RETHINKING NEOCOLONIAL ESTHETICS:
Literature, Politics, and Intellectual Community in Cuba's *Revista de Avance*

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> Si no hay inconveniente en aplicar
> a toda revista la idea clavada al libro,
> de que es una intención previa,
> con la cual ha de medirse la realización,
> será porque una revista no ha de estar
> exenta tampoco de cierta específica
> ideología, por provisoria que parezca.[1]

Writers from Jorge Luis Borges to Alejo Carpentier have celebrated the role of literary journalism in Latin American cultural life. The periodical press mediates between author and public, between the heavy sea of tradition and the rising tide of the new, between the institutions that sustain convention and the spontaneous, vibrant eruptions that give life to the avant-garde. Literary journalism thus traces the struggles of writers against the canon while revealing their engagement in the political and aesthetic events of the day. But as one might expect, literary journalism also unravels the neat boundaries of the finished work or the book in the ongoing dialogue with contemporary publications and multifaceted speculations on culture.[2] In this way, the pastiche of materials found in the modern review exposes the vivid heterogeneity of the intellectual field.

Like the anonymous author cited above, I am assuming that the materials compiled in a little review form a coherent whole, albeit it one frequently marked internally by erratic turns of logic and conflicting positions and arguments. In examining the *Revista de Avance* (1927–1930), the Cuban periodical that shaped a generation of writers in the 1920s, I intend

1. From an unsigned editorial, "Directrices: Vuelta al tema," *Revista de Avance* 4, no. 46 (1930):131.

2. These observations notwithstanding, scholars have tended to withdraw from the challenge of these heterogeneities and have often reduced the study of periodical production to a list of bibliographical entries. On Latin American publications, see such examples as Carter (1959) and Lafleur, Provenzano, and Alonso (1968).

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to trace the overlappings of literature, esthetics, and politics. Rarely even-handed, the discussions found in the pages of *Avance* focused on national identity and esthetics while questioning the role of the intelligentsia with respect to readers at home and writers and artists abroad. This article will track the relationships between the intellectual and national culture, the traditions of foreign and local concerns about art, esthetics, and race, and the polemics on cultural and economic dependency that engaged Cuban avant-garde writers in the 1920s. When analyzed in these terms, *Avance* clearly reveals its roots in ideology and history.

Avance was the most handsome product of avant-garde creative activity in Cuba and perhaps in Spanish America. Its pages were filled with reproductions of sculptures, lithographs, and paintings by internationally recognized artists such as Jean Cocteau, Salvador Dalí, and Henri Matisse. The journal thus provided superb examples of the flourishing of modern visual art in the 1920s. In publishing theory and texts by members of cosmopolitan avant-garde movements, *Avance* demonstrated that it was in touch with both the European and U.S. artistic communities as well as with intellectuals from all over Latin America.

During *Avance*'s four years of existence, each volume bore the year of publication as its title, as if to suggest a movement through time and space marked by progress within history. The publication's lasting identity, however, derived from its subtitle, *Revista de Avance*.[3] The contents were organized in three discrete units. An editorial statement entitled "Directrices" (printed in italic typeface) oriented readers toward the contents of each monthly issue and presented commentary on the political events of the day and the status of Cuban intellectual life. The main section of the review (printed in a large font) usually consisted of three or four lengthy essays that shared a common interest in a national literature, author, or theme. These articles ranged from discussions of philosophy and avant-garde esthetics to commentary on short stories and poetry. Also included in this section were squibs by distinguished contemporary figures, illustrations by local and international artists, and occasional biographical sketches. The third part of the magazine (set in reduced type) could well be considered ephemera, although it actually supplied valuable information on the general interests of contributors. In this section, the editorial staff reviewed recent publications, listed the contents of contemporary periodicals, and supplied an almanac of current artistic events taking place in Cuba and the Americas. In this section, a page of humorous quotations entitled the "Index Barbarorum" exposed the often stultifying logic and careless abuses of language found in texts by contemporary critics and creative writers. Intended more as a token of membership

3. Marcelo Pogolotti noted that *Avance*'s desire for change and movement is reflected "hasta en el nombre" (Pogolotti 1958, 103).

1927

revista de avance

QUINCENAL

Año 1. Núm. 1. La Habana, Marzo 15 de 1927

30 CTS.

SUMARIO:

APARTADO 2228
La Habana

Illustration 1. The first issue of Avance, *title page printed in red ink. (Original made available by the General Library of the University of California, Los Angeles.)*

in a guild of emerging intellectuals than as a slap at improprieties, the "Index" created a sense of solidarity among those contributing to international arts and letters.

In its broader scope, *Avance* surpassed the more locally defined endeavors in cultural criticism found in the pages of *Cuba Contemporánea* (1913–1927), the politically engaged *Social* (1916–1936), or even the literary supplement of Cuba's conservative daily, *El Diario de la Marina*, which carried news of avant-garde activities to an extensive readership.[4] In contrast, the writers contributing to *Avance* trained their gaze on international events in arts and letters to support their discussion of local politics and culture.

In this regard, *Avance* was participating in a wide cosmopolitan project that drew Cuban artists and writers into dialogue with those abroad. This effort also articulated a sustained meditation on diverse artistic manifestations of the time. *Avance*'s mandate was thus broader than other contemporary Caribbean efforts: the Puerto Rican Diepalista movement founded by Palés Matos and Diego Padró, in which the African registers of popular speech were recorded in verse; the Euforista proposal (also from Puerto Rico), which suggested a union of North and South American cultures; and the various ephemeral literary engagements that echoed the dictates of Filippo Tomaso Marinetti or Tristan Tzara.[5] Rather, *Avance* writers brought local political concerns into convergence with international esthetics. The Cuban avant-garde was not a servile imitation of European activism in the arts. Moreover, in contrast with the Martínfierristas in Argentina or the Estridentista group in Mexico, whose playful engagement with art suppressed the seriousness of more socially committed concerns, the Cubans turned their attention to a politicized appraisal of national culture.[6] In this context, *Avance* members often underscored the African legacy in Cuban life, using it as a tool for denouncing foreign interference in local affairs.

Recent critics have argued correctly that the Latin American avant-garde was never an exclusively cosmopolitan endeavor. Rather, it reso-

4. It is difficult to isolate the positions of these diverse reviews because the periodicals of the 1920s shared authors, ideologies, and style. Max Henríquez Ureña has noted that the Minorista political group arose out of *Social*, a review directed by Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring (Henríquez Ureña 1979, 417–19). Its contributors included virtually the entire editorial staff of *Avance:* Carpentier, Ichaso, Lizaso, Mañach, and Marinello. *Cuba Contemporánea*, which drew on the talents of Max Henríquez Ureña and Roig de Leuchsenring, also belonged to the Minorista camp. As noted, *Cuba Contemporánea* ceased publication when the *Revista de Avance* began to appear (Henríquez Ureña 1929, 370–72).

5. On the Puerto Rican avant-gardes, see Verani (1986, 17–18) and Schwartz (1991, 183–98); see also Klaus Müller-Burgh (1986), who provides a history of the Cuban avant-garde in the Caribbean context.

6. On the Martínfierristas, see Masiello (1986) and Montaldo (1989); on the Estridentista movement, Luis Mario Schneider (1970) is especially useful.

Illustration 2. Example of Avance's *promotion of the graphic arts, in Volume 1, Number 3. (Original made available by the General Library at the University of California, Los Angeles.)*

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nated to a curious fusion of nationalist and estheticizing rhythms.[7] These two currents—patriotic and cosmopolitan, nationalist and avant-garde—formed a peculiar literary discourse unique to international cultural activities in the 1920s and 1930s. Even on the level of iconography and aspects of public presentation, the Latin American avant-garde called on a stock of national images to define its cosmopolitan project. For example, the Argentine journal *Martín Fierro* (1924–1927) invoked in its title a literary symbol of nationalist pride and tradition while also seeking to promote a "new sensibility" that might modernize arts and letters. In Mexico the Estridentistas claimed they had found inspiration in the Mexican Revolution and dedicated poems to the memory of Aztec chieftains; and in Peru, Mariátegui's *Amauta* (1926–1930) invoked indigenous symbols to promote socialism.[8] *Avance,* too, revealed a great degree of integration of these projects. Its editors organized a program of political resistance specific to the issues of the 1920s with a corresponding proposal for renovating the arts in Cuba. Politics and esthetics were not to be perceived as parallel but independent phenomena. Rather, the textured interweavings of these two domains of interest reveal a high degree of editorial reflection about the complexities of Cuban culture under neocolonial rule.[9] At the center of

7. On the integration of nationalist and cosmopolitan concerns in the Latin American avant-garde, see for example, Nelson Osorio (1981, 1988). Despite the attractiveness of this theme, one should be advised of the dangers of a critical enterprise that seeks to locate national essence in certain forms of cultural expression. Indeed, as Carlos Alonso (1990) has noted, such exegesis betrays a suspiciously ethnographic motive (suggesting stasis and idealization) in which the literary text is taken as an anthropological object. With this caveat in mind, I wish to consider the avant-garde text insofar as it invites speculation on its cosmopolitan appeal and local leanings, bound in an organic relationship to nation and historical progress.

8. *Amauta* rejected an "art for art's sake" aesthetic and emphasized the civil responsibilities of writers. In the first issue, Mariátegui wrote: "El objeto de esta revista es el de planear, esclarecer, y conocer los problemas peruanos desde puntos de vista doctrinarios y científicos. . . . Estudiaremos todos los grandes momentos de renovación políticos, filosóficos, artísticos, literarios, científicos" (Mariátegui 1926, 1). While *Avance* expressed a broadly defined concern for international activities in the arts, *Amauta* referred to foreign authors for their contributions to new political and intellectual currents. Sigmund Freud, George Grosz, George Bernard Shaw, and Leon Trotsky were cited for their ideas on the bourgeois mind or the state of socialism in Europe. Marinetti's presence in the journal was a singular exception to the more politically inflected contributions of foreign writers. The Mexican review *Contemporáneos* (1928–1931) also expressed a quest for national identity through art, but with a clear and public repudiation of any political agenda that might taint the purity of artistic expression. On *Amauta* and the avant-garde, see Vicky Unruh (1989) and Mirla Alcibíades (1982); on *Contemporáneos,* see Edward Mullen (1972).

9. Evaluations of *Avance* have been colored strongly by the political persuasions of recent scholars, influenced either favorably or adversely by the political issues at stake in the 1920s or by the resonance of the Cuban Revolution. Thus many contemporary critics have tended to evaluate the significance of *Avance* based on their own ideological commitments in the present. Those who support the revolution, for example, have tended to describe *Avance* as a journal committed mainly to avant-garde literature and esthetics, while dismissing its political function as erroneous and confused. Within this model of analysis, only Juan Marinello (who went on to become one of the revolution's most impassioned advocates), is viewed as a redeeming figure. His colleagues have been treated disparagingly for their petit bourgeois

these discussions was a new vision of the role of the author, both as a leader of political activity and as a guide to an alternative esthetics.

AUTHORITY AND DISSENT: THE WRITER IN THE NATION

Political and intellectual culture in the 1920s exposed the stressful expansion of U.S. demands placed on the island economy. As the effects of the intrusive Platt Amendment were felt with increasing tension and the domination of U.S. sugar interests altered the composition of rural and urban populations, Cuban authorities facilitated the evolution of neocolonial rule. Young intellectuals took issue with policies favoring foreign interests to the detriment of Cuban sovereignty. At the same time, they protested the absence of democratic government in the political arena and in academic institutions. During the administrations of Presidents Mario García Menocal (1913–1921), Alfredo Zayas (1921–1925), and Gerardo Machado (1925–1933), abuses of power and corruption abounded.[10] Expression of public discontent increased dramatically in the 1920s: poet and activist Rubén Martínez Villena led the Protest of 13 in 1923; the Minorista group emerged among poets and writers;[11] Julio Antonio Mella organized the Liga Anti-Imperialista (founded in 1925) and the newly founded Communist Party; and Fernando Ortiz organized the Junta de Renovación Na-

analyses of politics and letters. Among the surviving members of the *Avance* collective who supported the revolution, Martí Casanovas insisted that the journal be evaluated for its contributions to revolutionary consciousness: "*Revista de Avance* forma parte del pasado prerrevolucionario—un pasado algo remoto—y al juzgarla y sentenciarla, pesando lo que hizo y lo que pudo hacer y no hizo en su tiempo y dadas las condiciones de su tiempo, debe considerarse especialmente su efectividad revolucionaria, o sea, lo que aportó al activo de la Revolución, y también, siempre desde este mismo punto de vista, sus errores y vacíos" (Casanovas 1965, 7–8). In this case, the revolution in 1959 has determined retrospectively the political merits of *Avance*. In contrast, Cintio Vitier was seriously skeptical of *Avance*'s success and claimed that the journal had exhibited no real direction in esthetics or politics. He also claimed that the publication had failed to influence the Cuban public: "Todo tiene poco fondo: hay una intrascendencia, un laicismo, una lisura particular" (Vitier 1958, 316). Dissident Cuban intellectuals (those in exile since the 1960s) have tended to view *Avance* exclusively as an oppositional journal whose mission, much like that of dissidents today, was to express the anxiety of youth in response to an untenable political program. Thus Ichaso and Mañach (who died abroad as exiles in the early 1960s) are described as those who gave the journal its orientation and assured its prestige in Cuban literary history. Defending this position, Rosario Rexach wrote, "De este modo se justificará un poco, aunque sea a esa generación tan llevada y traída y tan mal juzgada que fue la generación del 30, que tal parece como si no hubiese aportado nada a la conciencia cubana y que, sin embargo, cuán heroicamente luchó por rescatar al pueblo de Cuba del provincianismo y del colonialismo, tanto cultural como político y económico" (Rexach 1963, 8). The truth about *Avance* lies somewhere between these extremes of critical perspective.

10. Especially distressing was the rule of Machado, who tested the will of youthful intellectuals and students while expanding the limits of his presidential rule under the so-called *prórroga de poderes* in 1927.

11. On the constituency and goals of the Minoristas, see Ana Cairo Ballester (1978) and Carlos Ripoll (1968, 49–50).

cional, a civic opposition group. Coinciding with these activities, students led by Mella also staged a protest in the universities, demanding much-needed reform and a separation from state control, a gesture that led to the founding of the Universidad Popular José Martí.[12] Enrique José Varona, one of Cuba's leading writers, collaborated in organizing the Movimiento de Veteranos y Patriotas in 1923. This broad-based group, whose membership included many Minoristas, protested political corruption and in 1924 led a failed revolt against the Zayas administration.

Emerging from this panorama of activism in the 1920s was the image of the writer as a leader of national concerns. As Juan Marinello has observed, political activism among artists and writers represented a new intellectual position in the Cuban republican era: "La Protesta de los 13 supone una actitud distinta, nueva, en los intelectuales cubanos, que hasta entonces no habían expresado directa y militantemente, con riesgo personal, su inconformidad con la corrupción administrativa . . . ya desde entonces, los escritores y los artistas han sentido pesar sobre sí la responsabilidad de sus posturas políticas."[13]

With a renewed consciousness of their civic and political responsibilities, writers of the 1920s assumed a defiant stance, insisting that politics were central to the production of art. *Avance* was formed in these hectic moments, inspired by the model of resistance provided by José Martí, and its directors thus came to exalt the prominence of the author as a central figure in national life. With its editorial collective sharing the sympathies of the Minoristas and the Falange de Acción Cubana[14] and supporting the political protests of 1923, *Avance* sustained a general intellectual commitment to expose government corruption and situate a debate about art and letters within an evaluation of nationalist questions. Moreover, the precedent set by these manifestations of dissent allowed *Avance* as an independent review to legitimize its public authority. In other words, the style of protest, along with the seriousness of youthful demands on government, reshaped the role of the intellectual in Cuba of the 1920s. The most distinguished young Cuban essayists of the decade—Alejo Carpentier, Jorge Mañach, Juan Marinello, Martí Casanovas, and Francisco Ichaso, all editors of *Avance*—insisted that their assessments of

12. The demands for university reform were inspired in large part by the protests and reform of the Argentine university system staged in Córdoba in 1918. In addition, student protests in Cuba were motivated by objections to the Zayas government and Cuban dependence on the United States (see Cairo Ballester 1982).

13. Cited in Martí Casanovas (1965, 9). For a similar view, see also Luis Aguilar (1972, 69-70).

14. Cairo Ballester notes that most of *Avance*'s editors—Marinello, Ichaso, Mañach, and Lizaso—were founding members (along with Martínez Villena) of the Falange de Acción Cubana (1923), a group that protested the corrupt government of Zayas and organized civic opposition (Cairo Ballester 1976, 68).

modern art find a place alongside national political culture.[15] They reiterated this platform in the introductory statements of the journal and urged increased public participation in the democratic reform of Cuba as well as an awareness of innovation in the arts. Thus without reducing *Avance* to partisan propaganda, they insisted on forging an activist role for a new generation of writers and artists.[16]

DEFINING THE NATIONAL CHARACTER

In one of the early issues, the editors commented on the social progress made in Cuba in the twenty-five years since the Cuban Republic was founded:

> ¿Qué hemos hecho en estos veinte y cinco años de cruento aprendizaje cívico? Vistos en nuestra externidad, el avance ha sido considerable. Podría, en algunos sectores, tenerse por gigantesco. La cercanía y la íntima conexión con un pueblo que vive días de fuerte juventud han producido la transformación material de nuestra vida, incorporándonos a la corriente de sus increíbles improvisaciones. Nuestro progreso espiritual e ideológico no ha corrido parejo a esta transformación, importante pero superficial. A corruptelas coloniales hemos añadido lacras de nuevo cuño; a errores pasados, nuevos errores. Empeñados nuestros políticos en una pugna de bajísimo nivel:—obtener la posición ventajosa y sostenerse en ella—todo avance político de amplia perspectiva y, por ende, de seria y trabajosa elaboración, se ha estrellado en la impreparación de legisladores y ejecutores.[17]

Although Cuban accomplishments were considerable, as the editors claimed, Cuba was suffering nevertheless from a spiritual and ideological deficit. Responding to a legacy of corruption that was heightened during the regimes of Zayas and Machado, *Avance* identified a Cuban spiritual malaise—defined by inertia, passivity, and aimlessness—and a profoundly equivocal interpretation of national history. The editors traced these misunderstandings first to a structural dysfunction in Cuban society and second to the impoverished analysis of the past that had been rendered by intellectuals. Accordingly, *Avance* took on the study of Cuban

15. José Tallet and Félix Lizaso later replaced Carpentier and Casanovas as members of the editorial committee.

16. Although the true radicals of the Cuban 1920s were Rubén Martínez Villena, Raúl Roa, and Julio Antonio Mella, the members of the editorial collective also displayed a continuing commitment to political protest, even during their tenure with the review. Thus in 1927, Casanovas, Carpentier, and Tallet faced trial and sentencing for their Communist leanings. In 1930 Marinello was accused of instigating a student rebellion and was subsequently imprisoned, bringing *Avance* to a close. At the same time, the members of the editorial board were allied with the Minorista group. But by 1931, the political orientation of these individuals changed. Striking an alliance with conservatives, Mañach and Ichaso in 1931 joined the ABC, an organization of middle-class intellectuals opposing the Machado regime that was largely unsympathetic to activities of Communist party members and radical university students. On political organizations of the period, see Aguilar (1972, 119) and the general observations of Roa (1969).

17. "Directrices: Veinte y cinco años de república," *Avance* 1, pt. i, no. 5 (1927):97.

national character. Inspired by Fernando Ortiz (the spiritual father of the Minoristas), whose earliest ethnographic studies had set out to explore *la cubanidad*, editors Ichaso, Lizaso, Mañach, and Marinello began to investigate the nature of Cuban behavior in an effort to explain the current crisis. In fact, important investigations of Cuban character emerged from the 1920s and 1930s and were featured in the pages of *Avance*. Intellectuals reflected on definitions of nationhood, the heterogeneity of racial strands, and Cuba's dependent relationship to foreign cultures. Far from resolving such issues, however, these investigations yielded a number of questions, particularly about defining la cubanidad. Borrowing from popular tradition, Cuba was called a "país de viceversas," a description editors used to refer to disequilibrium at home:

> Burla burlando tocamos también una seria realidad cuando decimos "Cuba, país de viceversas." Porque nada sintomatiza tanto el desequilibrio orgánico de una colectividad como la flagrante contradicción funcional que en ella se produce. . . . Cuando en una sociedad las funciones se subvierten y unas clases asumen faenas y responsabilidades de otras y se aplican pretensas e inadecuadas soluciones a los problemas y se da al César lo que es de Dios y se vive, en fin, sin contar para nada con la realidad histórica, política y económica del momento, su metabolismo se ha alterado profundamente y es la hora de adoptar providencias radicales y salvadoras.[18]

Why, the editors asked, are Cuban voices of opposition lacking in purpose and reason? Thus they signaled the blindness of political journalists who had neglected to cover the effects of neocolonial land sales and targeted instead the displacement of Cubans as a primary concern of the day. Equally important, *Avance* recognized a crossing of discursive networks in which political language and speech had become the object of the writer's critique. To explain the current malaise and to define emerging strategies of popular resistance, the editors turned to analyzing the function of language.

Avance was consistently sensitive to the imbalances between language and critical form that marked public life in Cuba. Contributors ascribed these untenable contradictions to the lack of clearly defined roles for citizens along with the failure to integrate local policy with the realities of Cuban conditions. Jorge Mañach explained this sense of displacement in terms of a type of subversion of standard expression in Spanish. In what was to become his most famous essay and a landmark text on Cuban custom, Mañach published "Indagación del choteo" in the pages of *Avance* (1928b). He analyzed the Cuban custom of verbal disrespect and punning as a means used by individuals to undermine social hierarchy and to stretch the seeming inelasticity of official language and thought. Thus through jokes and irreverent humor, Cubans were using linguistic advantage to taunt state authority and mock its rules. By emphasizing the *choteo*,

18. "Directrices: El imperativo del viceversa," *Avance* 2, no. 23 (1928):139.

or subversive use of language, Mañach's essay touched on the ambiguities of the Cuban national character. Defined by registers of voice and defiance, *lo cubano* was explained in the pages of *Avance* as an element of radical defiance. As Gustavo Pérez Firmat (1984) has observed, the choteo relaxes social structures and joins elite and popular culture. He astutely situates the choteo within a larger Cuban affinity for translation. Thus Cubans—at the crossroads of foreign and vernacular traditions—express a provisional quality in both their language and their national character. Articulations such as the choteo or the *embullo* (described in Ichaso 1929) have been defined as subversive strategies with which Cubans challenge authority and emphasize creole mixture.[19] This hybridization comprises a major feature of la cubanidad and reflects an inability to resolve the nation's internal conflicts. Literature and journalism of the 1920s and 1930s returned persistently to this theme, exploring the crossing of races and tongues that constitute Cuban culture. Although later critics such as Antonio Benítez Rojo (1989) and Gustavo Pérez Firmat (1989) have celebrated this mixture as a decisive Cuban advantage, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity as discussed in the pages of *Avance* was cause for earnest inquiry and, on occasion, unresolved vexation.

Avance's editors went on to lament the passivity of Cubans when facing problems of major importance. According to the editors' perspective, what was needed was a mobilization of civic consciousness.[20] Just as the journal urged intellectuals into action, the popular sectors were invited to assume attitudes of public responsibility. Such recruitment was central to *Avance*'s endeavor to enlist readers to participate actively in society. National character was thus defined by Cuba's relation to land and by the continued encroachment of U.S. interests on Cuban sovereignty. *Avance* editors outlined these issues repeatedly to draw attention to questions of economic dependence and the expansion of the latifundio. One editorial column explained:

> Cuba tiene dos problemas capitales. Uno político-social interior, cuya solución depende sólo de sí misma: es un problema de galvanización cívica. Preparación cultural de la masa, movilización integral y genuina de la voluntad popular y así instruida, extirpación del profesionalismo político y de los gajes de veteranidad, utilización de los más aptos, imperio de la opinión pública y de la responsabilidad gubernamental. . . . El otro problema de Cuba es de implicaciones externas, pero no tanto que no esté también en nuestra mano el encaminarlo hacia un *modus vivendi* compatible con la dignidad y prosperidad nacionales. Es el problema de nuestro vasallaje económico. Tiene, como se sabe, dos aspectos: el latifundismo y

19. For additional commentary on Cuban national character, see also Lizaso (1929).

20. On *Avance*'s perception of Cuban apathy, see especially Mañach (1929c) and Roa García's review of Marinello's *Juventud y vejez* (Roa García 1928). *Avance* frequently implored its readers to mobilize for political action, as in the editorial "Directrices: Orientaciones," *Avance* 3, no. 34 (1929):127–28.

la general inestabilidad de nuestra economía, dominada por la producción azucarera. Sólo una política de expropriación y de socialización muy valerosa y enérgica pudiera reconquistarnos la tierra cubana enajenada a accionistas extranjeros.[21]

Avance responded to contradictions within Cuban society in the 1920s by calling for general public protests and a redistribution of national wealth. Heated debates on the Spanish colonial legacy and the U.S. presence on the island thus filled the pages of the review.

In the 1920s, every sector of the Cuban economy was affected by U.S. capital interests. U.S. firms owned a quarter of the arable land in Cuba, and U.S financial credits and loans to Cuba controlled the value of the peso along with the island's banking system. Moreover, Machado's government gave full assurance to U.S. banking and agriculture of continued commercial protection and reduced tariff legislation. In response, *Avance* encouraged a platform to end Cuban dependency culturally as well as economically. These programs were voiced by the *Avance* staff and echoed in the books reviewed in the journal. For example, the writings of Charles Chapman and Leland Jenks, although not necessarily influential in the United States, resonated strongly in Cuba because of their problematic discussions of the new U.S. territorial advances.[22] Jenks was cited often as the author of *Our Cuban Colony* (1928), a condemnation of U.S. interventions abroad. By contrast, Chapman's *A History of the Cuban Republic* (1927) was ill received by *Avance* for its explicit defense of the Platt Amendment and subsequent U.S. policy on the island. Spotlighting the heated topics of discussion raised by these books, *Avance* focused on the injustices of the Platt Amendment in Cuba (and the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America in general) and repeatedly denounced the U.S. presence in Central America and the Caribbean. Invariably, these concerns became part of debates about national culture. Mañach, for example, called for abolishing the Platt Amendment, but he also objected to the dulling of Cuban character that had been conditioned by steady U.S. control of politics and art (Mañach 1929c). On the home front, this trend had led to Cubans withdrawing from forms of public participation, while social citizenship was weakened by external forces. Mañach also observed that when Cubans were faced with a new international culture in arts and letters shaped by cinema, radio, and jazz, they had failed to develop an autonomous culture of their own. Indeed, they came to accept themselves

21. "Directrices: Orientaciones," *Avance* 3, no. 34 (1929):127–28.

22. *Avance* referred to Charles Chapman's *A History of the Cuban Republic* (1927) and Leland Jenks's *Our Cuban Colony* (1928). On Chapman's book, see the editorial "Directrices: Un libro injusto y un silencio que otorga," *Avance* 2, no. 19 (1928):35; on Jenks's study, see Juan Marinello's review, "Nuestra colonia de Cuba" (1929a). On *Avance*'s challenge to U.S. policy in general, see "Directrices: El sexto congreso panamericano," *Avance* 2, no. 18 (1928):3; and "Directrices: Mensaje a Puerto Rico," *Avance* 3, no. 41 (1929):351.

as inferior to their confreres abroad. Mañach characterized the national dependency resulting from this crisis in a harsh critique of Cubans:

> ¿Cómo explicarse esta pasividad no impasible en un pueblo que pudo, antaño, granjearse la tacha nórdica de "convulsivo," que aspiró y luchó a lo largo de todo un siglo, y que dió, en trance de liberarse, las muestras más auténticas de entereza y de abnegación? . . . Creo que se trata, para decirlo con palabras en boga, de un complejo de inferioridad en grado colectivo—una conciencia de limitaciones adventicias, pero definitivas, que se ha ido acumulando hasta destruir o vaciar de energía nuestra ilusión patriótica. . . . Lo que anda en quiebra es la voluntad de mejoración que debiera asistirlo. (Mañach 1929c, 322–23)

In these terms, Cuban character had been shaped by an unwilling dependency on external power. Creole blending and heterogeneous culture—the festive traces of Cuban originality—were in danger of succumbing to foreign models without so much as a challenge or a noisy expression of resistance.

THE CULTURE OF INTELLECTUALS

In the "Directrices" section of the review, the editors called for a vigorous anti-imperialist stance and sought to mobilize readers. They envisioned a society led by committed intellectuals. At a time when critics like Julien Benda and Hermann Keyserling were proposing theories of intellectual behavior in society, the Cubans, too, steered their journal toward analyzing the role of lettered traditions within their local context.[23] Reflecting on the writer's mission, Juan Marinello suggested in "El insoluble problema del intelectual" (1927b) that the intellectual's objective was not to support the state but to call attention to its limitations and challenge social injustice. Yet because of intellectual disengagement, Cuban thinkers had failed to respond to political issues and were simply letting history pass them by (see Marinello 1927b, 168). This inadaptability of the man of letters could be observed even in revolutionary society in Russia: "La formidable revolución rusa, inspirada por un propósito de renovación integral, no ha resuelto, no podía resolver nunca, el problema del poeta y del filósofo." Marinello thus acknowledged the difficult position of the man of ideas who often subordinated questions of daily survival to the leisurely pursuits of a disengaged aesthetic. Less pessimistic in a subsequent essay, Marinello expanded this meditation by arguing for a forceful integration of writers and artists in contemporary society: "El intelectual no debe rehuir en modo alguno, su obligación de orientador y aclarador de los problemas que confronta su país, o, como sucede en América, un conjunto de pueblos de análogos destinos" (Marinello 1928, 6).

23. On Benda's importance for Spanish American thinkers, see Zamora (1930); on Keyserling, see Núñez Valdivia (1927).

Echoing the initiative of Marinello, who had acknowledged a debt to José Martí, contributors to the journal described the function of literature as a weapon against the tyranny of censorship and social injustice. Finally, they invoked avant-garde art as a challenge to bourgeois ideology, assaulting a fixed semantic logic and awakening a new way of seeing in readers. Literature was thus to convey a social imperative on its own terms.

Avance repeatedly insisted on a reorganization of intellectuals in society, a response to the local situation of writers of the 1920s. This program was both pragmatic (with respect to publishing and distributing literature in Cuba) and idealistic (regarding *Avance*'s demands for political reform). In one editorial, for example, contributors called for the creation of a formal assembly of Cuban writers to promote cultural objectives in the nation.[24] This commission, they added, should be sponsored by the government yet remain free of governmental control. The editors also insisted that Cuban works be distributed more amply and contact between Cuban and U.S. writers encouraged. Finally, they called for an organized book exposition, or "Día del libro," of the kind offered in other Latin American nations but never before in Cuba.

As might be expected, these liberal alternatives never succeeded in placing artists in forceful opposition to the state. Rather, *Avance* was content to claim the avant-garde as a privileged minority voice whose most important function was its challenge to authority. Critics have speculated on the avant-garde's adversarial function. Renato Poggioli (1969) defined the defiant pose of the avant-garde in relation to tradition. In a more elaborate exposition more pertinent to the Cuban situation, Peter Burger (1984) explained the challenge posed by the avant-garde artist to that kind of "art for art's sake" aestheticism that had defined previous generations: the avant-garde was to compensate for this social inadequacy by exploiting positions of otherness to make an incursion into political life. Although this project was never fully realized in Europe (as Burger admits), in Cuba the avant-garde seized on its position as "other" to introduce a dynamic of lively exchanges between intellectuals and subaltern populations. This dimension was observable in *Avance*'s praise of feminist movements,[25] but

24. "Directrices: El día del libro y la gente de letras," *Avance* 3, no. 35 (1927):185.

25. Celebrating the suffragist movement propelled by the Alianza Nacional Feminista, the editors claimed that women could assist in democratic struggles. Because of their status as subalterns, women were described as free of the prejudices belonging to hegemonic groups: "Un grupo de nuestras mujeres, oficialmente constituído bajo el rótulo del 'Alianza Nacional Feminista,' se dispone a la conquista del voto en los precisos momentos en que nuestros hombres comienzan a prescindir de él como de una molestia ciudadana sin objeto. Esta falange de mujeres puede significar una oportuna reserva de fuerzas para nuestra diezmada democracia. Cuando los hombres usurpadores de un exclusivismo democrático esencialmente antidemocrático, más aún, antihumano, nos sentimos ganados por la desilusión y lloramos un poco boabdilescamente los principios que no supimos defender, las mujeres, menos escépticas, menos maliciadas en las mañas de la politiquería al uso, más henchidas de fe en los destinos del pueblo, acuden a cubrir la vanguardia y afirman enfáticamente su fe en los ide-

it resonated most strikingly in the journal's emerging awareness of marginality and race. These closely allied fields of inquiry took shape in the pages of *Avance*, first as part of a general question about the marginality of the man of letters within an international perspective and then as a preoccupation with the status of blacks in Cuba.

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCES AND ESTHETIC SOVEREIGNTY

Insisting on a transcontinental exchange of writers as essential for Cuban culture, *Avance* extended bridges between international modernists of the day.[26] In particular, the editors sought out dissident writers in the United States and Spain who might voice opposition to colonialist expansion and therefore strike an alliance with Cuba. In this regard and despite their repudiation of the colonial legacy inherited from the fatherland, Cuban intellectuals expressed a primary affinity with Hispanic traditions. Fomented in part through the activities of the Instituto de Cultura Hispano-Cubana, directed by Fernando Ortiz, Spanish culture was readily embraced by Cuban thinkers in the 1920s. In particular, the literary traditions leading to the generation of 1927 were found attractive because of the spirit of opposition developed in Spanish works. Cuban editors devoted special attention to Miguel de Unamuno and Federico García Lorca, to Ramón del Valle-Inclán's *Tirano Banderas*, and to the literary and political strategies of earlier artistic figures such as nineteenth-century Francisco Goya and Baroque poet Luis de Góngora.[27] By 1928 Goya had

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ales de la democracia. . . . Nuestra mujer, alejada hasta ahora de toda peripecia política, puede ir a ella tan limpia de prejuicios como pertrechada de puros entusiasmos. Suministraría a nuestra política de maquinaciones y personalismos ese fondo romántico que la hace más humana. Algún día veremos cómo el feminizar la política puede ser una manera de humanizarla y cómo un empaque de masculinidad fachendosas (el cacique, el muñidor, el mató) es el que la ha conducido a esa cosa ruín, antiestética y repugnante que es hoy." See "Directrices: Feminismo y democratización," *Avance* 3, no. 31 (1929):36, 63. Viewed in this light, women formed part of a dissident minority and posed an alternative to the corrupt politics of the 1920s through their faith and humanist intentions. *Avance*'s consistent interest in feminist issues is also revealed in the following essays: "Almanaque: El día del libro en el lyceum," *Avance* 3, no. 35 (1929):185; "Almanaque: La conferencia de Rita Shelton," *Avance* 3, no. 37 (1929):247; and "Directrices: La agresión al trabajo," *Avance* 4, no. 50 (1930):257.

26. *Avance*'s commitment to cosmopolitan activity was clearly expressed by the editorial collective: "*1929* [*Avance*] se propone, por encima de todo, enterar, informar a su público cubano de como se están expresando fuera de aquí las inteligencias y las sensibilidades más agudas de nuestro tiempo." See "Directrices: Piedras de escándalo," *Avance* 3, no. 30 (1929):4.

27. See, for example, Miguel de Unamuno, "Vanguardismo" (1928) and "Violación de correspondencia" (1929). On García Lorca, see especially issue 45 of the *Revista de Avance* (1930). On Valle-Inclán, see the unsigned review of *Tirano Banderas* in the section "Letras hispánicas," *Avance* 1, pt. i, no. 3 (1927):51; on Goya, see especially Mañach, "Goya, reivindicador" (Mañach 1928a); on Góngora, see Ichaso, "Góngora y la nueva poesía" (Ichaso 1927). *Avance*'s admiration for the Spanish tradition was unfailing. It should be noted that, like other Spanish American journals, *Avance* engaged in a heated polemic with the Spanish periodical *La Gaceta Literaria* over the importance of Spanish culture for Latin American writers. Despite *Avance*'s

become the major Spanish figure to be celebrated in the pages of *Avance* because the editors found in Goya's pictorial subjects—victims of war and haunting phantasm—an analogue for the Cuban masses (see Mañach 1928a).

Cuban literati were creating a concept of intellectual commitment that was based less on sectarian dogmatism than on the observable resistances of the artist in society:

> Nuestra preocupación política no invade los sectores estéticos porque entendemos . . . que el arte es función y no instrumento. Pero si delante de las páginas de pura creación o pura intelección mantenemos . . . una sección de carácter editorial como ésta, es porque sabemos que nuestro interés artístico no nos exime de responsabilidad cívica. Por fortuna, nuestra devoción por el arte nuevo corre paralela a nuestra apetencia de una vida más libre, más justa, individual y colectiva.[28]

As a result of parallel currents of aesthetic and political thought, selected artists drawn from an international field were introduced to Cuba. *Avance* especially highlighted dissident U.S. writers.[29] While the editors were understandably hostile toward U.S. policy in Cuba, they struck a clear alliance with U.S. writers occupying positions unauthorized by the state. Other Latin American publications also publicized U.S. writers and artists. *Contemporáneos* in Mexico spoke of Ezra Pound and Langston Hughes, and *Amauta* published essays by Waldo Frank. But *Avance* went far beyond these contemporaneous reviews in insisting on including U.S. writers to further a specific national project. In a gesture exceptional in Latin American periodical literature of the 1920s, *Avance* featured selections from major dissident modernists in the United States. Countee Cullen, John Dos Passos, Langston Hughes, Sinclair Lewis, H. L. Mencken, Eugene O'Neill, and Ezra Pound would have formed a significant constellation in any avant-garde publication, but their appearance in the pages of *Avance* lent a new dimension to their activities. Its editors consistently drew attention to the eccentricities of these writers and the social critique of U.S. culture issuing from their works. Credited with defining adversarial discourses of the 1920s, writers like Pound and Mencken illuminated in their literary works and commentary the ironies of U.S. pretensions. Pound, for instance, was published in *Avance* discussing the political impact of literary language in the state: "¿Tiene la literatura una función en el Estado, en el agregado humano, en la *res publica* (que debe significar la pública conveniencia, no obstante el lado de la burocracia y el excecrable gusto

assertion of autonomy from Hispanic traditions, it nonetheless remained firmly devoted to a "genuino espíritu fraterno." On this topic, see "Directrices: Sobre un meridiano intelectual," *Avance* 1, pt. i, no. 11 (1927):173–74.

28. See "Directrices: La izquierda y la siniestra," *Avance* 3, no. 36 (1929):192.

29. This is not to say that other Caribbean avant-gardists were not interested in establishing ties between writers of the North and the South. For example, the Euforista movement in Puerto Rico called for a union of both cultures, but it lacked a formal vehicle with which to advance a sustained platform of ideas (see Schwartz 1991, 185).

del populacho al elegir gobernantes)? La tiene" (Pound 1929, 307). By contrast, *Avance* included an essay by Mencken in which he commented ironically on the social division of labor and the merits of men of letters (Mencken 1928, 115). Exalting the behavior of iconoclasts and social misfits, Mencken was brought to the attention of Cuban readers as an example of the self-made man.

Avance also invoked foreign models to forge alliances among writers. One article claimed: "¿Cuál ha de ser la postura de las minorías insatisfechas de Hispanoamérica frente a los grupos inadaptados del Norte? Definir esta postura sería . . . de los que declaran la guerra a su tiempo—tanto como dejar trazado un vasto plan de reconquista espiritual del Continente."[30] In addition to dissident U.S. writers, *Avance* also published Spanish American writers of distinctly marginal status. Modern and avant-garde authors known for their eccentricities, reclusiveness, or isolation—among them Ecuadorian Pablo Palacio, Venezuelan José Rafael Pocaterra, and Uruguayan Horacio Quiroga—exemplified a discourse of otherness configured within the Spanish American context. As such, they provided voices of dissent to challenge any overarching statements about homogeneity among Spanish American voices, but they also suggested an alternative strategy for constructing the basis of modern culture.

The focus on oppositional writers coincided with *Avance*'s plan to show connections among marginal social sectors. The editors also explored the fruitfulness of otherness engendered within culture and extended a plea for camaraderie and action to intellectuals abroad. Thus the focus on odd and reclusive writers in *Avance* allowed Cuban intellectuals to speculate on their own traditions of isolation. In one essay, the editors addressed these concerns: "La aldeanidad persiste: para sobrepujarla . . . nos hubiéramos tendido las manos a distancia, para . . . construir y fortalecer un alma continental."[31] In an effort to combat provincial thinking and encourage dialogue among marginal groups, *Avance* identified the common ground shared by American artists of the North and the South.

Not all contributors to the review endorsed this platform for unity, however. Some were decidedly opposed to the Pan American celebrations sponsored by the United States, which promoted a synchrony of ideals shared by North and South America. Others objected to the dominance of European models in art prevalent in the 1920s. These contributors proposed an alternative vision, questioning universalism in favor of Cuban and Latin American expression. Identifying this conflict, Jorge Mañach claimed that art was determined by the specificities of the environment (Mañach 1927a). In this way, he called into question a more global approach to culture, turning his attention to the independent development

30. See "Directrices: Señales del Norte," *Avance* 4, no. 42 (1930):3.
31. See "Directrices: Viaje a América," *Avance* 3, no. 40 (1929):319.

of arts and letters in Latin America. In the tradition of Latin American intellectuals who have been obsessed with discovering the indigenous roots of their national cultures since the nineteenth century, the Cuban experience in the 1920s brought a heightened self-consciousness to this quest as writers like Mañach sought a creole expression that could explain the uniqueness of Cuban traditions. In view of the unavoidably hybrid influences traversing Cuban art and letters, it is not surprising that Mañach's search for indigenous strains led him to propose a set of wide alliances that would link Cubans to other Latin Americans in search of a common past. *Avance* thus forged links to writers of America, publishing special issues on Mexican, Peruvian, and Argentine literatures and lending direct political support for independence activities in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. In addition, the autonomy of Caribbean culture was constantly recalled in the journal. In a review signed F. L. (Felix Lizaso?), the author explained that a celebration of the tropics was necessary to erase the distinction between what Pedro Henríquez Ureña had identified as "la América buena y la América mala," a phrase that isolated the culture of the Caribbean ("la América mala") from the rest of Latin America (Lizaso 1928b, 291). In defense of Henríquez Ureña, however, the writer attributed diverse manifestations of art not to regional differences but to the artist's underlying sense of culture. The *institutions* of a nation—not geography—determined the maturation of arts and letters. Consequently, F. L. sought to advance an American aesthetic that would incorporate the cultural peculiarities of Caribbean nations.

In its preoccupation with promoting the expression of a uniquely American art, *Avance* drafted a four-item questionnaire addressed to writers throughout Spanish America. It asked about the responsibilities of American artists, the specificity of American art, and the possibility of revolutionary change through artistic media.[32] Respondents included Mexican Jaime Torres Bodet, Venezuelan Rufino Blanco Fombona, and Cubans José Antonio Ramos and Luis Felipe Rodríguez, each one emphasizing the moral responsibility of artists in facing the contemporary problems of Latin America.

As part of this concern for authentically Americanist works, the editors of *Avance* isolated a number of literary pieces that combined their formalist aesthetic concerns with a preoccupation with American regional issues. Among the works celebrated by *Avance, Don Segundo Sombra* received special attention for providing lessons in "fortaleza, espiritua-

32. The survey was first announced in a 1928 editorial that included the following questions: "¿Qué debe ser el arte americano? 1a. ¿Cree usted que la obra del artista americano debe revelar una preocupación americana? 2a. ¿Cree usted que la americanidad es cuestión de óptica, de contenido o de vehículo? 3a. ¿Cree usted en la posibilidad de caracteres comunes al arte de todos los países de nuestra America? 4a. ¿Cuál debe ser la actitud del artista americano ante lo europeo?" See "Directrices: Una encuesta," *Avance* 2, no. 26 (1928):235.

lidad y americanismo." Miguel Angel Asturias's *Leyendas de Guatemala* drew similar praise for the New World spirit recorded in its pages; Carlos Loveira's *Juan Criollo* was commended for its incisive review of modern Cuban history; and predictably, José Martí was honored for his exemplary commitment to American values.[33] The other component of this investigation was *Avance*'s investigation of race as a determinant of modern culture.

SUGAR, RACE, AND WRITING

Along with other intellectuals on the island, the editors paid particular attention to the rural economy of Cuba, noting the increased servitude of Cubans as a result of recent agricultural transformations. Although the Machado era had prompted heated discussion of the abuses of labor and concessions to foreign investors, the agricultural theme in particular captivated the minds of intellectuals. Carrying an emotive and patriotic appeal, the topic of foreign intervention in agriculture was used to promote the concept of a threatened national sovereignty as defined by one's ties to the land. In effect, as a part of changes in rural policy in the early 1920s, considerable property had moved from the hands of petit bourgeois nationals to U.S. latifundios, thereby limiting the participation of Cubans in their local economic development (Pérez 1986, 186–213). The model for this analysis, as recorded in *Avance,* was clearly borrowed from Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, whose essay "Azúcar y población en las Antillas" began as a lecture at the Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura and was published as a series of articles in *El Diario de la Marina*. Despite his allegiance to Machado, Guerra inspired many young liberal intellectuals, who found in his writings a way to explain the Cuban malaise.[34] Guerra's study drew attention to the shifting form of the Cuban latifundio, which was responsible for a new economic base in rural areas and for the importation of a less costly work force drawn from the black populations of Haiti and Jamaica. His essay began with a demographic overview on race and the ratio of European and creole citizens to persons of color, comparing Cuba's situation with those of other Caribbean nations (1976, 15). Denouncing foreign alterations of Cuban demographics through migration and forms of agricultural production alien to traditional society, Guerra called for the

33. See Lizaso (1928a) and Marinello (1930). *Avance* is replete with praise for Jose Martí. See, for example, Hernández Catá (1927), Lizaso (1929a, 1930), Mañach (1929a), and Marinello (1927a).

34. A curious alliance emerged between dissident intellectuals of *Avance* and Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, who served as a cabinet minister under Gerardo Machado. See *Avance*'s editorial review of Guerra's lecture in "Directrices: Tierra y población en las Antillas," *Avance* 1, pt. ii, no. 16 (1927):87. On Guerra's importance for Cuban intellectuals, see "Directrices: Veinte y cinco años de república," *Avance* 1, pt. i, no. 5 (1927):97. See also Ramiro Guerra's essay on agrarian questions (1927).

defense of local resources and insisted that citizens retain control of their labor force and mode of economic development.

Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones has correctly observed that Guerra's essay expressed a nostalgic desire to return to the pre-independence era, possibly to an age predating the freedom of slaves. "La exaltación de los patricios" became the focus of Guerra's thesis (1987, 57). Curiously enough, Guerra's brand of regressive nostalgia inspired the most liberal intellectuals in Cuba, providing a model for the essayists of *Avance* as well as for creative writers who began to cultivate the Afro-Cuban mode in the 1920s. Indeed, Roberto González Echevarría goes so far as to assert that all of Alejo Carpentier's fiction is informed by Guerra's perspective (1977, 45). Carpentier's first novel, *Ecue-Yamba-O* (written in 1928), explores the world of Haitian immigrants brought to Cuba to harvest cane. His later concerns about the emerging latifundio, the relationships between blacks and whites, and the economic dependency of Cuba show if not Guerra's inspiration at least a correspondence of concerns. Like Carpentier, other *Avance* intellectuals expanded on Guerra's thesis and provided their own nationalistic focus on migration and sugar. Although they might well have chosen other abuses of neocolonial advancement, ranging from duties placed on Cuban sugar to the decline in locally controlled agricultural production, they repeatedly complained instead about new patterns of immigration instigated by U.S. latifundios, in which black workers from Haiti and Jamaica replaced the more costly labor of native Cubans: "Si el haitiano y el jamaiquino fuesen intelectual y espiritualmente avanzados, no nos entristecería su importación y menos el tratamiento igualitario que entre nosotros se les diera. No es precisamente la negrura de la piel que nos estorba."[35]

As historians like Sidney Mintz have observed, plantation owners drew on Haitian and Jamaican laborers to replace Chinese and Indian labor. Between 1912 and 1924, 120,000 Haitians and 110,000 Jamaicans came to Cuba (Mintz 1964, xl). This new wave of immigrants peaked in 1929, when the Atlantic Sugar Company brought 3,000 Caribbean laborers into Cuba. Interestingly enough (and here the liberalism of the journal is clearly betrayed), *Avance* exhibited no anxiety about the fate of displaced Cubans of color, directing its attention exclusively to the perceived invasion of a new generation of black immigrants: "todos sabemos que la tierra se nos va y que otra raza inferior nos invade y nos amenaza."[36] Borrowing from the commentaries of Luis Araquistain in Madrid, *Avance* expressed special concern about the future of Spanish-Cuban landowners, who were leaving the island to escape this new program of agrarian trans-

35. See "Directrices: Cuba, caso antillano," *Avance* 3, no. 39 (1929):288.
36. "Directrices: Tierra y población en las Antillas," *Avance* 1, pt. ii, no. 16 (1927):87-88.

formation and fleeing what Araquistain referred to as "la gran tragedia racial de Cuba: su creciente africanización."

Avance's position on race issues was fraught with contradiction. At times, *Avance* directly expressed fear of migrant laborers. In other instances, when foreign journalists attributed Cuba's decline to the new waves of black immigration, the editors objected, claiming that the decadence of Cuba was linked directly to U.S. sugar politics and not to its foreign workers.[37] They argued that their criticism of Haitian and Jamaican migrants was based not on race but on the perception of an underdeveloped culture within those countries.

Racial issues were a common topic among Cuban intellectuals in the 1920s. Given the organization of the Partido Independiente de Color in 1908, a movement devoted to securing increased political power for blacks in Cuba that led to the "race war" of May 1912 (and the massacre of 3,000 blacks through U.S. interventions), race and color were fresh issues in the imaginations of politicians and writers.[38] Following that tragic event, columnists speculated on the future of blacks in Cuba, the advancement of blacks in education, and the possibility of their organization in society (Fernández Robaina 1990, 110–23).

But the threat of subsequent calls for black autonomy was received with apprehension in some intellectual quarters. Fernando Ortiz, whose studies of criminological patterns of blacks and their African rituals had been prominent since the 1910s, introduced a racialist discussion of broad and longstanding consequence. Ortiz proposed a model for cubanidad that prevailed over any specific racial characteristics of the island's inhabitants. In *La cubanidad y los negros* (1939), for example, he insisted on the prevailing national experience over the specificity of racial differences.[39] Similarly, Ortiz's remarks frequently betrayed ambivalence regarding national culture insofar as it was to be redefined by Amerindian or African constituents.[40] This attention to race began to intrigue writers in the 1920s

37. "Directrices: Cuba, caso antillano," *Avance* 3, no. 39 (1929):287.

38. The race war of 1912 was in reality the culmination of protests organized by Dominican Evaristo Estenoz and Haitian Pedro Ivonet. Luis Aguilar notes that although the majority of Cuban blacks did not join the movement, Caribbean migrants participated actively (1972, 36–37). On this topic, see also Pogolotti (1958, 95–97), Pérez (1986, 148–52), and the more impassioned account in Chapman (1927, 308–13). Finally, historians and literary critics have taken into account the aftermath of this affair in Cuban culture. Fernández de Castro noted that while the Estenoz-Ivonet affair of 1912 generated considerable interest and fear concerning the black population, it also initiated a literary tradition in which black characters figured prominently (1943, 65). Fernández Robaina comes to a different conclusion in stating that the events of 1912 did little to alter patterns of racial discrimination in Cuba (1990).

39. See Díaz-Quiñones for an excellent discussion of this text (1987, 55–56). For a consideration of the linguistic projects of Ortiz, see Pérez Firmat (1989, 16–66) and Benítez Rojo (1989, 149–85). On Ortiz's role in determining a Cuban discourse on race, see Aline Helg's recent essay (1990).

40. On this concept of culture, it is useful to consult the *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, a journal

and led to what was later called Afro-Cubanism in arts and letters. From its early manifestations in the poetry of Felipe Pichardo Moya and Agustín Acosta, who celebrated the cane harvest as a token of national pride yet sympathized with African workers, to the first fictions of Alejo Carpentier, who experimented in narrative with Ortiz's observations on Africans in Cuba, literature embraced questions of race in order to speculate about national culture.[41]

Anchored in this perspective, *Avance*'s editors attempted to merge the racialist and nationalist positions. Accordingly, they consolidated anti-imperialist concerns with a discussion of Afro-Cubans in sociological representation and in art. Sketches of and by Cubans of African descent, poems praising blackness, and celebrations of African heritage found their way into the pages of *Avance*. But the journal's representation of black culture never matched the extensive treatment provided in *El Diario de la Marina*, where Gustavo Urrutia in 1928 initiated a page devoted to Afro-Cuban literature and art under the title "Ideales de una raza." Nor did *Avance* offer more than a brief account of the writings of Nicolás Guillén.[42] Nevertheless, it supplied readers with a vast array of information about the ambivalent negotiations taking place over race, politics, and culture.

Afro-Cubanism was more than a passing concern for contributors to *Avance*. It synthesized a uniquely local debate about the uses of a particular minority expression in forming a national esthetics under neocolonial rule. The journal's interest in the status and culture of blacks carried major implications for the assertion of Cuban autonomy, especially in view of the tradition of U.S. interventions in the island. Afro-Cubanism in the 1920s was a close sibling of the Negrista literary movements in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic and an early but distant relative of the expression of Négritude, a term not coined until 1939 by Aimé Césaire and only then for purposes of an organized aesthetic movement designed to defend the rights of blacks.

Afro-Cubanism formed part of a nationalist renewal. *Avance*'s increased reporting on the presence of Africans in Cuba, beginning in 1929,

directed by Fernando Ortiz, to trace the general fears of writers and editors regarding what was identified as the decline of white civilization. See, for example, the unsigned essay entitled "El ocaso de las naciones blancas," *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 22 (1927):227.

41. All the same, Cuban intellectuals sought to preserve national autonomy to avoid what Nicolás Guillén and others feared would be an imitation of New York's Harlem that would result in the "ghettoization of Cuba" (see Fernández Robaina, 130).

42. In *El Diario de la Marina*, a section entitled "Ideales de una raza" and devoted to the representation of blacks in culture began in April 1928. It later became a Sunday supplement and ran until 1931. Here Guillén, Ballagas, Guirao, and Pedroso published their verses in Afro-Cuban style. Ironically, outside this literary page, *El Diario de la Marina* as a conservative paper promoted a less favorable representation of ethnic minorities in the news, printing scandalous accounts of Mexican braceros in the United States, Arabs in Spain, and black populations in Italy, apparently to displace anxieties about race among the Cuban bourgeoisie at home.

corresponded to the larger numbers of Haitians and Jamaicans immigrating to Cuba, but such coverage was also a way of renegotiating Cuba's cultural relationship to the United States and Europe. As examples of this interest, the *Revista de Avance* offered extensive articles on Haitian voodoo, santería, and other African rituals in Cuba. The journal reproduced Cuban engravings and drawings depicting black themes. Its editors also denounced the lynchings of blacks in the U.S. South and condemned the literary abuses of Parisian style that exoticized blackness for the purpose of avant-garde art. At the same time, Cuban authors wrote fiction evoking Afro-creole themes and offered commentary on Cuban contemporary music that drew attention to African motifs. Ramón Guirao and Emilio Ballagas published Afro-Cuban verses while Carpentier provided in 1930 a Negrista poem with the refrain "Yamba-ó." These positive representations, however, failed to resolve editorial confusion regarding a discourse on race. For example, Francisco Ichaso's commentary on African influences in the Cuban ballet "La rebambaramba" praised composer Amadeo Roldán for his use of folklore: "Porque el salvajismo es el único valor artístico del salvaje. Todo no lo que sea salvajismo en él entra en el común denominador de las funciones somáticas" (Ichaso 1928, 245).

At the same time, Tomás Castañeda Ledón observed about the African psyche: "Hasta hace poco regía: el negro era un animal parecido al hombre. Hoy, por el contrario, al hablársenos del tipismo estético, se concluye que el negro es tan bello y expresivo como los animales" (Castañeda Ledón 1929, 111). Here, exoticist interests were clearly directing the Cuban avant-garde. Ironically, when situated in the context of a wider international debate, Afro-Cubanism as an art form was used to counter colonialist aggressions in Latin America of the 1920s, while in Cuba odious stereotypes about blackness continued to exercise force.

Avance often used the representation of blackness as part of a strategy for confrontation between European and Latin Americanist interests. For example, in "Sobre la inquietud cubana," Juan Marinello observed that Cuba and Latin America had yet to find an autochthonous expression. Because of traditional ties to European cultural practices, he explained, the southern hemisphere lacked roots and language to articulate its American destiny: "La América hispánica es todavía, como la América inglesa, un reflejo europeo. Ni política ni intelectualmente ha dicho su *Palabra*" (Marinello 1929b, 354). American sovereignty in this instance was to be negotiated through an assessment of art. *Avance* thus inquired about the strategies used in Europe and America for representing racial "others." This topic was discussed most aggressively, I believe, in *Avance*'s assessment of the European avant-garde, especially in literary works that represented Latin Americans of color.

In 1929 *Avance* published an excerpt from Paul Morand's *Magie noire* under the title "El zar negro" (Morand 1929, 20–23). The fiction was re-

plete with exotic stereotypes about blacks and Latin Americans, such as: "Los latinos, en rigor, ofrecen con los negros puntos de semejanza; se les puede corromper, asimilárseles." Such writing inspired a deservedly heated editorial response and thus brought the topic of race and representation to *Avance*'s pages.[43] In the foreword to Morand's text, the editors praised the literary merit of the story but also protested Morand's imagistic excesses and his cold indifference to American culture:

> Publicamos este relato . . . para protestar contra la alusión deprimente e inconsulta que a Cuba se hace en la bella narración. A pesar de su vaguedad y tono irresponsable, entendemos que esa alusión acusa la ligereza con que el Sr. Morand . . . se refiere a cuestiones de política americana que no son de su especialidad. Esto no significa que "1929" [*Revista de Avance*] quiera ignorar el control económico que los Estado Unidos ejercen sobre una zona americana y contra el cual, en más de una ocasión, nos hemos pronunciado. Pero, sin negar esa influencia, bueno es recordarle al Sr. Morand que Cuba, pueblo libre y con soberanía propia, nunca ha padecido la abyecta condición que el Sr. Morand describe y por consiguiente, no cabe aludirlo como término de su comparación. (Prologue to Morand 1929, 20)

Morand's representation of black culture in America was not unlike other European treatments of colonized subalterns in the 1920s. Like Morand, writers such as Blaise Cendrars, Filippo Tomaso Marinetti, and Philippe Soupault (who all appeared in the pages of *Avance*) traveled with a cosmopolitan camera lens that focused on exotic figures. This kind of ethnographic distortion in the service of avant-garde art was frequently discussed in Cuba's cultural review. In another essay devoted to the fascination with the exotic, *Avance* took issue with the way in which the artist's gaze captured the avant-garde subject:

> Lo que vincula a todas las razas bajo un mismo ideal de dignidad humana, lo que ni el carnet ni la "kodak" del viajante despreocupado pueden captar, todo eso suele quedarse fuera del equipaje—escenografía y maquillaje—del señor Morand. Un negro de Haití, un mestizo de esos de "formación bastarda" de las Antillas, cuenta exclusivamente para el autor de "Le Budha vivant" como bello motivo para un grupo escultórico: carnes tersas de ónice, toros reverberantes de sudor. Lo que en uno y otro hay de humano, de universal—pasiones, anhelos, aspiraciones, dolor: vida, en su suma—no le interesa al empedernido esteticista. ¿Dónde está, pues, su pretenso cosmopolitismo? El Señor Morand confunde, de manera lastimosa, lo cosmopolita con lo exótico, que son, precisamente, nociones contrapuestas.[44]

Employing these criteria, *Avance*'s critics debated the merits of Morand's and Soupault's writings on blackness. They also challenged the misrepresentations of Afro-Cuban culture in the works of Cendrars and commented

43. See *Avance*'s response to Paul Morand in "Directrices: El Señor Morand y las Antillas," *Avance* 4, no. 32 (1929):64. Attacking Eurocentric views of Négritude, see also Mañach's review of Phillipe Soupault's book, *Le Negre,* in which Mañach challenges the view that America is culturally impoverished (Mañach 1929b).

44. "Directrices: El señor Morand y las Antillas," *Avance* 4, no. 32 (1929):64.

on the marketing of blackness among white modernists in New York. At the same time, the editors rendered evaluations of contemporary political commentary produced abroad.

As part of this search for authentically Americanist values, *Avance*'s writers frequently attacked the limits of Eurocentric criticism. Luis Alberto Sánchez criticized Max Daireaux for his ignorance of Latin American realities, while Juan Marinello denounced European formalist criticism for failing to notice the revolutionary potential of modern art and design (see Sánchez 1930 and Marinello 1930). As in the discussion of Afro-Cuban culture, extensive debates of this kind sought to demonstrate the unique advantage sustained by Latin American thinkers over their European confreres.[45]

Despite *Avance*'s reputation as a journal of a certain degree of enlightenment, its editorial statements issued in response to conservative foreign sources were often erratic and unclear, underscoring the problematic nature of *Avance*'s political vision on race and culture. At times the contributors to *Avance* engaged in the same dehumanizing gestures for which they denounced their European confreres. In other cases, *Avance*'s anti-imperialist platform prevailed over any detailed analysis of race and plurality. Most important, the publication revealed an intellectual practice as yet unconsolidated nationally in which a diversity of races and cultures refused to be subsumed into a single discourse. Far from speaking with a single voice, the writers of the 1920s discovered that Cuban genealogy could not be reduced to a homogeneous tradition. Rather, a hybridization of race and popular experience defined the nation. In a 1929 editorial, the collaborators of *Avance* discussed the relationship between race and culture. Citing Fernando Ortiz, they claimed that "La cultura . . . debe suplantar a la raza."[46] "La cubanidad," as Fernando Ortiz and his heirs aptly described it, was based on an absence of fixed social identity or any prevailing racial tradition. Through this kind of heterogeneity in the nation, *Avance* found a mode of resistance to outside intervention. This approach also allowed for initiating a preliminary discussion of the possible alliances among intellectuals throughout the Hispanic world.

CONCLUSION

In terms of literary and cultural criticism, the editors of the Cuban review *Avance* defended American sovereignty. Insofar as nativist literary styles were preferred to cultural visions established abroad, this program corresponded to an anti-imperialist declaration. Yet the contradictions of

45. Roberto González Echevarría relates these tendencies to the influence of Oswald Spengler and José Ortega y Gasset in Cuba (González Echevarría 1977, 52).

46. "Directrices: Raza y cultura," *Avance* 4, no. 30 (1929):3.

this position quickly surfaced in the pages of *Avance* as local intellectual interests were promoted at the expense of silent subalterns at home. In advancing elite culture, contributors to the journal often created a veritable objet d'art of the marginalized other, an abstraction that served aesthetic inquiries over any perceivable program of political integration of the masses. Thus writers celebrated the strokes of primitive genius found in noninstitutionalized cultures by likening them to the spontaneous eruptions of the avant-gardes themselves, which appeared at the margins of formally constituted fields of inquiry. In this way, the editorial attraction to disempowered figures can be interpreted as a form of self-interest, an avid defense of the writing subject built on the scattered images of "otherness" defined by Afro-Cuban cultural practices or by an emerging consciousness of Latin American identity.

Avance was not exceptional among avant-garde journals of the 1920s in seeking an Americanist voice to articulate aesthetic concerns. But as a model for journalistic practice, *Avance* exhibited a remarkable coherence between its political and aesthetic proposals. On the one hand, the editors reconsidered Cuban and Latin American esthetics in order to formulate a strategy of opposition to neocolonial practices. On the other hand, they organized this resistance by formulating a minority discourse that found its strength through local and international alliances among intellectuals and subalterns in national and international contexts. In this regard, *Avance* surpassed other contemporaneous avant-garde publications like *Martín Fierro* or *Proa* in Buenos Aires, where editors were mainly concerned with forming a public spectacle of art and attacking the hierarchies of senior writers at home. *Avance* was more like Mariátegui's *Amauta*, in which a regard for Indigenismo served a dominant interest in political party formation in that the Cuban journal defended Americanist culture to advance the cause of national autonomy. Through an often tortuous course of logic—alternating between a defense of community and an unembarrassed defense of self—the editors investigated the social status of the writer at a moment of cultural and political contestation. Far from separating esthetics from history, *Avance* integrated both areas of inquiry while securing a place for the modern intellectual as an arbiter of art and social life.

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