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Imperial Calculus: *E Pluribus Unum*

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"E Pluribus Unum?—Ethnic Identities in Processes of Transnational Integration in the Americas"

As the title of this conference implies, processes of integration have always had transnational implications in America. These processes of integration have also been highly contentious, when not outright conflictive. By America, as usual, I mean all of America, not just the USA, as I have explained amply in my presidential address to the founding congress of the International American Studies Association in Leiden in 2003 and in my guest-editor's introduction to the special issue of the *PMLA* on the idea of America in the same year.ⁱ As is usually the case with human geographies defined by conquest and colonization, the integration of ethnic identities in the Western Hemisphere has been a transnational process by virtue of the fact that ethnic identities have rarely been coterminous with national borders. On the one hand, the phrase "ethnic identities" has often referred to cultures within nation states where there is no historical or actual congruity between the jurisdictional boundaries of the state and all the cultures that it governs, as is the case, for example, in Canada, Guatemala, Peru, the USA, and, until very recently, Bolivia, where indigeneity and nation-state are far from coterminous. On the other hand, there are indigenous peoples, or first nations, whose life-world spans across borders of nation states, as is the case, for example, of Paraguay and Brazil, Bolivia and Argentina, Ecuador and Peru, Venezuela and Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala, Canada and the U.S.A. Because of such historical complexities, *e pluribus*

unum in America has been a problematic cipher. Despite its intended deployment as declarative of unity and harmonious blending, *e pluribus unum* has often served as ambiguous, if not paradoxical, marker for this incommensurability between ethnic identity and nation. It has also served as talisman for the fraught processes of imperial expansion and conflictive myths of integration, and continues to do so in the twenty-first century.

The ambiguities of the Latin trinomial are more than semantic. The term's cultural semiotics tracks a philological and political itinerary through a time of imperial universalism that dates from the first century B.C. The phrase has its origin in a time when the Roman Empire aspired to consolidate the multiple into the unitary, or the heterogeneous "multi-versal" plurality of peoples it conquered into the hegemonic "universal" of its imperial rule. Thus, it is not surprising that the term *e pluribus unum* should have its textual beginnings in Virgil, the epic voice of imperial Rome. Nor is it fortuitous that the Virgilian phrase should re-emerge as the national motto emblematic of the incipient United States of America at a time when the newly-minted nation projected itself into future history by invoking mimetically the Republican Rome of Virgil's era and the imperial reign of his patrons Maecenas, the influential court minister, and Octavian, who, in 27 B.C. became the Emperor Augustus Caesar. Mimed as well by the new republic of the U.S.A. are the ambivalences of Virgil's vocation as, on the one hand, epic poet of millennial empire through his *Aeneid*, commissioned by the Emperor Augustus and, on the other hand, as rustic bard of simplicity and the idyllic pastoral. The phrase *e pluribus unum* originates in the latter, the georgic idyll of the poem "Moretum," attributed to Virgil and collected as part of the *Appendix Virgiliana*.ⁱⁱ The career of the

phrase, however, has adhered more closely to, and has been more consequential in the former, the perennial history of imperial hegemony, certainly in its American avatars.

The history of *e pluribus unum* in the American New World, as you might recall, does not begin with the July 1776 committee of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams, the triumvirate commissioned by the Continental Congress to design the Great Seal for the new nation. Some two hundred and fifty years earlier Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and sovereign of America, Castille, Naples, the Low Countries, and numerous other geographical regions, had assumed the mantle of Augustus Caesar as emperor and took the Virgilian phrase as one of the talismans of his plural empire united in his majestic person. Virgil's term, then, enters early modernity as imperial marker that subsumed the American Hemisphere as early as the first decades of the sixteenth century. Its recuperation by the founding fathers of the new republic of the U. S. A. was perhaps inevitable—an inevitability corroborated with steady regularity in the history of the last 230-some years. Recent history demonstrates that the move to adapt the phrase in 1776 continues to prove prophetic well into the twenty-first century and the beginning of the third millennium. Aside from the apparent historical inevitability of its imperial avatars, the recuperation of Virgil's term from the 103rd verse of his georgic idyll entitled "Moretum," should serve as reminder to all Americanists that the significance of *e pluribus unum* has never been limited to local or parochial issues, but has invariably signaled an international complexity whose transnational dynamics have often been occluded behind the veil of integration, assimilation, and acculturation. The causes and geneses of these up-rooting processes and their resultant historical necessity have often been elided, perhaps precisely because of the imperial and hegemonic nature of those root

causes. The epistemological and disciplinary consequences of this elision have consisted in the shifting of focus away from the causes of the necessity for integration under the flag of the Virgilian formula. The historical record has focused, instead, on the effects of those unexamined causes. We could describe this as the documentary foregrounding of a discourse of manifest symptomatology. Skipped over in the process are the interrogation of motives, causes, reasons, and the diagnoses of their historical morphology. Consequently, the historiographic and sociological focus has been on the destination of displaced peoples, rather than on their displacement or the locus from which they have been displaced. In keeping with the teleological history of the New World, in other words, historical discourse and cultural analyses have been focused on the telos, the *terminus ad quem*, rather than on the point of departure and the reasons for departing or the governing logic of such points of departure. The origins of human dislocations, causal and geographical, are literally and epistemologically left behind. The scientific discourse and its epistemes follow in the footsteps of the unidirectional movement toward the cultural and social habitus at the end of displacement, flight, or migration, where the migrant masses face the inevitable and uncertain prospects of transformative integration and problematic assimilation, often occluded in the cloak of invisibility of ideologically over-determinative phrases such as “the American dream.”

This epistemic complex takes on even greater complexity by the end of the twentieth, beginning of the twenty-first centuries, when integration, ethnic and otherwise, no longer even needs follow the displacement of people. As part of the dynamics of hegemonic globalization, people can now be integrated without the inconvenience of having to be dislocated, and without the burden their flight historically has imposed on

destination countries or host nation states. People can now be rendered homeless at home, and integrated into global networks, ethnic and otherwise, just where they are. The latest supra-state and transnational realpolitik of the European Union, as well as the new immigration policies of the United States of America, now epitomized by the Tortilla Curtain at the southern border, seek to ensure that integration take place not at the end-point of population movements but at their point of origin, not by removal but by remote control through so-called “free-trade” agreements and restructuring of markets and local economies.

When we juxtapose the original moment of planetary integration at the end of the fifteenth century with its avatar at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we attain a keener appreciation of the historical processes implicit in *e pluribus unum*. Integration, then and now, signified forms of global consolidation. The momentous events of 1492 were momentous because of the identification of the earthly planetary sphere as composite of hemispheres, or half spheres, literally, that were finally combined into a unitary globe, or integral sphere. Thus, we still refer to the American New World as the “Western Hemisphere,” the half sphere that was joined to the other half after 1492. Integration, then, points to incorporative merging, or *corporate* consolidation as signaled by the motto of *e pluribus unum* in the Emperor Charles V’s royal incorporation and symbolic *embodiment* of his far-flung imperial territories.

We are now keenly aware that the amalgamation of disparate fractions occurs in ways that are invariably asymmetrical. The effects are uneven in their historical consequences for the integrated elements. This is the case whether we speak of ethnic integration, cultural integration, economic integration, genetic integration, or integration

of any other kind. The Brazilian sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in a 2001 article resonant with the work of the nineteenth-century Cuban revolutionary poet José Martí, “*Nuestra América: Reinventing a Subaltern Paradigm of Recognition and Redistribution,*” defines these historical developments as “hegemonic globalization.”ⁱⁱⁱ It was not until the mid-twentieth century, 1940, to be exact, that the Cuban ethnolinguist and cultural critic Fernando Ortiz in his now classic study on transculturation diagnosed the asymmetrically repercussive nature of these integrative processes.^{iv} Since Ortiz’ critical discernment at the threshold of World War II, the focus on integration and the decoding of the Roman imperial formula *e pluribus unum* have come into new light by virtue of that cataclysmic war’s consequences on demographic dislocations in Europe and the geographic shifts in the planet’s populations. The authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships that ensued from U.S. military incursions and political interventions in Latin America during the so-called Cold War, along with the military debacle of the Vietnam War saw tangible repercussions in the “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s. Many of the displaced victims of U.S. militarism from South and Central America, like the Vietnam War refugees from South East Asia, found their way to the eye of the storm from where the military shock waves that caused their dislocation emanated. During this time the academic discourse of *e pluribus unum* intensified, as documented by Todd Gitlin in his 1995 book *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars*.^v The critical diagnoses of the time were marked by an eminently culturalist discourse, by which I mean a discourse that tended to elide the historical, political, economic, and certainly the philological root causes for what came to be called “culture wars” in the U.S. The exception to this discursive or academic “culturalism” was the

Black Power movement of the 1960s, as was the Migrant Workers campaign that consolidated itself into the Chicano movement. But even when the materiality of historical conditions was not overlooked, the critical discourse of multi-culturalism in the U.S. neutralized its political effectiveness and reformist efficacy in the fragmentary atomization of *pluribus* and in the solipsism of *unum* as identitarian soliloquy, as my colleague Sophia McClennen reminds us in a recent reprise of the cultural and critical discourses of the 1980s. Her article is entitled “E Pluribus Unum, Ex Uno Plura: Legislating and Deregulating American Studies Post-9/11.”^{vi} Perhaps the most detailed sociological documentation of the current status of ethnic diversity and its human factors in the U.S.A. is a report by Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam entitled “*E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century.*” Putnam’s study was originally delivered as the 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture of the Nordic Political Science Association and published in 2007 in the journal *Scandinavian Political Studies*.^{vii} Though the report is limited to the arithmetical surveys and statistical data of its case studies, its raw sociological detail has great potential for critical and interpretive analysis.

The above-mentioned Brazilian Boaventura de Sousa Santos, basing himself on Fernando Ortiz’ seminal treatise and its re-elaboration in contemporary Latin American cultural diagnoses such as Angel Rama’s 1982 *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*^{viii} and Roberto Fernández Retamar’s 1971 essay *Caliban*,^{ix} translate the dynamics of transculturation into counter-hegemonic modes of convergence he calls a “*theory of translation*,” which he defines as, “[a] given particular or local struggle (for instance, an indigenous or feminist struggle) only recognizes another (for instance, an environment or

labor struggle) to the extent that both lose some of their particularism and localism. This occurs as mutual intelligibility between struggles is created” (192). One could argue with Santos, and, in fact, he argues with himself, on the logical plausibility of a simultaneous hegemonic globalization and a counter-hegemonic globalization, if globalization is indeed global, as happens to be the case especially in the first decade of the twenty-first century. But be that as it may, I invoke his work along with that of the Cuban and the Uruguayan cultural critics because their treatments of the question of ethnic integration raise the horizon of cultural history beyond local considerations, and beyond national and international analysis, to a world-systems purview.^x In terms of such theoretical constructs articulated by Immanuel Wallerstein in the decade of the 1970s, the diagnoses of these Latin American critics inflect the problematics of *e pluribus unum* with a hemispheric and global dynamic that obliges us to examine the diverse vicissitudes of ethnic integration not only in their circumscribed national cases. Such constructs also oblige us to recall historical precedents such as the first globalization in the sixteenth century and to view these dynamics in terms of what those local instances signify in the larger international/global context in which the local variants are embedded, especially in what is now referred to as “the global south.” These critics oblige us to view history in its *long durée*, the materiality of that history in the context of macroeconomics, and the cultural politics encoded in what came to be the contemporary version of Virgil’s imperial *e pluribus unum* in the context of modernity’s global realpolitik. Through this prism, the epistemic focus shifts beyond the culturalist parameters of symptomatology, celebratory or accusative, to encompass the causal or genealogical history of a larger politics and its determinacies that make their consequences felt in culture’s life world.

One of the most articulate contemporary examples of this sort of critical reflection can be found in the Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel.^{xi} Ethnic integration, especially as derivative of Virgil's imperial *e pluribus unum*, viewed in this light reveals the internal contradictions of the historical processes and discursive formations that characterize all modes of integration, ethnic and otherwise. It is through this prism that I view the significance of the phenomenon of *e pluribus unum* at this time.

The inherent contradictions of ethnic integration are rooted in ancient history, philological and political. And I submit that philology is eminently political and inseparable from matters of state and issues of polity. Those contradictions go back to the origins of the state, the city-state, to be exact, and the history of the term "ethnic." In this regard, the current European Union is very much in conformity with the ideological paradigm it sees as its genealogical precursor, the Athenian democratic city-state of antiquity. Amply clear in this continuity is the EU's latest legislation on immigrants and transnational migrant labor, which Fidel Castro has characterized as the epitome of hypocrisy, and against which the member countries of South America's Mercosur are protesting vehemently in their vociferous response to those policies.^{xiii} Mercosur, as you know, consists of full members Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, with pending ratification of full membership for Venezuela. Associate members are Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Among Europe's eight million migrant laborers there are "hundreds of thousands of South Americans working in EU countries, many of them illegally," according to the BBC report I am citing here. All of them are subject to the new EU legislation, due to be implemented in less than two years. It will criminalize undocumented workers, with detention of up to eighteen months, and expulsion with a

five-year ban on re-entry. The countries of Latin America are discovering, yet again, what it means to be ethnic, even as the metropolitan European Union is straining to integrate exogenous ethnicities already in Europe, while obviously preferring to integrate the rest by remote control, through the restructuring of international economies and local markets, which, for social scientists like Boaventura de Sousa Santos amounts to diverse forms of hegemonic globalization.

In these efforts, the supranational European Union echoes the pre-national city-state of Athens in its ambivalence toward peoples on its periphery. In Athenian antiquity the term that defined those outside the periphery of the polis was *ta ethne*, meaning “foreign peoples,” the same Greek phrase that was used to translate the Hebrew Scriptures’ term *goyim*, meaning *gentiles*. The Greek noun *ethnos* and the adjective *ethnikos*, which gave us “ethnic,” referred to those who could not be admitted into the polis as citizens, but whose existence “in league,” or in “federation,” or in today’s EU parlance, “special relationship” from the periphery was indispensable for the city-state’s sustainability. Since then, the actual insertion of the exogenous ethnics into the endogenous *polis* has not meant their integration as much as it has signified a demographic cyst in the body politic. To be part of an *ethnos*, then, has meant to belong to a homogenous group distinguished by the racial, linguistic, and cultural characteristics particular to its members. Any degree or type of integration necessarily implied an intercultural transaction where the “foreign peoples” encountered *the* people, or “the nations” entered the realm of the Athenian city-state, the *polis*, which was the paradigm for the political and, hence, according to Aristotle, was the standard for the human (*Politics* 1235a2-3). Thus, the designation of “ethnic,” then and now, signifies the status

of not being fully of the city-state. There were no ethnic Athenians, just as the phrase “ethnic German” in Germany, or “ethnic French” in France, can only refer to Germans or French inhabitants of Germany or France who are not of German or of French ethno-racial origin and who, as in the French case, might be considered French citizens *de jure*, though not recognized or treated *de facto* as such.

“Recognition” has, in fact, emerged as a key term in the politics of ethnic integration and in the realpolitik of *e pluribus unum*. Along with its related term “redistribution,” the two define the stresses, ambiguities, and contradictions of these cultural, economic, and political processes, whether in the American Hemisphere, or in Europe and its transatlantic interactions. Here is how Boaventura de Sousa Santos highlights the polar significance of these two key terms, in the sense of Raymond Williams’ usage of the phrase “key words”: “At the beginning of the new century, after almost 20 years of fierce neoliberal globalization, the balance between the two poles must be retrieved. From the perspective of an oppositional postmodernity, the idea that there is no recognition without redistribution is central [...]. Perhaps the best way to formulate this idea today is to resort to a modernist device, the notion of a fundamental meta-right: the right to have rights. We have the right to be equal whenever difference diminishes us; we have the right to be different whenever equality decharacterizes us. We have here a normative hybrid: it is modernist because based on an abstract universalism, but it is formulated in such a way as to sanction a postmodern opposition based on both redistribution [equality] and recognition [identity]” (Santos, 191-192).

As insightful as Santos’ articulation might be, what he did not anticipate when he was writing this in 2001 is that by 2008 the human struggle of the ethnic within, and the

resistance of those *ethnes* outside who are targeted by occupation, ideological zeal, and the depredations of capital, would be consumed by the struggle for meta-rights, or the defense of the possibility for the right to have rights, rather than actually ever arriving at the point of having any rights per se. The hegemonic powers and occupying colonists have ensured, strategically, that the realization of any rights always remains an epiphenomenon at least one remove from reality. Those targeted by hegemony and occupation, thus, are perpetually virtualized or derogated into the ghostliness of a meta-reality, just as their rights are held in abeyance while the question of meta-rights, or the right to have rights, is rhetorically deliberated and discursively disputed. As a result of this strategy, the greater the possibility for success of integration becomes, the more tactically the “integrated” are removed toward disintegration and into unreality. The most egregious example of this predicament are the indigenous people of America in reservations, the indigenous people of the Middle East under occupation—from Gaza to Afghanistan—, and the undocumented aliens in the metropolis itself who are integral to the economy, but are rendered invisible within the social and political life world that draws its lifeblood from their labor.

I would like to add a third dimension to Santos’ neo-modernist dialectic whose polar terms of opposition converge into a postmodern simultaneity of equality—called “redistribution” by Santos—, and identity, which he characterizes as “recognition.” This third dimension I propose is *not* the product of a dialectical oscillation between oppositional movements that intersect in postmodern virtual dis-integration or spectralization. Santos’ delineation is marked by an unmistakable Hegelian dialectic whose terms of redistribution and recognition resonate with the binary of distributive and

retributive justice. This is at the heart of what he defines as a counter-hegemonic mode of globalization. Its telos, however, much in the Hegelian fashion, is the Spirit, where the human beings and human agency become ghosted into a plurality spirits, the *pluribus* out of which is born the spectral revenant of *unum*. I propose to add here the possibility of a third dynamic, that of *poiesis* and the poetic, which point us toward “poetic justice.”

By *poetic* in this context I mean the enabling possibility to opt out of the oscillatory counterpoint between commensurable otherness (equality, or “redistribution,” in Santos’ terms) and self-identity (“recognition,” per Santos, retribution, or the re-attribution of identicalness to one’s selfhood). The *poetic*, as I view it, breaks with this dialectical entrapment and its barren, resolute syncretism (what Santos calls “a normative hybrid”) and, instead, forges, constructs, or makes (what the verbal actions of *poiesis* imply) a more emancipatory life world, a cultural existence that de-defines the vise of oscillatory dialectic between abstracted rights and metaleptic, or doubly figurative meta-rights. The meta-rights and the “normative hybridity” Santos speaks of are the realm of the doubly unreal, of ghosted or of virtualized sub-alternity—invisible Indians in the American context, un-recognized and, therefore, zombied terrorists in the context of the globalized hegemony of occupation and colonization in many other parts of the world. What I call the poetic should return us to the more dynamic transaction of what Fernando Ortiz identified as “transculturation,” a process that is not a synthesis that subsumes the elements of the encounter and dispatches them toward the evanescent aleatoriness or *aufhebung* of Spirit, but a process in which those social actors and historical factors that come into interaction retain identifiable and identifying traces that predate the inexorable transformations of the encounter. Santos, and most dialectical materialists, in hindsight, I

believe, would readily grant us as much, especially in view of what this haunted first decade of the twenty-first century has experienced.

What *poiesis* and poetic justice make possible, in addition to the convergence rehearsed by Santos, is the productive aftereffect—a continuity through and beyond the historical juncture of integration. This is the dynamic signification of the Greek term *poiesis* as combinatorial operation that does not stop with the syncretism and its ghostly demarcations, but continues to bedevil and compound the phenomena of the encounter and their material significations. *Poiesis* is literally the combinatorial process of “making,” “formation,” and trans-formation. The *poetic* is the discerning enablement that allows us to countenance a worldly predicament and make something of it. It is rooted, as you all know, in the verb *poiein*, meaning, “to make,” from which we derive *poiesis* “creation,” and which makes for poetry, especially concrete poetry, which, as a Brazilian, Boaventura de Sousa Santos should know well.

There are multiple productive ambiguities here, ambiguities with which our formation in literary studies trains us to co-exist, rather than succumbing to the easier course of disambiguation and reduction, or to their expedient dismissal when they are politically inconvenient for us. The *poetic* is the formation and training that give us the wherewithal to co-habit in the world with the contradictions of integration and the oppositional challenges of *e pluribus unum*. The *poetic*, most importantly, furnishes an interpretive acuity and an ethical stamina that takes us beyond the rationalizing of the contradictions and ambiguities we are obliged to live with. It enables us to question and investigate, forensically, if necessary, the normativity of what Santos calls, in the passage just cited, the “normative hybrid” that issues as postmodern opposition from a modernist

abstract universalism. We must elucidate the fact that in this hybridity of oppositions or self-contradictions, the most egregious acts of lawlessness could be rationalized or dismissively shrugged off as expedient norm with the glibness of “so what?”, or “democracy is messy,” or “stuff happens.” Redistribution and recognition, or equality and identity, do not suffice precisely because of their precariousness and their vulnerability. History demonstrates that we are, and actually have been, fully capable of recognizing and conceding the identity of others only to more effectively usurp and destroy them. We have demonstrated in human history that we could all coexist equally in criminality. In this regard, perhaps the most ethnically integrated command cohort in the history of the U.S. government has been the regime of George W. Bush during this first decade of the twenty-first century, with a black woman Secretary of State, a Chicano Secretary of the Department of Justice, a Zionist Director of the National Security Council, a Chinese American legal scholar-specialist on international law and the Geneva Conventions, and a strongly homogeneous ethnic cabal of Neoconservative ideologues that have defined the agenda for a global realpolitik for what they claim as *their* new century. Our “universal consensus,” to paraphrase Jean-François Lyotard’s critique of Jürgen Habermas’ ideology of communication, could well be a screen for tyranny and terror, or, in Lyotard’s words, “conversational imperialism.”^{xiii} Lyotard’s apprehensions on consensus, expressed in a published conversation with Richard Rorty in 1985, are now starkly illustrated by historical reality during the first decade of the twenty-first century in that baneful avatar of *e pluribus unum* that calls itself the “coalition of the willing.”

The *poetic* I propose for this complex equation is the quotient that can help us calibrate what we make of the worldly conditions we must face, what we do with and

what we do about those circumstances once we can discern, recognize, and identify them. Yes, indeed, the *poetic* happens to be an ethical dimension, a dimension that one could only mention apologetically since it has so little currency in public discourse and so little cache in private expression at this historical moment. The *poetic* I propose is the link between the *ethnos* and the *ethos*, or the bridge between ethnicity and ethicality. The *poetic* is what foregrounds the complications of integration, ethnic or culinary. This is the third dimension in Virgil's poem that is elided by those founding fathers of the U.S.A. charged with designing the national emblem in 1776 and who discovered their motto in the Roman poet's georgic idyll "Moretum." The *poetic* in that particular act of appropriation is a dimension that was, and has been since, relegated to oblivion. I hope you do not mind if we revisit it briefly.

At a most elemental level, the *poetic* dimension, as we could exercise it in the life world of the cultural and the social, makes it possible for us to recognize and to live productively with the connotative resonances of Virgil's poem and the imperial implications beyond the idealized georgics of the pastoral imputed to him. It is the performative demonstration and political contents of this legacy that we must bring, as a third dimension, to the social and cultural discourse of equality and identity, of recognition and distribution, in the social scientist's lexicon.

By way of demonstration, then, here is one instance of the *poetic* third dimension and what it comprises in the inheritance we have taken from Virgil as his posterity through his poem: In the paradox of a postmodern élan from Virgil's pre-modernity (remember, the poem dates from the first century B.C.), Virgil reminds us meta-discursively, or meta-poetically, that his poem is a poem. He does this ambiguously, that

is, in a two-handed way, but without capitulating the concrete reality of his poem and of its moment. Virgil accomplishes this by allusion to another poem of which Virgil's own is a re-enactment or "reproduction." Then, narratively, through the dramatization of a combinatorial process, he integrates disparate elements into making or performing through *poiesis* a production that is signified by the title of the work, "Moretum." The "reproductive" performance consists, according to the editor of Virgil's Loeb Classics edition,^{xiv} H. Rushton Fairclough, of the likely rendering of a Greek poem by Parthenius. Parthenius of Nicaea was a Greek poet who was brought to Rome as a prisoner of war in 73 B.C. Once freed from slavery, he settled in Italy and worked as a poet and teacher. Virgil was one of Parthenius' students. This is one phase of integration, of Greek elegiac poetry into Roman idyll and into the poetic work of Rome's imperial epic poet. Next, the subject of the poem, starting with its title, reflectively enacts the combinatorial poetic process through self-recognition. "Moretum" is an eclectic mixture of garden herbs, consisting of garlic, parsley, coriander, rue, all blended with cheese and seasoned with salt, olive oil and vinegar, and formed into a ball. Verse 103 of the poem speaks of the resulting blend as "color est e pluribus unus [sic]." It is from this chromatic characterization of the mixture that *e pluribus unum* is derived.

There is yet another *poetic* dimension, perhaps most literally connected to the two terms of equality and identity, or redistribution and recognition. This is the ethno-political dimension whose discernment the *poetic* makes possible. It is suggested in Virgil's poem through the *dramatis personae*, the *prosopopoeia*, or putting a face on the issues encoded and signified by the poem. These consist in the poor farmer Simylus and his one house servant, the black African woman Scybale, who bakes the farmer's bread that

accompanies the “moretum.”^{xv} Scybale is likely Simylus’ manumitted slave turned into a domestic. Thus, if Virgil derives his poem from the freed war prisoner, the Greek Parthenius, who became his teacher and poetic precursor, the freed slave Scybale is the baker of Simylus’ daily bread and his female companion. The relationship between the two characters of the poem mirrors not only the derivation of the poem itself and the poetic career of the poet Virgil, it also reflects the subject of the poem designated by the title, which names the depicted phenomenon—a mixture in substance and in chromatic value, both derived from blending a diversity of elements.

Virgil’s poem, as a classic, has proved its enduring relevance in offering the founding fathers of the new U.S. republic a signifying enablement—a significant semiotic precedent for capturing the ideological thrust of a historic moment, its encodation as political descriptor, as desideratum, and as portent for the future. The poem’s efficacy continues to be viable for us and for the poetic discernments we must attain in the context of discursive and critical predicaments that history imposes on us at this moment. Chief among these discernments is the unavoidable obligation to recognize that the human integration at the heart of Virgil’s poem glosses over something very important—the insurmountable difference between Simylus and Scybale. This consists in the unevenness that no redistributive process, or act of recognition, should be able to hide from us given what we have learned from history—the history of Virgil’s poem and our own history in the last two millennia as reflected in the political career of that poem. Behind the harmonious chromatics of its georgic idyll, we should be able to discern the asymmetry in the convivial *métissage* depicted by the poem. We now know, or should know, that this is the inevitable asymmetry that characterizes even the most ideal

processes of integration between, or among, human subjects, especially when the differential marks of their heterogeneity entail gender, ethnicity, race, class, collective history, and personal biography.

These are differential elements that no mode of integration can overlook, and no mode of integration can afford to succumb to. The first, overlooking, ensures failure by omission. The latter, enthrallment, inevitably blinds by mystification. Difference disdained is no less perilous than difference overvalued and fetishized. As the Brazilian Santos phrases it in the passage already cited, “[w]e have the right to be equal whenever difference diminishes us; we have the right to be different whenever equality decharacterizes us. We have here a normative hybrid.” I maintain that this oscillatory distance between difference and equality has to be continuously assessed and renegotiated. Instrumental in that negotiation is what I have endeavored to define here as the *poetic*, or the discerning faculty that makes it possible for us to decide what to make of the inevitable asymmetries in human interaction and what to do with the “normative hybrid” that issues from even the most successful processes of integration. Integration, I submit, is not an end or telos, but an intermediate threshold. The ethical discernment of the *poetic* is what enables us to define the possibilities of how to approach, cross, and move beyond that threshold, even as we do so in anticipation of yet another threshold before us. The greatest resistance to the *poetic* and its ethical dimension historically has been the reductive calculus of *Unum*, whether as devouring antithesis to *Pluribus*, or as imperial telos and self-justification as an end in itself.

The elision of asymmetries in human factors integral to processes of integration, starting with Virgil’s own historical moment, is not an oversight. Rather, it reflects,

symptomatically, an imperial calculus that Virgil himself inscribes in the more canonical corpus of his *Georgics*. These factors and their subtending calculus could well be the trademarks of an idealized “normative hybrid,” to use Santos’ phrase once more, that make Virgil attractive to the founding fathers of the new U.S. Republic in 1776. Certainly, Virgil’s elision in the “Moretum,” namely, the master-slave relationship integral to the prosopopoeia of *e pluribus unus* was significantly apposite to the ironic oversight of the emancipatory project of the founders of U.S. independence, namely, slavery of Africans and forced displacement of indigenous populations. These were elements omitted from Virgil’s idylls, though they were integral to the historical reality of the Roman countryside celebrated in his poetry. There is something hauntingly resonant still in the *Georgics*, which was completed by the year 29 B.C., a resonance still significant, certainly reminiscent even now, of the historical moment at the beginning of our twenty-first century. It occurs in the coda of book 4, the last of the *Georgics*, which closes with the celebration of Julius Caesar’s military expedition in the East, a mission that will have served as precedent for empire’s self-justification, and continues to justify the imperial calculus of a monadic world, or the new world order’s *E Pluribus Unum* as One World:

This song of husbandry of crops and beasts
And fruit-trees I was singing while great Caesar
Was thundering beside the deep Euphrates
In war, victoriously for grateful peoples
Appointing laws and setting his course for Heaven.

(bk. 4, lines 558-562).^{xvi}

The integration of ethnicities and barbarians to the fold of civilization, then, has its genesis in Rome's Augustan Empire. New Caesars have repeatedly embarked since, and continue to embark still, on missions of liberation to bring the laws of Man and the light of Heaven to "grateful peoples" on the banks of the Euphrates, expected to greet invading armies with flowers and songs of gratitude. That civilizing mission, whose zeal intensified once it was anointed with the sanctity of religion, as I have documented in my 1992 book on Columbus and Europe's prophetic rhetoric as conquering ideology,^{xvii} would underwrite the conquest and colonization of the American New World under the standard of *E Pluribus Unum* as the motto of Charles V the Holy Roman Emperor and as the founding motto of what has emerged as modernity's imperial republic and its *Pax Americana*. As the Salvationist mission enunciated by Virgil passed through the second British imperial era at the end of the nineteenth century, the imperial torch passed on to the U.S.A. was poetically re-calculated by Rudyard Kipling as "the white man's burden"^{xviii} following the Spanish American War and the American conquest of the Philippines. The peroration in Virgil's last georgic figures as "the earliest statement of what was to be the Augustan imperial ideal."^{xix} It is an ideal still very much alive today, at the beginning of the third millennium.

ⁱ Djelal Kadir, "Introduction: America and its Studies," *PMLA*, 118:1 (2003): 9-24; "Defending America Against Its Devotees," in *How Far Is America From Here?* Selected Proceedings of the First World Congress of the International American Studies Association 22-24 May 2003. Co-edited by Theo D'haen, Paul Giles, Djelal Kadir, and Lois Parkinson Zamora. Amsterdam/New York: Editions Rodopi, 2005. Pp. 13-34.

ⁱⁱ I am referring to P. Virgili Maronis, "Moretum," in *The Eclogues, Georgics and Moretum of Virgil*. George Stuart, ed. (Philadelphia: Edredge & Brother, 1876), pp. 99-102. On the *Appendix Virgiliana*, see, Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature, A History*. Trans. Joseph B. Solodow (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994), especially pp.430-433.

ⁱⁱⁱ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "Nuestra América: Reinventing a Subaltern Paradigm of Recognition and Redistribution," *Theory, Culture and Society* 18:2-3 (2001): 185-217.

^{iv} Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azucar* (1940). Barcelona: Ariel, 1973.

^v Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995).

^{vi} Sophia McClennen, "E Pluribus Unum, Ex Uno Plura: Legislating and Deregulating American Studies Post-9/11," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8:1 (2008): 155-185.

^{vii} Robert D. Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century, originally delivered as The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30.2 (2007): 137-174.

^{viii} Angel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*. México: Siglo XXI, 1982.

^{ix} Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, trans. Edward Baker, forward by Frederic Jameson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

^x On world-systems theory, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

^{xi} See, for example, Dussel's *Ética de la Liberación en la edad de la Globalización y de la Exclusión*. México: Editorial Trotta-UAM.I-UNAM, 1998; 3rd. ed. 2000 and 1492: *El encubrimiento del Otro*. Madrid: Nueva Utopía, 1992.

^{xii} See, "Mercosur anger at EU migrant laws," BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/americas/7482767.stm> Published: 2008/07/01 09:09:59 GMT; also, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/americas/7482767.stm> Published: 2008/07/02 00:05:21 GMT. See also, "EU Passes Tough Migrant Measure," <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/19/world/europe/19migrant.html?hp#>.

^{xiii} For the most concise statement of Lyotard's pointed critique of Habermas' consensus, see, Jean-François Lyotard and Richard Rorty, 'Discussion', *Critique*, 41 (1985), 581-584.

^{xiv} *Virgil, I, Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid. Books 1-6*. Trans. H. Roushton Fairclough. Revised by G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1916.

^{xv} Fitzgerald William, "Labor and the Laborer in Latin Poetry: The Case of the Moretum." □ *Arethusa* 29: 3 (Fall 1996): 389-418.

^{xvi} *Virgil. The Georgics*. L. P. Wilkinson, trans. Penguin Classics (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 143.

^{xvii} Djelal Kadir, *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe's Prophetic Rhetoric as Conquering Ideology* (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1992).

^{xviii} Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," (1899): <http://www.online-literature.com/kipling/922/>

^{xix} *Virgil. The Georgics*, translator's note to line 561, p. 160.