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**Dangerous Liaisons: Transatlantic Multilingualism
in Latin American and Maghreb Literature.
With Examples from Elias Canetti, Jorge Luis
Borges, Rubén Darío, Assia Djebar¹**

1. Language and memory

Meine früheste Erinnerung ist in Rot getaucht. Auf dem Arm eines Mädchens komme ich zur Tür heraus, der Boden vor mir ist rot, und zur Linken geht eine Treppe hinunter, die ebenso rot ist. Gegenüber von uns, in selber Höhe, öffnet sich eine Türe und ein lächelnder Mann tritt heraus, der freundlich auf mich zugeht. Er tritt ganz nahe an mich heran, bleibt stehen und sagt zu mir: "Zeig mir die Zunge!" Ich strecke die Zunge heraus, er greift in seine Tasche, zieht ein Taschenmesser hervor, öffnet es und führt die Klinge ganz nahe an meine Zunge heran. Er sagt: "Jetzt schneiden wir ihm die Zunge ab." Ich wage es nicht, die Zunge zurückzuziehen, er kommt immer näher, gleich wird er sie mit der Klinge berühren. Im letzten Augenblick zieht er das Messer zurück, sagt: "Heute noch nicht, morgen." Er klappt das Messer wieder zu und steckt es in seine Tasche (Canetti 1977: 9).

Elias Canetti's autobiography begins with this scene. With this memory, the title *Die gerettete Zunge* ("the saved tongue") takes on a first, wild, threatening, even eerie meaning. The laughing man is the lover of the Bulgarian nanny who looked after the two-year-old Canetti. The scene is repeated, sometimes several times a day. The threat was evidently effective, since Canetti did not dare relate the story until ten years later. Its position at the beginning of the autobiography shows that it takes on a more expansive, symbolic significances for the author, a Jew growing up on the lower Danube in Bulgarian Rouse (1905-1911). Canetti's early childhood was coloured by his multicultural environment – the Bulgarian of the nanny, meetings with Turks, Greeks, Albanians, Armenians, Russians and Rumanians that were everyday occurrences. After his childhood in Bulgaria, he spent his adolescence in England (Manchester 1911-1913), Austria (Vienna

¹ Translation by Jim Phetterplace.

1913-1916), and Switzerland (Zurich 1916-1921). As an adult, he chose to use the German language. The author Canetti also understood “the saved tongue” as “the saved language” and therefore the salvation of the language. In the Romance languages, this connection is even clearer, where the French “langue” and Spanish “lengua” mean both tongue **and** language. The coincidence also appears in the Turkish “dili”, as Ottmar Ette impressively explains using the example of Sevgi Özdamar’s programmatic title “Mutterzunge” (“mother tongue”).² A second motif connected with and transmitted through language comes out in this beginning. The first chapter heading is “My earliest memory”. The language of Canetti’s earliest memories was Sephardic, the language of the exiled Jews, the Sephardim, though his parents communicated in German. German is neither his native language nor is it connected with the fatherland. As a biographical element, it represents an experience of breaking away, of varieties and dialects; Vienna and Zurich sound different. For Canetti, though his choice to use German granted him identity, it was not the same as selecting a national language. German is neither a native nor a foreign language, nor even simply the home of the author among languages; rather, it is found somewhere in between.

In the following text, I refer to two functions that determine this ambiguous area more clearly: the mnemonic and the emotive or affective. For the author Canetti, the threatening element of the language signifies rescue. As far as the emotive aspect is concerned, German for him is the language of love. After the early death of his father, he attempts to take the man’s place by using German with his mother in everyday speech.

As a child of the upper class, Canetti is an exception, at least socially; his successful integration of biographical multilingualism and its literary preservation are hardly the rule among the children of Latin American immigrants in the US or those of the Maghreb in the suburbs of France. It is rare to even find an evenly balanced **bilingualism**; after all, who feels equally at home in the realms of the mundane, the feelings and thoughts of two cultures? Nevertheless, Canetti is a modern, multilingual author along the lines of George Steiner, who, like

2 Ette (2004), especially in the chapter: “Die gerettete Zunge” (Ette 2004: 232-238).

Max Aub, Samuel Beckett, Héctor Biancotti, Emile Cioran, Juan Goytisolo, Nancy Huston, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Milan Kundera, Eduardo Manet, and Jorge Semprún, more or less consciously chooses which language to write in. In the context of modern Europe, regularly adding countries and languages, multilingualism is also no longer exceptional. Increasing language contact – dependent on migration and globalisation – is a sign of the 20th century. The integration and borders of the nation-states and national languages are thereby getting looser in literature. National literature is increasingly being written by people from other cultural spheres, for example German literature by people of Turkish ancestry, French literature by French-born Maghreb or African authors, English literature by Indians and Asians. Latin American literature is written to a large extent in the U.S., where entirely new cultural hybrids of U.S.-American literature are created. This trend also affects the corresponding language studies. It is questionable whether the future history of literature will manage without this category of national literature. One thing is certain: it will not be able to avoid considering the transnational patterns of behaviour coming about via decolonisation and migration.

These new, handed down patterns, which also determine transatlantic relations, fall in the space between literature and cultural studies. In Latin American studies, the close connection between the use of language and the cultural positioning of the speaker and the discourse is a central question. It has undergone great development since the conquest of 1492, took a new turn when independence was declared and has again gained new contours in the twentieth century, based on exile and the manifold migration. One phenomenon spanning over epochs and connected to the perceived relationship to language is the collective cultural memory. Language usage and the relationship to language always imply a certain position in the cultural memory of a society. This connection means that every literary text is integrated in a more comprehensive discursive situation and is therefore a social phenomenon; in the words of Bill Ashcroft: “The written text is a social situation”.³

3 Ashcroft continues, “[...] meaning is a social accomplishment characterized by the participation of the writer and reader functions within the ‘event’ of a particular discourse. To take into account the necessary presence of these functions

Canetti's example thus establishes an exciting link between multilingualism and cultural memory. However, a distinction must be made here. It is not enough to simply join in on the praise for multilingualism. Foreign language philologists in every field, comparativists, and even specialists in German studies consider monolingualism to be a flaw that should be corrected as soon as possible – via English language instruction for pre-schoolers at the latest. In the theory for language, literary and cultural studies, monolingualism is an unfashionable deficiency, manifesting itself through monologicality, that is, ideologically constructed simple-mindedness that serves the exercise of governmental and political power. For specialists in Romance language studies, the positive assessment of multilingualism is a downright intrinsic experience, sometimes biographically conditioned, but sometimes also plainly traceable to a love for other languages. In any case, the recognition of the relativity and the interconnectedness of national literatures is integral to Romance languages. It seems to simply be a logical consequence thereof to say goodbye to the idea of a hegemonic language. Mixed in with the pleasure felt by specialists in Latin American studies about the advance of Spanish in the U.S. is a bad conscience about Latin America's hegemony over its indigenous languages.

This supposedly unprecedented trend toward linguistic variety and difference must be relativized in the cultural history. In classical antiquity, the predominant attitude toward speakers of other languages—the barbarians – was negative. Since the Middle Ages right up to the present, the relationship to the classical period has been *per se* multilingual. In his essay "Extraterritorial", George Steiner makes reference to the fact that European literature from Petrarch to Hölderlin has been under pressure from more than one language (Steiner 1974: 18). He refers to the tradition dating back to the 18th century of using Greek, Latin and French as the languages to be learned because they were considered "classical languages". Dante, Pico de la Mirandola, Erasmus von Rotterdam, Montaigne, Leibniz and Descartes were all at least bilingual. Steiner differentiates modern multilingualism from these epochs dependent upon the classical education of the European

and the situation in which the meaning occurs, the meaning may be called a 'situated accomplishment'" (Ashcroft 1995: 298-299).

elite. He adds that classical multilingualism in the teaching of national literature in the Romance languages was accompanied by a strong tendency toward monolingualism. Multilingualism within a single text fell in the category of comedy or was even placed in the niche with macaronic verse. In particular, the modern 'high' literature tends toward monolingualism, an attitude that is changing drastically in the post-modern era.

The current trend to mixing languages could be contrasted with Paul Celan: "An Zweisprachigkeit in der Dichtung glaube ich nicht. [...] Dichtung das ist das schicksalhaft Einmalige der Sprache [...] also nicht das Zweimalige" (Celan 1983: 175).⁴ Celan's attitude to his German literary language was therefore anything but simple, being a multilingual translator who rubbed shoulders with the likes of Hans Magnus Enzensberger or Rainer Maria Rilke. His dictum gains weight from the fact that German is the language of the holocaust and nevertheless enables him to write poetry about it. The rejection of bilingualism in poetry reaches its deepest meaning in this form of remembering. It sets up a counterpoint to Adorno, who felt that after Auschwitz, writing poetry was vital for survival, in all languages, but especially in German. The collective could also "save their tongues" by talking about the injuries of the past.

However, accepting the truth of poetic uniqueness need not rule out the experience of multilingualism. Canetti's example helps clarify this seeming contradiction. Just like Celan's poetry, Canetti's autobiography touches the intersection of language and memory. As an anonymous, unconscious and collective artwork of a society, language is a memory for many voices. Writing is a constant work of remembering with the language and in the language, often with and in more than just one (Weinrich 1976: 294). An interdisciplinary effort is necessary to research the diverse connections between language and memory. My current aim is hopefully easier to reach: Using the example of literary multilingualism, I would like to present a single aspect that cuts across the various levels of this interconnectedness. I will concentrate on the emotive or affective function of language,

4 "I don't believe in bilingualism in poetry. [...] Poetry is the fateful uniqueness of language [...] and thus doesn't appear twice".

particularly important in the context of memory, and its representation in literature.

2. Multilingualism, heteroglossia, and *littérature mineure*

In his theory of the novel, Michail Bakhtin uses the word heteroglossia to describe the heteroglot nature of natural language. He begins with the differentiation of centrifugal and centripetal forces in the development of European national languages. These forces also work within a language between the various dialects and sociolects. Heteroglossia affects the collective development of language as well as individual language usage. In novels, heteroglossia appears more strongly than its analogous term polyphony via the discursive diversity of narrators and figures that represent a situation of social antagonism. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism was widely received in Latin America and Francophone regions. It has so far been mostly isolated, however, without consideration of the transatlantic exchange. This wide acceptance of the dialogic principle can be traced back to the societal need to recognise multiple voices and multilingualism. Bakhtin's model of the novel describes the transsocietal communication metonymically. Only by including this external pragmatics can the current process of creating meaning between subject and society be understood. The search for social meaning has been concentrated on the borders and exceptions of culture for some time. The transatlantic relationships make up a large and multi-layered interspace. The heterogeneity is best observed in the newly forming zones of contact. Here, language is also a starting place for the process of negotiating new identities. Two examples: the increasing spreading of Spanish in the world is not only coming from Spain and Latin America, but also from the U.S.; conversely, in the Maghreb and Africa, French is being strongly held onto. In the regions of dissolving borders, the concepts of hybrids, like creolisation and *métissage*, serve to represent the multitude of voices and languages in the postcolonial world. Special attention is thus being paid to approaches like the "bi-langue" of the Moroccan Adelkebir Khatibi and Eduard Glissant's poetics "de la relation", which strives for a unity of forces.

Before discussing the authors that serve as examples, I would like to return to the oft-mentioned "language as a home of the writer". The

emotional content of this idea is evident. But how do writers imagine this home? Is it one home? Is it an identity of home and language? Writers look for a mother tongue, for a language that leads to the original naming of things experienced via the mother. Writing means recognising the loss of this supposedly original language (or tongue), ideally learned in the loving presence of the mother. Writing also means rising above an acceptance of this loss – making the unconscious conscious, which Freud observed as the universal language and whose linguistic structure was investigated by Lacan. Only by including this other language buried within oneself – though without declaring it an all-explaining unified language – does the emotive function open its entire width. The search for a home in language thus leads to the eerie realisation that language is not even one's own, that the linguistic sign and that which it signifies can be separated. The decentred subject can only approximate the lost original. The fact that this approximation, from the semiotic perspective, relates to the language itself and can take place quite lustfully – therefore being affective – was formulated by Roland Barthes with great clarity:

Le langage est une peau: je frotte mon langage contre l'autre. C'est comme si j'avais des mots en guise de doigts, ou des doigts au bout de mes mots. Mon langage tremble de désir. L'émoi vient d'un double contact: d'une part toute une activité de discours vient relever discrètement, indirectement, un signifié unique, qui est "je te désire", et le libère, l'alimente, le ramifie, le fait exploser (le langage jouit de se toucher lui-même); d'autre part, j'enroule l'autre dans mes mots, je le caresse, je le frôle, j'entretiens ce frôlage, je me dépense à faire durer le commentaire auquel je soumetts la relation (Barthes 1977: 87).

The desire experienced as lust expresses the open characters' relationship to language in two ways. On the one hand, there is the joy of language itself. On the other, it is a gloss, a commentary on the relationship being presented in the text as an amour. The commentary seems to be innocuous, however, particularly because it avoids any mention of the national language and instead appears to be trans-linguistic, because it includes all languages.

In contrast, George Steiner defines differently the "extraterritorial" type of writer, who is no longer enrooted in the national culture. Beckett and Nabokov are his representatives. Heinrich Heine, who mastered both French and German equally, serves as his forerunner; it was in relation to him that the paradox of homelessness in language

first became clear (Steiner 1974: 19). Only someone who does not really feel at home in his language uses it as an instrument, Adorno said about Heine. Canetti is an example of this instrumentalisation; he developed intensive relationships to the various languages that he learned in the course of his life, yet presented them without passion. This is not the case with many Arabic, Francophone and Latin American writers, as we are about to see.

This spatially semanticised (or affectively charged) relationship to language also appears *ex negativo* in the image of nomads. In the manner of Deleuze and Guattari, as nomads in their own language, Franz Kafka represents the “deterritorialised” writer. The concept of a minority writing in the language of the majority, known as *littérature mineure*, is structured as a binary opposition. The nomads between minor and major literatures can be characterised as nomads within one and/or within several languages. As an example, I take Jorge Luis Borges.⁵ The Argentinean did not simply translate Virginia Woolfe’s *Orlando* into Spanish, but also translated within his Spanish-speaking texts. This internal translation is so subtly manifested that one need not necessarily even sense it. It comes across more noticeably in the interplay with linguistic interference and in philosophical reflection over what language is and the Babylonian coexistence of various worldviews dependent on language. In his 1932 essay “El escritor argentino y la tradición”, Borges anticipates the central questions of postmodernism **and** postcolonialism: What is it like to live in a peripheral culture? What does it mean to write in the language of the colonisers? His answer:

Creo que nuestra tradición es toda la cultura occidental. [...] Creo que los argentinos, los sudamericanos en general, [...] podemos manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene, consecuencias afortunadas (Borges 1974: 273).

By Western culture he also means the corresponding languages. In advanced age, Borges wrote an “Ode an die deutsche Sprache” (“Ode to the German language”) and began to learn Arabic in the last years of his life. In his work Borges gleefully translates the disrespectful ap-

5 For Steiner he is together with Nabokov and Beckett one of the three “most genial figures of contemporary prose” (“genialsten Gestalten der zeitgenössischen Prosaliteratur” [Steiner 1974: 35]).

propriation of other cultures into reality. Therefore he became the model author for all of Latin America and was able to do the same for *francophonie* and postcolonial literature. Tahar Ben Jelloun, a French-speaking writer from Morocco, paid homage to him in his novel *L'enfant de sable*.

Transatlantic Intertextuality 1: Borges, who appeared as a dream in a dream, symbolised the freedom of literature for those Moroccans who lived mostly in Paris. Borges' work lives on and in the tension between a heterogeneous national literature on the one hand and a European-orientated high culture on the other. His preferred narrative and aesthetic strategies were imitation and mixture; he preferred to situate himself linguistically in the interstice created by multilingualism. An example can be found in his reading of Dante.

Transatlantic Intertextuality 2: The opposite direction. In his essay "La Divina Comedia", Borges describes how he reads Dante in a tram in Buenos Aires (Borges 1989: 208sq.). He uses a bilingual English-Italian edition and begins with the English translation. At a central point, however, where Dante reaches paradise, he reads the Italian original first and then the English translation. Borges, a polyglot and extraterritorial author *par excellence*, confesses in the same essay that he did not have a strong grasp of Italian; he "only" understood the older language. However one judges Borges' modesty in his representation of his multilingualism, the change from the translation to the original is significant, as it occurs because he is so emotionally moved. Dante, henceforth without the accompaniment of Virgil, meets Beatrice, the unreachable woman. At this key place Borges gives priority to the language of the original, of which he had a lesser command, to better enjoy the insuperable language of Dante. Admittedly, he immediately reads the English version afterwards. He then applies this use of two foreign languages within Argentinean Spanish creatively and parodistically in his "El Aleph", one of his best-known stories. In this case, the dangerous liaison is in the content, although one can also read the rejected love as an allegory for homelessness.⁶

6 Also see Adorno on Heine in Adorno (1974).

3. Latin America

Starting with Borges, who like Canetti spent his formative years in Switzerland, further examples of internal nomadism in Latin American literature become evident. Other examples can be found in lyrical literature that go beyond Bachtin and contradict him in this point.⁷ One worth pointing out is Rubén Darío (1867-1916), the leading figure of modernism from Nicaragua, who spoke of French as his lover. He confesses his infidelity in a letter to his grandfather: “Abuelo, preciso es decíroslo: mi esposa es de mi tierra; mi querida, de París”.⁸ The concept of linguistic bigamy still enjoys great popularity today, especially among male authors, in particular from the Maghreb. Augusto Roa Bastos and Rubén Bareiro Sagüier from Paraguay can also be named; their novels written during their French exile are shaped by Guaraní’s oral substratum. The Argentinean Juan Gelman also represents exile-related deterritorialisation. Though hardly known in this country, the poet belongs with Pérez Esquivel, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, and the “Madres de la Plaza de Mayo” to the opponents of those who would forget their country. Exile, sadness, hope, love and language are existentially interlinked subjects of his work. In his nearly thirty volumes of poetry, he writes about tango and the holocaust, about the military dictatorship and the *desaparecidos* – the disappeared – which include his son and his daughter-in-law, who was pregnant at the time of their abduction. After moving to Rome, Paris, Madrid and Managua, he finally settled in Mexico. One of the great Latin American poets in exile, Gelman condensed the linguistic side of deterritorialisation by letting it implode. In the area of lexicon and the level of syntax, he created and deformed. Inventing verbs, changing gender and adjectives, in addition to the hyperbolic use of nearly untranslatable diminutives, show that his poetry gives expression to the battle of language with reality. For this reason, it is too simple to say that Gelman was true to his language. Jacques Derrida mentions in his book on Celan that the latter let his language migrate within German: Babel within a single language.⁹ The same can be said of Gel-

7 Also see Hopfe (1998).

8 Darío (1983), “Prólogo”: “My wife comes from my country, my lover from Paris”.

9 Derrida (1986: 125), in the footnote.

man's Spanish. Through this internal Babel, both manage to express a possibly irreparable injury. The holocaust in one case and the Argentinean military dictatorship in the other are traumatising, deep wounds of the mind. Both poets demonstrate this by deforming the language. The injured mind is mostly represented by the scream, by stammering, floundering, absence and silence.

Gelman gives us an example of real translation in his bilingual volume *Dibaxu*, written in Sephardic and Spanish (Gelman 1999). While Darío develops his poetry, modernism, through his relationship to a French lover, Gelman, born in 1930 in Buenos Aires to Russian Jewish immigrants, finds his passion in the archaised Spanish of his ancestors. In contrast to Canetti, he never spoke this language, yet he writes *Dibaxu* bilingually.

Where can the transatlantic starting point (for the study of literature and culture) be found here? It is in the historical perspective. Darío managed to reverse the flow of dominant cultural influence up to that point; for the first time, an aesthetic movement shifted from the periphery toward the centre. With the figure of the French lover whose musicality seduced him, he founded Latin American modernism and overtook Spanish literature. Since recapturing Granada, the Spanish language ideal had been "casticismo", the purity of Castilian, which represented the central value of "hispanidad". At the end of the 20th century, Gelman also instigated an event of language appropriation and transformation when he used the great tradition of Spanish poetry as his foundation. With the background of colonial history, both Darío and Gelman are considered impure poets who develop their poetry from their relationship to the language of the centre. Gelman compares the present situation of Latin America with the Spain of the 16th century. He traces the clarity of the phrasing of Teresa de Avila and San Juan de la Cruz, his most significant role models, back to the fact that they were aware of the Spanish language that was in creation (Scheerer (1987; 2002). In this way he indicates that the purity of Castilian is a myth. Through Darío and Gelman, the central idea of "hispanidad" experiences a cultural revaluation, extending far beyond the language, away from the colonial centre toward Latin America. One thing is certain: what changing their language or to nomadising within their own language means to writers affects the

development of subjectivity as well as such major cultural currents as the transatlantic.

4. *Francophonie*

Though they do not cross the Atlantic, the dangerous liaisons of the French Maghreb do cross the Mediterranean. The French equivalent of the concept of *hispanidad* is *francité*. This term was not generally accepted, however, and was replaced by *francophonie*. The language situation here is more complex than that in the Spanish-speaking world, and a broader differentiation within the French language is therefore indispensable. The relationships between Creole and French in the Caribbean must be distinguished from those in Belgium or in Africa. An author in the Caribbean writing in French uses the social diglossia, though one can in turn differentiate this internal form of diglossia from the external form found in the Arabic-speaking world. What effect do these roughly outlined, typological differences have in the area of external pragmatics on the affective functions of a language?

One striking feature of Francophone literature is the overdetermination of the language consciousness.¹⁰ One example is the Moroccan sociologist and writer Abdelkebir Khatibi, who has studied the history of multilingualism and its functions extensively. In his novel *Amour bilingue* (1983), he employs a typical expression of higher language awareness by eroticising language contact. The male narrator, a kind of personification of language, joins the figure of **bi-language** in the ocean. This female protagonist is an imaginary mixture of mother and lover, the Arabic and the French. The features of the seductive “*belle étrangère*” are strongly present in her. Khatibi emphasises the affective function of passionate physicality, though without developing it into a cohesive whole. As a propagator of Barthes and Derrida in Maghreb, he emphasises the game of *différance* (with an “a”) and the unending process of the displacement of sense. The representation of French as the “*belle étrangère*” is omnipresent in Maghreb, African and Caribbean literature. In the history of genre, its meaning appears particularly often in the autobiographical schematic. In the protago-

10 Lise Gauvin speaks of the “surconscience linguistique” (Gauvin 1996).

nist's development, she fulfils a multi-tiered function of initiation in language, love and life. It is not rare for a transfer of the desire for the body of the teacher to the corpus of the language to occur. As early as in his *La mémoire tatouée* (1971), Khatibi described in his perfect mastery of the language his experience in French lessons as the school of seduction. In *Le Polygone étoilé* (1966), the Algerian Kateb Yacine emphasised the role of the beautiful French teacher who tears away his mother tongue, which resembles a second severing of the umbilical cord. Tahar Ben Jelloun also describes his relationship to French as something more passionate, with more clearly erotic features, than as something logical-rational. While French plays the role of the second woman, who seduces and wants to be seduced, Arabic appears as the wife.¹¹ In *Phantasia* (1986), a novel by the Tunisian author Abdelwahab Meddeb, the Oedipal constellation underlying these dangerous liaisons is omitted in favour of the classical Arabic. He identifies the father with written High Arabic and the mother with the Arabian dialect. The paternal language for him is like the language of Virgil for Dante. The illiterate mothers, on the other hand, only understand Arabic with effort – and starting from the dialect:

[Arabic is] langue paternelle, comme l'est pour Dante la langue de Virgile, langue arabe que la génération des nourrices et des mères analphabètes entendent à peine, à travers les repères approchants de leurs dialectes (Meddeb 1986: 138).

Due to the connection of High Arabic with the Koran, the classical standard language is often a ground for conflict, as in Driss Chraïbi's novel, *Le passé simple* (1954), in which the young protagonist openly revolts against it. The affective function of language also appears clearly in a relationship filled with hate. The Algerian author Assia Djebar begins her novel *L'Amour, la fantasia* with the memory of her first day of school:

Fillette arabe allant pour la première fois à l'école, un matin d'automne, main dans la main du père. Celui-ci, un fez sur la tête, la silhouette haute et droite dans son costume européen, porte un cartable, il est instituteur à

11 "Ma seconde femme, je l'ai trouvée tout seul, ou presque. Elle m'était offerte, mais il fallait la séduire, jouer et intriguer avec elle pour la mériter et la garder" (Ben Jelloun 1995: 197).

l'école française. Fillette arabe dans un village du Sahel algérien (Djebar 1995: 11).¹²

The young girl holding her father's hand, being led to French, does not fit the male model mentioned thus far, but the fundamental coordinates remain comparable. The first chapter summarises the life story of the protagonist, changed by this event. As the title of the book indicates, love plays a central role in the story. The experience of love in the French language is ambivalent, however; it signifies a separation from the mother tongue. French, the language of distance and the outside world, suppresses the native language, the Arabian dialect, the intimate language of sentiment and nearness. It is a long path that begins on that first day of school. In the novel, it is doubled and deepened with Algerian history from colonisation to liberation. As Algeria is affected by colonisation, Assia Djebar feels herself and her body wrapped up and suppressed by French. The language of others, "la langue des autres", envelops her body. The keywords are clear: mutilation, salvation and desire. The latter is not as strong as Khatibi's; nevertheless, French is the language of freedom, especially for the woman. Djebar's writing is a statement against the oppression of women. It is considerably more efficient for this purpose than the Arabian dialect, defined by male discourse as it is. The anonymous voices that make up the third part of the novel come mostly from women. The historian Djebar crosses the borders of history and fiction, high culture and folk culture, Arabic and French, the oral and written. In her "autobiographie au pluriel" she is a translator of spoken words, Arabic *kalam*, in French *écriture*. Differently from Canetti, the mutilation is actually executed, as with Atahualpa, the symbolic representative of Latin America. In the nations of Maghreb colonised by France, the children are taught, as the French, in French history and are thus robbed of their Arabian-Berber roots. Arabic is not on the curriculum; the historical memory of Algeria is mutilated. The novel begins with a quotation of Eugène Fromentin, a painter who accompanied the colonisation.

12 "A young girl going to school for the first time, a morning in autumn, hand in hand with her father. He, wearing a fez, silhouette tall and straight in a European suit, carries a school bag. He is a teacher at the French school. A young Arabian girl in a village in Algerian Sahel".

Il y eut un cri déchirant – je l’entends encore au moment où je t’écris –, puis des clameurs, puis un tumulte [...]. E. F. Une année dans le Sahel, 1852 (Djebar 1995: 11).¹³

At the end, this epigraph from Fromentin’s report is repeated with some macabre details:

Au sortir de l’oasis que le massacre, six mois après, empuantit, Fromentin ramasse, dans la poussière, une main coupée d’Algérienne anonyme. Il la jette ensuite sur son chemin. Plus tard, je me saisis de cette main vivante, main de la mutilation et du souvenir et je tente de lui faire porter le “qalam” (Djebar 1995: 255).¹⁴

The important thing here is that the Arabic word “qalâm” means feather. By changing the severed hand into a writing quill, Djebar executes Canetti’s salvation of the tongue. She grants the scream a new voice, a French one, but she does not just save her tongue by becoming a writer, but also that of the people because she translates the oral Arabic into written French. That sounds pathetic, but this pathos communicates a sobering realisation: when changing a scream into literature, as during the passage the one language into another, just then, when it happens in the eroticised code of love, there are limits and things that cannot be translated. The gap between the oral and the written as the central factor of diglossia connects the writing of Djebar with the literature of Black Africa, where authors like Amadou Hampaté Bâ are engaged in passing on the oral culture.¹⁵ This salvation of the tongue is also a main objective in Caribbean literature. Simone Schwartz-Bart, Maryse Condé, Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau are cultural mediators, like Djebar, who want to transmit the knowledge, soul and life of the oral tradition.

In Francophone Maghreb, the salvation of the tongue in the language is often affectively charged and eroticised. Yet the question arises as to whether the admiration of French stressed by Senghor and Césaire, the founding fathers of *francophonie*, can be saved in the age

13 “There was a heartrending scream – I can hear it even as I write – then commotion, then a tumult [...]”.

14 “Somewhere in the oasis, which had been plagued by the reek of the massacre six months earlier, he finds the hand of a woman in the dust. He picks it up and throws it away. Later I reach for this living hand, this mutilated hand of memory, and I try to let it carry the ‘qalam’”.

15 Example texts: *Koumen*, 1961; *Kaidara*, 1969; *L’étrange destin de Wangrin*, 1973.

of globalisation. In principle, the answer is yes. Nevertheless, and this is the commonality of the examples given, the old ideals are at stake in this salvation: *pureté*, *clarté*, *rationalité*, all the values that were once regulated by *bon usage*, which cared for the universality of the French language. The new generation, like Bernabé, Confiant and Chamoiseau in *Eloge de la créolité* (1989), sings the praises of *métissage*, that is, the impurity. Creole appears therein as a worldview suppressed by colonialism that should be preserved, not at the cost of French, but with it, with English, with Spanish. The poetry of *créolisation* that has emerged is found, as Glissant observed in his *Poétique de la relation* (1990), in the context of globalisation. With the Caribbean authors, we move further along the transatlantic spiral because their aesthetic is so close to the Latin American *realismo mágico* of García Márquez and the *real maravilloso* of Alejo Carpentier, without being directly attached. An aesthetic that can be designated as a comparativist aspect of heteroglossia at the interface of literature and culture.

In the course of globalisation, the bipolar concepts of centre and periphery, already undermined by Borges and deconstructed by Homi Bhabha, begin to totter. The one is penetrated by the other. If one attempts to place writers who are at home in several languages and cultures on the school curriculum, typologies that measure the relationship of centrifugal and centripetal forces are no longer sufficient. Concepts are needed that capture the relationship between language and its qualities. Research into the affective function is a starting point. Multilingualism has entered individual and cultural memory. This must be considered, especially when – as with Canetti and the former colonies – language signifies the memory of trauma and, at the same time, salvation.

In closing I would like to return to the question of the transatlantic connection between Francophone and Latin American studies. Is it not wishful thinking to want to bring together areas that are similar in general terms, yet in detail much too heterogeneous? Should these highly complex territories not be left conceptually and analytically separate? And is the search for a connection not simply another transfer of Eurocentric hermeneutics, with a demand for universality that is no longer sustainable in this postcolonial era? Does every understanding of the experience of others as different not come to a stop in order to cross into the process of projection of one's self? Facing these ques-

tions, multilingualism proves to be a productive interface that touches issues of alterity and collective memory that are carried out in the conflicts of society. An example of multilingualism is the integration of literature in the overall, ever more problematic process of establishing meaning. Literature as a part of communication within all aspects of society – and this is the order of the day – can only be researched within a framework that accepts that language represents a living historical experience, and this experience flows into its various functions.

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