

Cultural pluralism and linguistic rights in Latin America*

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Within the framework of debate on post-regionalism in the global age, the intercultural agenda of Latin America now needs to work on approaches of decentralisation, and on investigating further its—now well-known—linguistic and *existential* peripheral fields. Rather than a mere legal exigency, this should be a genuine demand; a chorus for inclusion within the context of a solid democracy in favour of all positive discrimination. It is a multilingual agenda that seeks a culture of common ground and hospitality.

I would like to recall the well-known book *Globalising the regional: regionalising the global*, by Rick Fawn, when he quotes Samuel Kim:

* Translation by Juliet Attwater.

the new regionalism reflects and affects a complex interplay of local, regional, and global forces, simultaneously involving states as well as non-state, market, and societal actors. Assessing how regions function and interact is further complicated by acceptance that regions are work in progress, indeed that they are perpetually unfinished projects, and that they are also “porous,” interlinking, influencing and being influenced regularly by other actors and regions. Even in the economic realm, trade patterns are now seen to involve “globally diffused network regions,” rather than being tidy, self-contained units, and in contradistinction to the bloc idea prevalent even in the 1990s. This makes their analysis more exciting and more challenging, particularly in terms of security, and some terminology is again beneficial as region, regional community, and regional system may be related but are nevertheless distinct. That regional communities and regional systems do not necessarily coincide is evident from the fact that an outsider power may be integral to the functioning of the latter and not necessarily share any of its values.

342 This means that it is necessary to define the areas of Latin America in dialogue, and to define which interlocutors are committed to multilateral projects that are not reduced to mere volatile economics—to liquid, erratic clouds of capital. It is necessary to find projects that are able to withstand the corrosive immanence created by marketing theology, which encourages uniformity through disastrous methods of homogenisation in accordance with the doctrines of the system, and which create hundreds of thousands of precarious consumers rather than genuine citizens with rights, and thereby large pockets of intolerance and fragmentation.

This kind of narcissistic linguistic and ideological hegemony must be condemned, as it blocks protagonists from the periphery of society, and uses a single grammar that is disconnected from the beauty of discovery and demonises any-

thing that is hybrid and impure. The promotion of the culture of peace and diversity needs to confront a kind of anti-Esperanto movement, in favour of a multiplicity of languages that are not in the thrall of the interests of the manufacture of global standards, and that slow down the clouds of capital and their fast-paced, nebulous methods of persuasion.

Latin America needs to increasingly horizontalise the stones of Babel, those same non-physical stones that Antonio Vieira describes along the Amazon River—the River Babel, ecumenical and all encompassing, which holds a dialogue with all its affluents and tributaries, like in a poem by Velimir Khlebnikov: a river that gathers everything to it along its challenging route. This flow does not dilute the *felix culpa* of all the languages held within it, now considered a Promethean flame, a celestial blessing, an unfinished unit.

343

The subject here is nothing less than a defence of the linguistic rights of the continent. In Brazil alone there are nearly two hundred languages in search of a territory as yet un-anchored or ill-defined, where culture and nature are able to interact in a cycle of bio-security. There is no other way of equating the interwoven relationship between language and land than from within a culture of hospitality.

While we perhaps lack a descriptive grammar of the language of paradise, we are able to intuit its poetic qualities on an essential plane, stemming from the zero aura of the world, and thereby set in motion an Adamic denomination, when the course of the river and the stars came together to form a single destiny.

This unthinkable language needs a utopian approach from poets and translators who are able to turn their backs on the swirling clouds of the Single and embrace the Multiple, which by definition vibrates, and is marked by the beauty and mystery of difference.

In *Des tours de Babel*, Derrida writes that

because of translation, because of this linguistic supplementarity where one language gives the other what it lacks, this crossing of languages guarantees the “blessed growth of languages” up until the messianic limits of history. All this is seen in the translation process, through the “eternalisation of the work” and “the infinite rebirth of languages.” This perpetual resurrection, this constant regeneration through translation, is, rather than a revelation, the revelation of itself, more an annunciation, an alliance and a promise.

344

These towers of stone are invisible, like in Bartolomeu Meliá’s exquisite publication of the *Ayvu rapyta*, the theogony according to the Guarani, the great meta-physicists of the Americas.

The multilingualism of the Americas is a reaction against the ontology of Sameness spread throughout the world, in the global economy’s liquid—or more appropriately, nebulous—impositions.

Auerbach’s famous essay, “Philology and *Weltliterature*” is still relevant today as it draws attention to the increasing lack of diversity since the aftermath of the Post-War:

It is time to ask what meaning the word *Weltliteratur* can still have if we relate it, as Goethe did, both to the past and the future. Our earth, the domain of *Weltliteratur*, is growing smaller and losing its diversity (...).

Latin America must respond to Auerbach’s essay with the beauty and strength of Minerva’s owl, with its eyes

wide-open and alight, and using policies that promote these fundamental languages. As well as the bilingualism in Paraguay, Peru and Bolivia, their mix of religions are a reaction against global evangelism (according to Peter Berger and Samuel Huntington in *Many globalizations*) and against all-pervading financial systems. They represent centres of insurgency and inflection that consolidate on the peripheries, along the banks of the River Babel and at the edges of intransitive and intransigent democracies.

The advantages of bilingualism are that it encourages a shared ethics between what is in friction (language one and language two), incomplete groups, which are propelled by a kind of incomplete completeness, or are motivated by translation between two groups or in the uncertain space of inter-language, and which thus open the possibility of a third way, a third view, from which both groups are enriched.

345

This is an inverted Babel, with golden threads, and with an etymology that looks, scandalously, towards the future. The following extract from the book *Tyre'ỹ rape/Camino del huérfano*, by the Paraguayan writer Susy Delgado, written in Guarani and Spanish, is particularly pertinent:

I have brought together in this book both [poems] that were born in Guarani and those that asked to be written in Castilian... As an author, I can see how my two languages come together in this book; they are different accents along this unending path that seems an increasingly deserted Babel.

Between the project of Adamic denomination and regional policies that are subsumed by globalisation, or as Milton Santos says, between *the tower and the desert*, Susy manag-

Marco Lucchesi

es to show that the uniqueness of her heritage is not entirely lost, and that one *can* dream of the Earth without Evils:

Camino
descamino
despatria
deslugar
desorilla
descuerpo
deshondura
desnorte
desencuentro

Path
dis-path
dis-nation
dis-place
dis-margin
dis-embody
dis-depth
dis-orient
dis-discover

346

The hospitality affirmed through the negation and the incompleteness of the inverse Babel path, which should flow between nation and dis-nation, leads one to urgently question, “where were you/where are you/where will you be? Earth without Evil?”

A hidden face—one that demands a new path traced between rise and fall, through an anti-poetics—is seen in the work of the Chilean poet, Nicanor Parra, *Poemas para combater a calvicie*, from which come the following lines:

Consumismo
derroche
despilfarro
serpiente que se traga su propia cola

Buenas noticias:
La tierra
de años
Somos nosotros los que desaparecemos

EL MUNDO ACTUAL?
EL inMUNDO ACTUAL!

Consumerism
waste
squandering
serpent that swallows its own tail

Good news:
From the earth
of years
It is we who will vanish

THE WORLD NOW?
THE nonWORLD NOW!

347

As a counter to the gravity of ideological or even capillary commitments, and to circles of exclusion, we can also look at the work of the Mexican writer Natalio Hernández, who comments that “my language, just as any other, was a mine of treasures. And I continue to slowly discover these treasures held in the heart of the Nahuatl language.”

This mine, which is contained within its speakers, requires one to climb up to its depths, in a conundrum of continual inversions, or as the Chilean poet Elicura Chihuailaf tells us in the Mapudungan language, here translated into English (via Spanish and Portuguese):

Ala labrada por naturaleza
heme aquí, lentamente subiendo
hacia mi propia hondura.

Marco Lucchesi

Wing tended by nature
here I am, slowly rising
towards my own depths.

Rising, rather than falling to the depths, is an insistent and resistant act that is expressive and perhaps even metaphysical, and one very much like that found in the “Coplas de Cochabamba”, translated from the Quechua by Jesús Lara:

¿Que nube es aquella nube
que engrenecida se acerca?
Será el llanto de mi madre
que viene trocado de lluvia.

What is this cloud
that closes in and encloses?
Is it my mother's alarm that the rains are
changing? tears become rain?

348

These tears, which irrigate *Pacha Mama*, the Earth-Mother, the source of every face and every chthonic and decentralised language, are the tears of a woman in labour, with her breasts turned towards the not-yet, towards new plans, paths and potentials.

This leads one to Ernesto Cardenal, when he questions the possibility of

restablecer las carreteras rotas
de Sudamérica
hacia los Cuatro Horizontes
con sus antiguos correos.

re-setting the pathways
of South America
towards the four Horizons
and their ancient messenger routes.

This is a vast communication network that encompasses ancient indigenous paths as well as those that continue to evolve today, and involves the already mentioned tension between language and geography; not as mere adhesion to the past, but rather as a horizontal continuation of a new and thankfully unending Tower.

Linguistic rights are an urgent and essential step towards this, as they can halt the crime of forgetfulness, both within the Americas as well as beyond them, and yet not lose contact between what is regional and what is global, and these “old communication networks” can be understood from the perspective of a wide and expansive geography, along the cosmological horizon where the Nicaraguan poet’s vast *Poema cósmico* is set.

349

Thus, from the perspective of this constant rebirth, I return to Auerbach’s essay, in which he states that the home of philology is the Earth, and no longer a nation. This seems the right way to defend the multilingualism of our lands: it is situated between global philology and the syntax of difference. I would like here to quote from the poem “The only book” (единая книга), by Velimir Khlebnikov, which synthesises the Earth as a dialogue; it is a book marked by difference and by hospitality, governed by the poetry of the great narratives revisited:

I saw the dark Vedas
the Testament and the Koran
and the books of the Mongols,
on silken boards,
with the dust of the steppes
with perfumed manure (...),
erect a pyre

Marco Lucchesi

and throw themselves in it.
White widows enclosed within clouds of smoke
fanned the rise
of the only book,
whose pages, wider than the sea,
vibrate like the wings of blue butterflies
(...)

And some verses below he says:

“Wide rivers of blue waters:
the Volga, where they celebrate Razin,
the yellow Nile, where they worship the Sun,
the Yangtze Kiang full of dense human clay,”
And you, Mississippi, where the Yanks
wear trousers of starry skies,
and wrap their legs in the stars,
the Ganges, where dark men are trees of intelligence,
the Danube, where in the whiteness, white men
in white shirts float over the waters,
the Zambezi, where the men are blacker than a boot,
the impetuous Obi, where they flog the idol
and turn it round,
as they eat fatty meat
and the Thames, where the boredom is grey.

350

And he continues (I cannot resist quoting three lines in Russian):

Род человечества—книги читатель,
И на обложке надпись творца,
Имя мое, письменна голубые.

The human kind is the book's reader!
You can find the creator's mark on the cover,
my name in blue letters.

Khlebnikov's only-book, while there is still time, is a guide for difference, a repository of rare beauty, a Book that

now is little more than a summary. However, it has numerous authors; it is a collective, silent, republican work with a global democracy under construction. An earth without evils?

Yvy Mare'y!

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Marco Lucchesi

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