

# QUADERNA

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## **The Liquor Store Opens at 10 am**

### **Référence électronique**

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## The Liquor Store Opens at 10 am

There is nothing monolingual about the corner of my block,

or its history.

In varied order: English. Black English not Ebonics. Southern English. Spanish. Puerto Rican Spanish. Spanglish. Dominican Spanish. Haitian Creole. Italian English. Residuals of Korean War-Bad Korean spoken by a Bronx born Black alcoholic. Moon Zapa Valley Girl English spoken by a West-Indian Bruce Springsteen loving-Barbizon Modeling School attendee. Yes, we spoke Valleyspeak in Harlem. Jamaican English. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Jamaican Patois. Belize English. Cherokee via Washington Heights spoken by Cherokee elders that sounds like Southern English but not Baptist Preacher English. In one breath.

This is childhood.

Between *bata*<sup>child (Tagalog)</sup> dialects.

Between *taitafola*<sup>lagoon (Samoan)</sup> codes.

Between *bakoba*<sup>banana (Papiamentu)</sup> idioms.

Between *ozomatli*<sup>monkey (Nahuatl)</sup> vernaculars.

Between origins.

This is adolescence.

At present, 111<sup>th</sup> still holds a number of these tongues. 2013 includes:

Brazilian Portuguese Laundromat

Korean Dry Cleaner

Pakistani pharmacy and Dominican cell phone depot.

Middle Eastern Fried Chicken and Pizza spot

The employees are from Mali.

Greek/Guinea Bissau owned Boxing Gym.

New: Subway franchise ran by Bangladeshi community.

In this assumed English-only neighborhood, if you turn down the volume on the Queen's chatter, other mother tongues are heard.

After the order has been taken, the clothing has been dropped off and the workout session has left you praying for air, this universe is a synthesis.

Daily, the workers on 111<sup>th</sup> and Lenox switch throughout from a place of business to the familiar of their kinfolk. I may never be invited there. Our only accord is the money exchange.

I do desire to be part of them; to entertain them with a word or three. It would be polite to know, to announce in some way:

*I want to make you smile* *ngití (Tagalog)*,

*I want to communicate with you humbly.*

*Mi ta buska ollin* *I am looking for movement (Papiamento/Nahuatl)*

*I want to show you that I can try.* *Bailar conmigo (Spanish)*

Alas, Korean is not easy. Korean is tricky. I've tried but it falls flat. And other tongues simply don't sit on my tongue well.

Unlike Samoan when heard from the mouth of Samoan interior designer who celebrates Polynesian Gay Pride every year on 117<sup>th</sup> and Madison with a host of opera singers, newly recruited football players, a French Tahitian fire dancer and a dentist from Utah.

*alofa atu oe* *Benicio del Toro*

*alofa tele atu ia oe* *I love you very much (Samoan)*

Some are too woody. Some are too guttural.

Some leave me temporarily air deprived. Call it a natural high. *como el reggae*

Like Diné that's never spoken in Harlem  
unless you're in my living room.

*yá'át'ééh* *hello (Diné)*

*deigo* *up*

*mósí* *cat*

*béégashii* *cow*

So what is it?

The tuning of my ear informs me that the(se) tongue(s) need(s) to choose me. Through relation. Through sound. Through connection. Though a lonesome one. These speakers do not share my bed. They are phrase books and brief encounters. It leaves me conversing with invisible people in my writing.

Through dance. Through dreams.  
Miti o mana'oga dreams or desires (Samoan)  
Through some sort of raíz root (Spanish).

*You know like* the trade winds off the coast of Perú in the direction of the Polynesian Islands. Kon Tiki. Incan Sun God. Tiki. Maori's first man.

*You know like* the irony of a new Bangladeshi community completely unaware of a community of Muslim Bengali seamen who jumped boat making East Harlem a home back in the 1930s onward.

*You know like* the Philippines and Malaysia.

*Like* Cherokee and Japanese having a slightly similar phonetic system.

a-e-i-o-u-v                      a-i-u-e-o-ā-ī-ū-ē-ō

*You know like* Japanese is heard more often in Harlem than

Cherokee  
Delaware  
Mohawk  
Wampanoag

Thank the lord for Gospel music.

*You know like* how this year is the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Asiento; a contract signed between the British and Spanish, thereby giving the English rights over the African slave trade in Spanish colonies for thirty years.

*Like totally narly.*

*You know like* how the official language in North America could have been German. Or Spanish. *Asquani* (Spaniard) Spanish. Or Russian.

The Wolof I am hearing some blocks from home is familiar because of a 1996 study abroad and the poet Jayne Cortez. My favorite tailor from Senegal was deported a year ago. The shopkeeper on 125<sup>th</sup> I can still greet before we barter on fabric prices.

And six years ago I could write my first name in Arabic.  
I am left with about three words.

Shokran *Jërëjëf (Wolof)*

Al'afw *ñoku boku (Wolof)*

As-salam alaykum

Wa 'alaykum al-salaam. Habibi. *Hablar conmigo (Spanish)*

*Na nga def? (Wolof)*

*Maa ngi fi rekk (Wolof)*

I want to pray in Portuguese because of Seu Jorge.  
or ever since a Haitian lover hid me in his closet  
when his Swiss girlfriend was suspecting another woman (I was a girl).  
In the backdrop of their arguments  
he introduced me to Djavan and Manhattan Transfer.

No, I want Seu Jorge to sing to me personally in my kitchen.

*fa'amolemole please (Samoan)*

Nokchito! *Behave! (Chickasaw)*

*Pois eu vou fazer uma prece*

*Prá Deus, nosso Senhor*

*Prá chuva parar*

*De molhar o meu divino amor*

*Que é muito lindo*

*É mais que o infinto*

*É puro e belo*

*Inocente como a flor<sup>i</sup>*

*como onekaka red hot sand (Maori)*

*como taupou ceremonial virgin (Samoan)*

Nowadays, barrio dreams are occupied by Mexican Spanish.  
It is not a bad thing. It just is.

It has a nasal quality. *As in nanishi (Papiamentu)* Short. *kòrtiku (Papimentu)*. Staccato.  
como Suzuki primer violín lección cuatro

It is a newer Harlem. Not the one the Mormons want to reclaim as Harleman Halls but a Harlem of Oaxaca women peddling tamales on the corner of Lexington and 110<sup>th</sup>. French Bistros and a Bier garden. A Harlem with cheap Mexican restaurants to the East and high price Tapas to the West. It is at

times drunk and slurred when heard from the men who collect bottles and soda cans all day and form a line at the back of the Fine Fare to cash in on 112<sup>th</sup>. Sometimes, they receive tickets from the police for parking their stolen shopping carts on a curb.

Honduran Spanish. Laid back when heard from the mouth of an old black Honduran man who adorns a black woven cowboy hat. Every word has a slick slow crescendo. Every word is slippery and wants you to be his girlfriend despite a 30-year age gap.

Puerto Rican Spanish. Sadly disappearing. I hear it in scant moments when I bump into Lydia, the matriarch whose family is the last remaining on 111<sup>th</sup>. The old men at the Cuchi Fritos spot on 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave I haven't seen for a while now. I have to go the Bronx or hang at Camaradas on 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. to hear it. Or Columbus Avenida nearest 107<sup>th</sup>.

Something is not right with this picture.

*Gohusdi gesvi nasginigesvna duyu(go)dv utloyasdi hiano ditlilostanv*

Businesses at the corner 111<sup>th</sup> retire at either 6 in the evening or 2 in the morning. Upon closing, my brain wants to be dysfunctional southern. It hears Liquor Store English. The Pepsi and vodka drool of my mother's drinking pals. Night Train English. It then wants to speak in High School Global Studies English. Not too proper but enough to challenge the young men selling crack on my stoop. I am waiting for the right moment to call one of them a troglodyte. It wants to be Harlem English. Born and bred Uptown Baby English. But this type of English has always been the most difficult for me.

*ayv (Cherokee)*

This is why some people insist that I do not sound like a New Yorker.

I have never been fluent.

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<sup>i</sup> Verse taken from the song "Chove Chuva" written by Jorge Ben Jor