

**Caught In Between or Living an Inter-American Identity?  
Experiences of a Western Hemisphere Curriculum Vitae in  
Ariel Dorfman's "Heading South, Looking North. A Bilingual Journey"**

"Identity is a process-in-the-making."<sup>1</sup> This phrase, coined by Gloria Anzaldúa, might best sum up the autobiographical novel "Heading South, Looking North. A Bilingual Journey" by Ariel Dorfman, American writer, critique, lecturer - temporarily residing in Durham/North Carolina/USA. Truly, Dorfman is American in the very sense of the word - neither exclusively U.S. nor exclusively Latin American but American in its hemispheric meaning. Born in Buenos Aires/Argentina in 1942, then three-year old Vladimiro Dorfman was uprooted from his native surroundings heading North with his exiled father, only to choose a new home alongside a new language and identity in Manhattan/USA.<sup>2</sup>

[. . .]When my parents [- both Argentine nationals -] came to collect their son [after a three week stay in hospital . . .] I disconcerted them by refusing to answer their Spanish questions, by speaking only English. 'I don't understand,' my mother says that I said - and from that moment onward I stubbornly, steadfastly, adamantly refused to speak a word in the tongue I had been born into. I did not speak another word of Spanish for ten years (29).

Most probably, this is the first of the many borders to follow in Dorfman's life, those he raises or tears down himself and those raised or torn down by others. And particularly language, the means of communication and creating contacts, respectively the means of exclusion and burning bridges will play a most crucial part in this mono- and yet bilingual American journey to be told.

Throughout the history of the Americas the number of people with a transnational - if not hemispheric - curriculum vitae has increased dramatically and is by now a common characteristic in Americans at the beginning of the 21st century. This increase in trans-American identities simultaneously displays a growing inter-dependence of the Americas - furthered by political and economic integration, facilitated means of communication, steady migration, and transnational family formation - becoming an irrevocable truth demanding an open inter-American dialogue to overcome the differences besides resistance and apprehension on either side.

[. . .]Identity formation throughout the American continent (and elsewhere) was and is based upon complex processes of transculturation - the interplay (juxtaposition, superimposition and/or intertwinement) of heterogeneous times, spaces, races, ethnicities, and cultures [. . .]. Rather than being rooted in fixed, civilizationally specific identities,

---

<sup>1</sup> Henríquez Betancor, María. "Writing. A Way of Life." *Gloria E. Anzaldúa. Interviews/Entrevistas*. Hrsg. AnaLouise Keating. New York/London: Routledge, 2000, 235-249. 239.

<sup>2</sup> Dorfman, Ariel. *Heading South, Looking North. A Bilingual Journey*. London: Hodder&Stoughton, 1998. 11-29. The following references of the primary source will be included in parenthesis (page numbers only) in the text.

cultural differences emerge from multilayered spaces characterized by a juxtaposition, mixture and/or overlap of cultures."<sup>3</sup>

Besides the transcultural process described in the novel, the core problems in Ariel Dorfman's prime example to display a hemispheric identity are the political, socio-cultural and economic tensions characteristic of the American continent alongside a simultaneous breaking open of obsolete patterns of identity formation - so far bound to rigid national, geographic and political boundaries.

Starting out from transnational theories by Homi K. Bhabha who describes a "[. . .] cultural space - a third space - where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences"<sup>4</sup>, Gloria Anzaldúa who asks for "[. . .] the breaking down of paradigms [. . .]"<sup>5</sup>, and José David Saldívar who claims that "[. . .] cultural forms can no longer be exclusively located within the border-patrolled boundaries of the nation-state"<sup>6</sup> this paper extends those theoretical approaches - commonly applied to the United States, the Caribbean and Mexico exclusively<sup>7</sup> - to a far wider territory, analyzing how Dorfman deals with borders and borderlands on his way to a Western Hemisphere identity.

Dorfman's curriculum vitae is not only remarkable due to the various American places he has stayed at repeatedly and for long periods of time - Buenos Aires, Manhattan, Santiago de Chile, San Francisco - but also due to his admiration of and identification with the respective surrounding culture and language, each at a different phase of his life. Hence, the hospital scene described above is not just "[. . .] a childish linguistic tantrum [. . .]" (47), a mere "[. . .] *capricho* [. . .] which would soon pass [. . .]" (original emphasis, 62); for young Dorfman, "[. . .] the question of language had become ensnared in the question of nationality, and therefore of identity" (47).

Though at his young age he does not yet understand the process of identity formation, Vlado Dorfman intuitively decides for the complete barring of Spanish from his linguistic system alongside the cultural identification with anything belonging to this Latino language in order to turn entirely North, seeking linguistic, cultural, and national identity with English and the nation where it is spoken, the United States. "Borders", says Anzaldúa, "are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe [. . .]. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge" (Anzaldúa 3) - and just to not drop over this 'steep edge' and slide into a life of unsafe, uprooted bilingualism, a life between two worlds, Dorfman clearly defines a safe place to identify with by

<sup>3</sup> Walter, Roland. Narrative Identities. (Inter)Cultural In-Betweenness in the Americas. Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt/Main, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2003. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. London, New York: Routledge, 1994. 218.

<sup>5</sup> Anzaldúa, Gloria. Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza. San Francisco, Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987. 80.

<sup>6</sup> Saldívar, José David. Border Matters. Remapping American Cultural Studies. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 1997. 128.

<sup>7</sup> - but all too often considered as representative of the entire Western Hemisphere -

building this barrier, by excluding his former Argentine - Latino - identity, thus creating a space where Spanish cannot enter (61), enabling himself to entirely dive into and assimilate the U.S. culture and language surrounding him. Then, he does not yet know of the polarities he will later feel torn by, making him struggle in the conflictive interstice, the in-betweenness of two cultures. He does not yet know "[. . .] what it means to be living in and between worlds at the crossroads of forgotten, re(-)membered and newly arranged (hi)stories, to be located, dislocated and relocated between a past home that is no more, a present homelessness, and a future home that is yet to be" (Walter 16). At that early stage in his life, Dorfman is definite of who he is, what he wants and where his home is supposed to be, with nothing ever seeming able to break his conviction. He felt

[h]ome. That's where I was, where I had chosen to be: I was swinging low sweet chariot, come to carry me home, I was home, home on the range, I was in the land of the free and the home of the brave, this land was my land and it was made for you and me, but especially, I felt, it had been made for me (48). I had nowhere else to go and no one else to turn to. Bereft of a past and a language that told me who I was, what else was I to do? I became a [. . . U.S.] American (50)."

However, besides his feeling of safety for identifying with a powerful language in a powerful country his sense of belonging is not meant to last. While still rejoicing in U.S. made hot dogs, U.S. candy bars and "[. . .] the infinite aisles of toys at Macy's [. . .]" (63), Vlady Dorfman has to realize that contrary to his intentions he is already deeply caught in the net of a double life. One is that of an all-U.S. American kid at school, playing baseball, reading comics and kidding around with his mates in the newest New York slang, the other that of listening to his left-wing oriented Latino parents secretly supporting communist regimes in other nations and conspiring with like-minded fellows against capitalist U.S. politics. Though for several years successfully keeping separate these two worlds he inhabits (69), it is the political border dividing the globe into East and West - the iron curtain - to soon come down in the middle of his very own life (65). Worse yet - this iron barrier is "[. . .] to drive a wedge, the first in my life, between [U.S.] America and me" (71) when he decides to not denounce his father at school for being non-conformist with Usanian<sup>8</sup> political attitudes. The consequences of his father's political orientation is a second exile and - more than that - the loss of a home to Vlady Dorfman who will have to move to the Southern part of the Western Hemisphere, to Santiago de Chile.

The fear of losing his home, the environment, and culture he truly identifies with binds Dorfman even closer to the language he has adopted as a three-year old. Instead of conscientiously rebuilding the linguistic bridges to Latin America in order to prepare himself a

---

<sup>8</sup> "[A]dj.: of or relating to or characteristic of the United States of America or its people or culture; 'his wife is USAnian' (syn: American)", "Why USAnian?" 14 June 2004. < <http://clublet.com/c/c/why?USAnian> >. For further information also look at < <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/the%20Americas> >.

more pleasant arrival he burns those remaining links with ferocity (77) readying himself for a future "[. . .] when I would not have [U.S.] America nearby, as if I had to frantically accumulate it inside me. [. . .] On the verge of leaving for another continent, I melted, I tried to melt, I wanted to melt and dissolve, bewitched, dazzled, and bewildered, into the gigantic melting pot of America. I lived the early fifties as if America was a permanent shower, I took as often as I could [. . .]" (78) in the anxious attempt to rid himself of anything reminding him of his Argentine, his Latino origin, making himself the most U.S. American possible (78).

But not only does he try to eliminate any psychological border to keep him from identifying with the U.S.; his strive to make himself a U.S. American is still taken further ahead. If unable to live in the country he identifies with, at least its language is to replace the geographic space he is about to lose. "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity - I am my language" (Anzaldúa 59) says Anzaldúa and this is also the way Dorfman arms himself to overcome the geographic distance - in dedicating his spare time to literature. In writing a diary, essays and short stories exclusively in English, in shaping his written expression, playing with words until the right one is found and in critically reading his work over and over again (130-131), he slowly creates a linguistic space inside himself he can withdraw to, excluding any intervening outside disturbances. By the time he arrives in Chile, "[. . .] English had become the efficient instrument of my intimacy, the inner kingdom I could control [. . .]" (86). While first having raised a border to keep Spanish out of his system, Dorfman now raises another border protecting his U.S. identity by using his linguistic twin skin, fiercely defending his English knowledge against the Spanish lurking outside the borders, eager to penetrate the protected territory. "By separating language from reality [. . .]", Dorfman creates a "[. . .] national temporality of the 'meanwhile', a form of homogeneous empty time" (Bhabha 157/158). He is able to transfer and safeguard his linguistic - and thus his national identity - into the national, linguistic, geographic and socio-culturally divergent surrounding of Latino Chile.

Finally, as if this was not protection enough, Vlady Dorfman takes his self-imposed identification process with the United States still a step further ridding himself of his detested Latino sounding name Vladimiro - short Vlady.

I took this crusade against my past to its extreme. Because there had been, all these years, one vestige from my previous life that reminded me and everybody else how different I really was: my name. It stood between the United States and me, forced me to recollect every day, every moment of the day, how far I really was from being irreversibly [U.S.] American, how tainted I was by both Russia and Latin America (78/79)

and he chooses from then on to only answer if called Edward (80).

However, with leaving the United States and its direct linguistic as well as cultural sphere of influence, he takes the initial step which will later turn him into "[. . .] a character in

transition" (Walter 218), a transgressor of borders, a step which is - subtly - followed by more straight ones, although at first, he keeps defending his isolated inner self. "[. . .] I really believed that I could live in Chile indefinitely and at the same time write fiction in English, without my identity eroding or being put to the test" (132) with the aim to 'survive' the forced stay in the South until graduating from school and applying as an undergraduate student at a U.S. university, taking him back North.

Besides persuading his parents - not out of love for cricket or rugby but because "[. . .] a series of subjects were additionally taught in English [. . .]" (106) - to send him to the Grange, a public school modeled on the British system, Dorfman's bridge to the place he identifies with is in addition fortified by much more concrete, tangible items than merely a linguistic one. "There are more subtle ways that we internalize identification, especially in the forms of images and emotions. For me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland" (Anzaldúa 61) writes Anzaldúa which is equally true for Dorfman whose senses are stimulated in order to overcome the geographic distance to the United States, taking him on a journey of sensual pleasure back "home" (118). With the father being a UN diplomat, the Dorfman family is privileged to receive a package every three months "[. . .] imported straight from [U.S.] America" (117) and filled to the top with goodies reminding Eddie of his past - from cornflakes and syrup over tomato soup and pancake mix to magazines, books, records, and clothes but most of all, "[. . .] an assortment of twelve candy bars" just for him alone (117). Hiding the sweet treasure in the drawer next to his "most precious manuscripts" - food and literature side by side, his two means to make him mentally travel home - Dorfman faces the dear task to discipline himself into the endurance of "[. . .] twelve weeks, until the next shipment would bring relief. [. . .]; if I resisted temptation, the candy bars would allow me to remain the child I had been, flash back piecemeal each night to the States until the day when I could really journey home and gorge myself at the local drugstore" (117). However, self-discipline is ever more difficult if relief is nearby and after having a carefully tiny bite of a Baby Ruth, a Mars bar or another sweet reminder of his past, it is just too difficult to stand firm. Lying in bed "[. . .] my mind would inevitably turn to the candy bar there, in the drawer, so close at hand, so lonesome, so willing to take me, salivating, back to my lost and faraway land [. . .]" (117/118). And all too soon he was up for another tiny bite, hoping "[. . .] that the morsel of chocolate would meld me toward the States" (118). This tiny bite is followed by another, and one more, "[. . .] only one more, I promise, I swear! and all of a sudden there I was, stranded in my room in Santiago with all those empty wrappers on the floor and [. . .] the realization that I had just swallowed in one sitting a whole month of secret passages to America [. . .]" (118). At least, the short pleasure of delighting in transitory chocolate flights to the United States is prolonged and supported by the subscription

of an abundance of magazines from his homeland, which could be devoured over and over again (118) beside a seeming omnipresence of U.S. American culture invading the country particularly apparent "[. . .] in the music young Chileans were starting to listen to" (119). Irony of the fate, his efforts to defend his self-elected U.S. identity against intrusion of the Latino surroundings turn him "[. . .] into much more of an all-American kid than any child back in the States" (118/119) with an abundant choice of products of U.S. American culture at hand.

Against his brave efforts to resist the diverse Latino influences, his self-constructed borders to keep up his Northern identity are slowly hollowed out, and partly so by the very language Dorfman had refused to speak when arriving in the United States as a three-year-old. Although he realizes this gradual process of the borders giving way to the Spanish constantly roaming at the boundaries of his fortress eager to find access to his linguistic system, he intuitively keeps the two language territories apart.

[I]t was a subtle, cunning, camouflaged process, the vocabulary and the grammatical code seeping into my consciousness slowly, turning me into a person who, without acknowledging it, began to function in either language. Although from the very beginning I did not allow my new language to enter into a dialogue with the older one. I stubbornly avoided comparing their relative merits, what one could offer me that the other could not. It was as if they inhabited two strictly different, segregated zones in my mind, or perhaps as if there were two Edwards, one for each language, each incommunicado like a split personality, each trying to ignore the other, afraid of contamination. I did not attempt - or even contemplate the possibility - of cross-fertilization: to weigh the caliber and performance of one against the other would have meant creating a territory from which to think the phenomenon, a common space they both shared within me. It would have meant admitting that I was irrevocably bilingual, opening the door to questions of identity [. . .]" (115/116).

Questions, Dorfman is not yet willing to answer or even to contemplate. At this time, he is neither to renounce to his bilingual inner self, nor to give up the dream of returning home, back North, to where his "[. . .] head [i]s firmly turned [. . .]" (116).

The mere admittance, however, of using Spanish when better appropriate (114) is slowly dragging him into the interstice between cultures, this borderland of cultural hybridity which pulls the psyche into opposite directions without allowing to settle down and rest. "The hither and thither of the stairwell [as liminal space], the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 4). That phase of constant "[. . .] movement between rootedness and rootlessness [. . .]" (Walter 197) describes Anzaldúa as *nepantla*, "[. . .] a Nahuatl term meaning 'el lugar entre medio,' el lugar entre medio de todos los lugares, the space in-between" (Henríquez Betancor 238), "[. . .] this birthing stage where you feel like you're reconfiguring your identity and don't know where you are. [. . .]"

You're changing worlds and cultures and maybe classes, sexual preferences. So you go through this birthing of nepantla".<sup>9</sup> After years of denying to himself this state of nepantlism, the hybrid person he has become, the double life he leads with one Edward babbling with his friends in Spanish and the other Edward writing literature in English, Dorfman finds himself in a complete state of homelessness, at an inner crossroads of routes without roots, unable to tell where he comes from or where he wants to go, a state of total delusion in which no borders show him the limits, the shape of his identity.

Where are you from? It was a question that since the age of two and a half, and until I was eighteen, I had always answered, spontaneously, invariably: I was from [U.S.] America, I was [U.S.] American. That response had been there, on the tip of my tongue, my first day of class at the Universidad de Chile in March of 1960 [. . .]. I should have answered: I don't know. I should have answered: All my life I thought I was a Yankee but now I'm not so sure, I wanted to be one so badly that I went to the extreme of changing my name to Edward. [. . .] I should have answered: You want to know the truth? I'm still attracted to the United States. I may hate its politics but I love its jazz and its movies and its people and the language they gave me, which is still the language I use to make sense of the world. [. . .] I should have answered: I don't have a country. [. . .] I should have answered: I'm alone on this planet and I don't know where I belong. Instead, quite simply, I said: "*Soy de Argentina*", I'm Argentinian (original emphasis, 150-153).

In a state of complete deterritorialization, of complete homelessness, with "[. . .] nothing else to cleave to [. . .]" (153), Dorfman mentally returns to his accidental birthplace, a place he has not the slightest connection to besides being born there but which in this moment feels the safest to withdraw to. "It was a convenient way of not having to examine my own confusion, admit that my fluid life was in transition, suspended between a country to the North that was drifting away from me and this country here in the South I was not yet ready to commit to permanently. It was a way of giving myself time to figure out who I really was" (153).

Tormented by an inner dis- and re-orientation, Dorfman sets out for another journey of yet unknown duration and destination facing the steady delusion of borders, the psychological ambivalence of a heterogeneous identity, a state in which he feels to neither belong to a particular geographic, linguistic nor cultural space. His once fixed identity, kept within rigid boundaries giving it a safe space and a clear shape has transcended the national borders - the borders of the United States he so firmly identified with - to leave him "[. . .] sandwiched between two cultures, straddling [. . .] their value systems, [. . .] undergoing [. . .] a struggle of borders, an inner war. [. . .] The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision" (Anzaldúa 78) with

---

<sup>9</sup> Blake, Debbie and Carmen Abrego. "Doing Gigs. Speaking, Writing, and Change." [Gloria E. Anzaldúa. Interviews/Entrevistas. Hrsg. AnaLouise Keating.](#) New York/London: Routledge, 2000, 211-233. 125.

"[t]he borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out" (Anzaldúa 79) washed away.

Throughout this phase of transition, Dorfman begins to realize, how far his split personality is owned by the two cultures he is trying to "juggle" (Anzaldúa 79), how contradictory his behavior has already become. He actively protests against United States military, economic, and political invasion in Chile and Latin America, he curses President Johnson - in Spanish - for intervening in Santo Domingo (190), and he makes underprivileged children of the Santiago shantytowns join classes at the social project "Universidad Móvil para el Trabajador"<sup>10</sup> in showing them a movie of one of the most U.S. American characters - Mickey Mouse (163-165). Opposite to his "[. . .] gesticulating public Spanish-American persona [. . .]" engaged in political activism, Dorfman simultaneously keeps his "[. . .] private English-language self [. . .]" (191), writing his most personal thoughts, his diary and literary works in the language of a nation he feels increasingly non-conform to (172). He meets with friends to celebrate his birthday with a wild rock 'n' roll party and they dance to songs of the Rolling Stones and John Lennon (190). Still, although gradually becoming a Latino, Dorfman cannot completely 'divorce' himself from the United States.

At a time when I was throwing everything else in my life into the frantic public caldron of Latin America and remaking it at a furious pace, keeping my receding English intact was a way of secreting some private part of my past and person away from the overly political world I inhabited [. . .]. Maybe I needed one unchanging island of identity that, as I transmogrified into a Latin American, linked me to the gringo I had once been (191).

Additionally to this "one unchanging island" of linguistic identification he retreats to in the evenings after coming home from another protest march, Dorfman applies the very traits and skills acquired as a U.S. child to now counterfeit the imperialist attitude of the Northern nation. "I was everywhere, vociferous, exhorting, convincing, boundless in my energy and my convictions, using to the hilt the traits of a personality formed during my Yankee childhood [. . .] p]lacing at the service of the socialist revolution my obsession with responsibility and individual effort learned in [U.S.] America" (166-167). Though trying to give his lost identity a new shape, he is too much child of both contrasting cultures inhabiting him as to simply swap one for the other.

Swimming in this seemingly borderless zone of disorientation, one moment turning North, the other moment turning South, Dorfman finally takes a first clear cut step giving his search of belonging and lack of home an unambiguous direction, - not long before raising a new and strong border which will substantiate this initial move. Former Vladimiro then Edward Dorfman decides for another, a third name change to lessen the Northern ties and fortify his

---

<sup>10</sup> - the Mobile University for the Worker, a social project of university students to overcome class differences in Chile -



sense of belonging to the country in the Southern Cone. He adopts his neglected middle name Ariel (159).

The decision to break ties with his English identity to become a Latino is only to be reinforced throughout Dorfman's two-year stay in San Francisco. Here, he does not only discover how much he has distanced himself from the nation he longed for in his teenage years but he also learns how deeply he has already breathed in the Chilean air. After yet another time of questioning himself about his identity, after discovering - though not yet admitting to himself - his bicultural, bilingual, binational hybridism of this "[. . .] amalgam of the Latino and the Anglo" (160) he is, Dorfman sets an almost desperate end to his search for a home, to his inner conflict of a "[. . .] remote rudderless no-man's land [. . .]" (219).

This was the sixties of extreme nationalism, the all-or-nothing, the either-or sixties. It was not a time for shades of difference, for complexity, for soul-searching about the enigma of heterogeneous identity. You were one thing or another, you had to be on this side or on that side of the conflict. [. . . And] I was not willing to be a young man in between, not knowing his own name, adrift in a world torn by the two Americas inside and outside him. [. . .] The rival languages had been kept separate throughout my life, and now that I was switching again, that is where, more than ever, I wanted them to remain, exiled from one another, supposedly belonging to unconnected and compartmentalized universes. [. . .] I told myself, and anybody else who cared to listen, that I would never again write another word in English as long as I lived (220-221).

More than that, it is not only the language Dorfman excludes from his linguistic system. It is the entire U.S. nation, the country he once adored and that he now completely rejects, renounces, trying to erase and completely replace it with his new *patria* Chile (34, 101). Had Dorfman left Chile as a Northern Edward in 1967, he comes home as a Southern Ariel, seemingly self-confident of the place he belongs to (209-210) and with yet another bridge to his past burning.

Within the years to follow the decision on where he wants to belong, Dorfman's identification with that country is first of all "[. . .] political: fused with Chile and its cause and its people [. . .]" (39). Throughout the early 1970s, it is mostly his political activism and enthusiasm for Salvador Allende and his party that tie Dorfman to the Chilean nation and convey a strong feeling of national belonging with clear-cut boundaries to save him from doubts about his identity. Supporting a left-wing party unmistakably opposed to any U.S. influence reinforces ever more Dorfman's attitude of divorcing himself of his past, of cutting the ties to the nation up North. And still, it is again his "[. . .] intimate knowledge of the United States [. . .]", these ties he used to carefully tend and cultivate, that really enable him to become identified as a Chilean writer, a spokesperson of Latin America, the author of thoughts clearly denouncing the Northern opponent (253). Back in Chile, Dorfman is frantically confronting the remaining part of a United States inside himself in order to finally extinguish it - again a most U.S. American ceremony -

the dream "[. . .] of burying the past and starting over with a clean slate" (252). This action alone reveals again, how much Usanian Dorfman is, how diluted the borders are and how impossible the completing of his desire to rip these traits from inside himself, to make the dividing walls impervious.

With the military coup of General Augusto Pinochet in 1973, from one moment to the other, these firmly built walls of nationhood are smashed again, destroying the new-found home and sending Dorfman into yet another exile, separating him from the Chilean people he feels to be part of. Longing for the country he came to love and identify with but which after the coup no longer exists as such, Dorfman slides into another state of homelessness and - at least for the moment - it is little consolation to be given the role by his compatriots to cross the national borders and remain outside to tell the world what is happening within the country (147). At this moment of deepest sorrow, he cannot yet see his task as part of a gradual subversion of the borders raised by Pinochet, - the corrosion not from within but from a continuous outside scratching. Terribly lost and alone, Dorfman escapes into the extraterritorial space of the Argentine embassy, the country which - irony of the fate - now comes to offer him a safe place to remain, the country of his birth he would call home had his father not been sent into exile some 28 years ago (271).

Excluded from the place he longs to be and worried to never be allowed to return (148), Dorfman awaits his transport to the airport into Argentine exile, secluded within the walls of the embassy. Reduced to either his ears - listening to the daily noises of the Chilean streets behind the walls of the embassy's garden (202) - or his eyes - silently watching his wife and son passing by the embassy as a last good-bye before they take off for Argentina (240) - Dorfman is unable to take part, subordinate to passively let things pass by without being able to intervene, to participate.

And yet, left to himself with his sad thoughts on having lost his *patria*, Dorfman's transitory home becomes the very place where he begins to gradually deconstruct the borders he set up by himself when deciding for one culture and one language only. The accidental acquaintance of the Argentine ambassador's Usanian wife does not only open the door to let English back into his life and slowly gain a secure stronghold in his linguistic and psychological system. It is also the initial step into yet another crossing, a journey into a bilingual future where both languages, both cultures, the Latino and the Anglo, will be part of him. It is the initial step to accept this "third space", this inter-cultural in-betweenness of straddling two cultures despised for so long (265-270) in which the opposing parts of his inner self are invited to coexist and to be equally loved (preface).

"Caught In-Between" or "Living a Hemispheric Identity" - Dorfman himself answers the question at the end of his novel when, after a long journey of switching sides - linguistic, national and cultural - he is able to admit the status of biculturalism, binationalism, bilingualism, when he finally comes to enjoy this hybrid person inhabiting him. Is he throughout this journey caught in-between his own ambivalence and inner conflicts, the vacillation between two nations, two cultures and two languages, does he finally learn to juggle these differences and to actually live a hemispheric identity, made up of a true Latino and a true Anglo part, one from the South, one from the North.

But not only is such inter-national, inter-cultural or even hemispheric identity true for Ariel, alias Edward, alias Vladimiro Dorfman.

Stable identities", writes Roland Walter, "make way for liminal identities in a complex process of multiple, interwoven, and constantly shifting cultural practices, generating ambivalent, conflicted subjects. In an age of growing cultural and ethnoracial hybridity characterized by 'porous [. . .] borders' - a ceaseless physical and psychic migration between home and exile, between multiple discourses and practices and the implicit (re)articulation of a variety of identities/positionalities based on class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and income, among others - it is necessary to rethink the relationship between culture, identity and the nation-space/people in its historical process" (Walter 106).

With the Americas inevitably growing closer, with transnational curriculum vitae gaining space in a multilayered patchwork society of different roots, races, and routes, of "border subjects positioned between cultures" (Walter 351), there is need of a modern pan-American map of the Western Hemisphere reflecting the postnational conditions encountered today. After an extensive ambivalent struggle, Ariel Dorfman has learned to love both the Anglo and the Latino part he is made of - besides severe differences existing in the world outside. With his journey, he sets an example of what the future structure of the American society might - or should - look like, with inhabitants each proud of their individual origin and their particular features, each having a space to itself but all united by transparent borders asking to be transgressed.

## Bibliography

"Alternate Words for American." 14 June 2004

< [http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/the%20Americas and others](http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/the%20Americas+and+others) >.

**Anzaldúa, Gloria.** Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza. San Francisco, Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.

**Bhabha, Homi K.** The Location of Culture. London, New York: Routledge, 1994.

**Blake, Debbie and Carmen Abrego.** "Doing Gigs. Speaking, Writing, and Change." Gloria E. Anzaldúa. Interviews/Entrevistas. Hrsg. AnaLouise Keating. New York/London: Routledge, 2000, 211-233.

**Dorfman, Ariel.** Heading South, Looking North. A Bilingual Journey. London: Hodder& Stoughton, 1998.

**Henríquez Betancor, María.** "Writing. A Way of Life." Gloria E. Anzaldúa. Interviews/ Entrevistas. Hrsg. AnaLouise Keating. New York/London: Routledge, 2000, 235-249.

**Saldívar, José David.** Border Matters. Remapping American Cultural Studies. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 1997. 128.

**Walter, Roland.** Narrative Identities. (Inter)Cultural In-Betweenness in the Americas. Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt/Main, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2003.

"Why USAnian?" 14 June 2004 < <http://clublet.com/c/c/why?USAnian> >.