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(26/8/1929-20/09/2020)

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ANDRÉE TABOURET-KELLER

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Parole chiave: *Andrée Tabouret-Keller, Alsaziano, R.B. Le Page, creolo, Belize, attivista, situazioni plurilingui*

Mots-clés: *Andrée Tabouret-Keller, Alsacien, R.B. Le Page, créole, Bêlize, activiste, situations plurilingues*

Andrée Tabouret-Keller, who passed away on Sunday 20 September 2020, was a unique figure in Sociolinguistics in France, though not only in the Sociolinguistics of French. She was thoroughly French, but at the same time deeply attached to her native Alsace and a fluent Alsatian speaker. She came from a modest background; her father was an engineer and her mother had been a seamstress. She began by studying medicine in Strasbourg after the War but changed to Psychology and Linguistics. Her 1969 doctoral thesis, under the supervision of André Martinet, was on the language acquisition of her bilingual nieces. It stands out from other comparable studies in that it describes bilingual acquisition in a working-class household, as opposed to an elite linguist's family. In her brother's home, the dialect was spoken alongside French with no thought of deliberately separating them.

An encounter at a conference with another truly original figure in the anglophone Sociolinguistics world, Professor Robert Le Page, led to their collaborating on various linguistic situations worldwide, notably on Jamaican and Belizean creoles, which led to their seminal Cambridge University Press volume 'Acts of Identity: Creole-Based Approaches to Language and Ethnicity' (1985), and to a lifelong friendship.

'Acts of Identity' was highly regarded in creole studies as well as sociolinguistics more generally. The central thesis was that, as the creole continuum demonstrated, the whole idea of 'a language' was largely a fiction, but one which speakers and institutions believed in and which consequently affected their behaviour. The (variable) choices speakers made among the options available to them were a way of asserting similarity with some groups and difference from others. Le Page applied the notions (taken from photography) of 'focusing and diffusion' to language, as a way of describing the spectrum from highly standardised to totally unregulated varieties. Andrée was sensitive to the social and political implications for speakers of the unregulated varieties. There

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followed a series of workshops held in York, England, leading to an edited book on the – still under-researched – implications of advocating for ‘Vernacular literacy: A re-evaluation’ (edited by Andrée Tabouret-Keller, Robert Le Page, Penelope Gardner-Chloros and Gabrielle Varro, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997).

For many years in Strasbourg Andrée headed a CNRS unit focused on ‘complex linguistic situations’. The core group was mainly made up of fiercely intellectual women with backgrounds in psychoanalysis. As a sometimes bemused if privileged participant, I learned the hard way that in France, the study of language and the terms used to describe it differed as night from day from what I had learned of sociolinguistics in the UK. Fortunately for me, Andrée also understood and appreciated the pragmatic ‘Anglo-Saxon’ approach alongside the more discursive French tradition.

Alongside her linguistic work on Alsace, on creoles and other plurilingual situations like that of the Basque Country and Aosta, Andrée engaged passionately with the educational implications of her work, jointly editing a journal on bilingual education with Gabrielle Varro and running a regular seminar in Paris, deep into her retirement years. She also continued to practice as a Lacanian psychotherapist but was always discreet on this aspect of her professional life.

She had met René Tabouret, her future husband, on a train in Czechoslovakia as a fellow activist at the end of the War. Both were engaged at the time in the Communist movement and deeply involved in the fallout of the Algerian War. Known to all as Tabou – what better name if you are married to a psychoanalyst? – she and René were united to the end. They had two sons, Pierre, and Jean, and were immensely fond of their grandchildren who they gathered together every summer in their house in Pelvoux. The ‘Tabous’ were unshakably hospitable to a range of colleagues and students from all over the world and usually had someone staying at their flat in Strasbourg.

My own relationship with Andrée began as one of her numerous and very fortunate PhD students, and ended up as an enduring friendship; Andrée was godmother to my first son. While subject to bouts of ill health in old age, she never stopped researching, writing and being curious about her environment, politics, and world affairs and developing new areas of interest. She leaves a legacy of deeply thoughtful books and articles which are part of no established school but have earned the respect of many.

NOTE:

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