclassing of himself. First, there is his recognition of his estrangement from the classes on whose behalf and in whose name he aspires to speak. He begins to see the extent to which, despite himself, he has remained, in Cabral's terminology, an "unconverted"<sup>14</sup> intellectual: at about the time he is writing his review of

Achebe's *A Man of the People*, we also find him speaking thus of the position of the African writer: "When we, the black intellectuals, the black bourgeoisie, got the power, we never tried to bring about those policies which would be in harmony with the needs of the peasants and workers. I think that it is time that the African writers also started to talk in the terms of these workers and peasants."<sup>15</sup>

Building upon this recognition of estrangement, Ngugi moves, second, to a complementary awareness that what he needs to write *about* is not the social and historical experience of the elite--not, that is to say, his *own* experience--but that of the Kenyan masses, hitherto voiceless in the written literature of the nation. Here, too, he presumably draws his inspiration from Fanon, who had written that "the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge."<sup>16</sup> In accordance with this conceptualization, we find Ngugi announcing the aims and conditions of his identification with the Kenyan masses. In an essay written in 1969, he framed his views as follows:

I believe that African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country, and sing a new song. Perhaps, in a small way, the African writer can help in articulating the feelings behind this struggle.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the stage is cleared for the third and last step in the movement of unclassing: the conscious rejection of the intellectual's class of origin. Ngugi describes this last step as necessary in order to consolidate the forging of a "regenerative link with the people."<sup>18</sup> One is troubled here, perhaps, by the apparent resemblance between a religious experience of conversion and Ngugi's description of unclassing. Even repentance for the errors of past ways forms part of Ngugi's narrative: in his prison memoir, *Detained*, for instance, he writes that "My only regret was that for many years I had wandered in the bourgeois jungle and the wilderness of foreign cultures and languages."<sup>19</sup> Yet Ngugi has always been a profoundly religious writer; and whatever misgivings we may feel about the tone and exact

register of his account of his passage to radicalism, there is no mistaking the authority of his current standpoint, from which he now speaks to us of the need for all African writers to follow in his footsteps. Here is a characteristic passage from the collection, *Writers in Politics*, published in 1981. In it, Ngugi speaks directly to his vision of the social responsibility of the writer in contemporary Africa:

What the African writer is called upon to do is not easy: it demands of him that he recognize the global character of imperialism and the global character or dimension of the forces struggling against it to build a new world. He must reject, repudiate, and negate his roots in the native bourgeoisie and its spokesmen, and find his true creative links with the pan-African masses over the earth in alliance with all the socialistic forces of the world. He must of course be very particular, very involved in a grain of sand, but must also see the world past, present, and future in that grain. He must write with the vibrations and tremors of the struggles of all the working people in Africa, America, Asia and Europe behind him.<sup>20</sup>

This will make a good place to stop. In closing, however, I would like to sketch out a couple of questions that seem to me to have been framed, but left open, in what I have outlined in this paper.

1. Once the intellectual has unclassed himself and aligned himself actively with the peasants and/or workers--and is, presumably, living and working with and among them--what ought his bearing toward them to be?
2. What, specifically, ought the nature of the service rendered by the revolutionary *writer* be?
3. Depending on our answer to question 2 above, what ought the writer's attitude be toward the metropolitan languages of the ex-colonial power?

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics: Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 119-20.

<sup>3</sup>Fanon, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>7</sup>Anouar Abde1-Malek, *Nation and Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup>Kwame Mkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p. 40.

<sup>9</sup>Julius K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development. A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1968-1973* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 25.

<sup>10</sup>Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 44-5.

<sup>11</sup>Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture, and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 54.

<sup>12</sup>Fanon, p. 179.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>14</sup>See Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral*, ed. Africa Information Service (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 46.

<sup>15</sup>Ngugi wa Thiong'o's discussion of Wole Soyinka's paper, "The Writer in a Modern African State," in Per Westberg, ed., *The Writer in Modern Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969), p. 25.

<sup>16</sup>Fanon, p. 181.

<sup>17</sup>Ngugi, *Homecoming*, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup>Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Detained. A Writer's Prison Diary* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 160.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>20</sup>Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, p. 80.

THE HESITATIONS OF THEORY:  
EDOUARD GLISSANT'S THEORY OF "LA RELATION"

Marilyn Jiménez

There is a street in Martinique named after Frantz Fanon, its most famous native son; and this forgetful homage symbolizes the ironic fate of revolutionary theories of liberation in societies subjected to advanced forms of neo-colonization. The powerful echoes of Césaire's appeal to Negritude and Fanon's call for revolutionary violence reverberate still in areas of the Third World where the struggle for liberation is a daily matter of life or death; in the French Caribbean, however, where colonization succeeded beyond even the greatest expectation of the colonizers (but much to their later *chagrin*), these echoes have been muted by the myths of political integration and cultural assimilation. Such societies can not, in Edouard Glissant's view, be awakened to action by theories that point to the universal or general forms of oppression, for the conflictual nature of political domination has been veiled by the fiction of participation; they can be brought to the brink of action only by the patient, relentless elucidation of the forms of domination and cultural genocide past and present. The main function of theory, then, is to re-interpret history or, more accurately, to "historicize," if we may coin a term in English that is readily available in French, the collective consciousness of a people denied a living, productive relation with its past.

In Glissant's conceptualization of the role of theory, the theorist is more of a researcher, an investigator, and less of an ideological leader, proposer of solutions or revolutionary prophet: hence, what we shall term, less in a negative sense, than in the sense of the movement of frontal attack, followed by a strategic retreat, the "hesitations" of his theory. The gap between theory and action,

which other theorists have attempted to bridge with varying degrees of failure, becomes, in our view, constitutive of Glissant's theory. By continually pointing to the more modest role of theory in guiding revolutionary action, Glissant gives primacy to action, since action becomes "unthinkable" within theory. However, we may be anticipating a conclusion that can only be reached after a profound reading of Glissant's *Le discours antillais*.<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, we must limit ourselves to a brief sketch of Glissant's theory.

Stated in its most simple, abstract form, "La relation" is the relationship between the West, conceived as a project of domination and not a place, and every society or ethnic and cultural group with which it comes into contact. The relation is "a planetary drama," the struggle between the hegemonic, universalizing force of the West and the "opaque" diversity of colonized groups. Fanon had already pointed out that the colonized opposes his "originality," the irrational concreteness of his individual existence, to the universalizing discourse of the colonizer. Glissant takes this observation one step further by requiring that the theoretic discourse of the colonized itself be diverse, plural; the theory "specific," not general. The characteristics that the West associates with the discourse of theory--generalizations, rationality, logic, lucidity, and so on--all mask a will to power, to subsume the concrete "otherness" of the colonized under universal categories. For Glissant, the only truly generalizable category is that of the "relation" itself; beyond that, each colonized group lives its relationship to its oppressor within a concrete, historical situation. The generalizing tendency of theoretic discourse should, in Glissant's view, be countered by the weight of the particular, irreducible "lived experience," whether present or past, that is accumulated in the discursive process.

It follows, then, that Glissant should be critical of the conventional Marxist's reductive use of categories. While Glissant makes use of Marxist categories, he, like Fanon before him, is calling for a critique of conventional Marxism in the light of the experience of colonization. Fanon had observed that in the colonized situation the infra-structure is also a super-structure, and he called for a "loosening" of Marxist methodology. Similarly, Glissant is suspicious of the concepts of infra- and superstructure, for, in his words, they act as "écrans sécurisants." The danger is to fall prey to the hierarchical assumptions underlying these Marxist notions. Everywhere he denounces the Hegelian concepts of history underlying Marxist

criticism. It is not, as he admits, that he does not use Marxist categories, such as the notion of production, for he does; but that he refuses to privilege the infrastructure over the superstructure. At best, the primacy of the infra-structure is chronological; at worst, it serves to mask the real processes of domination. In order, perhaps, to avoid the assumptions of hierarchy underlying the discursive exposition, Glissant repeatedly jumps from one type of discourse to another. Thus, an analysis of the elite's relationship to the means of production may be preceded or followed by a psychoanalytic analysis of behavior or a discussion of poetics. In so doing, he also undermines what he sees as the tyrannical role that the notion of production plays in Marxist analysis. He argues that, while it is a useful category of analysis, its pivotal role in the theory of class conflict closes off the possibility of other means of overcoming oppression than seizing the means of production.

The peculiarity of Martinique, for example, is to have been a society where the relationships between the group and the means of production have been illusory. Glissant points out that the Martinican planter was far less interested in the mechanisms of production and, therefore, far more dependent upon the metropolis as the promoter and initiator of economic changes than other dependent elites of the region. Thus, the planter does not become the decisive enemy for the slave and later for the agricultural worker. Class conflicts in Martinique are a form of shadow-boxing around non-existent means of production. The phantasmal nature of class conflicts in Martinique is further attenuated by the legal fiction of incorporation into France. In this process, Martinique has been reduced to non-productivity and passive consumption of metropolitan products, to the exaggerated extent that no product, according to Glissant, that is consumed in Martinique has been produced there. A more adequate analysis of the Martinican situation would focus on the notion of "technical mastery" (*la maîtrise technique*) of the environment that must precede the development of production. Throughout *Le Discours antillais*, Glissant implies that for Martinique to free itself from its dependency, the Martinican people must first learn to master their environment. In this way, an adequate theory can suggest a modality of action, if not the action itself.

Glissant also questions the uncritical use of universal categories derived from psychoanalysis to describe the situation of the colonized. Like Fanon before him, Glissant speaks of the moral and

mental disequilibrium of Martinican society, and he links its morbid character to the non-functionality of Martinican social groups (that is, their lack of a real relationship to the means of production). However, he insists that the "collective unconscious" is first and foremost historical; all psychic phenomena and impulses have been in large part historically conditioned. Thus, the irruption of psychic forces, as in Fanon, can lead to revolutionary action, but only if that psychic release is conditioned by a true vision of the real:

*Aucune théorie ne "conduit" le réel, et le pulsionnel peut être producteur d'histoire. Mais c'est quand il vient bouleverser par sa soudaineté féconde une vision décidée de ce réel.<sup>2</sup>*

Theory must be not only historical, but also total and provide a totalizing view of the real:

*Il s'agit de sérier les problèmes, partout où les mécanismes d'aliénation et d'oppression ne sont pas si visibles qu'on veut le croire; là où, par conséquent, le recours mécanique à des catégories notionnelles pré-établies (en politique comme en "sciences humaines") renforce l'aliénation et en définitive sert le système. La pensée théorique doit par exemple poursuivre en même temps l'investigation des mobiles "individuels" et l'élimination des aliénations "économiques" globales.<sup>3</sup>*

To return to Fanon, then, and the strange irony that his theory has had greater impact outside of the French Caribbean than within, Glissant places the blame and the praise on the generalizing aspects of his theory:

*La parole poétique de Césaire, l'acte politique de Fanon nous ont menés quelque part [. . .] Les traces de la Négritude et de la théorie révolutionnaire des Damnés sont pourtant généralisants. Ils suivent le contour historique de la décolonisation finissante dans le monde. Ils illustrent et démontrent le paysage d'un Ailleurs partagé. Il faut revenir au lieu.<sup>4</sup>*

For himself, Glissant reserves a less heroic role, but perhaps one that can be ignored less easily:

*Nous en avons fini, du combat contre l'exil. Nos tâches sont aujourd'hui d'insertion. Non plus la généralité prodigieuse du cri, mais l'ingrat recensement du détail du pays.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>*Le discours antillais* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 265.