Can Multilingualism Be a Radical Force in Contemporary Canadian Theatre? Exploring The Option of Non-Translation

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Recognizing the richness of multilingual theatre in Canada, this article argues that the choice of non-translation as the absolute staging of multilingual hospitality carries the promise of a more radical co-habitation and offers both critical and reparative encounters with bodies that resist mainstream recuperation. Beyond multicultural accommodation of diversity, non-translation as a politicized choice is examined through examples chosen from contemporary Asian Canadian and Afro-Caribbean Canadian drama, as well as Indigenous performance. Specifically, the article analyzes the deployment of multilingualism "from below" (Alison Phipps's term) in front of mainstream Anglophone audiences in such plays as debbie young and naila belvett's *yagayah.two.womyn.black.griots*, Betty Quan's *Mother Tongue*, and Monique Mojica's *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*. The decolonial practice of non-translation embraced by these playwrights contributes to the trend of "diversifying diversity" and promotes more balanced linguistic ecologies. Rather than softening the hard edges of difference in a global spread of equivalences, multilingualism "from below," associated with minoritized languages and invisibility, embraces radical heterogeneity and incommensurability, radically confronting the meaning of ethnicized, hyphenated multiculturalism. However, at the same time, these forms of multi-lingualism throw into high relief the selective cultural politics of translation that privileges Canada's official bilingualism.

Dans cet article, Karpinski souligne la richesse du théâtre multilingue au Canada tout en faisant valoir que le choix de ne pas s'appuyer sur la traduction pour mettre en scène un accueil multilingue porte la promesse d'une cohabitation plus radicale et permet des rencontres à la fois critiques et réparatrices avec des entités qui résistent à la récupération par des courants dominants. Plus qu'une conciliation multiculturelle de la diversité, la non-traduction comme choix politisé est examinée ici au moyen d'exemples tirés du théâtre contemporain canado-asiatique et canado-afro-caribéen, de même qu'à travers des spectacles autochtones. Karpinski analyse notamment la mise en œuvre du multilinguisme « d'en dessous » (une expression d'Alison Phipps) destiné au grand public anglophone par des pièces comme yagayah.two.womyn.black.griots *de debbie young et naila belvett,* Mother Tongue *de Betty Quan et* Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way *de Monique Mojica. La pratique décoloniale de la non-traduction adoptée par ces dramaturges participe de la tendance à « diversifier la diversité » et promeut un meilleur équilibre des écologies linguistiques. Au lieu d'arrondir les côtés rigides de la différence en ayant recours à une dissémination mondiale des équivalences, le multilinguisme « d'en dessous », associé aux langues minorisées et à l'invisibilité, adopte une hétérogénéité radicale et incommensurable et confronte de manière radicale le sens du multiculturalisme ethnicisé à particule. En même temps, ces formes de multilinguisme mettent en évidence les politiques culturelles discriminantes de la traduction qui favorisent le bilinguisme officiel du Canada.*

Despite the widespread co-presence of multiple languages, for the majority of Canadians monolingualism is perceived as the default position, much the same as national languages are viewed as bounded and unitary rather than fluid and heteroglot. Evidently, even in settler colonial and immigrant societies, where multilingual and multi-accented soundscapes abound, the centripetal pull of governmentality works towards suppression and homogenizing of linguistic difference. In Canada, official bilingualism confirms rather than disproves the monolingual grip of the modern liberal nation-state with its declared policy of multiculturalism without de facto multilingualism, the policy intended to promote the state's benign pluralism by means of public recognition of ethnic and cultural particularities. However, multilingualism itself is structured in relations of domination, and not all multilingualisms are created equal. In multilingual spaces, languages are deployed not just horizontally, that is, in synchronic contiguity, or next to each other, but also vertically, one above another, reflecting stratified histories and hierarchies of extra-linguistic agency and the socio-symbolic power of different groups. When trying to account for unequal vectors of cultural exchange and uneven flows of translation and non-translation that operate in contemporary multilingual theatre in Canada, where very little of local productions by linguistically minoritized immigrant, diasporic, and Indigenous communities ever gets translated into one of the two dominant languages or is moved to mainstream stages, we must pay attention to these stratifications that are produced at intersections of different legacies of settler colonialism and uneven pathways of migration and globalization.

This paper proceeds from the assumption that when "minor" languages are deployed on the Canadian stage, in transparent or non-transparent ways, something radical may happen. Can co-emergence and public materialization of these different languages expose the deficits of a politics of recognition, which is often dedicated to the containment and softening of the hard edges of difference? In particular, I argue that the choice of non-translation as the absolute staging of multilingual hospitality carries the promise of a more radical co-habitation and, through the "work of discomfort" (Kim 187), offers both critical and reparative encounters with bodies languaging[1] their stories in ways that resist mainstream recuperation. In this respect, my position distances itself from that of Julie Byczynski, who addresses a similar problem of non-translation from within the dominant paradigm of multicultural liberal-pluralist accommodation. She ponders the possibility of resistance to a dominant language and culture by leaving untranslated chunks of "minority" languages in plays about "immigrant experience," mounted for mainstream audiences. Significantly, worried about the risk of antagonizing presumably Anglophone viewers, she advises moderation, suggesting that the mere hint of "foreign" dialogue is sufficient to establish "an unmistakable presence of minority language and culture" (33).[2]

Following Alison Phipps, it might be useful to distinguish between multilingualism "from above," linked to economic privilege, free mobility, and commodity exchange, and multilingualism "from below," associated with "minor" languages, non-marketability, and invisibility. Mirroring global asymmetries, multilingualism from above comprises dominant majority languages (often belonging to former colonial powers) enjoying wide currency and spoken by transnational elites (financial, commercial, artistic, and academic), while multilingualism from below refers to those local languages and idioms that belong to Indigenous peoples, subalterns, immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers. Theoretically, one

might expect that proliferating these "minor" languages from the stage would trouble the dominant paradigms that have defined and confined the aesthetics, politics, and communicative patterns of Canadian multicultural theatre. Even a cursory look at this scene reveals its richness and historical complexity, on mainstream, fringe, and community stages. While "ethnospecific theatre" (Berger et al) that flourished from the early twentieth century well into the 1980s has transitioned from immigrant audiences to mainstream professionalism, especially as children of white European immigrants have become assimilated into the English-Canadian and French-Canadian theatre industry, for a long time such assimilation has been more difficult for racialized artists.[3]

Today's multilingual theatre manifests in diverse forms. On the one hand, we have Robert Lepage's large-scale, cosmopolitan, and multi-media experimentation, or such Dora-winning performances as *RETURN (The Sarajevo project)* and *UBUNTU (The Cape Town Project)* by Ahuri Theatre, which since 2005 has programmatically been mixing cultures and languages. On the other hand, we still witness the presence of community-based, grassroots cultural productions that explore differences across and within multilingual groups, such as the Toronto Hindustani Drama festival, organized for several years by the Indian diasporic playwright Danish Jawaid, who has also produced teleplays and radio plays. At the same time, since the establishment of the Native Theatre School in 1974 and Native Earth Performing Arts in 1982, Indigenous theatre has been in ascendance, integrating Indigenous languages into theatrical performances. One cannot ignore the difference in affects attached to the deployment of multilingualism within spaces occupied by marginalized groups: whereas the Canadian settler state has often supported heritage languages of its immigrant populations, it has adopted a genocidal approach in relation to Indigenous languages and cultures, amply evidenced in the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report on residential schools. As a result, out of an estimated fifty-two Indigenous languages only three—Inuktitut, Cree, and Ojibway-Anishinaabe—are not threatened with extinction today (Macfarlane 97). Consequently, the political and affective significance of sounding Indigenous languages from Canadian stages far exceeds the multicultural pattern of showcasing or honouring "diversity" and rather has to be seen as a vital means of survival. It fulfills the hope for Indigenous resurgence and for the possibility of healing and divesting of the hold of colonial power on wounded communities.

In order to explore a politicized choice of non-translation and its consequences, I focus on three selected examples of contemporary Asian Canadian, Afro-Caribbean Canadian, and Indigenous performance. I interrogate the deployment of untranslated multilingualisms from below in front of mainstream Anglophone audiences in Betty Quan's *Mother Tongue* (1995), debbie young and naila belvett's *yagayah.two.womyn.black.griots* (2001), and Monique Mojica's *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way* (2011). The appearance of these untranslated multilingual performances indexes three different decades when the cracks in the Canadian multicultural edifice began to show, revealing the disavowals of racism and racialization and the ongoing colonial exclusions of Indigeneity as the fault lines of multiculturalism. During the time spanned by these three multilingual, racialized productions, multiculturalist discourse has peaked, supported by state policies, institutional funding, and academic theorizing, and gradually started to lose hegemony, with the global scene getting more politically complicated and shifting toward what sociologist Steven Vertovec has labelled super-diver-

sity.[4] Initially touted as a progressive, liberal discourse, multiculturalism on the one hand has been met with a nationalist backlash (for instance, in Quebec) while on the other hand it has proven itself to be amenable to reactionary causes aligned, for example, with social conservatism and religious fundamentalism (as seen in the controversy over sharia law). The current situation in Canada is characterized by the co-existence and inter-mixing of different paradigms of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and super-diversity, each leaning toward a slightly different model of multilingualism. While cosmopolitanism traditionally privileges multilingualism from above (vide Robert Lepage's use of French, Spanish, German, and English in his productions), ethnicized multiculturalism is open to translated multilingualisms from below (for example such hugely popular plays as Ins Choi's *Kim's Convenience*, or Anusree Roy's *Pyaasa*), albeit positioned always in subordinate relation to the dominant culture(s). Characteristically, the latter model is premised on traditional binary notions of translation as a linguistic transfer between two discrete, relatively homogeneous monocultural entities. Finally, super-diversity favours more lateral, transversal, internally differentiated, and often non-translated multilingual contact and exchanges (e.g. Guillermo Verdecchia's *Fronteras Americanas*). Theatre as a microcosm encapsulates these different potentialities of multilingual co-emergence and participates in transnational transformations that affect the global linguistic landscape.

Similar to the assertion that multiculturalism can be used to support essentialist and reactionary politics, Yaseem Noorani argues that in the globalized post-Babel situation, multilingualism may function as the "soft" instrument of homogenization. Noorani claims that, paradoxically, the facility of present-day inter-lingual communication has been made possible largely due to the processes of modernization and nationalization—resulting in the linguistic and conceptual leveling of modern languages, which to some degree become infused with the ideologies of neoliberalism, democracy, capitalism, consumerism, individualism, discourses of rights, and gender equality. Languages increasingly resemble one another and employ similar communicative templates. Watching multicultural news channels or Hockey Night in Canada in Punjabi reveals the confluence of multilingual life-worlds and their adaptability to the dominant standards of intelligibility. Intolerant of opacity, Canadian multiculturalism has been premised on translatability and availability of difference for mainstream consumption. In this setup, dominant cultures and languages have constituted a hospitable (bilingual) framework open to accommodating the presence of various multilingualisms from below, provided that these minoritized languages conform to the "soft" model of alterity. Given this hegemonic pressure on interchangeability and equivalences, one has to view the option of non-translation adopted by the playwrights I discuss below as an attempt to embrace radical heterogeneity and incommensurability, challenging the meaning of ethnicized, hyphenated multiculturalism.

Significantly, all three of these theatrical events have met with not-always-favourable critical reception of their linguistic experimentation among mainstream reviewers and audience members who complained they could not understand the material.[5] Ellen Samuels, who applies a critical disability studies framework to Quan's play, describes *Mother Tongue* as "unperformable except to a uniquely trilingual audience" (19) that speaks English, Cantonese, and American Sign Language (ASL). She quotes some negative reviews that followed the Vancouver and Toronto productions as evidence that "the play was alienating

for its primarily white and hearing audiences" (27). Similarly, the issue of accessibility of Jamaican patois in *yagayah* comes up even in the introductory dialogue between ahdri zhina mandiela and Rachel Van Fossen that precedes the published version of the play, when Van Fossen admits that she "didn't 'understand' everything in a literal sense" (353). In "playwrights' notes on *yagayah,*" young and belvett mention that when they first workshopped the script in front of the audience in 1999, some people decided to leave "cause di subject matta did too heavy" (390). Finally, with regard to Mojica's performance, Jill Carter recalls its effects on non-Indigenous spectators, when in June 2010, during a lecture-demonstration at CUNY, several members of the audience were outraged because they found it inaccessible. Instead of reaffirming the power of the colonizing gaze back to settlers/colonizers, the performance refused to mirror victimization. It was powered by the "teachings and aesthetic principles emerging from cultural wellsprings absolutely *unknown* by [the audience] and absolutely uninfluenced by colonial disruption" (Carter 187). Such reactions highlight the awkwardness of multicultural becomings and the important "work of discomfort" (Kim 187) in staging both affective and critical encounters with bodies read as multilingual, racialized, Indigenous, queered, and disabled.

For Quan, young and belvett, and Mojica, the radical deployment of multilingualism as embodied performance has transformative potential, with the body emerging into being as a bearer of shared histories and collective traumas. By inviting us to think about performance more in terms of the body than identity, they counter multicultural aesthetics steeped in identity politics and the principle of authentic representativeness. For example, in a biographical blurb included with the play's text, young prioritizes embodiment by choosing description over identity labels, introducing herself as "a bald-headed. broad-nosed. thick-lipped. dark-skinned. blackbushooman" (350). Rather than gesturing to somewhere else, by means of metaphoric or metonymic substitution, these playwrights draw us back to the process of the body taking form and meaning on the stage. To play the character of Mother, Quan's script requires the physical presence of the body that can voice Cantonese, the language that is absent from the notation. The contours of the part are available in English transcription, as Quan explains in stage directions, to provide "flexibility with the character" (168) and accommodate the actor's ability with the language, thus creating openings for different actualizations in performance. Moreover, as Mojica's case in particular strongly illustrates, in this kind of embodied performance the body is a source of what Ric Knowles calls "documemory," where the performers are really drawing on their "bodily archive" (Susan Bennett's term). That archive contains both social and somatic inscriptions as it encompasses "the regulatory fictions" of identity (a body politic) and the flesh whose very physicality and autobiographical history signify a life lived in a particular embodiment (Bennett 35). In both instances the significance of performance as a body-based practice exceeds the individual, marking persons as belonging to the community and to the world, turning the body itself into a site of relationality, powerful affects, and epigenetic memory.[6]

Foregrounding intergenerational and linguistic separations, *Mother Tongue* presents scenes from the life of a Chinese immigrant family in Vancouver. The four characters communicate across several overlapping languages: English, Chinese/Cantonese, and American Sign Language (ASL). The widowed Mother, who came to Canada at the age of eighteen, speaks mostly in Cantonese, but also in accented English (although, as Quan notes, "not pidgin

English" [168]). She had to work hard doing piecework to raise her two children—the daughter Mimi, now twenty-two, and the son Steve, sixteen—and it is "too late" for her to learn English (182). With the exception of a few mostly untranslated Chinese words transcribed in English (*Jingwei*, *bi sin*, *Chinming*, *jai*, and *loong*), the parts spoken by Mother are scripted entirely in English, and her inner voice always speaks in English. Quan uses stage directions to signal which sections are to be performed in Cantonese (C) or repeated in English (E), as Mother often interjects sentences in English into her speech (176). Canadian-born Mimi, who clashes with Mother over her plans to study architecture in Kingston, has no Chinese accent. She also speaks some Cantonese, and uses some ASL when communicating with her younger brother Steve. She misses her dead Father and dreams of speaking "perfect Cantonese" (175). Steve lost his hearing at age eleven and is fluent in ASL, but has no Cantonese. He is also given two other registers: he occasionally speaks in his "inner voice" articulated in fluent English, in addition to speaking aloud in a voice that mimics what Quan in stage directions describes as "speaking as a deaf person would" (171; 187). There is also the fourth voice in the play, namely that of Father, who is heard by Mimi only as the haunting or ghostly voice speaking with a Chinese accent (173).

The Toronto and Vancouver productions of *Mother Tongue* did not translate any of the play's non-English dialogue in Cantonese or ASL, making the play challenging to different kinds of audiences. However, Quan embeds some innovative strategies in constructing the dialogue so as to triangulate among these language contexts. Throughout the text she uses parenthetical symbols indicating what language is spoken. While for the parts that are signed she recommends the involvement of a Deaf consultant or a certified sign language interpreter, she does not provide "a translation from the English to Chinese" (168) for the parts when the Mother speaks in Cantonese, allowing the actor to decide how much of the dialogue she wants to use, depending on language proficiency. Moreover, the daughter Mimi, who employs a hybridized language, functions as an unofficial translator within the play, bridging the languages spoken by her Mother and Steve. This sometimes takes the form of one language shadowing the other as she repeats or signs Mother's and Steve's words or phrases spoken in Cantonese and ASL respectively, constructing the context of intelligibility:

> MOTHER *(E)* I remember when your father died, you were just seven, and Steve, Steve was just two. *(C)* Still a baby. He doesn't remember your father, does he?
> MIMI He remembers him a bit; I don't know.
> MOTHER *(C)* Sometimes during the night you'd wake up screaming. You had terrible nightmares. Do you remember?
> MIMI Yes.
> MOTHER *(C)* Nightmares about your father. Do you still have them? Mimi?
> MIMI *(lying)* It doesn't matter. I don't have nightmares about him anymore. (180)

In this dialogue Mimi's responses incorporate enough of Mother's words that a non-Cantonese or a non-signing spectator has some grasp of the communication. At other times, all three languages are used simultaneously, with Mother speaking Cantonese, Mimi speaking English, Steve signing, and Father's voice coming from the side of the stage or done in voice-over, as in the scene when they retell the story of the Jingwei bird (174).

Language creates demarcations and spatial boundaries, which are physically materialized on the stage through the use of red (Mother), blue (Steve), and white (Mimi) light associated with different characters (Rodgers 175). Moments of misrecognition and miscommunication, when the characters do not understand one another, mirror the position of monolingual audience members. But despite privileging English, evident in the theatrical productions that neither offered sign language translation of the spoken parts for non-hearing viewers nor provided Cantonese translation from English for Cantonese-speakers in the audience, the multilingual performance produces a tangible estrangement effect that unsettles the expectations of multicultural intelligibility. Invoking Ngugi Wa Thiongo's view of performance space as always traversed by vectors of power, including the political power of the state, Jenna Rodgers observes that "Minorities in Canada trying to carve spaces for themselves within the national theatre scene are faced with the dilemma of subscribing to the prescribed formula of theatricalized multiculturalism" (178). This formula imposes a pedagogical imperative of educating mainstream spectators about "minority" cultures and ethnic audiences about their own. However, *Mother Tongue*'s non-transparencies resist such multicultural pedagogies, allowing its audiences and even performers to experience unfamiliar soundscapes and sign-scapes.

Quan's play also reminds viewers that language is deeply rooted in corporeality, particularly through Steve, who uses his embodiment to communicate by signing ASL and mouthing words. For Steve, speaking without hearing is an embodied process, one that involves the feeling of air-becoming-voice coming from inside his body: "the movement of the throat, the exhalation of air as it forms into sounds as it forms into words. Air forming into sounds I can't hear. Into words I can't speak. Into sentences no one will listen to" (171). Rejected by Mother, he urges her to look at him and assures her that he has not "forgotten how to listen" (187). He has the memory of her voice lodged in his body, and when she speaks, "The vibration crosses [his] spine [… His] body hears [the] sounds" (187). While Steve's plea to look at him may resonate with the demands of recognition voiced by ethic, racialized, and immigrant bodies, affect exceeds politics in this theatrical space. The play's phenomenological concern with issues of perception and listening to multilingual sounds and vibrations appeals to the performers and spectators alike—inviting different bodies to open to other bodies. Moreover, in encoding the racialized, Asian Canadian body through muteness and deafness, Quan not only provokes questions about the status of immigrant languages and accented speech vis-à-vis exclusion and marginalization, but also in a more nuanced way, according to Ellen Samuels, revisits the political issue of whether people with disabilities, and specifically Deaf people, constitute an (ethnic) minority under Canada's Multiculturalism Act.[7] As Samuels writes, referencing Bakhtin's concept, by virtue of its multilingualism, "*Mother Tongue* participates in a recent trend toward heteroglossic theatre" (25), disrupting the hegemonic assumptions and expectations of its audience, even at the risk of linguistic alienation.

My next example, young and belvett's *yagayah*, is a stage duet between two Jamaican women, the working class mary and the slightly more affluent imogene, set in Kingston and Montreal. It spans a series of vignettes showing their relationship, from childhood, when they are seven and eight and imogene is abused by her uncle, to their separation at sixteen and seventeen, when imogen's father sends for her from Canada, and their reconnection at twenty-one and twenty-two, when pregnant mary makes a phone call to imogen, who has

stopped writing to her. The episodic, non-linear structure of the play is punctuated by the insertion of such hybrid elements as Jamaican children's rhyming games (emmanuel road); dub poems ("singularity" and "mary's pregnancy"); a spoken word poem "birtrite"; a retelling of Creole folktales based on Yoruba deities yemoja and ogun; a mock re-enactment of a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*; fragments of pop songs; and letters exchanged by the characters. Such braiding and syncretism hark back to the anti-mimetic, anti-Eurocentric tradition of Caribbean discourse (Glissant) that has evolved in the African diasporas as a result of multiple displacements and forced migrations of the Africans, beginning with the rupture of the Middle Passage to a long history of immigration from the islands—a motif which is also present in mary and imogen's dreams of a better life abroad. The pattern of the succeeding scenes, with its rhythms and fragmentation, expresses the African diasporic consciousness of movement, process, and dislocation, transposed into an aesthetic form that can bring these multiple histories into a creative juxtaposition.

The dialogues and monologues are written almost entirely in Jamaican patois, which Edward Kamau Brathwaite calls the "nation language." It has been embraced to challenge the primacy of standard or "proper" English perceived as capable of articulating only Eurocentric experience, alien to the Afro-Caribbean consciousness. The language of the dispossessed and marginalized, Jamaican patois, or Caribbean demotic, is the product of creolization, described as "the unceasing process of transformation" (Glissant 142), a historical and linguistic fusion that characterizes Caribbean cultures in their openness and receptiveness to many influences. Edouard Glissant and Braithwaite similarly argue that French and English as imperial monolanguages can never function as an unproblematic means of self-expression for postcolonial or Indigenous peoples. These are not only the languages of conquest and oppression, but they also render the non-European standpoints and experiences invisible, unspeakable, and unthinkable. Previously denigrated as substandard, the rich, creolized nation language has several affective functions, expressing group allegiance and values, and functioning as a signifier of resistance, providing links to African diasporic histories and to Africa itself. In the performance, patois captures the social and psychic toll of diasporic displacement (in Montreal, imogene speaks no French but also "no proper English" [368]); it also becomes a subversive tool for rewriting Shakespeare in Jamaican patois. But young and belvett claim their right to move fluidly in and out of different linguistic contexts when they use code-switching (in imogen's letters to mary) or recast the parts spoken by mary and imogen as ogun and yemoja in the poetic "standard" English.

Furthermore, *yagayah* as a collaborative performance grounded in Afro-Caribbean cultural traditions adds another layer to this history of linguistic creative resistance by reinventing dub from an Afro-gynocentric or womanist perspective. Rooted in the nation language, dub poetry is "[t]he rhythm-driven, embodied, and performance-based poetic form" that emerged in Jamaica in the 1970s and 1980s, "deeply influenced by the revolutionary and celebratory Black politics," Bob Marley's reggae and Rastafarianism (Knowles, "To Be Dub"). debbie young is the daughter of anita stewart, who was a pioneering dub poet in Jamaica (and whose name she later adopted when she became known as d'bi young anitafrika). Moreover, *yagayah* was first workshopped and directed under the mentorship of Jamaican-born ahdri zhina mandiela, founder of the b current company and a dub theatre practitioner, who helped to launch young's career.

Like their Jamaican female predecessors such as Louise Bennett and anita stewart, as well as other contemporary dub poets including Lillian Allen, Afua Cooper, or Motion (Wendy Braithwaite), young and belvett reclaim dub from its largely masculinist roots, injecting it with explicitly womanist content and messages. Womanism is the term introduced by African American writer Alice Walker to celebrate Black women's strength, transnational solidarity, and resistance, as well as their distinct intersectional experiences of marginalization based on gender, race, class, and heteronormative regulation of sexuality. The womanist standpoint is repeatedly voiced in the play, which celebrates the beautiful friendship between two Black women who in their childhood doll playing dream of being strong and man-free:

> **imogene**
> well mi play paulette an she nuh guh have nuh man inna di house an nuh uncle. paulette is going to be one big oomaan yuh know mary. big an strong di man dem fraid of har.
> **mary**
> no man nah guh fraid of suzette yuh know. mi aguh jus tell dem she, yuh si di cooking an di cleaning, an di looking afta di whole heap a pickney dem, dem mus duh all a dat while mi free fi duh what mi want fi duh. suzette nah go let nobady tie har down, neither pickney, nor man. (385)

They not only fight back against the abuses of their bodies, but also envision the radical possibility of self-love and erotic love between Black women, articulated in terms of the mythic romance of yemoja and ogun. At the same time, by adopting Sojourner Truth's "ain't i a oomaan" (373) in the nation language, they put their own stamp on Black feminism and take an oppositional stance in relation to Western feminism. After reading Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem in Canada, imogen comes to the conclusion that the women's movement only serves the "liberation of the white middle-class woman" (373). She develops a politicized consciousness that leads her to solidarity with other oppressed groups through awareness that white colonialism has stolen the land from Indigenous peoples (368).

In emphasizing female creativity, friendship, and resilience, the creators of *yagayah* develop forms of empowerment that womanize and queer Afro-Caribbean theatrical discourse, drawing on the tradition of "griots"—west African storytellers and keepers of oral histories of their people. They attempt to elaborate a theatrical methodology that would remain conscious of a "symbiotic relationship" with their communities and "the responsibilities that accompany that relationship" vis-à-vis the rest of society (Knowles, "To Be Dub"). In her later statement, young, now performing as d'bi young anitafrika, frames her practice through the four principles of dub poetry learned from her mother. They include rhythm, political content and context, language, and orality, to which she adds sacredness, integrity, and urgency (qtd. in Knowles, "To Be Dub"). She is developing what she calls "a comprehensive eco-system" (93) that would bind the artist/storyteller, the stories to be told, the choices of how to tell these stories, and to whom to tell the stories, based on the recognition of the socio-political and socio-economic effects of these stories on everyday life and on the need for accountability and responsibility to the artist's communities.

The choice of patois and non-translation in *yagayah* is aimed against regimes of linguistic standardization that work as a form of subjugation and control of "substandard" dialects

perceived as languages that get "no respect" (Lippi-Green 43). Such linguistic stratification runs parallel to the ongoing devaluation of Black lives and discrimination against Black bodies in the North American and European diasporas, which makes its way into the play in the form of denigrating, racist stereotypes of Jamaicans, unemployment, and entrapment in the cycle of violence. Consequently, to use the language of lower social prestige vis-à-vis mainstream audiences is a political decision, aimed at decolonizing the oppressive structures of representation embedded in English as the language of settler-colonial domination. The situation of diglossia with its hierarchy of "superior" and "inferior" Englishes that differentially mark their historically racialized bearers must be distinguished from the verticality of the relationship between English and immigrant languages illustrated in Quan's play, where a shift in languages in immigrant families gives rise to the need for intergenerational translation. Creolization, on the other hand, can be related to the non-hegemonic and celebratory practices of cross-breeding, creative invigoration, and transformation, which preserve traces of heterogeneity and heteroglossia rather than insisting on the erasure or fetishization of difference. Through its blended Canadian / Afro-Caribbean / womanist aesthetics, *yagayah* transcends the narrow nationalist contexts of both Canadian multicultural and Caribbean masculinist traditions, adopting a transnational, Afro-Caribbean, embodied, diasporic perspective.

Finally, Monique Mojica's *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way* represents another case of the strategic use of multilingual non-translation, forcing the audience to suspend their epistemic paradigms and accept the limitations of their familiar theoretical frameworks. Descended through her maternal grandfather from the Indigenous Guna people of Panama, Mojica in *Chocolate Woman* interweaves her personal experiences with stories from Guna cosmologies, including Sky Woman's cosmic fall, and origin-stories about the Youngest Daughter from the Stars. Far from being a nostalgic or idealized return to some "authentic" Indigeneity that preceded colonization, Mojica's process-based project is artistically innovative, liberatory, and oriented toward Indigenous futurity. It has emerged from several years of collaborative workshops conducted with other Indigenous artists, including Cree director Floyd Favel and Guna designer and cultural consultant Oswaldo DeLeón Kantule. Workshopping the play was a rigorous process of acquiring internal understanding and investigating different possibilities of making connections within and across multiple archives such as the human body, Guna traditions of a textile and narrative art of *molas* (traditional embroidered panels of a blouse worn by women), Guna pictographs and medicinal chants, objects on the stage, fabric design on silk banners, and oral and written texts translated back-and-forth between English, Spanish, and Guna in the course of a recursive reworking of the script. The performance also involved the constant presence on the stage of Mojica's mother, Gloria Miguel, a co-founder of Spiderwoman Theatre, who personifies the ancient grandmothers of Earth and Sky. Positioned next to each other, Mojica and Miguel embody a corporeal intergenerational connection: biological, genetic, cultural, political, affective, and symbolic—as a mother-daughter couple, Indigenous women descended from the territory of Guna Yala, and performers of Guna creation stories.

This intricate process of developing the play tapped into the unconscious layers of the performer's body, allowing for the emergence of latent affects and corporeal connection to ancient cosmologies. For Mojica the body is a repository of ancestral memory: "our bodies

are our libraries—fully referenced in memory, an endless resource, a giant database of stories" ("Stories" 16). She talks elsewhere of her own personal and artistic trajectory that "transforms amnesia through stories drawn from conscious memory, muscle memory, blood memory, then births organic texts, allowing [her] to emerge trusting the Indigenous knowledge encoded in [her] dreams, in [her] waking visions, and in [her] DNA" ("Chocolate" 160). Her philosophy of organically generating texts through a bodily-discursive process ("Chocolate" 166) gestures toward a Maturana-like recognition that humans are both biological and cultural, leading a hybridly organic and discursive existence. Participation in the performance required a suspension of disbelief and an epistemological shift that accepts the reality of not knowing, or knowing intuitively, pushing the spectators out of their habitual comfort zones. Mojica's process changes a Western-centric understanding of embodiment: the body is not a discrete individual entity, but a site of affective emergence of collective memory, mobile in time and space, a site of porosity between subjects. Memory-work is affective, linked to feeling/thinking but also moving along the less recognized paths that may be mysterious to us and that exceed conventional understandings based on emotional or rational recall. Reconnection to such hidden latencies fuels the reparative work of the performance, allowing it to reinscribe broken continuities and recuperate decolonized knowledges.

While workshopping the performance, Mojica decided to incorporate more of the Guna language (Delugaya), feeling it was important to physically re-embody language. By voicing the lost mother tongue from the stage she enacts the process of literally dislodging colonialism from the body and accessing deeper resources buried under colonial detritus. For her, like for her collaborator Favel, language embedded in the body is a conduit of intergenerational memory and continuity:

> The sound of our native languages on stage is a totally different experience of theatrical sound from English. The voice immediately gets more rooted in the body, it is richer and more musical, and a whole different mood is evoked. Present in the immediate words are the ancestors, which go back generation by generation, right back to the day our language bubbled up from the springs and whispers of the trees and grass. (Favel 9)

To protect this shared connection to the land and the community of origin and to preserve the integrity of the sacred myths, the Guna stories had to be abstracted and obfuscated, presented "as if through the smoke screen of Chocolate Woman's smudge" (Mojica, "Chocolate" 166). Mojica's choice of non-translation is consistent with performance as an event that de-emphasizes transparent meaning and shifts focus onto process and transformation. By opting for the aesthetics of non-transparency to protect the sacred, she escapes entrapment within the discursive categories and frames imposed by white settler-colonial society and its dominant language. Similarly, Favel talks about his difficulty of working in English as a language foreign to this land, unlike Indigenous languages not rooted in "this part of the world," with its foreign structures inhospitable to "the whole heart and spirit of a people's soul" (8). Hence speaking Cree on stage is a political stance of decolonizing a mental territory and "using the theatre to develop and rejuvenate our culture" (Favel 11).

At the same time, both Mojica and Favel are aware of the challenges faced by Indigenous artists who include elements of their original languages in their works. As Favel jokingly spec-

ulates about staging a play totally in Cree, "my audience would be severely limited ... My box office would suffer and I would wind up with a deficit, probably get my funding cut, then where would I be, probably just mumbling to myself in my own language, cussing at my business practice" (8). In a different vein, Mojica and another Indigenous performer, Billy Merasty, also talk about the problem of performing in Cree for non-Native audiences who cannot understand the language. Even though the performers rely on body language and visual images to do the work of emotional translation, Mojica and Merasty agree that "listening to other languages, or accents or dialects" can be channeled as an effective strategy of decentering and decolonizing the minds of dominant speakers of English ("In the Mother Tongue" 43), while also inviting non-Indigenous audience members to respect what is unknowable and untranslatable. Yet, according to Merasty, the incommensurability of English and Indigenous languages remains, and "what you're giving can't be fully translated—so there's always something left behind" (40). Significantly, although the Guna language, if left untranslated, exposes the inadequacy and limitations of the spectators' cultural knowledge, it is not necessarily the case for Indigenous audiences who may experience a sense of community and connection without being able to speak the language.

In reuniting Indigenous aesthetics, cosmologies, and epistemologies, Mojica's project inscribes itself in a decolonial tradition that calls for performing a programmatic delinking from Western epistemologies and aesthetics. As a type of critical theory, decoloniality opens up the possibility of re-constructing "silenced histories, repressed subjectivities, subalternized knowledges and languages" (Mignolo 451). Indigenous and de-colonial scholars have written about the continuing grip of the modernity/coloniality paradigm as the most general form of global domination of the symbolic sphere, persisting beyond the end of political colonialism and making it almost impossible to feel and think outside of Western rationality (Quijano 170). Mojica's embodied performance of languaging Guna stories confounds all kinds of traditional binaries underpinning Western knowledges that separate art from ritual, tradition from modernity, and spiritual from material bodies. Such binaries constrain our ability to imagine the whole heterogeneous range of other practices of being and knowing. Some concepts we encounter in Mojica's work—for example, the need to embrace non-translation and not-knowing as legitimate epistemic stances, or using body memory and Indigenous ontologies as valid sources of knowledge—pose serious challenges to Western-oriented audiences. In particular, the idea of inhabiting and being inhabited by language throws into crisis common-sense categories steeped in Eurocentric thinking. Mojica often quotes Indigenous linguist Troy Richardson, who suggests that texts written in English by Indigenous writers who may have lost their ancestral tongues are nevertheless inflected by rhythms and syntactical elements that resemble the ghosts of languages which they no longer speak but which "inhabit their bodies and speak through them" (Mojica and Knowles, "Introduction to Staging" vi).

To conclude, I would like to return to my initial question of whether multilingualism can be a radical force in Canadian theatre. All three cases examined here, in harnessing multilingualism from below with the option of non-translation, offer different ways of refusing reterritorialization and containment within multicultural, liberal-pluralist, and settler-colonial frames. Non-translation functions here as a form of resistance to mainstream audiences' expectations of transparency and stories of victimhood that the immigrant, racialized, and

Indigenous performers' bodies are supposed to deliver. *Mother Tongue*, *yagayah*, and *Chocolate Woman* are complex assemblages—in the Deleuzian sense of multiply coded, complexly ordered, and relationally linked systems of articulations—generating affects that bind together the performers, the audience, their ancestors, and their communities. The performances co-implicate each group in the being of others and create relational spaces where different languages can appear to one another. In their deployment of non-translated multilingualism from below, these playwrights not only contribute to the trend of diversifying diversity, but invite their audiences to participate in a form of decolonial delinking from Western-centric epistemological paradigms. The non-transparencies of multilingual performance require that the viewers accept the limits of knowability and abandon their obsession with intelligibility and fixing meaning, as they allow themselves to be folded into the affective relations that connect different bodies and environments. Consequently, such embodied multilingual performances promote more balanced linguistic ecologies, that is, the synergistic and life-sustaining coexistence of various languages and the worldviews contained in them.

Notes

1 Languaging is a term first developed by Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana in his book *Biology and Cognition* (1970). It has recently been embraced in affect studies to convey the understanding of language as a whole-body, affective, socio-culturally enacted activity of sense making.

2 In all fairness, Byczynski also warns about the dangers of exoticizing and "re-inscribing otherness."

3 Berger, Yoon, and Grajewski list numerous multicultural/multilingual theatre initiatives in Canada that sprung up between the 1930s and 1990s and have either fallen out of existence or continued staging plays. These ethnic theatre initiatives included such languages as Ukrainian, Yiddish, Italian, Hungarian, Finnish, Lithuanian, Czech, and Cantonese. Similarly, the history of Black theatre goes back to the nineteenth century. Since the early 1980s, urban centres such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal have been host to multilingual theatre activities in the Turkish, Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, Latin-American, Iranian, South Asian, Caribbean, and African communities.

4 Vertovec uses the term to account for the new intensities and complexities of postmodern global diversity that no longer fits a familiar multicultural framework premised on the existence of multiple unitary or hyphenated bounded identities and nation-states. The porosity of bodies and new patterns of mobility—of people, ideas, images, capital, goods, and information—have created further diversifications within communities and triggered new global restratifications. At the same time, as new openings for flow and interchange have emerged, some boundaries separating populations have been tightened, with increased surveillance and ideological policing.

5 The whole range of such reactions has been identified by Byczynski: from feelings of alienation, to surprise, frustration, bewilderment, and boredom—all of which may jeopardize the mainstream audience's positive reception of the play.

6 Loosely speaking, epigenetic memory refers to the transgenerational retention, on the body's cellular and molecular levels, of the impact of environmental stresses and collective trauma and suffering.

7 Similar tensions resurface in the recent Toronto production by Cahoots Theatre and Theatre Passe Muraille of the Deaf playwright Adam Pottle's play *Ultrasound*, which raises important questions for the Deaf community.

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