

INTRODUCTION



THE CREOLIZATION OF THEORY

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This America
has been a burden
of steel and mad
death,
but, look now,
there are flowers
and new grass
and a spring wind
rising
from Sand Creek

Simon J. Ortiz, *From Sand Creek*

Tu dimunn pu vini kreol
Mauritian popular saying¹

Creolization commonly refers to a historical process specific to particular colonial sites and moments of world history, especially in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. Today, however, it is increasingly being used to describe many forms of cultural contact, including both reciprocal and asymmetrical exchanges across a wide range of cultural formations. Scholars such as the anthropologist Stephan Palmié (2006) have warned against facile appropriations of the concept. While we too argue in this book against the easy universalization of the notion of creolization, we are interested in putting the notion to more general use. Our goal here is twofold: to raise questions about the forms of intellectual and political entanglements that have marked disciplinary formations in the academy, and to bring into

productive conversation a set of theoretical approaches that can enable us to move past the increasingly melancholic tone adopted in the past decade by the aging field of Euro-American Theory.

How can a focus on creolization help achieve such a goal? Emerging first in fields such as sociolinguistics and anthropology, the creolization model is used when referring to the mixing of cultures and languages in parts of the early colonial world. It describes a straightforward empirical reality in which cultural and ideological entanglements abound. It is also used as a flexible hypothesis that allows researchers to map different relationships, modes of contact, and migration patterns in and among diverse ethnic and linguistic communities. As a concept creolization is simultaneously descriptive and analytical: it emerges from the experiential but provides a theoretical framework that does justice to the lived realities of subaltern subjects, while explaining their experiences in terms of an epistemology that remains connected to those realities. Creolization indexes flexibility, welcomes the test of reality, and is a mode of theorizing that is integral to the living practices of being and knowing. It is a mode shared by all cultures in contact. A foundational theoretical concept, it thus emerges from a productive engagement with the living dynamics of an uneven but interdependent world. But it is not the “Theory” most familiar to, and at times most vilified by, scholars in the United States.

Our academic division of labor remains such that we generally fail to account for the degree to which our politics of knowledge, disciplinary formations, and social inequalities are mutually constituted. To think about the genealogies of our specialized disciplines is to recognize that, far from being discrete entities, they are much more interconnected and entangled than we generally concede. Objects of study that might first seem antithetical are often historically imbricated, just like creolized cultures or transnational intellectual movements.

The intersections of an array of intellectual currents in the 1960s form our case in point. We are interested in these currents as they emerged from or traveled to Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. In France, Maoism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and the student protests of 1968 led to what has since been termed *la pensée 68* and eventually to what became known as “French Theory.” In the United States, the sixties were marked by the Cold War and the development of area studies, as well as the civil rights

movement and the creation of ethnic studies programs. The sixties are also the era of decolonization, the Algerian War, the Vietnam War, and the Six-Day War in the Middle East, which in turn gave rise to new forms of Arab anti-Semitism. It is the period during which the works of Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire were first translated into English and appropriated by political movements of liberation around the world, by African American thinkers and later by postcolonial theorists.² The challenge, as we see it, is to think theoretically and comprehensively about all these historical events and to underscore that they provide the primary ground for the interrelated global disciplinary questions that concern us now.

The Creolization of Theory is our response to this challenge. It is our attempt to think through the notion of theory in an age when its death is frequently announced and prematurely mourned. Our goal is to theorize relationality in a way that can encourage scholars to see historical, social, political, and cultural issues as forming part of a creolized system of knowledge. Our project is thus part intellectual history, part critique of the exclusiveness of Theory—or more specifically of that theoretical discourse that has, of late, become asphyxiated in its own abstract universe, and whose death is chronically being foretold.

A Chronicle of Theory's Death

Indeed, we seem to be living in a time when the death of theory is repeatedly pronounced. This is, of course, not the first time theory has died. Theoretical paradigms have their life cycles; they come into being, live (prosperously or perilously), wane, die, and perhaps are resurrected. The pronouncements of the death of theory since the 1980s are directed specifically against the American version of French poststructuralism as a hegemonic theory with a capital *T* that has gradually lost dominance, and hence relevance. John Scad, in a short preface to *Life after Theory* (2003), describes the moment in a lighthearted fashion:

If [theory] can be said (speaking very roughly) to have begun in Paris in the late 1960s, and peaked in Yale in the 1970s and 1980s, then it has been busy declining in a university “near you” in the second half of the nineties. Indeed, in the last few years, there have been a number of books marking this passing—witness, for example, Thomas Docherty’s *After*

Theory (1996), Wendell Harris's *Beyond Poststructuralism* (1996) and Martin McQuillan's *Post-Theory* (1999). (Scad 2003, ix–x)

In the same year, 2003, seven years after the publication of Docherty's *After Theory*, Terry Eagleton published a book with the same title, *After Theory*. Eagleton's tone is ironic, his humor acerbic. He begins:

The golden age of cultural theory is long past. The pioneering works of Jacques Lacan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault are several decades behind us. So are the path-breaking early writings of Raymond Williams, Luce Irigaray, Pierre Bourdieu, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said. Not much that has been written since has matched the ambitiousness and originality of these founding mothers and fathers. Some of them have since been struck down. Fate pushed Roland Barthes under a Parisian laundry van, and afflicted Michel Foucault with AIDS. It dispatched Lacan, Williams, and Bourdieu, and banished Louis Althusser to a psychiatric hospital for the murder of his wife. It seemed that God was not a structuralist. (Eagleton 2003, 1)

Eagleton draws up a list of theorists (those he calls postmodernists) and a list of heroes (mostly theorists on the left) and calls for a return to classical philosophical values such as truth, virtue, objectivity, love, and morality, in combination with a return to what he calls the “materialist ethics” of radical Marxism. In the course of what David Simpson calls a petulant argument, full of “spleen” and “polemical reductionism” (2006, 131, 133), Eagleton throws into the same dustbin of theory what he calls the “Cult of the Other” (2003, 21), referring to all the developments that may otherwise be seen as generally positive developments in academia: postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, gender studies, cultural studies, sexuality studies, and multiculturalism. Any discourse that might celebrate difference and heterogeneity is taken to be the symptom of the depoliticized 1980s and 1990s. Theory as the postmodernist cult of the other is thus complicit with global capitalism, which fetishizes and marketizes culturalist difference and heterogeneity with glee and élan. For Eagleton, the cult of the other is merely the academic manifestation of the final victory of global capitalism, which denies the classical virtues he values most.

Contemporary calls for the death of Theory come from at least three

other positions. One might be identified as the loosely associated liberal humanist camp that includes the work of Anthony Appiah, from the tradition of analytical philosophy, and the late Edward Said, who called for a return to humanism and philology (Appiah 2005; Said 2003). The second camp might be so-called postpositivist theorists such as Satya Mohanty who claim a solid ground for identity and knowledge against what they perceive to be poststructuralist relativism, which has trivialized experience-based struggles for identity and their significance for politics (Moya and Hames-Garcia 2000). The third camp, the most obvious and polemical one, is the ceaseless neoconservative backlash against Theory, including those who, for instance, have organized themselves around a thick volume titled *Theory's Empire* (2005), a compendium of antitheory writings from the preceding few decades. The volume's editors profess an "affection for literature" and aim to "redeem the study of literature as an activity worth pursuing in its own right" (Patai and Corral 2005, 14, 13). To them, theory with a capital T not only is excessive and nihilistic but also lacks logic, reason, consistency, and evidence. Theory consistently commits "textual harassment" on literature while promoting the "stardom" (8) of theorists who are full of "political pretenses" (12). Theory, in short, has become a gospel, an imperialist dogma, hence the word "empire" in the title. If we identify Terry Eagleton (a former theory proponent who is now grumpy about it) and his followers as the fourth camp, then we have the historical convergence of four different critical positions against Theory, and there are probably more. Even if the validity of these positions is open to varying degrees of elaboration and questioning, this convergence has obviously been very much the symptom of the times.

The most powerful critique against Theory, it can be argued, comes from the critics on the left who take a more historically materialist perspective than Eagleton in their examination of the political economy of the production of knowledge. Poststructuralism, seen historically as a knowledge formation in the last four decades of the twentieth century, when global capitalism reached its greatest height, has been criticized as the cultural symptom of global capitalism and its neoliberalizing impulse. The decentered world, here, is not the decentered world of power but that of capital. The world of capital is borderless. However, such is not the case for the world of the dispossessed and perennially oppressed in the highly stratified and uneven terrains of wealth and influence. Arif Dirlik (1997) has famously read post-

colonial theory, intimately linked to the poststructuralist turn in the United States, as the moment when postcolonial intellectuals arrived in the First World academy. In a later essay, Dirlik (2007) criticizes the culture of Theory as a culture of consumption that reflects a radical degradation of the political impulse, from the time when theory was enmeshed with radical politics until as late as the 1960s.

Rey Chow's provocative essay "European Theory in America," included in *The Age of the World Target* (2006), similarly situates the rise of post-structuralist theory in the United States by examining its historical conjuncture with the consolidation of area studies since the 1960s. The turn to self-referentiality and the deferral of meaning as promoted in this version of Theory coincided, for Chow, with the rise and consolidation of information-retrieval-oriented area studies, necessary for the rise and maintenance of the postwar empire that is the United States. Chow's concern is over the "epistemic scandal" (13) caused by the globalization of French Theory by American scholars in the medium of global English and applied to the discussions of the "wretched of the earth" (11). While we agree that this development has its scandalous aspects, we interpret that historical conjuncture as the manifestation of a double movement of the imperial consciousness. This imperial double movement is one of narcissism, often expressed as self-criticism (through Theory) occurring simultaneously with self-expansionism (through area studies). The interiorized "self-reflexive and (fashionably) mournful/melancholy postures" (13) of Theory are mirrored by exteriorized self-expansionism served by the information gathered by area studies scholars.

Thus, while some theorists may tend to drown in fashionable melancholia and mourning, area studies scholars are relegated to pragmatic and empirical research readily extracted for strategic purposes—this is the double movement of the imperial consciousness that is also in fact a highly effective division of labor: the theorists do theory, while the area studies "experts" do area. Wittingly or not, both groups ultimately serve the same purpose of furthering imperial agendas. But in the politics of knowledge within the university, theory has been deemed more sophisticated, and area studies is assumed to be uncritical, if not merely instrumentalist. This unambiguous binarism has been the cause of anguish for many theoretically minded scholars working in area studies who try to negotiate their own engagement with, and entry into, the temple of Theory. Recall that a similar interior-

exterior mechanism was at work in earlier times as well: modernism as a literary practice of interiority can be understood partly as a practice of psychic displacement of colonial reality and a disavowal of colonial violence, as argued by Fredric Jameson, Raymond Williams, and others (Jameson 1990; Williams 1989). Poststructuralist theory, in its use in the United States, is equally inextricable from the cultural logic of the imperium; hence Chow's call, after Deleuze, to "restore words and things to their constitutive exteriority" (Deleuze 1988, 43; Chow 2006, 10, 23), or to put it differently, to expose the exteriority (imperial domination) that is the condition of possibility for interiority (poststructuralist theory).

If area studies was charged with the task of transforming the unknowable Third World into a knowable entity by turning it into the object of empirical analysis, the birth of ethnic studies in the United States was clearly an aftermath of the civil rights movements in the 1950s and 1960s, which were themselves inspired by the revolutionary movements across the Third World. One might argue that this revolutionary Third World is what area studies sought to contain by constructing a discourse of threat that is supposed to be based on hard-earned data, though some area studies scholars initially went into the field motivated by a more utopian Third Worldism.³ The Title VI programs funded by the Department of Education, for instance, were aimed mainly to train students in "strategically important" languages, especially those spoken behind the supposed iron curtain of socialism. But it was the Third World and the civil rights movements in the United States that in turn formed a significant backdrop to the 1968 student protests in France and other radical movements around the globe. Fredric Jameson emphasized this in "Periodizing the 60s":

It does not seem particularly controversial to mark the beginnings of what will come to be called the 60s in the Third World with the great movement of decolonization in British and French Africa. . . . Indeed, politically, a First World 60s owed much to Third-Worldism in terms of politicocultural models, as in a symbolic Maoism. . . . The new black politics and the civil rights movement . . . [were] also a movement of decolonization, and in any case the constant exchange and mutual influences between the American black movements and the various African and Caribbean ones are continuous and incalculable throughout this period. (Jameson 1988, 180)

What has since happened is by now a familiar story, comprising the Maoist sixties in France, the younger generation's rejection of Sartre's imposing influence, and the subsequent "linguistic turn" that heralded poststructuralism. Jameson marks this moment as the one when "philosophy" is replaced by "theory" (1988, 193). The contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou's (1999) call for a return to philosophy against what he calls "antiphilosophy" (read "Theory") makes sense only in this context. The disparaging of Theory was widely shared by critics on the left, but as John McCumber (2009) has pointed out in "Philosophy vs. Theory: Reshaping the Debate," the distinction between philosophy and Theory is far from conclusive.

One point that Eagleton's book makes clear and Jameson echoes is their conflation of all that happened afterward as the same symptom of the depoliticization and neoliberalization brought forth by the unprecedented expansion of capitalism. But contrary to Jameson's suggestion that the post-1960s production of "new subjects of history"—decolonized peoples, women, blacks, and other minorities—was endemic to the gradual loss of class narrative in Theory, and hence part of a larger depoliticization process, what we suggest is that they constitute anomalies or contradictions within this process. Contrary to Eagleton's contention that Theory produced a cult of the other, into which he throws ethnic studies, women's studies, and the like—we argue that the otherness produced by Theory has never fully coincided with the new subjects of history as valorized and analyzed in ethnic studies. Ethnic studies and Theory, though historically conjunctural, should not be situated on the chain of equivalence that Jameson and Eagleton construct for the 1960s. In fact, during the heyday of Theory in the United States, those who did Theory were largely disdainful of issues of race and ethnicity, and it is ethnic studies that steadfastly held on to the category of class and fought a valiant battle against the hegemony of Theory. The Marxist strain in the civil rights movements is something that cannot be so easily dismissed; it left an indelible mark on the basic principles and ideals of ethnic studies and its strategies for equality (Noblet 1993; Wieviorka 1998). The otherness in and of ethnic studies is not at all the otherness in Theory that neutralizes issues of class.

The otherness that is contained in Theory, we argue, has always been the other in the self, the Eurocentric self quivering at the moment of encounter with an abstract otherness, which may be a narcissistic exploration of the unknowable within the self, a self-absorbed meditation on the ethical im-

plications of the self's unquestionable subjectivity, or the manifestation of a rebellion against Theory's fathers (such as Sartre or, broadly, the European philosophical tradition of universalism). The relationship between this other and the self tellingly replicates the structure of Lacanian extimacy, in which the other is "something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me" (Lacan 1992, 71). It is the Eurocentric unconscious that produces this other for itself, so that the "internal exclusion" (Balibar 2004, 43) of concrete others can remain unquestioned. For instance, in explaining that her intention in *Strangers to Ourselves* was to transfer Kant's "cosmic" thinking to a more personal level" (130), Julia Kristeva (in an overview of her own contributions to French Theory) offers further interiorization of the other in the Lacanian vein. She explicitly conflates her psychoanalytic and therapeutic goals—to "restore the narcissism or the ideal ego" of the melancholic individual (2008, 129)—with what she sees as the current historical need to shore up national identity to solve social problems. She is interested in the *psychic* demand to restore pride as a primary means of addressing the concrete and urgent social issues of difference, immigration, and globalization that confront the European Union today. Although she insists on "the diversity of cultural models" as "the only guarantee for . . . humanity" (136), it is hard to see how a focus on interiority alone can achieve the goal of respectful diversity that we all share here.⁴

The capitalization of the word *Other* raised the term to a universal, theoretical category, detached from its use as a social, economic, and political category that actually *refers* to new subjects in history. The two recurring phrases in Derridean poststructuralism regarding otherness, "always already" (*toujours déjà*) and "to come" (*à venir*), denote the places where otherness is banished: to the always already existing structure, either yoked to a past from which there is no escape or linked to an uncertain future existing only as a promise (Lionnet and Shih 2005, 3). This is certainly not the otherness that can lead to daily indignities suffered as a result of structural racism or sexism by minority populations in the United States, which is the subject of ethnic studies. Neither is this the otherness suffered by minorities in France, so powerfully described in Alain Badiou's account of the frequent arrests to which his adopted son is subjected as a young black man in Paris (2006, 111–14). We have noted the hereness of the others as subjects of history in our previous work, *Minor Transnationalism*, and we insist further that "à venir" should more properly be understood as a future that has

been ushered in by *concrete others* and is already upon us—a future that is finite. By recognizing the future that is here and the embodied differences that abstract otherness conceals, we want to acknowledge the distinct subjectivities of those who have been—and often continue to be—described as “people without history.”

One has to note, however, that ethnic studies (and we include some early versions of Francophone studies in that designation) had clearly come under the influence of Theory by the mid-1980s and early 1990s. The transformation of the Korean American writer Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha’s avant-garde text *Dictée* from being disparaged as irrelevant and irresponsible to community concerns to being celebrated as a classic in Asian American literary studies took just about one decade to complete from the late 1980s to the 1990s. The perception by a younger generation of scholars that the class-based paradigm of ethnic studies was less and less able to account for new and multifarious forms of citizenship and more variable forms of culture, coupled with the increasing institutionalization of ethnic studies, led to the awareness that ethnic studies scholars, especially in the humanities, must partake of the larger trends in Theory.

It is arguable that the two issues of *Critical Inquiry* from 1985 and 1986 gathered together in the volume “*Race, Writing, and Difference*,” edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K. Anthony Appiah (with essays by Houston Baker Jr., Mary Louise Pratt, Abdul Jan Mohamed, et al.), marked that moment for race studies, while *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, edited by Gates (with essays by Barbara Johnson, Wole Soyinka, Mary Helen Washington), first did so for African American literary studies in 1984.⁵ The special issue of *Amerasia* titled “Thinking Theory in Asian American Studies,” edited in 1995 by Michael Omi and Dana Takagi (with articles by Lisa Lowe, David Palumbo-Liu, Sau-ling Wong), did the same for Asian American studies, and the double special issue of *Yale French Studies* edited in 1993 by Françoise Lionnet and Ronnie Scharfman (with articles by Réda Bensmaïa, Maryse Condé, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Mireille Rosello) indicated a similar turn for Francophone studies. In Chicano/a feminist studies, the collection *Making Face, Making Soul*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa in 1990, opened the way for theoretically grounded discussions of identity. A comprehensive overview of ethnic literary studies in 1995 was provided by the collection *The Ethnic Canon*, edited by David Palumbo-Liu.

Throughout this process, dissident voices have arisen within ethnic studies: some were fundamentally antitheory and some argued for the reconceptualization of Theory for specific uses. The poststructuralist celebration of the death of the subject did not work well for those clamoring for new subjectivities; the constant revalorization of the texts of “dead white male writers” since Plato by scholars such as Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* and Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon* did not help expand the canon itself to include minority and women writers.⁶ In a useful overview that contrasts sharply with the positions of Bloom and Bloom, Sharon Holland traces the debates on Theory in African American studies from Barbara Christian’s critique of the race for theory to the work of London Barrett, Hazel Carby, and Hortense Spillers; Holland emphasizes the imperative of gendered criticism “with both *theory* and *practice* in mind” (2000, 335).

But if ethnic studies scholars have often been placed on the defensive, tending to be reactive to Theory by developing their own theories of oppression and trauma, others have now come to compete for these theories by universalizing an originary wounding of the colonialist subject in support of a reactionary, nostalgic, and melancholic agenda, including, for example, that of anti-Castro Cubans in the United States and that of repatriated *pieds noirs* in France. The *pieds noirs*, while celebrating their French-Algerian heritage, continue to argue in favor of the recognition of the “positive” influence of colonialism (Stora 2007; Kimmelman 2009). In this logic, everyone is marginalized or oppressed by a different identity politics; everyone can be diasporic depending on how one defines diaspora; everyone suffers from melancholia; and everyone is hybrid, mixed, and has multiple subject positions. The particular experiences of being minoritized as the racial other were readily drowned out by the universal pathologizing of postmodern or fragmented subjectivity that Theory helped to inaugurate and rationalize. Furthermore, what is seriously overlooked in the use of the label *postmodern* is the phenomenon of cultural creolization, which predates it and exhibits patterns of creativity congruent with unpredictability, novelty, and parody, all associated with postmodern genres (Haring 2004; Lang 2000). Creolization, however, has not (yet?) carried the same kind of epistemological privilege that such patterns have acquired under the name of postmodernism.

The questions to ask at this crucial juncture are these: What do we make

of the complex historical confluence of Theory, Third World liberation movements, the civil rights movements, the consolidation of area studies in the United States, and the emergence of ethnic studies in the same? How do we sort through the entanglements among these conjunctural formations, and what implications do these entanglements have for a different notion of theory with a lowercase *t*? What might this theory look like, where do we find it, and what might be its resources? This is not the Theory that foretells its death by melancholic abandon, pushing melancholia to the level of a universal pathology for any and all postmodern subjects. One form of melancholia is never the same as another, as each arises from distinct social, economic, political, and cultural situations (W. Brown 2002; Eng and Kazanjian 2002; Cheng 2001). To put it simply, the universalization of melancholia actually occludes the melancholia of racialized or sexualized subjects. The same can be said of any number of critical vocabularies regarding loss and trauma made current by Theory, which have led to forms of competitive victimology or “wars of memory” (Stora 2007). But as we insist here, more lucid articulations of these complex questions can emerge as a result of the relational (Glissant 1990), intersectional (Crenshaw 1989; V. Smith 1998), or multidirectional (Rothberg 2009) approaches that have been used productively by scholars whose theoretical focus encompasses broader sets of phenomena.

There is, then, quite a different story to tell about the age of theory in the American academy, one that neither keeps announcing its death nor universalizing its reach.

The Becoming Theory of the Minor

To begin with the task of trying to comprehend the nature of the entanglements of these intellectual and political formations, we may recall that the First World sixties in the United States, inspired by the Third World liberation movements, led to the creation of ethnic studies, in which the Marxist theory of class was inventively wedded to studies of race to the extent that race was often theorized *as* class. In France, by contrast, Marxism as theory gradually lost ground, when it was not outright repudiated. Marxism became more or less unspeakable, except for a few trenchant party Marxists such as Louis Althusser or the unapologetic but largely marginalized post-

Maoists such as Alain Badiou, who rose into prominence only after the death of Derrida, and primarily in California. It was only toward the end of his life that Derrida wrote *Specters of Marx*, as if finally to acknowledge the existence or influence of Marxism—albeit as a spectral one (Cheah 2003).

On historical grounds, the two epistemological moments coincide—ethnic studies and Theory—but perhaps they have been rightfully opposites of each other. The criticism we often heard, that ethnic studies was not “theoretically sophisticated,” meaning it did not use enough Theory, turned out to be the consequence of ethnic studies’ groundedness in the social, lacking the *universalizing* impulse that has arguably pushed Theory to the abyss of death. But ethnic studies and racially marked Francophone studies are not a symptom of Theory. While some leftist critics deplore what they consider to be the balkanization of the class-based collective by “smaller” units of analysis, such as gender, race, and ethnicity, they failed to see that ethnic studies is in fact largely responsible for keeping class analysis alive. If Marxist theorists such as Jameson and others continued to elaborate on Marxism in theory and offered important theoretical analyses of different stages of capitalism, it is ethnic studies that kept Marxism connected to the concrete social. The conservative charge against ethnic studies is perhaps better known and more prevalent: ethnic studies plays identity politics and destroys the universal foundations for commonalities among humans (though these commonalities privileged white-centrism and Eurocentrism). In this conservative case too, the charge has been that this trend only leads to fragmentation and balkanization.

Both camps, otherwise ideological opposites, are nonetheless complicit in their disparagement of ethnic studies, facilely connecting ethnic studies to Theory without tracing their divergent intellectual genealogies. They both charge identitarian struggles with the crimes committed not by ethnic studies or women’s studies but, in the final analysis, by global capitalism and its liberal *laissez-faire* ideologies of relativism. One might say that this displacement may be either a symptom of the powerlessness of left critique in the face of the unprecedented triumph of contemporary capitalism or the sheer internalization of capitalist logic by the neoliberal conservatives.

The call for universalism thus seems to be coming from all directions these days: leftist,⁷ neoliberal conservative, liberal humanist, and even from ethnic studies scholars who argue in favor of what might be termed a “post-

difference ethics” or, in Paul Gilroy’s term, a “strategic universalism” (2000, 95) beyond ethnic *ressentiment*. Our present moment, then, marks a new turn, perhaps to be named the new *universalist turn*, the political implications of which are not yet clear.

Disentangling the misidentification between the celebration of *différance* in Theory and the insistence on difference in ethnic studies therefore shows us an alternative genealogy of theory related to but also divergent from Theory, in the sense of the becoming minor of Theory and the becoming theory of the minor. This is probably the first entanglement between theory and Theory. Ethnic or Francophone studies predate the rise of Theory as a discipline, but as inherently interdisciplinary fields of study, their goals tend to be misrecognized and thus denied the status of theory. The same can readily be said of theorists of gender and sexuality in Francophone African or Southeast Asian studies, whose contribution is trivialized by those who privilege Theory (Nnaemeka 2004; Ha 2009). Chicana/o studies, native studies, African American studies, Latina/o studies, and Asian American studies have not called themselves “theory” *not* because their work always lacked theoretical rigor but because they focused on what they perceived to be more pressing priorities, above and beyond the need to label their methods and critical productions “theory.”

The First World sixties in France were indebted not only to the revolutionary Third World, such as Maoism and anticolonial movements in Africa and the Caribbean, but also, reciprocally, to the civil rights movements in the United States.⁸ It is well-known that Fanon’s work has exerted direct influence on civil rights and black power ideologies (Turner and Alan 1978; Donadey, this volume; Young 2005). While the proponents of the linguistic turn in French thought suppressed the influence of Sartre and his explicit commitment to decolonization (which had been common among the intellectuals of his generation), it was Fanon who creatively used Sartrean phenomenology for the liberation of consciousness for the benefit of the colonized. This may be the second entanglement between Theory and theory, between the Americanized version of French poststructuralism and Francophone decolonial thought. As Lionnet has observed:

If there is one singular convergence among French-speaking intellectuals who are read here [in the United States], and who have been influential in this country—from Albert Camus to Jacques Derrida, from Edmond

Jabès to Nathalie Sarraute, from Emmanuel Levinas to Marguerite Duras, from Julia Kristeva to Tzvetan Todorov, from Aimé Césaire to Maryse Condé, from Edouard Glissant to Abdelkebir Khatibi—it is their common experience of multiculturalism, of exile and displacement from either “la France coloniale” or Central Europe, and the fact that they are bilingual or multilingual, although they choose to write in French and their intellectual achievements are very much part of a certain cosmopolitan “Parisian” scene. (Lionnet 1998, 126)

If this list of theorists is not a typical one, it is because it clearly differs from the predominant American canon of French Theory, which would include perhaps only half of the theorists mentioned. If the predominant Theory in America can be described as the majority appropriation of Theory, then this list registers a minority orientation, a second becoming minor of Theory into theory. Indeed, what the works of the Francophone Césaire, Condé, Glissant, and Khatibi have in common is an attempt at the decolonization of the mind congruent with the agenda of ethnic studies.

In fact, the becoming minor of theory is consistent with the need to recuperate the radical roots of French thought, long sidestepped by two significant historical processes in France and the United States, respectively. First, French universalism, which assimilates within itself all forms of cultural diversity into a concept of Culture (or *culture générale*), hides geographic, racial, and other differences (Lionnet 2008). This is manifested in the refusal to articulate the immanence of intellectual life and the concrete geohistorical determinations of ideas. The constitutive significance of the event of the Algerian War to French thought is seldom given its due, when in fact the war was a formative experience for the major philosophers of the mid-twentieth century. Robert Young (1990), for instance, stresses that the historical roots of poststructuralism lie in the Algerian struggles of the fifties and sixties. It is well known that Derrida, Cixous, and Rancière were born in Algeria, but seldom is this information made explicitly relevant to their thought. Lyotard taught in Algeria between 1950 and 1952 and wrote sharp criticisms of the French colonial presence in his seldom-read political writings. Foucault taught in Tunisia, and his critique of the “ethnocentricity of reason” (Dosse 1998, 142) and rationalized war should also be understood alongside the rising tide of criticism against French colonialism in Algeria. The significance of the Vietnam War and the Chinese Cultural Revolution

for this generation of intellectuals who were thereafter involved in May '68 was studied by historians, but not by the American heirs of those who profess to be experts in Theory. As a result, French thought became, in the United States, synonymous with depoliticized Theory.

This process of depoliticization was further enhanced by its travels in the American university system. Translated as fashionable Theory under the guises of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, French thought became increasingly neutralized by a set of mutual misunderstandings between the producers of Theory and their readers. And here we come full circle to Jameson's and Eagleton's charge, which, in looking for what they consider to be the missing Marxian radicalism, actually undermines the radical roots already there. As previously stated, John McCumber (2009) has called for settling the debate between philosophy and theory by elucidating French thought's debt to German philosophy to understand the epistemological grounds of oppression and thereby resituating theory within philosophy. Not all Theory needs to be recuperated, of course, but McCumber's is an important reminder to think theory in geopolitical, historical, and genealogical terms, rather than as a network of transcendent and abstract ideas. That is, to think theory in Theory.

Thus, the radical writings of Césaire, Fanon, Khatibi, among others, while in dialogue with Hegelian, Nietzschean, and Sartrean thought, offered a set of theories that demand the undoing of the colonial structures of knowledge. In an eloquent passage from the essay "Pensée-autre" (Other Thinking/Thinking Otherwise) first published in 1977, Khatibi writes:

When we enter into dialogue with Western thinkers of difference (such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and among our close contemporaries, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida), we take into account not just their thinking style, but also their strategy and their lines of attack in order to press their thought into the service of our own struggles, which are of necessity about transforming the mind through a process of effective decolonization, a concrete thinking of difference. (Khatibi 1983, 20)

As a secular Muslim thinker, Khatibi insists on the kind of relational and dialogical thinking that can put the Western tradition in the service of its own disintegration and thus help achieve the decolonization of the mind. He discusses Western philosophers critical of the rationalist tradition from

which they emerge, and chooses Islamic thinkers (e.g., Ibn Khaldûn) whose dialectical method engenders a critique of their own traditional practices. These two sets of thinkers are placed in confrontation and mutual critique, hence Khatibi's notion of "double critique" (43–111) that favors the margins.⁹ Like Derrida, Khatibi is a thinker of the margin, but differently so: "A way of thinking that does not draw its inspiration from its own poverty is always elaborated with the object of dominating and humiliating; thought that is not *oriented to the minority, and marginal, fragmentary or incomplete* is ultimately directed upon ethnocide [*une pensée de l'ethnocide*]" (18), he declares. His approach thus helps us set aside *différance* (or endless deferral) and focus instead on the finite and concrete differences that matter: differences produced by colonialism and other structuring principles of inequality and minoritization (what Walter Dignolo calls "the colonial difference" [2000b, and this volume]).

To recognize the structuring principles of colonial inequality is to open the door to active involvement with social change and revolutionary struggles. It is about recognition and redistribution in a colonial context. Thus Fanon's involvement in the Algerian revolution and Césaire's early political commitment to the decolonization of the island colonies culminate in Glissant's complex understanding of the insidious nature of French domination in the Caribbean. In this regard, Fanon opposed "actional" to "reactional" thinking to escape from the circularity of dialectical negation, which remains dependent on the system that decolonizing or decolonial thinking is trying to undo (1967, 222; 2008, 197). In other words, decolonization requires a revolution in politics, thought, and language, all simultaneously, and it is much more than a reaction against colonialism. Rather, it is an act of self-assertion and self-creation. Thus Barnor Hesse, in this book, explores the meaning of the political in the wake of the democratic disavowal of black politics and self-affirmation since the Haitian Revolution. For him, race is a colonial category of governance that produces an idea of the political as constituted by and through the logic of creolization: modern democracy *as produced by* colonial entanglements. Hesse argues in favor of a redefinition of the traditional and gendered binaries of the private and the public in terms of a disavowed third term, the "subaltern sphere—the slaves, the colonized, the natives, the *racially segregated others*." To use race as a political and theoretical category, then, is to challenge Western

notions of universality and to suggest a broader, creolized understanding of democracy.

In institutional terms, the conjuncture of the three theoretical formations whose entanglements we stress here—ethnic studies, theory in Theory, and Francophone thought—needs to be explored further for their interrelated intellectual and institutional life stories, since they have been artificially separated into discrete subjects and disciplines. As mentioned earlier, the connection between ethnic studies and Francophone thought with its decolonizing gestures is based on actual historical affiliations between American civil rights movements and Third World liberation movements. Black movements in the United States were both national and international, with the agenda of civil rights extending to a pan-African call for liberation of all black peoples from racism and colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean (Turner and Alan 1978; Young 2005; Edwards 2003). The Asian American movement, strongly influenced by the black movements (Ho and Mullen 2008), drew inspiration from the same political ferment in Africa and the Caribbean and added to it inspiration drawn from other anti-imperialist movements specific to Asia: Maoism, Vietnamese communism, student activism against Marcos in the Philippines, anticolonial riots in Hong Kong, and so on. A leaflet published in 1969 by the Asian American Political Alliance makes this link clear:

The Third World feels at the gut level that Western imperialism and colonialism has been the number one factor in the continuous state of deprivation seen all over Asia, Africa, and Latin America; in the colonies of Algiers, Hong Kong, Singapore, Calcutta, and the internal colonies of the black, brown, and yellow ghettos of America. (Dong 2001, 188)

Asian American demonstrations were at the time partly aimed against “Vietnamization,”¹⁰ by which they meant both a stance against the Vietnam War and a resistance to racialized domination in the United States. What the Americans were doing in Vietnam was perceived to be deeply connected to the way the United States was treating its Asian American minorities. The leaflet unequivocally makes a connection between external colonies and internal colonies, and this connection is the historical basis for the linkage between civil rights demands and Third World liberation movements.¹¹ This, we argue, constitutes the epistemological foundation for ethnic studies. It

was as a part and as a consequence of the Asian American movement, for instance, that struggles for the creation of Asian American studies departments across the United States took place.

The convergence of decolonization (of which the civil rights movements are an integral part), the Vietnam War, and the critique of Western rationalism and civilization created a political and intellectual constellation with lasting effects. Much as the understanding of French thought in the United States suffers from depoliticization, this convergence demonstrates its entanglement with decolonial thinking. What has been missing from the intellectual history of the period is the kind of conjunctural perspective that understands the global 1960s in intersectional ways, so as to underscore the ways in which Third World liberation movements, civil rights claims, anti-war demonstrations, and May '68 are all interrelated. These interrelations were the factors that led to a particular institutional formation of ethnic studies and Francophone studies in the United States. Fanon, for instance, was not widely read by the French until his work was translated and widely used by Anglophone activists and scholars in South Africa, England, and the United States. As a strong American disciplinary formation, Francophone studies came into being as a result of academic engagement with colonial, decolonial, and feminist thinking; the discipline could not have come into being within France, where such sociopolitical considerations have had no impact on the creation of literary programs of study. While Theory became depoliticized in the United States, Francophone studies gathered its strength: on the one hand, by appealing to thinkers who were part of the same conjuncture but not given equal due here as *both* political and intellectual figures (from Deleuze to Fanon and Césaire), and on the other hand, by developing common ground with or building on its growing affinities with feminist, gender, sexuality, or ethnic studies and their common interarticulations.¹²

Anne Donadey, in this book, deploys the feminist theory of intersectionality, à la Valerie Smith and Kimberlé Crenshaw, to analyze the relationship between ethnic studies (in this case, African American studies) and postcolonial studies (in this case, Francophone studies). Her essay confirms our understanding that creolization is an act of theory that anticipates the conceptual frameworks of the postmodern, and that theorizing requires a deep historicism of the social: the field of the social has to take seriously

the women's movements of the mid-twentieth century in intersection with ethnic studies and Francophone postcolonial thought. Donadey reappropriates the category of the postcolonial from Anglocentric theorists, as she and Murdoch have done in *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies* (2005).

Simon Gikandi (2004) has argued in a different context that an intimate connection exists between poststructuralism and Anglophone postcolonial theory, noting, as an example, Bhabha's disavowal of Fanon's profound humanism. Indian intellectuals have largely dominated discussions on postcoloniality, focusing on questions of mimicry (Bhabha), derivative-ness (Chatterjee), and the constraints of representation (Spivak 1988) at the expense of more transformative approaches. By emphasizing the difficulty of giving an account of oneself in the dominant and hegemonic language of the colonial power, their work has tended to generate a self-perpetuating and politically unproductive anxiety that could be said to be self-absorbed. This anxiety, in historical hindsight, is not unlike the melancholia of the First World theorists that we noted earlier. The anxiety of early Anglophone postcolonial theory would fall, for us, under the rubric of reactional theorizing, rather than actional theorizing, as privileged by Fanon. However, the intersection between postcolonial theory (Anglophone and otherwise) and Theory should not be debilitating, as we have tried to show. Dipesh Chakrabarty's provincialization of Europe, Ashis Nandy's India, which is not solipsistically defined in terms of the West, and Spivak's own trenchant criticism of the neocolonial production of knowledge (1993) can all show us a way out of the impasse of anxiety.

Takeuchi Yoshimi, a midcentury Japanese scholar of Chinese literature, wrote an influential essay called "Asia as Method" (*Hōhō toshite no Ajia*) in 1961, the insights of which have never been taken into account in the discussions of the social and intellectual movements of the global 1960s. A critic of Japanese imperialism, which he saw as mimicking European imperialism, Takeuchi made the important observation that Japanese thinkers willingly adopt Western thought to the extent of self-colonization. He saw in modern Chinese writers, especially Lu Xun, a truly resistant spirit to colonial knowledge, and used Lu Xun as an inspiration to propose "Asia as method." Instead of Asia being the content to be researched with Western methods, here Asia becomes the method with which to study the West. If different realities

mandate different analytics, then Asia as a different reality offers different analytics, not so much to propose alternatives as to “further elevate those universal values that the West has produced,” as Takeuchi puts it (2005, 165).

The reverse of Asia as method—“the West as method”—has actually been more common all across Asia. The predominant intellectual paradigm for many Asian intellectuals throughout the twentieth century has been Western. These Asian intellectuals used the West as method to evaluate the universal values that Asia itself has produced, because Asian universals as such also need to be critiqued for the way they were translated into hegemonic practices in Asia. What we have, then, is a nonessentialist conception of method, or theory in a different name. If minor formations become method and theory, then new analytics will be brought to the foreground to creolize the universalisms we live with today, doing so from the bottom up and from the inside out. It is this process of becoming theory of the minor that we are also calling creolization.

As Pheng Cheah demonstrates, postcolonial theory is itself a creolized theory. However, he argues, Fanon’s transformative transposition of Freud’s theory of trauma can and should be critiqued to arrive at a concrete understanding of the paradigm of power as both more than a question of mental dynamics and not just a matter of *external* imposition. Cheah invokes the Derridean concept of “autoimmunity” to conceptualize the excesses of capital flows that led to the Asian financial crisis in 1997 (and, indeed, to today’s catastrophic economic situation), and he is echoed by Liz Constable’s expansion of Kelly Oliver’s analysis of the tension between the psychic and the social and her focus on the political economy of the structures of affect in the lives of postcolonial Algerians. In her efforts to rethink psychoanalytical concepts from a minoritized perspective, Constable highlights the relational and transcolonial (Lionnet and Shih 2005, 11, 17), rather than merely postcolonial dimensions of unmourned loss. She thus produces a lucid example of a vernacular and creolized transposition of these concepts.

Does such a wide-ranging approach to creolization leave us vulnerable to charges of overgeneralization? We address this in the next section to highlight the epistemological challenges posed by the goal of achieving a truly democratic understanding of intellectual, scholarly, and political work in a planetary context.

Creolizations

In his landmark study of 1992, *Des îles, des hommes, des langues: Essai sur la créolisation linguistique et culturelle*, the eminent French linguist Robert Chaudenson cautions against overgeneralization of the concept of creolization. He explains the etymology of the word *creole* and theorizes the sophisticated process of linguistic creolization as it developed in diverse French colonial environments. He maintains the importance of discriminating among geographically specific uses of the terms *creole* and *creolization* but also underlines some basic commonalities. *Creole* was originally used to describe children born to European settlers in the New World and in the island colonies of the Indian Ocean and in the Caribbean basin. The word derives from the Spanish *criollo* and the Portuguese *crioulo* (or its older form *creoulo*). By the first half of the eighteenth century, the French word *créole* was used to refer to blacks, whites, and mulattoes born in the Caribbean, Louisiana, or the Mascarenes, although the semantics evolved toward slightly different racial meanings in New Orleans as opposed to western Louisiana, or in Mauritius versus Réunion or Haiti. While in contemporary Mauritius the term is used to refer primarily to nonwhites, in Réunion and in the Antilles, by contrast, it still refers to whites as well as blacks and mulattoes (Chaudenson 2001, 5–8). This instability is a function of historically specific dynamics that militate against any easy universalization of the concept.¹³

There are many different creole languages. Their typology is complex, and linguists continue to disagree on the genesis of these vernaculars, although it is understood that most are European-language based. But all French-based creoles, for example, are not the same. In different locales, the word *creole* refers to different ethnic groups as well as to the combination of different language systems (European, African, South Asian, Carib) that came together in the contact zones to constitute a lingua franca forged in the crucible of colonization. Creolization in the most general sense refers to the results of a history of contact and to the subsequent process of indigenization or nativization of European settlers. It underscores racial and cultural mixing due to colonization, slavery, and migration. But *créolie*, *creolité* (creoleness), and *créolisation* have also been appropriated to widely differing ideological ends: either to register a range of divisive identitarian and linguistic

categories that emphasize social and ethnic cleavages or to promote forms of “ecumenicity” aimed at transcending the exact same cleavages (Lionnet 1993). An “ethics of vigilance” (Enwezor et al. 2003; Ramassamy 2003) is thus crucial when discussing those diverse processes. Anxiety toward generalizing the concept of creolization beyond its context-specific uses has been well articulated by Stephen Palmié in 2006, in a long review essay, “Creolization and Its Discontents.” Palmié gives an account of how the concept has gathered, in recent years, general purchase within the fields of archaeology and cultural anthropology. He is strongly suspicious of the “metaphorics” of creolization and spends the larger part of his essay on the need to remain specific and regionalist. Because creolization is a historically, contextually, and regionally specific concept, one should use it as theoretical or cultural metaphor with great prudence.

These cautionary stances notwithstanding, we want to point out that all life stories of theoretical concepts do begin as regional concepts; they are all first historically and contextually specific before they become widely disseminated, applied, or assumed to be universal. It is, on the one hand, as Palmié notes, a matter of “conceptual politics” that certain concepts can overcome their particularity while others are not able to or not given a chance to. On the other hand, what is also at issue is the degree of pretentiousness that we attribute to a given theory. Our hunch is that without being Theory with a capital *T*, theory can engage with the objects of one’s analysis in multiple ways and to different levels of intensity. When objects of analysis are not simple instances and illustrations of theory and are not made to conform to theory, theory as such performs a very different function. Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier propose the practice of midrange theorizing that is empirically based and theorizes and revises itself on the go; Arif Dirlik (after Mao) emphasizes theory’s need to confront concrete reality at all times, so that theory itself is open to “different interpretations against the test of different realities” (2007, 15); Radhakrishnan (after Said) talks about theory’s capacity to build connections and find common ground, and notes theory’s need to be rooted in immanence with a promise of transcendence or “transitivity” (2003, viii; 178); the art historian Nicolas Bourriaud (after Althusser) develops a theory of relational aesthetics based on the “materialism of encounter” (indebted to Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art”) where each particular artwork is a “proposal to live in a shared world” linking indi-

viduals in social forms that are material and historical (2002, 18–22). We can easily be reminded of similar calls for theory coming from various positions that do not necessarily see eye to eye with each other but share the same overall objective: the search for a theory that is simultaneously rooted in changing material and historical processes while promising a certain transitivity to that which is emergent.

In proposing the creolization of theory, we have a similar intention here. To begin with, the distinction between *créolité* and *créolisation* as made by Édouard Glissant and others is informative: creoleness refers to a state; creolization refers to a process. Creoleness is a state and a condition in which the constituent elements may become hardened and reified, thus erecting “multilingualism or multiethnicity into a dogma or model” (Chanda 2000). By contrast, creolization is an open-ended process that can be happening in different parts of the world. Indeed, it has been happening everywhere: Latin America, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, and the new Europe. As Lee Haring puts it: “When acculturation, transculturation, mixing, and hybridization occur with enough intensity, they become the norm” (2003, 21). The ways in which concepts such as “Creole” and “cosmopolitan” can overlap *and* diverge will need to be further studied if we are to give creolization its full conceptual range, as Lionnet has pointed out (Lionnet 2009; Lionnet and Spear, forthcoming).

Earlier processes of creolization emerged from violent encounters that were colonial and imperial; today, the dark side of globalization is a contemporary manifestation of similar dynamics. In the interview reprinted in this book, Glissant relates contemporary creolization to globalization and what he calls the *tout-monde*. But precisely because processes of creolization are thoroughly unpredictable, we must stress that the *chaos-monde* of creolization needs to be rigorously delineated historically and geographically. Dominique Chancé’s useful summary of the received meanings of creolization, and her critique of the utopian slippages to which the concept can give rise, can serve here as conclusive reminders of the complexity of the issues raised in this introduction.

Unmoored uses of the concept of creolization can take it in the direction of merely playful bricolage or transculturalism. Without an anchor in history, creolization can become too pliable, like any other concept that might too easily be decontextualized, such as hybridity, mixture, brico-

lage, and transculturation.¹⁴ What we insist on, along with Stuart Hall or Françoise Vergès, is that the strength of the concept arises directly from its historical specificity. As a process that registers the history of slavery, plantation culture, colonization, settlement, forced migration, and most recently the uneven global circulation of labor, creolization describes the encounter among peoples in a highly stratified terrain. So it is not just any transculturation but “forced transculturation.” As Hall notes:

Creolization is, as it were, forced transculturation under the circumstances peculiar to transportation, slavery, and colonization. Of course, both terms describe societies where different cultures are forced to establish reciprocal relationships of some kind. But, in creolization, the process of “fusion” occurs in circumstances of massive disparities of power and the exercise of a brutal cultural dominance and incorporation between the different cultural elements. (Hall 2003a, 186)

It is not the kind of bricolage that celebrates just any form of mixture or postmodern pastiche (Haring 2003, 2004) but a bricolage that is a tactical response to a situation of “domination and conflict” (Vergès 2003a, 84). This conception of creolization militates against the neutralization and obfuscation of power dynamics. Hall continues:

Creolization *always* entails inequality, hierarchization, issues of domination and subalternity, mastery and servitude, control and resistance. Questions of *power*, as well as issues of *entanglement*, are always at stake. (Hall 2003b, 31)

Hall highlights issues of power and entanglement, much as Glissant does repeatedly in all his oeuvre, invoking the *point d'intrication* (commonly translated as “entanglement” [1989, 26]) that is the moment of encounter between power and its other and between cultures. These terms—*power* and *entanglement*—refer to the crucial dynamics that our own use of *creolization* is meant to index.

By using the expression “the creolization of theory,” we want to stress three complementary meanings of the process this expression describes—*creolization as theory*, *creolized theory*, and *creolization of theory*—all born of encounter and entanglement in uneven terrains. We emphasize the need for theory precisely because we believe in the transformative potential of a

theory that can change the form of our entanglement with and in the world. Simone de Beauvoir's existential insight that if a theory is convincing, it changes our relationship to the world and colors our experience of it, is highly relevant here.¹⁵ For Beauvoir, theory has a direct and immediate impact on her relationship to others; it is not a self-contained, intransitive activity but something that "colors" our experience of the world, destabilizing and unsettling received perceptions. Reading Beauvoir literally here, a "convincing" theory for our times is indeed one that takes color into account, one that acknowledges the racial structuring of the world, one that enables us to question previous assumptions and to challenge the existing cultural or philosophical doxa that passes for Theory. European philosophy presupposes that the activity of thought is colorblind and unmoored from determinations of immanence, but Beauvoir's insight helps us see how creolization as theory is rooted in the world of immanence. In this sense, theory is what forces us to engage with abstractions in a way that takes us outside of our comfortable or common-sense view of reality and its representations while also making clear that these abstractions arise from the uneven terrains of existence in a world marked by dissymmetry.

By virtue of that fact, theory is primarily a distancing mechanism, but we can speak of two forms of distancing here: distancing as a grand gesture of generalization that is in fact based on a myopic understanding of the world, and distancing as a necessary mechanism that propels us outside of our own subjective mode of being and our disciplinary comfort zones. The coupling of theory with the idea of its possible creolization raises questions about conceptual purity, the clear and distinct ideas that Descartes called "first principles" and that Glissant militates against in his insistence on the notion of opacity (2000, 111–20, 189–94; Lionnet 2008). That is why creolization as theory can undermine the tired opposing arguments about the usefulness (or not) of theory, and the relevance of methodologies that remain divorced from the existential realities of gender, race, class, and sexuality. The death of theory as articulated by scholars on both the left and the right reveals their need to defend the status quo of dialectical thinking, an approach that always excludes the remainders produced by colonialism. Their argument is one that has made strange bedfellows of both idealists and materialists, those who defend a conservative view of the "literary" and those who are faithful to radical Marxism, both apparently arguing for a return to

more “authentic” or grounded methodologies (even if the exact nature of those methodologies puts one side at odds with the other). What is glaringly absent from this intimate debate between the aforementioned bedfellows is the difference that color makes. Race as a structuring principle of the world is intimately connected not only to social relations but also to epistemological formations; it is a way of living and looking at the world; it is theory (Shih 2008).

The difference that geography makes can be gleaned clearly from the different knowledge systems in the world, which suggests to us the crucial task of decolonizing epistemology. A major consequence of colonialism, whether oceanic, settler, or continental, is what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls “epistemicide” (2005, xix). Racialized, epistemicide is performed by what Mignolo calls, in a milder language, “epistemic racism” (this volume). Arguing for “global cognitive justice,” Santos poses the power differential between the global North and the global South in the realm of knowledge as that between Northern epistemologies and Southern epistemologies. Sandra Harding’s (1998) contention that all science is “ethnoscience,” including Western science with universalistic pretensions, is aimed to achieve the same kind of decolonization of knowledge in the field of science studies. The question of indigenous knowledge, now gathering momentum as the “IK Movement” around the world, foregrounds how something that may be called “settler epistemology” has papered over different, nontextual, ways of knowing the world with respect to philosophy, language, ecology, biodiversity, and other such all-encompassing issues.¹⁶ Different pedagogies have thus emerged in the last few decades, such as Paulo Freire’s well-known *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1968 and the more recent *Methodologies of the Oppressed* by Chela Sandoval, as well as Sandy Grande’s *Red Pedagogy* and Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Calling them methodologies and pedagogies underscores their practical engagement with social realities, but they are in fact also theories of knowledge.

The argument for epistemological diversity and democracy is not an argument for epistemological relativism. Santos cautions that relativism is premised on an “absence of criteria for hierarchies of validity among different forms of knowledge” and is therefore not a tenable position (2005, xi). History has shown, time and time again, how structures of knowledge have been made hierarchical, privileging a perspective that is misconstrued as

universal, especially in fields such as science and philosophy. Besides recognizing those other vast epistemological resources from a nonrelativistic viewpoint, the goal here is also to foreground the knowledge produced as a result of colonial and other encounters.

When we say *creolization as theory*, we are thus referring to encounters as situations that produce the possibility of a theory or a method that can itself be conceptualized as creolization. But this is not to idealize all encounters. Heidegger's later concept of *Dasein*, produced in dialogue with Japanese translations of Chinese Taoist philosophy, is an example of intellectual conversation in the mode of a "republic of ideas" between two powerful philosophical traditions. Heidegger never clearly acknowledged his philosophical debt to Asian conceptualizations of being, especially the ones derived from his direct exchanges with philosophers of the Kyoto school such as Kuki Shuzo. In a similar vein, poststructuralist thinkers such as Derrida or Lyotard never engaged with Arabic thought and language, although their interest in Algerian politics and culture is very much a part of the development of theories of deconstruction.

By contrast, Takeuchi's critique of Japanese mimeticism of the West by means of Chinese literature is born of the shame of Japanese imperialism in Asia, a perceived epistemological subjugation of the Japanese to the West, and the American occupation of Japan after World War II. Takeuchi studied the Chinese language with humility and conviction in the early twentieth century when Japan had already gone through a century of cultural movements against Chinese influence (since the Meiji Restoration) and repositioned itself as superior to China and thus destined to conquer it. Not that dominant Chinese epistemologies were not oppressive vis-à-vis their internal others within China, but that at this historical moment, using China to critique the West was a strong form of Asian self-critique.

Leo Ching, in this book, argues that Takeuchi's Lu Xun, however, remains a romantic one, when we consider the context of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan and Japanese philosophy's complicity with it. While the other philosophers of the Kyoto school such as Kōyama and Kōsaka criticized Eurocentrism with profound conviction, their theories reveal a "thinly disguised justification" for continuing Japanese aggression in Asia, all the while deploying the language of Hegelian metaphysics. The difference that matters here is the one between two different imperialisms, Western and Japanese,

and this “imperial difference” (Mignolo’s term) elides the lived realities of colonialism in Taiwan. Through this elision, Taiwan can never be considered the site of theory. The crucial question, therefore, is not “Why does Taiwan not produce theory?” The issue is about suppressed local histories and subaltern knowledges, and about the geopolitics of knowledge in a global context. Hence Ching’s theoretical movement is a lateral one, from Taiwan literature to decolonial thought in Latin America and vice versa, creating a conversation between two forms of subaltern knowledge emanating from two different geopolitical locations—what we have termed “minor transnational” encounters (Lionnet and Shih 2005).

Mignolo provides a conceptual formula to help us think through such geopolitics of knowledge by transforming the Cartesian dogma of “I think therefore I am” to “I am where I think.” Drawing from the Colombian Santiago Castro-Gómez, the Argentine Rodolfo Kusch, the Jamaican Sylvia Wynter, and the Algerian Malik Bennabi, Mignolo argues for the imperative to recognize the intimate connection among biography (“I am”), geography (“where”), and knowledge (“I think”). This procedure exposes the pretensions to universality of Western thought and activates a process of epistemic democratization, which is also a movement toward “pluriversality.” He lays bare how epistemic difference between the colonizer (as *humanitas*) and the colonized (as *anthropos*) has been constructed, and how decolonial thinking has directly and consistently challenged such epistemic racism. This is why Mignolo notes that the paradoxical consequence of global colonial thinking is the simultaneous rise of decolonial thought all across the world.

Decolonial thinking has existed alongside movements of peoples from formerly colonized and other subaltern countries to the metropolises of Europe. The rights of these relocated subjects are the objects of Balibar’s reflection on the “gigantic inequality” in the global circulation and mobility of persons. Perceived as external to the polity to which they are forced to migrate for reasons of economic survival, such persons are no longer merely strangers but the enemy in the new Europe. Balibar calls for a renewal of the *droit de cité* (right to belong) from a “cosmopolitical” perspective to eliminate the border that reinforces radically unequal constructions of the exterior and interior elements that are constitutive of the nation. Hence his reconceptualization of a “diasporic citizenship,” the implications of which are to be carefully distinguished from unmoored or depoliticized concepts

of diaspora. This new vision of inclusive citizenship partakes of the kind of pluralization and democratization of thinking in the field of knowledge that Mignolo and others discuss.

Similarly, Fatima El-Tayeb and Ping-hui Liao analyze the contributions of second-generation migrants to the public polity and to democratic plurality. El Tayeb analyzes the impossible positions of immigrants and second-generation citizens of color and offers methodological challenges to the colorblind political ideologies of the European Union. She blames Eurocentric and gender-neutral theories for their inability to offer satisfactory accounts of these positions, and proposes instead a queer critique that can destabilize categories and thus allow her more thoroughly to think through questions of race and citizenship. Ping-hui Liao, on the other hand, focuses on the cultural politics of creolization in the work of the Chinese American playwright David Henry Hwang to suggest that second-generation culture-writing by Hwang can operate outside the Hegelian dialectic, much like Fanon's "actional" thinking discussed earlier. Hwang attempts to move beyond "ethnic style" and engenders a mode of collaboration with Philip Glass that shows mutual entanglement and reciprocal enrichment in a cosmopolitan process of creolization.

When we use the expression *creolized theory*, we want to register the epistemological entanglement between the knowledge systems of colonizer and colonized, between Theory and theory. Entanglement is an existential condition with a long history, one that takes many different forms in the continuous process of creolization. Creolized theory is not simply a reactive epistemological position against colonialism but one that is open to creolization conceived (as we have suggested all along) as a dynamic, never-ending, and ongoing phenomenon that begins in the plantation economies of the New World (with their violent encounters that nonetheless gave rise to productive forms of contact, the *mises en relation* theorized by Glissant) that continues to take new forms in the contemporary world, leading to unknown and unforeseeable results. In today's world of financial meltdowns and immense power differentials exacerbated by globalization, people from all areas of the planet are experiencing something akin to the "shock of space and time" of early plantation cultures (Gallagher 2002). Creolization as we understand it registers both the violence of past and present colonialisms and the epistemological transformations wrought by new encounters. As Françoise Vergès puts it:

There is something in the process and practices of creolization that can teach other groups and individuals who are caught in the maelstrom of globalization today. . . . There are strategies that have emerged . . . strategies of resistance, of inventiveness, of creativity in the arts, music, and even in the political discourse that would give, or rather allow comparisons, or transfers of tools . . . exchange rather than hegemonization. (Vergès 2003b, 209)

If many have resisted or are resisting the perceived hegemony of certain theories that get applied indiscriminately to a minoritized or creole content, our goal is to develop a critical language that assumes creolization as the ground of theory. Creolized theory is open to vernacular grammars, methods, and lexicons in the originary sense of creolization as a linguistic phenomenon, but also in the sense that it is a living practice that precedes yet calls for theorization while resisting ossification. Creolized theory enables unexpected comparisons and the use of different analytical tools. It can thus make Theory more pliable, less rigid, substituting exchange and communication for hegemonization. If creolization seeks to express the polycentricity of theory and the diversity of “encounters that are never fixed but constantly reworked and reconfigured” (Enwezor et al. 2003, 16), then it seems to us ever more urgent to attempt theory in the many idioms and languages that are congruent with our diverse orientations as transnational producers of knowledge.

The contributors to this book rigorously think through the intellectual, disciplinary, and ethical consequences of the optical shifts generated by our efforts to reconfigure the order of knowledge in and out of the academy. We have grouped the book’s chapters in two parts, followed by a pair of appendices. We have purposely discussed each chapter in relation to the theoretical points raised at various stages of our argument in this introduction in order to underscore the very practice of intellectual exchange and intersectional thinking that motivates our theoretical project.

Part I, “Creolizing Methodologies,” brings together political theory (Hesse), political economy (Cheah), psychoanalysis (Cheah, Constable), feminism and ethnic studies (Donadey), gender and film (Constable), and literature and music (Liao) to flesh out the promise of the double meaning of the title. Depending on whether one understands *creolizing* to be a verb or an adjective, one can infer, on the one hand, that each contributor is en-

gaged in actively creolizing a theory or disciplinary method, or on the other hand, that each uses a methodology that is in itself a creolizing practice. In part II, “Epistemological Locations,” contributors confront the geopolitics of knowledge from a similarly transpositional optic: critical comparativism (Mignolo, Ching), political theory (Balibar), and the new European race studies (El-Tayeb) are brought together to illuminate what is urgently at stake both in the way we produce and consume knowledge and in the real-world impact of the seemingly abstract and disembodied theoretical choices we make as scholars and pedagogues. Finally, in the appendices, we offer, for the first time in English translation, part of a 1998 interview with Glissant (Hiepmo) that drafts the contours of a new European Archipelago, a notion that stands in opposition to the conservative conceptions of a racialized Fortress Europe of the 1980s. In addition, an overview by Chancé of the genealogy of the concept of creolization from linguistics to Glissant further elucidates our emphasis on the geohistorical specificity of moments of entanglement, as well as the unpredictability of their outcome in different geographies where processes of creolization have long been in place, from antiquity to colonization and globalization.

The working assumptions that found many intellectual disciplines serve both to erect walls around academic subjects and to structure the concrete identities of groups and individuals. The articulations we have brought to light and analyzed here show the degree to which structures of knowledge are complicit with the politics of global inequality. *The Creolization of Theory* is thus conceived and offered as an intervention that underscores the mutually constituted nature of both our sociocultural realities and intellectual formations.

Notes

All translations are ours unless otherwise noted.

- 1 “Everyone is becoming creole”: a common saying, used after the 1968 independence and its surge of hopeful Creole nationalism, to refer to the ongoing transformation of language and culture in postcolonial Mauritius. See Eriksen 1999.
- 2 For a useful critique of how Fanon’s work is both useful and misappropriated in different contexts, see Koh and Ekotto 2007.
- 3 Many scholars who entered the field of China studies during the Vietnam War era were interested in seeking alternative political possibilities from those that prevailed

- in the United States. But many of those scholars later turned away from a more utopian or Marxist position after becoming disillusioned by the workings of Chinese socialism when it became possible to actually visit China in person.
- 4 For an eloquent denunciation of Kristeva's increasing "intransigence" see Braidotti 2009, 102–3.
 - 5 As Gates notes, the intention behind the special issues is to "bring critical theory to bear upon ideas of race" (1986, 18). This is also when *difference* (inspired by Derridean *différance*) became a valorized critical term.
 - 6 Harold Bloom subsequently edited a series that included, at the urging of others, the works of Zora Neale Hurston and Caribbean women writers, but these are largely a token presence in the series.
 - 7 Eagleton's catchy phrase is "genuine" universality (2003, 161).
 - 8 Our notion of the sixties, following Ross (2002), refers not only to the decade from 1960 to 1969 but more broadly to the global revolutionary ferment from the 1950s to the 1970s.
 - 9 Edward Said's notion of contrapuntal thinking is very much an unacknowledged echo of Khatibi's thinking (Lionnet, forthcoming) as much as it is an unacknowledged borrowing from Simone de Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity (Lionnet 2006).
 - 10 See the photo showing the 1971 "No Vietnamization" antiwar march in New York (Dong 2001, 190).
 - 11 *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment* documents some of these connections as Asian American activists traveled to Maoist China, Africa, Vietnam, and Latin America and became involved with liberation movements both at home and abroad.
 - 12 See, for example, Lionnet 1989, the first critical work to combine such comparative and theoretical approaches to *francophonie*. For postcoloniality and the field of comparative literature, see Melas 2007. For comparative creole literatures, see Lang 2000.
 - 13 For a useful historical overview of linguistic and racial issues, see also Stewart 2007.
 - 14 For a comprehensive overview of the limits and prospects of hybridity, see Prabhu 2007. For groundbreaking work on Indian Ocean folklore and hybridities, see Harding 2003 and 2005.
 - 15 "Si une théorie me convainquit, elle ne me restait pas extérieure; elle changeait mon rapport au monde, elle colorait mon expérience" (Beauvoir 1960, 255).
 - 16 See D. Michael Warren (2001) for a good overview of the indigenous knowledge movement, and his identification of various IK resource centers around the world and their major tasks and concerns. We are grateful to Sandra Harding for this reference. See also Semali and Kincheloe 1999, as well as Ellen and Harris 2000.