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Edited by Javier Muñoz-Basols, Laura Lonsdale and Manuel Delgado

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Javier Muñoz-Basols, Laura Lonsdale, Manuel Delgado

Of Treasure Maps and Dictionaries

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Laura Lonsdale

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OF TREASURE MAPS AND
DICTIONARIESSearching for home in *Carlota Fainberg*,
Bilbao-New York-Bilbao and *L'últim patriarca**Laura Lonsdale*

Iberian Studies is born of a frustration with what Joan Ramón Resina describes as “Hispanism’s cosy monolingualism” (2013, 2), in a move at once disciplinary and political that seeks to assert the multilingual diversity of the Iberian Peninsula and of Spain in particular. This assertion of plurality and multilingualism speaks, of course, to Spain’s polemical constitution (and Constitution) as a “nation of nations, or a nation of nations and regions” (Balfour and Quiroga 2007, 2), but it may also be considered a response to globalisation and the challenges and opportunities it offers to the articulation of local identities. As Daniele Conversi argues:

On the one hand, the changed [globalised] context has provided novel opportunities for minority nations to advance differentialist claims that are no longer based on the homogeneous concept of the nation-state. On the other hand, the erosion of representative political institutions as a consequence of globalization has contributed to a potential backlash against cultural difference and a desire to revert to past notions of homogeneity – and these are inevitably bound to affect indigenous minorities as well.
(2014, 36)

Iberian Studies is particularly concerned with the “indigenous minorities” of Spain and establishing greater dialogue between its cultural and linguistic traditions; but if we consider the claims of Iberian Studies as a response not just to the tension between nationalism and nation-statism (Conversi 2014, 29, 40), but as a wider manifestation of the problem of articulating local identities in a globalised context, it casts a somewhat different light on the ways in which authors choose to articulate their sense of belonging in relation to both territory and language. If our present era is defined by travel, migration and globalisation, what function does language play in our sense of who we are? How can local identities be maintained or assumed in a multilingual and transnational reality? These are evidently significant questions for writers in minority languages, though they also have broader implications in a world dominated by English and the United States.

This chapter looks at three works that explore different facets of the problem of articulating the local in the context of the global, reflecting concerns that are expressive of the globalised dimension of local identity in the Iberian context, with territory and language figured in the

map and the dictionary. Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Carlota Fainberg* (1999) is a satirical, bilingual novella that considers the linguistic formulation of Spanish and North American cultural values in the context of the United States' cultural ascendancy; Kirmen Uribe's *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao* (2009) is a work of autofiction that reflects on the past and future of Basque language and culture in the age of the Internet; and Najat El Hachmi's *L'últim patriarca* (2008) is a novel of immigration in which the young Moroccan protagonist seeks emancipation in an adopted culture and language (Catalan). Muñoz Molina and Uribe employ the treasure map as a motif for discovery, where X marks the spot of home as well as the promise of the unknown, and as a means of exploring power relations between nations; while Uribe and El Hachmi use the dictionary as a motif for cultural values they hold dear, in a spirit of preservation and emancipation, respectively.

Antonio Muñoz Molina, *Carlota Fainberg*

Carlota Fainberg reflects on the cultural fortunes of Spanish and Spain in a globalised world, in which the US is the dominant force. A round satire of literary studies in the American university, the novella employs both intratextual and intertextual strategies to map one man's migration of cultural values from his home to his host nation and back again. Written bilingually, both the intratextual encounter of Spanish and English and the intertextual encounter with Borges and Robert Louis Stevenson generate an ironic perspective on the narrator's attempt to negotiate the complex and uneven pathways of cultural identity.

The novella's protagonist and narrator (Claudio, a Spaniard) is an associate professor who has lived in the US for several years and now hopes to achieve tenure in his university post. Claudio's experience of living in America has led to a gradual assimilation of American values – he does not smoke, he protects his personal space, he splits the bill – and an increasingly dismissive view of his compatriots as politically incorrect pleasure seekers. Waiting at Pittsburgh airport for a delayed flight to Buenos Aires, where he will give a conference paper on 'Narratividad e intertextualidad' in Borges's sonnet 'Blind Pew,' Claudio is accosted by the voluble Spaniard Marcelo Abengoa, a loud, expansive, and irritatingly generous man who has in abundance all the characteristics that Claudio squeamishly associates with Spanishness. He certainly shares none of Claudio's embarrassment and temerity, both of which seem to have been enhanced by his experience of being a foreigner in the US. An engaging raconteur, Abengoa tells Claudio the story of Carlota Fainberg, a red-lipped, honeysuckle-perfumed, rampantly feminine glamour puss he once met in the dilapidated Town Hall hotel in Buenos Aires. Both the pleasurable 'naivety' of Abengoa's linear narrative and the political incorrectness of his theme are deeply troubling to Claudio, who is not only hyper-correct in his politics but has also adopted all the postmodernist sophistication of his host nation, and can only speak of pleasure, beauty and value between heavily inverted commas. Yet Abengoa, whose physical and linguistic habits remind Claudio of his father and uncle, not only succeeds in fascinating him with this story of a blonde bombshell who encapsulates all the clichés of masculine fantasy, but also displays a remarkable ability to tap unintentionally into Claudio's thoughts, an ability that suggests they share a frame of cultural reference, though Claudio would hate to admit it. In this way Abengoa becomes, ironically and against the narrator's will, an embodiment of the 'wrong' kind of 'narratividad' and 'intertextualidad,' as the author parodies, subverts and caricatures the narrator's migration of values.

This migration is most clearly reflected in Claudio's use of language, a Spanish peppered with words, phrases and idioms in American English, none of which is italicised, translated or

otherwise marked out within the text. Though Claudio himself clearly regards this as a mark of his successful cultural assimilation, Muñoz Molina employs it ironically, as we see in the following examples:

Estaba Abengoa, sin saberlo, ejerciendo la digression como transgression, como ruptura del discurso narrativo canónico, al modo de ciertos textos de Juan Goytisolo.
(52–53)

Mientras escuchaba a Abengoa, yo miraba instintivamente a mi alrededor, [. . .] como si estuviera en el departamento y alguna faculty de feminismo agresivo rondara en busca de una oportunidad de acusarme de verbal harrassment o de male chauvinism.
(49)

Uno se va haciendo poco a poco a la vida de aquí, y cuando vuelve a España ya encuentra algo upsetting que las mujeres se pinten los labios y se pongan tacones y minifalda para hacer el shopping en la mantequería de la esquina, o que las chicas acudan a la junior high school maquilladas como gheisas, con corpiño, o top, según creo que llaman a esa prenda innegablemente turbadora.
(48–49)

Claudio's use of English reflects his assimilation of North American cultural values to varying degrees, such that questions of acculturation are more deeply – and more ironically – embedded in some word choices than others. At the most superficial level, the words 'faculty' and 'junior high school' simply reveal something of Claudio's adaptation to the institutional structures of American society. At a deeper level, 'La digression como transgression' reveals Claudio's self-conscious adaptation to the institutionalised parlance of the North American university (as synecdoche of the culture as a whole), while also giving the phrase the distinctively ironic ring of a received idea or trendy formulation. In a similar way, the terms 'verbal harassment' and 'male chauvinism' are implicitly dismissed as artificial verbal constructs belonging to the language of political correctness; Claudio's cowardly sense of being under threat from 'alguna faculty de feminismo agresivo' suggests both a self-conscious acceptance of, and perhaps an unconscious resistance to, the values they encode. At a still deeper and seemingly more unconscious level, the word 'upsetting' has a precious quality in English that perfectly captures Claudio's prudishness, apparently absorbed from North American culture. The word 'shopping' has a pretentious ring here, but also perhaps evokes something more directly associated with consumer culture than 'ir de compras' might in Spanish; and the word 'top' is contrasted with the not quite accurate, and somehow rather old-fashioned, Spanish equivalent of *corpiño*. In each case Claudio reveals that the Anglophone culture of the US has begun to significantly shape his thoughts on cultural matters but, in addition to revealing his incomplete process of assimilation, the use of words and phrases in English attaches a certain weight of criticism to the culture from which they derive: it is modish and vacuous; precious and pretentious; prudish yet louche. This creates an ironic counterpoint to Claudio's sense that Spain is backward or outmoded in its values. Though he dismisses Spanish attitudes to women as 'igual de antiguo[s] que el abrigo echado por los hombros de mi padre' (49), the warm, textured image of his father's coat conveys a comforting nostalgia that does more to reveal the brittleness of Claudio's adopted values than to reinforce them.

The intratextual use of English as a means of exploring cultural values is an expression of a broader interest in intertextuality within the novella, an interest that deepens and enhances

what might otherwise appear a rather crude satire of cultural identity. The text on which Claudio is to give his conference paper, Borges's sonnet "Blind Pew," is itself a complex intertext, not least because it evokes the cosmopolitan figure of its Argentine author, that giant of international letters who, to quote George Steiner, "moves with a cat's assurance through the sound-world of many tongues" (1972, 26). Steiner refers to Borges as a "universalist" (26), an "unhoused" writer with a "disdain of anchor" (27), and indeed his cosmopolitanism and linguistic dexterity seem to form a kind of aspirational backdrop to the novella. Despite his "unhousedness" Borges's nationality is not incidental here; the Buenos Aires hotel where Abengoa meets the beautiful and exotic Carlota Fainberg is a crumbling relic of an old Europe on a new continent, creating a network of New World–Old World relationships that Muñoz Molina ironically explores.

The intertext to Borges's sonnet is in turn Robert Louis Stevenson's adventure novel, *Treasure Island*, which itself becomes an intertext to Muñoz Molina's text by association with certain supposed taboos of contemporary academic discourse. As a story, it constitutes exactly the kind of linear, pleasurable narrative towards which Claudio shows dutiful suspicion, and which the garrulous Abengoa is so good at producing. Secondly, with its masculine swashbuckling and its appropriative adventuring, it would by all accounts constitute a guilty pleasure to the literary critic with one eye on the politics of gender and another on postcolonialism. *Treasure Island* is in many ways an allegory of the New World and the opportunities it offers rough white men to become rich and free; the colonial history implied by the ship *Hispaniola* may be secondary to the novel's adventure story, but it is nevertheless the history of imperialism and colonialism – and associated history of trade and piracy – that makes the story possible at all. It is precisely on this basis that Claudio's meekly delivered contribution to the conference in Buenos Aires is derided by the famous and terrifying Ann Gadea Simpson Mariátegui, an overwrought caricature of a feminist academic if ever there was one: ". . . de Palo Alto, California . . . exhibe los apellidos de sus ex maridos como si fueran los trofeos de un guerrero jíbaro, y . . . la . . . llaman, no sin razón, la Terminator del New Lesbian Criticism" (135). Unluckily for Claudio, Ann Gadea's keynote speech also happens to be on Borges, and in contrast to the modest subject of Claudio's paper it is entitled: 'From Aleph to Anus: Faces (and feces) in Borges. An attempt at Postcolonial Analysis' (136). With aggressive derision Ann Gadea dismisses Borges as "dead white male trash" (142) and accuses Claudio of being complicit with the "fascinación europea, heterosexual y masculina por los mitos del expolio colonial" (140) represented by *Treasure Island*. Not only is Claudio complicit with this gendered Eurocentricity (Europe=Eu/rape in Gadea's own formulation), but is barred from speaking with any authority about Borges because he is from Spain, and not from Latin America (139).

It is here that we begin to see the extended ironic significance of the assimilation of North American values reflected in Claudio's use of language: he has accepted a hierarchy of progress in his mind according to which the US must show the way to retrograde Old World nations such as Spain, but in his encounter with Ann Gadea we are brought back to an observation he made earlier, that any Spaniard in America soon discovers "que ha de cargar resignadamente sobre sus hombros con todo el peso intacto de la Leyenda Negra" (24). The black legend singled out Spain for, among other things, its brutality and plunder overseas even when other European nations were engaged in aggressive imperialist campaigns of their own, and Ann Gadea's dismissal of Claudio on the basis of his nationality carries the historical weight of a long-standing demonization of Spain. The equivalence between Spain and colonialist plunder that is at the heart of the black legend begins to appear as an accepted and acceptable form of "othering," a sanctioned rejection of a particular national culture that Claudio himself

has already associated in his own mind with deep-seated political incorrectness. The hypocrisy and perceived injustice of this fact is compounded by the perpetuation of the legend by academics supposedly immersed in and alert to the language of cultural relations. So contained within the satire of American academia and, especially, of its language, is an accusation of hypocrisy that comes to us partly through the intertextual allusion to *Treasure Island*.

In contrast to Ann Gadea's tortuous cultural logic and impenetrable jargon, Borges and his "recóndito tesoro" seem to stand as embodiments of something more truly authentic, cosmopolitan and open, as we learn about the value and hope encapsulated in the mystery and promise of the unknowable: the "vasta y vaga y necesaria muerte." In the elegant simplicity of its diction and form the sonnet undoubtedly forms a counterpoint to the aggressive conviction, moral righteousness and theoretical sophistry of Ann Gadea, whose wordplay appears empty, exclusive and tyrannical in comparison. But Ann Gadea is a caricature, like Claudio and Abengoa no doubt but with none of their redeeming qualities, a reductive essence of something that is both feared and despised; and together with the fantasy blonde she might well be considered the target of an angry and wounded pride, masculine and national, covered over with a dubious claim to the cosmopolitan. This undermines what is otherwise a funny, ironic and unusual text, alert to the linguistic formulation of cultural values in the context of unequal relationships of power.

Kirmen Uribe, *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*

Bilbao-New York-Bilbao is also a work about home, globalisation and language, though unlike *Carlota Fainberg* it is written in a minor key. A work of autofiction originally written in Basque (though here read in Spanish translation), the book is narrated by an author travelling by air between Bilbao and New York, drawing an explicit contrast between seafaring and air travel, and evoking through family history the marine culture of the Basque Country and the changes wrought by modernity. The crossing of the Atlantic and the naming of many places on its shores give a sense of the global perspective of the work, despite its interest in the local and personal. Structured associatively in the manner of a "red" (Kortazar 2010, 26), perhaps evoking Barthes's "réseaux" but, more specifically, both the fisherman's net and the Internet, the text interweaves stories, reflections and experiences, "hyperlinking" themes and motifs through repetition and association. One of these motifs is the map, an image of physical space in contrast to the virtual space of the Net, which Uribe employs to reflect on the place of a minority language and culture in a globalised context. Cartography is associated ambivalently with the transition from the pre-modern to the modern, figured in terms of imperialist territorial expansion (the overwhelming of the small), though also in terms of the potential forging of new connections between small entities, thus ensuring their survival. In this way maps and map-making become figures for the problems and opportunities of globalisation for minority languages and cultures.

The narrator's father, we are told, once sailed mapless but guided by Columbus's writings from the Cantabrian coast to the Caribbean (183–184). This mention of Columbus evokes the association between cartography and imperialism, an idea reinforced by a brief but significant intertextual reference to Borges's "Del rigor en la ciencia," a microfictional and supposedly apocryphal tale about cartography and empire which begins:

En aquel Imperio, el Arte de la Cartografía logró tal Perfección que el Mapa de una sola Provincia ocupaba toda una Ciudad, y el Mapa del Imperio, toda una Provincia. Con el tiempo, estos Mapas Desmesurados no satisficieron y los Colegios de

Cartógrafos levantaron un Mapa del Imperio, que tenía el Tamaño del Imperio y coincidía puntualmente con él.

(Borges 1975, 143)

The map is left to rot in the desert by the “Generaciones Sigüientes,” who understand “que ese dilatado Mapa era inútil” (143). It is a suggestive choice of intertext, not least because Borges’ labyrinthine, librarian mode (especially in “El Jardín de senderos que se bifurcan”) is sometimes considered a model of the hypertext (Manovich 2003, 15). Borges’s “Del rigor . . .” also highlights the association between map-making and representation, and the potentially absurd and tautological desire for exactitude. It may be a comment on scientific method, as the title indicates, but it is also surely a comment on artistic representation and verisimilitude, which entails both a claim to total knowledge (empire) and a preservationist but also domineering desire to capture things exactly (map). This is significant to the metafictional and self-referential mode in which Uribe’s book is written, and underscores his choice of the net rather than the map as the structuring image of his work: the fishing net/Internet avoids the expansionist, imperialist domination of space implied by the map, evoking both the local and the global, the physical and the virtual, the past and the present, a layered and complex space rather than just its two-dimensional representation.

A concern with both maps and map-making is first introduced by the narrator in the form of an anecdote about himself and his father. Shortly after the latter’s retirement from the sea, the narrator presented him with an atlas and a pen and asked him to draw a line showing the way to Rockall, a small island off the coast of Scotland where he used to fish. His father’s reaction is one of suspicious surprise: “[. . .] se quedó de piedra [. . .] Mostró desconfianza, como si otro patrón de pesca le estuviera pidiendo algún secreto del mar, el camino a una cala oculta” (43). With a “mano nerviosa” his father eventually traces a line revealing a secret that, but for the map and the pen, would have died with him; and it is precisely the thought that his father will one day die that assails the narrator as he observes the line he has drawn. The father’s suspicion and nervousness seem to owe themselves to the fact that “un patrón no enseña jamás sus cartas de navegación, cuando llega a puerto se lleva con él los rollos a casa” (43), but in the context of this scene between father and son it seems inexplicable. Why should the father react in this way to his son’s request? The father was himself responsible for drawing the first fishing maps of the area around Rockall, as the narrator remembers from his childhood: “Ellos tuvieron que cartografiar los mapas. Yo mismo recuerdo cómo trazaba mi padre las cartas en casa; imaginaba los fondos marinos de aquella zona con rotuladores azules, rojos y negros” (171–172). This description presents cartography as an act of writing, an inscribing of knowledge much more detailed and comprehensive than the crude line the narrator asks his father to trace across the atlas; the father’s suspicion perhaps concerns then to what use the knowledge will be put, as the allusion to another “patrón de pesca” indicates. Though the father’s response may be pragmatic rather than philosophical, the narrator both acknowledges and extends its implications: his own preservationist instinct, the one that drives him to ask his father to mark the way to Rockall, is complicated not only by the father’s sense of a loss of ownership but also by his own sudden intuition of mortality, as if in recognition of the fact that any act of preservation marks both an appropriation and an ending.

In a fine example of Uribe’s networking of ideas, this becomes significant to his concern with the balance between preservation and renewal necessary to guarantee the survival and reinvigoration of a minority language and its culture. The balance is a fragile one, requiring the sensitivity and lightness of touch proper to the blowing of fine glass (180) or the cultivation

of roses (194), and characteristic of Uribe's prose. The skills required for these crafts, as for fishing and good seamanship, resonate in the book for their common association with the pre-industrial (the narrator's father is himself associated with the adventurous seafaring of a romantic and artisanal age) and Uribe highlights this by associating such skills with inheritance rather than acquisition. The glass blower will excel at his craft because his forebears have taught him to know and love glass (180–181); the sailor will sail successfully because he knows and loves boats, the wind and the stars. Map-making, in this context, is an ambivalent process: it is a preservation of knowledge, but also a rationalisation of it. The graphic separation of knowledge from its source, the sense that the map makes knowledge available to others, and will last long after the man who drew it dies, breaks that chain of inherited tradition that is associated with craftsmanship, and breaks also the connection between the experience that gave rise to knowledge and the acquisition of that knowledge. Does this express an anxiety about the preservation of a language that relies on acquiring new speakers to survive, that relies, in other words, on a separation from its cultural history and tradition of inherited speech?

The narrator expresses the association between language and autochthonous culture most powerfully in his account of the compiling of the *Diccionario de los pescadores vizcaínos*, a highly conservationist enterprise that sought to capture, first in recordings and then in the dictionary itself, the vocabulary of Basque fishermen. Of course, what this emphasises is not just the conservation of a language but of a culture and craft traditionally associated with that language. One of the fishermen to be recorded, the narrator's uncle, is heard to say on tape that "antes el mar estaba llenos de peces, ahora de agua," a phrase the narrator interprets to mean, "Habrà técnica pero no hay peces, porque se ha pescado demasiado" (75). In the next paragraph the narrator reflects: "Cómo se hace un diccionario. Muchas veces me lo he preguntado. En la grabación se aprecia con claridad la técnica de Barrutia [the compiler]" (75). By means of the word *técnica*, "hyperlinked" from fishing to Barrutia's compiling of the dictionary, Uribe brings to mind again the technical knowledge associated with craftsmanship and the labour of love, and also directly unites the compiling of a dictionary of Basque fishing terms with fishing in a depleted sea. Even in translation the fisherman's vocabulary is specialised and unfamiliar: "El profesor enuncia una palabra, la mayor parte de las veces en castellano, y el tío la traduce al euskera del pueblo. Por ejemplo, cuando le pregunta 'sotavento,' el tío responde 'haixebekaldo,' y, si le dice 'barlovento,' entonces 'haixekaldi'" (75). The act of fishing, the language of fishing, and the language *of the language* of fishing are indivisible and perishing. And yet the conservation of this cultural history is both vital and precious, beyond monetary value:

[Nerea] trabaja en un banco. [. . .] un cliente, cada vez que ella lo atiende, le entrega un papelito con palabras antiguas escritas en él. "Hace tiempo que no he oído esta palabra," le dice, y a continuación le pide a Nerea que la guarde. El marino retirado le lleva palabras, refranes, nombres de peces. En el sitio donde se guarda el dinero él pone a salvo las palabras antiguas.

(154)

If the map figures a break in a community's inherited tradition and experience, in the same way that a grammar book might figure a break in the life of an autonomous linguistic community, its outward movement nonetheless presents opportunities for new kinds of connection and even reconnection. Uribe consistently evokes other minority European, especially Celtic

cultures and languages in relation to his own, and notes a legend shared by the Scots and the Basques derived from the Tower of Babel. This is the legend of Tubal, grandson of Noah, who according to chronicle brought the Basque language from Babel to the Iberian Peninsula, where he remained (25). Later, on a visit to Stornoway in Scotland, the narrator discovers that “los escoceses creían que la lengua de Tubal era el gaélico, igual que los vascos” (149). This shared tradition does a number of things: it marks the Basque language as very ancient, but belonging to a family of languages rather than existing in isolation, as commonly thought; it offers a genetic “mapping” of Celtic cultures that establishes new but also ancient connections not formerly understood (as BBC Wales reported in 2001, genetically speaking “the Celtic populations turn out to be statistically indistinguishable from the Basques”); it places the history of the Basque language in the context of diversity (Babel), but also rootedness (“se quedó a vivir” [25]); and it inscribes Basque history as legend and chronicle, in keeping with its ancient roots and oral traditions.

At a conference of writers in Estonia, the narrator tells us, the Welsh writer Meredid Puw Davies argued that for minority languages to make themselves heard they must live in the present and take advantage of technology, recognising that “[a]hora no se escribía únicamente para los miembros de la misma comunidad. Ahora el mundo era más pequeño” (101). Preservation is therefore a question of renewal, of adjustment to new ways of living and communicating. At a talk given at the University of Oxford in October 2014, Uribe stressed the importance of this openness in guaranteeing the survival of a language: Basques must not be possessive of their language, but must encourage more and more people to learn it. He explained that an “Euskaldun” is not necessarily a native speaker, but rather a person who is in possession of the language; and he suggested that this democratic concept of language allowed any speaker of Basque to become, in a sense, Basque. In the book, the map is again significant to this question. On a visit to the US in 2003, the narrator tells us that “la escritora neoyorquina Phyllis Levin me regaló la definición más bella de un idioma que he escuchado en mi vida” (29). Looking at a text in Basque, she notes the frequency of the letter x:

“Vuestra lengua parece el mapa del tesoro,” me descubrió. “Si desenfocas el resto de letras y percibes sólo las x, parece como si te guiaran por la ruta del tesoro.”

Me pareció que aquello era lo más bonito que se podía decir de un idioma que no conoces, que se asemejaba a un mapa del tesoro.

(29–30)

At the same talk in Oxford, the author explained that most Basque speakers are not born to the language, but have rather had to acquire it in a process of discovery, and this was for him the particular significance of the treasure map. If we return to the observations about map-making outlined previously, we could also argue that the image speaks to those questions of preservation and renewal, conservation and value, representation and communication, craftsmanship and knowledge, the passion of adventure and the labour of love, that give the novel its delicate focus.

Does this delicacy mean that the novel can bear no historical or ideological weight? Luisa Elena Delgado argues that the view from above allows it to reconcile differences too easily, smoothing over a history of violence in line with “esa cultura de consenso que asume que en una realidad compleja todo es inteligible y compatible:”

No me parece casual, en ese sentido, que la obra de Uribe se desarrolle durante un vuelo transatlántico, esto es, literalmente suspendida en el aire, lejos de las fronteras

concretas institucionales, pero también de los vínculos que marcan la pertenencia a uno y otro lugar, ideológico y geográfico. Es quizá sólo en el aire donde, hoy por hoy, su visión integradora de la identidad vasca puede tener lugar.

(2014, Kindle loc. 3307)

But as we have seen, the map and the web evoke not the flattening out of difference but rather the complex layering of time and space, according to which the local finds expression in the connections afforded by the global, precisely allowing for the creation of new networks with alternative centres. The novel is therefore less concerned with compatibility than it is with complex association; less with integration than the fragile balance between opposing terms; and it is less indebted to a national culture of consensus than it is to a transnational imaginary.

Najat El Hachmi, *L'últim patriarca*

In Najat El Hachmi's novel the associations between language and culture established by the other two authors are shaped by a concern with female emancipation in a migratory context. Written in two parts, the novel is narrated by a young Moroccan-born girl who first tells the story of her father, Mimoun, the violent, unpredictable, authoritarian, gambling, drinking, womanising eponymous patriarch, before relating her own coming of age. Her struggle to release herself from his influence is figured in linguistic terms, as the narrator immerses herself in Catalan language and literature as a means of escape and self-expression. Despite its difficult subject matter the novel is ironic and often funny, frequently bordering on the sarcastic. This tone of detachment helps to establish some distance between the narrator and her narration, suggesting she has come a long way in the interpretation of her experience; but in the best tradition of irony, it also generates a strong sense of ambiguity. A novel whose structure and principal intertexts – the Catalan dictionary and Mercè Rodoreda's *La plaça del Diamant* (1962) – suggest a narrative of cultural assimilation and female emancipation, it is at least partly destabilised by this ironic ambiguity.

The nameless narrator-protagonist moves to Barcelona with her parents and brothers when she is a young girl. Unlike her subjugated and abused mother, who rarely leaves the house and never learns to speak Catalan, the narrator is schooled in the Catalan language and becomes acutely aware in adolescence of the conflicting demands of her “esperit de rebel·lió” (II, ch. 14) and the cultural demands of home. Subjected like the rest of her family to the whims of her father, in a moment of crisis she turns to the Catalan dictionary in an attempt to relieve and express herself:

Per escapar del *poltergeist* [. . .] has de riure molt, fins a sentir que tens les costelles a punt de petar, o has de plorar molt, fins a sentir que t'has buidat, o has de tenir un orgasme, que, fet i fet, també és buidar-se. Jo encara no en sabia, de tenir orgasmes, al pare no li agradava que ningú plorés i a la mare no li agradava que ningú rigués. De manera que vaig començar a llegir, paraula per paraula, aquell diccionari de la llengua catalana. Tothom deia quina nena més intel·ligent, quina nena més estudiosa, però només era per buscar una de les tres coses.

(Part II, ch. 4, para. 1)

This is significant because, as Kathryn Cramer notes, “neither [the narrator's] mother nor father have any real command of Catalan (her mother hardly even speaks Spanish), and it is therefore in some senses a language of her own, giving her access to a world that is hidden

from them” (2013, 5). In addition, the dictionary not only represents her adoptive culture but also symbolises her education, which she achieves largely by reading. Though her reading of the dictionary – symbolic in some sense of all her other reading – can be interpreted as a feat of emancipation through education, the young narrator undertakes it almost unconsciously and with a misguided sense of what it can achieve, as her evocation of physical drives rather than conscious objectives illustrates.

The narrator first picks up the dictionary at a moment of extreme stress (II, ch 4) – her bullied and depressed mother appears to be starving herself to death – and ends, as she reaches Z, just before she embarks on her first serious romantic relationship with a man (II, ch 27). If her reading of the dictionary is an exercise in liberation, it is significant that it should end with an act of rebellion against her father and an adult assertion of control over her own life; but in fact both the rebellion and self-determination are illusory, ending in her marriage to a man no less unreliable and restrictive than her father. Though she never comments or gives up on her enterprise, her failure to find what she is looking for is reflected in her sampling of dictionary entries at the end of each chapter, where there is often more dryness than joy, more frustration than fascination, more obscurity than enlightenment: “*Daci, dàcia*, que és un adjectiu, *dació* que és una acció i *dacita* que és una roca” (II, ch. 5); “*Yperita*, iperita. *Ypressià – ana*, relatiu a l’*ypressià*” (II, ch. 26). Often she conveys meanings that seem to partially converge with her own feelings without giving them direct expression, as if maintaining the still repressed nature of her desires: the bitter mustard gas of the letter Y; the mysterious O of menstruation; the ironically pastoral images of R; the paternal and priestly P; the inhibiting cardiac glucose of U, the bathetic V of *va vana* and a herd of cows. The idea that a dictionary, of all texts, will provoke *inarticulate* self-expression and physical or emotional climax is both comically and poignantly expressive of the narrator’s desperate search for any means of escape; and to the extent that liberation is not achieved on reaching Z, the reading of the dictionary has been a failure.

The dictionary is not only emotionally sterile but sometimes also beyond comprehension: “Jo tot això no ho entenia, però ho llegia igualment, per veure com sonava” (II, ch. 4). On several occasions she fails altogether to interpret or communicate meaning: “és força difícil de definir” (II, ch. 9); “era massa complicat per llegir-me’n la definició” (II, ch. 13); “és molt complicat” (II, ch. 14); “és massa complicat” (II, ch. 18); “un terme massa complicat” (266). On other occasions she draws attention to the morphological similarity of semantically unrelated words, as if to highlight the arbitrariness of meaning: “*Taba*, astròleg. *Tabac*, que és una planta. *Tabac*, que és una cistelleta rodona; *tàbac*, que és un cop de puny” (II, ch. 21); “*Wagnerisme*, un corrent dramaticomusical. *Wagnerita*, un fluosofat de magnesi” (II, ch. 24). Of course, words are meaningless until they are articulated in context, as the apparently arbitrary listing of them implies; and they do not provide expression or release until they are meaningfully articulated. It is precisely the articulation of her cultural context, and of herself within it, that her father’s own arbitrariness makes so problematic. A good example of this is the narrator’s decision – having reached the letter M – to wear a Muslim headscarf, a decision initially in keeping with the impulsive devoutness of her father. Her father disapproves of the headscarf, despite the traditional modesty associated with it, and warns her not to wear it; the narrator defies him – partly because she thinks he must be joking, partly because her “esperit de rebel·lió” chooses to express itself “en les situacions menys esperades” (II, ch. 14) – and she is severely punished. How to articulate a context, and herself within in it, when it is regulated by the impossibly capricious terms of her father’s dominance? The decontextualized, arbitrary, often technical and obscure words of the dictionary help her neither to express what she feels nor to understand what she experiences, so though her consciousness is beginning

to develop thanks to the novels of Rodoreda and others, the symbolic power of the dictionary remains latent.

By the end of the novel the narrator has left her husband, and is living independently in a bedsit. But this has not rid her of the influence of her father, who pesters her constantly (II, ch. 38). Visited one evening by her uncle, an Islamic scholar on his way to a conference in Paris, she engages in anal sex with him and exposes their act to her father by means of the video entry system. The resonances of this are multiple: anal sex is the means by which Moroccan girls preserve their virginity for marriage, as we learn at some length in Part I; it is incestuous with an uncle, Mimoun's brother, the very one her father has always jealously suspected of an adulterous liaison with his wife; Mimoun was himself probably raped by his own uncle at the age of twelve, though this has never been openly discussed (ch. 6); and it is voyeuristic, evoking the Muslim taboo of the veiled woman, and the narrator's earlier paradoxical attempt to rebel against her father by wearing the headscarf. All these resonances are highly culturally specific; and where they cross with images of Westernised sexual behaviour, such as in the reference to the anal sex scene of *Last Tango in Paris*, they are humorously "brought home" (the narrator explains that, being Mediterranean, she and her uncle used olive oil in place of Marlon Brando's butter).

The release the narrator experiences through multiple orgasm, as she hovers between pleasure and pain, is nothing if not ambiguous. In its contrast with the difficult penetration and false orgasms of her previous sexual relationship, we can assume this "venjança en tota regla" (ch. 39) against her father to represent a personal triumph and a sexual liberation; but as a statement of cultural and gendered identity it is very difficult to read. For Cristián Ricci, the narrator reaffirms "una libertad que da por tierra con la tradición moral musulmana: rechazo a la monotonía del amor convencional y burla al honor. En términos foucauldianos la trasgresión deliberada propiciada por el 'discurso ilícito' que invita a deformar la realidad, consigna una clara afirmación de la sublimación concupiscente, lo demoníaco y lo prohibido" (2010, 79). But this sexual affirmation relies on a reclaiming of terms, and the reclaiming of terms is always a risky business; after all, the sexual act they perform belongs entirely to the system of patriarchal taboos and double standards it is also designed to undermine. Read positively, this act with her uncle brings together all the images of sexual hypocrisy and paranoia identified in the novel with patriarchy in the culturally specific form in which she has experienced it, and transmits them back to the patriarch in a spirit of rebellion and a bid for self-expression. Only by relaying the message to him in terms he can recognise – if not understand – will he receive its full force, and this guarantees that he will never again play the patriarch, "no pas amb mi" (II, ch. 39, final para).

For me, the image of the narrator in dubious sexual liaison with her uncle remains ironically ambiguous. But what does seem evident is that the inarticulacy of expressed emotion gives way at last to the articulation of contextualised meaning, in the form of the narration. If a child's first language is the one "in which personal involvement is expressed, and the second [is] the language of distance and detachment" (Pavlenko and Dewaele 2002, cited in Crameri 2013, 4), it is significant that the emotional and physical release of orgasm should be achieved in sexual liaison with a man belonging to the intimate world of her childhood. It is only by returning to the world of her first language that she can access the emotional and physical well-spring she had hoped to find in Catalan, which becomes rather the language of ironic distance that allows her to process her emotions and experiences intellectually (Crameri 2013, 7). It is interesting in this context that the final word of the novel, "estimada," should evoke not the father's violence, but his love; a notion itself charged with irony, but which also suggests that

her articulacy and rebellion come at an emotional cost. Arguably, the real winner in this novel is not the narrator but Catalonia itself; firstly, because its language and literature are conceived not in peripheral relation to the Spanish, but as emancipatory expressions of Western culture in their own right; and secondly, because the narrator's identification of herself as Catalan seems to uphold its civic model of national identity. But the ambiguity of the novel's ending also troubles and perhaps resists the rhetoric of assimilation, associating it with ambivalence and emotional loss.

Conclusion

These three works offer powerfully distinctive readings of the tensions surrounding local and linguistic identity in a globalised or migratory context, which is nevertheless highly particular to the multilingual constitution of Spain itself. In his challenge to US hegemony, Muñoz Molina posits fantasy and humour as liberating alternatives to new forms of cultural authoritarianism, but the novella protests too much, generating an uncomfortable blend of cosmopolitan ambition and nationalist nostalgia in the process. Uribe's book spins the most delicate of narrative webs around the question of local identity in a global context, finding in both craftsmanship and new technology an opportunity for survival and expansion. It is a creative response to the need, in Andreas Huyssen's words, to "focus on differential histories and deep cultural knowledge as they shape the incorporation of the global in local or regional economies and cultures" (2008, 11). El Hachmi stakes a bold claim for emancipation and inclusion in terms both gendered and cultural, while recognising the emotional cost of acculturation. All three works place a strong value on the idea of home, while recognising the complex transnational networks within which linguistic and cultural identity must operate.

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