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TESI DI DOTTORATO

*Marlene NourbeSe Philip and Linton Kwesi Johnson:
Sociolinguistic Analysis and Translation Issues*

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*Alla mia famiglia,
ma soprattutto a te, Papà,
che sei ovunque, in me.
I have got you under my skin.*

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Introduction

United by the will of giving to the Caribbean legacy and language the prestige they deserve, Marlene NourbeSe Philip and Linton Kwesi Johnson constitute a fascinating task for any scholar who approaches their work. The project is divided into three chapters plus a closing paragraph that summarizes the outcome of the work.

The first chapter is, in turn, divided into three parts: in the first part Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis are defined, and the pioneers, the most relevant scholars of the disciplines are introduced. The second part deals with the Caribbean socio-cultural and linguistic development and wants to provide a guideline towards the birth of a Caribbean Postcolonial Literature. In the third, Postcolonial writing and translation issues are examined in detail: the attempt is to uncover all the writing strategies adopted by postcolonial writers in general, and how these texts prove to be highly challenging when translated from ‘english’ into any other language.

The second chapter, titled ‘Marlene NourbeSe Philip: A Geography of Voices’, is made of three parts: part one is made of two introductory sections, the first to the style and the poetic of the author, the second to the oral tradition behind NourbeSe Philip writing; part two, titled ‘Leafing *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*’, provides a multi-perspective analysis – sociolinguistic, computational, literary analysis – of her book; part three deals with *Zong!*, her latest book so far, characterized by whimsical writing strategies that will be the core of the closing remarks, in which the theme of untranslatability is developed.

Chapter three, titled ‘Linton Kwesi Johnson: Dub, Language and Riots’, is divided into three parts, or rather, into three decades – Seventies, Eighties, Nineties Verses. For each decade, some emblematic songs are analysed and some of them translated into Italian. Particularly interesting in this chapter are the analysis of Jamaican language and the investigation of the political issues behind the poems/songs.

The whole work is focussed on translation and (un)translatability into Italian of some of the books in which the writers play with the possibilities of language. The closing remarks paragraph, ‘Until the End of the Word’, wants to be both a conclusive reflection on the outcome of the whole work and to highlight how the issue of untranslatability constitute a further incentive for the translator, who will be allowed to enhance the text, unveil stories hidden in the interstices, play with the text and turn it into something new.

Chapter 1 - Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis And Critical Discourse Analysis

1.1 Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics as an academic field of study developed in the latter part of the last century. Basically, sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society, useful to understand how the way we speak changes in different social contexts and to reveal the social relationships in a given community. The term “sociolinguistics” was apparently coined in 1939 after the title of an article by Thomas C. Hodson, *Sociolinguistics in India*, published in the journal *Man in India*.¹ In linguistics, the term was first used by Eugene Nida in the second edition of his *Morphology*; yet, the term is often attributed to Haver Currie, who himself claimed to have invented it.

Bernard Spolsky, in *Sociolinguistics and the Sociology of Language*², writes about the start of sociolinguistics as a new field of study in 1964 at the Linguistic Institute in Bloomington. On the occasion, the fathers of sociolinguistics attended the event: William Labov, John Gumperz, Dell Hymes, Charles Ferguson and Joshua Fishman above all. One among the most important qualities of language sociolinguistics is interested in, and the most relevant for this work, is the so-called “linguistic variation”, a way to express social belonging through particular uses of language at any linguistic level (lexical, morphologic, syntactic etc.):

Sociolinguists use the term *variety* (or sometimes *code*) to refer to any set of linguistic forms which patterns according to social factors. Variety is a sociolinguistic term referring to language in context...a set of linguistic forms used under specific social circumstances...Variety is therefore a broad term which includes different accents, different linguistic styles, different dialects and even different languages which contrast with each other for social reasons³.

¹ H. Currie, 1980, “On the Proposal of Sociolinguistics as a Discipline of Research”, in *Language in Society*, Queen Mary University, London, 9(03), pp. 407-411.

² B. Spolsky, 2011, “Ferguson and Fishman: Sociolinguistics and the Sociology of Language”, in R. Wodak, B. Johnstone & P. Kerswill (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, SAGE, London, pp.11-24.

³ J. Holmes, 2013, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, Routledge, London, p.6.

1.1.1 William Labov

Probably, the first variationist was William Labov, now Professor of Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, who participated with lectures and papers on what is now known as the field of variationist sociolinguistics, namely the study of variation in language due to social factors. Particularly, Labov produced clues of how this variation was highly structured in his 1963 study on *Martha's Vineyard*⁴, of which a brief summary follows:

Martha's Vineyard is an island lying about 3 miles off New England on the East Coast of the United States of America, with a permanent population of about 6000. However, much to the disgust of a number of locals, over 40,000 visitors, known somewhat disparagingly as the 'summer people' flood in every summer.

[...]

In his study, Labov focused on realisations of the diphthongs [aw] and [ay] (as in mouse and mice). He interviewed a number of speakers drawn from different ages and ethnic groups on the island, and noted that among the younger (31-45 years) speakers a movement seemed to be taking place away from the pronunciations associated with the standard New England norms, and towards a pronunciation associated with conservative and characteristically Vineyard speakers, notably the Chilmark fishermen. The heaviest users of this type of pronunciation were young men who actively sought to identify themselves as Vineyarders, rejected the values of the mainland, and resented the encroachment of wealthy summer visitors on the traditional island way of life. Thus, these speakers seem to be exploiting the resources of the non-standard dialect. The pattern emerged despite extensive exposure of speakers to the educational system; some college-educated boys from Martha's Vineyard were extremely heavy users of the vernacular vowels.⁵

In 1969, Labov published an essay entitled *The Logic Of Nonstandard English*⁶ in which he provided a critical analysis of the traditional education system in the US, whose school programs are grounded on an unfounded criterion of cultural and linguistic discrimination toward the culturally and verbally deprived black children.

⁴ W. Labov, 1972, *Sociolinguistic Patterns (No. 4)*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

⁵ Language In Use

<http://www.putlearningfirst.com/language/research/vinyard.html> (accessed 2 July 2014).

⁶ W. Labov, 1969, *The Logic of Non-Standard English*, Georgetown Monographs on Language and Linguistics, Georgetown University Press, Washington, 22(1), pp.1-31.

Labov highlights that such a gap is an effect of the caste system in the American society, which he calls a colour marking system, thus retracing the racist path on which society was - and still is – structured and that will be widely developed in this work, especially in the chapter about Marlene NourbeSe Philip. In this essay, Labov criticizes the inadequacy of educational psychologist who, themselves deprived of the necessary linguistic knowledge, promoted the dangerous myth of verbal deprivation based on a genetic inferiority of black children. In particular Labov critically examined two approaches,

Children are treated as if they have no language of their own in the preschool programs put forward by Bereiter and Engelmann (1966). The linguistic behavior of ghetto children in test situations is the principal evidence for their genetic inferiority in the view of Arthur Jensen (1969).⁷

Particularly interesting is the first part of the essay, ‘Verbality’, in which Labov recognizes that the speaking difficulties encountered by lower-class children (who lack of a paternal figure who provide a steady income to the family) are due to a cultural deprivation arisen from a total alienation from school systems. Indeed, the children Labov addresses represent the basic vernacular culture, grown up in the streets of South Central Harlem ghetto, whose cognitive and verbal abilities are developed in the street. These children rarely interact with adults, even more rarely read; they are not allowed to broaden their cultural horizons by, for example, interacting with white population, namely, the educated side of society.

⁷ Ivi, p. 2.

In support of this, Labov reports a study carried by Sigmund Bereiter, who,

In his work with four-year-old Negro children from Urbana, [Bereiter] reports that their communication was by gestures, 'single words', and 'a series of badly-connected words or phrases', such as 'They mine and Me got juice'. He reports that Negro children could not ask questions, that 'without exaggerating . . . these four-year-olds could make no statements of any kind.' Furthermore, when these children were asked 'Where is the book?', they did not know enough to look at the table where the book was lying in order to answer. Thus Bereiter concludes that the children's speech forms are nothing more than a series of emotional cries, and he decides to treat them 'as if the children had no language at all'. He identifies their speech with his interpretation of Bernstein's restricted code: 'the language of culturally deprived children . . . is not merely an underdeveloped version of standard English, but is a basically non-logical mode of expressive behavior' (Bereiter et al 1966: 113).⁸

The experiment was carried out by interviewing children in two different contexts: in the first a white adult interviews a child in a New York City school, in the second a black adult interviews two children living in the same neighbourhood, thus who know each other and, most important, know the interviewer. The mode of expression of the children interviewed, from a Standard English and hostile situation to a non-standard and friendly one, changed from a list of monosyllables to a fluent conversation. This confirmed how cultural constraints affect the behaviour and the verbal abilities of a child, regardless the complexion. Indeed, Labov concludes:

It means that the social situation is the most powerful determinant of verbal behavior and that an adult must enter into the right social relation with a child if he wants to find out what a child can do.

⁸ Ivi, p. 4.

1.1.2 John Gumperz

If Labov is thus regarded as the founder of the variationist linguistics, John Gumperz is considered the first interactional sociolinguist, a discipline who goes far from the structuralist attempts to explain language with abstractions and focuses on speech acts. In the preface to his 1982 book *Discourse Strategies*, Gumperz summarizes his first decade of scholar research taking him apart from the Labovian approach:

This book seeks to develop interpretative sociolinguistic approaches to the analysis of real time processes in face-to-face encounters. It grew out of approximately ten years of field studies of verbal communication in India, Europe and the United States, originally intended to answer questions and test hypotheses arising from earlier ethnographic work on the realization of social categories in language (Blom & Gumperz 1972, Gumperz 1972). Detailed observation of verbal strategies revealed that an individual's choice of speech style has symbolic value and interpretive consequences that cannot be explained simply by correlating the incidence of linguistic variants with independently determined social and contextual categories.⁹

Gumperz goes on affirming that any interpretation of a discourse can have place only if sociolinguistic variables, being themselves part of the social reality, are “treated as part of a more general class of indexical signs which guide and channel the interpretation of intent.”¹⁰ Gumperz dedicated most of his studies on code switching, which defined as a “discourse phenomenon in which speakers rely on juxtaposition of grammatically distinct subsystems to generate conversational inferences”¹¹. Gumperz analysed the phenomenon in several linguistic contexts: here, also coherent with the anti-racial function of the former (and following) analyses, is summarized a study of code switching in Mexican-American and Afro-American speakers that proves how these alterations serve well definite purposes¹².

⁹ J. J. Gumperz, 1982, *Discourse Strategies (Vol. 1)*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. vii.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 97.

¹² J. J. Gumperz, 1970, *Verbal Strategies in Multilingual Communication*, Working Paper No. 36, Language-Behavior Research Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley.

The premise is, in agreement with Labov, that both children of middle-class and non-middle-class approach school with a definite and well structured grammatical competence: rather, and here Gumperz quotes Labov, “they are the output of dialect or language-specific syntactic rules which are every bit as complex as those of standard English (Labov, 1969)”¹³. To Gumperz, ignorance of the minorities, with their styles of behaviour and speech rules, contributed to the notion of linguistic deprivation above mentioned. On the contrary, the Afro-American folklore, with its rich variety of verbal strategies and modes of speech, largely contributed to verbal art.

The importance of bilingualism is to be retrieved in the speakers’ voluntary misspeaking to achieve social ends. In support of this, it is interesting the example provided by Gumperz which shows how a Puerto Rican mother in Jersey City, after a first attempt to call his child in Spanish – Ven aquí, ven aquí –, shifts, to her child’s failure to obey, to a more convincing “Come here, you”, whereas an English-speaking mother would, in the same condition, say something like “John Henry Smith, you come here right away”.¹⁴ Thus, both mothers show annoyance and pursue their aims by using different verbal strategies. Throughout the essay, Gumperz provides other examples of systematical code switching, concluding (here again the finger is mainly pointed at bad school teaching) that it is essential for middle class adults to learn and appreciate the ethno-cultural background and the different verbal strategies adopted by bilingual low-class speakers in order to adapt their methods.

¹³ Ivi, p. 2.

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 6.

1.1.3 Dell Hymes

In the Bloomington “scholarhood”, Dell Hymes distinguished himself for his research toward the anthropological side of linguistics, or better, in his parlance, the linguistic anthropology. In 1972, Hymes founded the journal *Language in Society* and served as its editor for 22 years. He is acknowledged as the founder of the field known as “Ethnography of Communication”, asserting the need for linguists to study language use in specific settings, thus criticising the study of language *per se*, out of context. In his *Introduction: Towards Ethnographies of Communication*¹⁵, Hymes defines as follows the field:

In short, "ethnography of communication" implies two characteristics that an adequate approach to the problems of language which engage anthropologists must have. Firstly, such an approach cannot simply take separate results from linguistics, psychology, sociology, ethnology, as given, and seek to correlate them, however partially useful such work is. It must call attention to the need for fresh kinds of data, to the need to investigate directly the use of language in contexts of situation so as to discern patterns proper to speech activity, patterns which escape separate studies of grammar, of personality, of religion, of kinship and the like, each abstracting from the patterning of speech activity as such into some other frame of reference. Secondly, such an approach cannot take linguistic form, a given code, or speech itself, as frame of reference. It must take as context a community, investigating its communicative habits as a whole, so that any given use of channel and code takes its place as but part of the resources upon which the members of the community draw.

Hymes is also recalled for developing the “S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G. model” for analysis, a way to promote discourse analysis as a series of speech events and speech acts within a cultural context, providing a structure which facilitates your perception of the elements / components of the speech act.

¹⁵ D. Hymes, 1964, “Introduction: Toward Ethnographies of Communication”, in *American Anthropologist*, 66 (6_PART 2), American Anthropological Association, Arlington, Virginia, pp.1-34.

- (S) Setting including the time and place, physical aspects of the situation such as arrangement of furniture in the classroom;
- (P) participant identity including personal characteristics such as age and sex, social status, relationship with each other;
- (E) ends including the purpose of the event itself as well as the individual goals of the participants;
- (A) act, sequence or how speech acts are organized within a speech event and what topic/s are addressed;
- (K) key or the tone and manner in which something is said or written;
- (I) instrumentalities or the linguistic code i.e. language, dialect, variety and channel i.e. speech or writing;
- (N) norm or the standard socio-cultural rules of interaction and interpretation;
- (G) genre or type of event such as lecture, poem, letter.¹⁶

¹⁶ B. Johnstone, W.M. Marcellino, 2010, "Dell Hymes and the Ethnography of Communication", in R. Wodak, B. Johnstone & P. Kerswill (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, SAGE, London, p. 57.

1.1.4 Other Scholars

Scholars from disciplines other than linguistics had a fundamental role as indirect co-founders of the sociolinguistics field. Very interesting was the personal and academic relationship between Charles Ferguson and Joshua Fishman, whose divergences shaped the field: the former was oriented on the linguistic side of sociolinguistics, especially focusing on diglossia, the latter on the sociological one, specializing his research on multilingualism; Ferguson was a very active organizer of meetings and seminars, aiming at “forming, consolidating and publicizing what is clearly one of the most fruitful fields for the study of language”¹⁷, Fishman preferred the management of research projects and the editing activity, promoting a massive number of publications on the subject; Ferguson founded *The Journal of Sociolinguistics*, Fishman *The International Journal of Sociology of Language*, which reached 194 issues in 2009.

Heinz Kloss, German linguist and recognized authority on ethnic law and linguistic minorities, was at first just a regular attendee of the seminars, gradually becoming ever more involved in the Bloomington scholarhood until he was assigned the chairmanship of the Committee on Sociolinguistics. Among the several papers published, Kloss is mainly remembered for *Abstand Languages and Ausbau Languages*¹⁸, in which the linguist provided a categorization of languages and dialects according to linguistic and sociological criteria.

¹⁷ J.J. Gumperz, 1982, *Discourse Strategies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.14.

¹⁸ H. Kloss, 1967, “Abstand Languages and Ausbau Languages”, in *Anthropological Linguistics*, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, pp. 29-41.

Stanley Lieberman, sociologist from Montreal, contributed to the field with publications on language shift¹⁹: particularly interesting were an article published on the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* titled *What's In A Name? Some Sociolinguistic Possibilities*²⁰, in which he claims that first names denote the social taste and its evolution in society, and *Early Developments in Sociolinguistics*, a chapter in *The Early Days of Sociolinguistics: Memories and Reflections*²¹.

¹⁹ S. Lieberman, 1980, "Procedures for Improving Sociolinguistic Surveys of Language Maintenance and Language Shift", in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin and Boston, issue 25, pp. 11-27.

²⁰ S. Lieberman, 1984, "What's In A Name?. Some Sociolinguistic Possibilities", in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin and Boston, issue 45, pp.77-87.

²¹ S. Lieberman, 1997, "Early Developments in Sociolinguistics", in C.B. Paulston, R.G. Tucker, *The Early Days of Sociolinguistics: Memories and Reflections*, The Summer Institute of Linguistics, Arlington, Texas, pp. 159-169.

1.2 Discourse Analysis

Tightly linked to sociolinguistics – and thus to other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, linguistic anthropology - is discourse analysis. If the former(s) carried out the study of social interaction in order to understand how people forge the world around them, the latter can be considered as one of the strong arms of sociolinguistics, a discipline that covers a wide variety of different sociolinguistic approaches.

As a gateway to the work, the following definitions of sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis – a sub-discipline of discourse analysis – are necessary:

Sociolinguists study the relationship between language and society. They are interested in explaining why we speak differently in different social contexts, and they are concerned with identifying the social functions of language and the ways it is used to convey social meaning...and the way people convey and construct aspects of their social identity through their language.²²

[Discourse Analysis] is the analysis of language as it is used to enact activities, perspectives, and identities.²³

Critical Discourse Analysis regards ‘language as a social practice’ (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) and takes consideration of the context of language use to be crucial (Wodak, 2000c; Benke, 2000). Moreover, CDA takes a particular interest in the relation between language and power. The term CDA is used nowadays to refer more specifically to the critical linguistic approach of scholars who find the larger discursive unit of text to be basic unit of communication. This research specifically considers institutional, political, gender and media discourses (in the broadest sense) which testify to more or less overt relations of struggle and conflict.²⁴

²² J. Holmes, 2013, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Routledge, London and New York, p.1.

²³ J.P. Gee, 1999, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Theory and Method*, Routledge, New York, p.5.

²⁴ R. Wodak, M. Meyer (Eds.), 2009, *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, Sage Publications Ltd., London, p.1.

The above definitions neatly fit as introduction to this work, in which these disciplines, especially in a postcolonial context, collide towards the shared purpose of understanding how language is manipulated, appropriated, transformed in order to shape identities. The relationship between the disciplines can be summarized as follows: Sociolinguistics, a branch of linguistics, is generally concerned with language performance; Discourse Analysis is a sub-discipline of Sociolinguistics that grew in popularity in the 1950s thanks to scholars such as Michel Foucault, according to whom “nothing has any meaning outside of discourse”²⁵.

What does the word “discourse” mean? Carter defines discourse as “the organization of connected text beyond the level of the sentence”²⁶. Furthermore, discourse is concerned with language behaviours linked to social practices. This is the main concern of Critical Discourse Analysis, a further development of Discourse Analysis particularly interested in political and power relations. Discourse, thus, investigates how people construct a vision of the world using language, how different perspectives of the world are reflected through different terms: an example is how words such as ‘terrorist’ or ‘freedom fighter’ shape a given identity and encourage people to take a particular perspective.

Michael Hoey gives a practical explanation of what the purpose of discourse analysis is:

In writing, sentences bunch into conventional units called paragraphs, paragraphs into chapters, and chapters into books. In short, in our everyday speech and writing, the sentence is only a small cog in a normally much larger machine. It is the task of discourse analysis to find out how that machine works, partly because it is fascinating in itself, and partly because at times particular machines need repairing.²⁷

²⁵ M. Foucault, 1972, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge, London p.32.

²⁶ R. Carter (Ed.), 2011, *Linguistics and The Teacher (Vol. 112)*, Routledge, London, p.184.

²⁷ M. Hoey, 1983, *On The Surface of Discourse*, George Allen & Unwin, London, p.1.

1.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Particularly interesting for this work is to understand what Critical Discourse Analysis is about. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer²⁸ provide an exhaustive definition of the discipline by identifying the differences between Discourse Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis:

The significant difference between DS and CDS (or CDA) lies in the *constitutive problem-oriented, interdisciplinary approach* of the latter [...]. *CDA is therefore not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodical approach.*

The beginning of the Critical Discourse Analysis studies was marked by the Amsterdam meeting in January 1991, where scholars such as Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak spent two days together discussing theories and methods of Critical Discourse Analysis. In 1990, van Dijk launched the *Discourse and Society* journal in which he presented the approaches that arose during the meeting.

The difference between Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis lies in the word “critical”, as defined by Max Horkheimer in 1937²⁹ when he contrasted the traditional theory by asserting that, to put it simple, scholars should approach any kind of research with the purpose of critiquing, changing, improving society and not only describing the theoretical system on which it is founded. Critical Discourse Analysis tries to do this by interacting with many other fields of study – economics, anthropology, psychology, social sciences and others – all of which participate in the making of a society. The aim of the discipline is to allow people to develop their own viewpoint, to look at what surrounds them with, in fact, a critical perspective in order to emancipate themselves through self-reflection.

²⁸ R. Wodak, M. Meyer, 2009, “Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory, and Methodology”, in R. Wodak, M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, Sage (2nd revised edition), London, p. 1-33.

²⁹ M. Horkheimer, 1972, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays (Vol. 1)*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.

Thus, Critical Discourse Analysis analyses texts that cover a wide range of topics. For the nature of the present work, it is interesting to pause on the political discourse as defined by Teun van Dijk³⁰ and on some practical examples that show how power messages are sent through texts. Firstly, van Dijk defines the social power as “control”, and addresses two basic questions for Critical Discourse Analysis research:

1 How do (more) powerful groups control public discourse?

2 How does such discourse control mind and action of (less) powerful groups, and what are the social consequences of such control, such as social inequality?³¹

To answer the first question, van Dijk stresses the basic role played by the context and the structure of the text – or the talk- itself. For example, on the occasion of a public event, the control exerted by a group of people on the context, namely on the several components of the context - the participants, their role in the event, their opinion etc. -, determines the outcome of the communicative situation. Throughout this work, especially in the chapter dedicated to Linton Kwesi Johnson, other kinds of abuse will be exposed. Among the ones van Dijk deals with, it is well-fitting for this work the power abuse of a police officer on a suspect: context, social power, prejudice are among the components involved that determine the control by a person on another on the ground of a set of acquired beliefs that justify the worst behaviour.

Van Dijk goes through the second question explaining how mind control is a direct consequence of the above-explained social control through media and other reliable and trustworthy sources such as scholars, professors or experts. Often, the recipients of the controlling discourse are people without the necessary culture or autonomous thought to open a debate.

³⁰ T.A. Van Dijk, 2003, “Critical Discourse Analysis” in D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, H.E. Hamilton (Eds.), 2008, *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, New Jersey, pp. 352-371.

³¹ Ivi, p. 355.

Later in this work, it will be shown how the grammatical, lexical, syntactical choices made by the authors portray their political, ideological viewpoint. To conclude this introduction, some among the most common linguistic devices studied by critical discourse analysts are introduced:

Active or Passive voice: the use of an active verb aims at defining the performer of an action, focussing on *who*, for example, is to blame in a given context: the author does not hide his pointing finger and gives a clear picture of the protagonists; when a passive verb is used, the attention shifts on what happened without blaming anyone in particular and leaving the reader free to create his own idea. Also common is the use nominalisation, where the noun form of the verb is used to create even more ambiguity.

Naming: the way in which a text addresses the performers of an action is another device to take position and perpetuate ideologies. This can affect reader's interpretation of the facts. In the sphere of the 'naming' tool, are the so-called pre-modified nouns, also known as epithets: for example, "gay marriage" or "same-sex marriage" implies that this is different from heterosexual marriage.

What is relevant in the political discourse is the ability of pre-modified names to dress ideology with the clothes of knowledge: this is what happens when party leaders claim – in a very subtle way – the absolute naturalness of their statements. It is known how politicians make a widespread use of **indirect quotes**, mainly when there is no evidence of reported speech or data in support of their claims.

Chapter 2 – Postcolonial And Translation Issues

2.1 Caribbean Literature: An Overview

Among postcolonial literatures, Caribbean writing can be considered an outstanding example of how language contact can result in highly imaginative use of language. The new “english” resulting from such a contact, unfolds the starring role of linguistic transformation – by means of neologisms, innovations, semantic distortions, etc. – in the constant process of re-affirming identity, a process that shows “the ironic inability of the English language to ward off [the linguistic] invasion by those whom they invaded”³². Caribbean colonial history shows how this people suffered an unique form of mistreatment, from the genocide of Amerindians, the native inhabitants of the Caribbean islands before Columbus’ arrival in the archipelago, to a violent slavery Caribbean people were subjected until the 1960s. Consequently, Caribbean Creole language can be considered like “a symbol of the historical conflict evident within Creole languages; i.e. the conflict between the European enslaver and the African enslaved.”³³ A literary movement characterized by a continuous search for traditions and values, maybe unreachable, given the wholesale imposition of European values from the very beginning, confirms the sudden beginning of Caribbean history. This lack of roots led many scholars to affirm the absence of a significant history in the Caribbean. Accordingly, V.S. Naipaul affirmed: “history is built on creation and achievement and nothing was created in the West Indies”³⁴. To the embittered statement by the 2001 Nobel Prize winner from Trinidad, replied the first Caribbean Nobel literature laureate, Derek Walcott: “if there was nothing, there was everything to be made”³⁵.

³² B. Ashcroft, 2009, *Caliban’s Voice*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 9.

³³ M. Dalphinis, 1985, *African and Caribbean Languages, Social History, Language, Literature and Education*, Karia Press, London.

³⁴ V.S. Naipaul, 1962, “The Middle Passage”, in J. Procter (Ed.), 2000, *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 54.

³⁵ D. Walcott, 1985, *What the Twilight Says*, Faber & Faber, London, p. 4.

Since the 1950s, writers such as Samuel Selvon, John Hearne, V.S. Naipaul and George Lamming began to be published in the United Kingdom, launching the so called West Indian literature movement. Identity, ethnicity, language and the retrieving of a mother tongue are the issues pervading the work of many Caribbean writers, issues that shape a literary production tightly tied to the Caribbean historical experience. This intertwining with history, has led me to a reflection about the word Postcolonial, the label for literatures from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In a process of emancipation from the English norm, such a term is, to me, a continuous recalling of the supremacy of the English Empire and the undisputed superiority of its values and language. Thus, it risks a continuous reaffirmation of the inferiority and subjugation of the colonies, politically created and exploited by the colonizer. From another vantage, exploitation, slavery and subjugation constitute the undeniable and essential starting point for postcolonial writers. According to George Lamming, the most successful novelist, poet and essayist from Barbados, history is essential to recover identity. In his introduction to *The Castle of my Skin*, Lamming writes:

The Novel has had a peculiar function in the Caribbean. The writer's preoccupation has been mainly with the poor; and fiction has served as a way of restoring these lives – this world of men and women from down below – to a proper order of attention; to make their reality the supreme concern of the total society. But along with this desire, there was also the writer's recognition that this world, in spite of its long history of deprivation, represented the womb from which himself had sprung, and the richest collective reservoir of experience on which the creative imagination could draw.³⁶

From this point of no return, the beginning of the end of colonized past, Caribbean writers shape a collective memory through a body of work which outlines the borders of a literature surrounded by oceans of rage against the English oppressor.

³⁶ G. Lamming, 1970, *In The Castle of My Skin*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, p. xxxvii.

The Caribbean had the 42% of the African slaves; together with Brazil, it contained 84% of all slaves traded in the human commerce by the English, Spanish, Dutch, French and Portuguese.³⁷ The denial of any political freedom during the plantation regime in the Caribbean was masked by allowing the locals to express themselves through art, namely music and dance, forms that still represent the main effort for emancipation, “the continuity of art and life”³⁸.

Several Caribbean writers pay tribute to the sea: for Derek Walcott, *The Sea is History*, according to the title of his famous poem in which he traces the historical development of the Caribbean and affirms the role of the sea as the key environmental element:

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History.³⁹

For Fred D’Aguiar,

The sea is slavery. [...] Sea receives a body as if that body has come to rest on a cushion, one that gives way to the body’s weight and folds around it like an envelope.⁴⁰

The bodies to which the author refers in his novel *Feeding the Ghosts*, are those of the slaves thrown overboard the Zong slave ship, a massacre I will deal with in the next chapter of this work, entirely dedicated to Marlene NourbeSe Philip.

³⁷ C.A. Palmer, 1995, *The First Passage: Blacks in The Americas 1502-1617*(Vol. 1), Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 8-10.

³⁸ P. Gilroy, 1993, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, Mass., Cambridge, p. 57.

³⁹ D. Walcott, 1986, “The Sea is History”, from *Collected Poems, 1948-1984*, Macmillan, New York.

⁴⁰ F. D’Aguiar, 1997, *Feeding The Ghosts*, Vintage, London, p. 3.

2.2 Postcolonial Writing And Translation Issues

The birth of Postcolonial Studies can be dated around the end of the 70's, when the process of decolonization of the so-called Third World was completed and the consequent critique of euro centrism ignited the debate. The complexity of the phenomenon perfectly matches its literary expression, which can be a mixture of hybridism, displacement, and alienation. The attempt, by postcolonial writers, to define themselves through a new literature, takes shape in the transformation of their writing style, the creation of a high number of neologisms, and the appropriation of the Standard English imposed by the empire. The need to express their thought has occasioned a large number of translations of novels, short stories, and essays written by artists from the old colonial areas.

This led to the adoption of new translation theories and strategies, whose application can be extended to literature in general. Translating a text challenges us to translate a culture. This is even truer if the texts we refer to are ascribable to postcolonial literature. In order to accomplish the role of ambassador, of middleman between two different languages, spaces and cultures, the translator is expected to command the target language, the one spoken by the foreign readership s/he is dealing with, as well as the fine details of the target culture. The discovery of the hidden features of language and customs should allow the identity of a people to emerge in translation.

The challenge for the translator is extremely complex, due to the multiple-angled view s/he has to adopt to detect all the nuances of meaning. This is another vantage point Salman Rushdie claims for postcolonial writers: they themselves are “translated men”. In *Shame*, he writes:

I, too, am a translated man. I have been borne across. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion...that something can also be gained.⁴¹

⁴¹ S. Rushdie, 1984, *Shame*, Picador, London, p. 29.

Rushdie plays with the double meaning of the word translation to indicate, on one side, linguistic losses from a source text/culture to a target text/culture, and on the other, the wide gains in terms of cultural perspectives, a kaleidoscopic eye for a-symmetrical reflection and analysis, and a vision over and beyond national borders. Translation, in Rushdie's parlance, allows us to "step across this line". But there is a limit to translation, and many obstacles to overcome. These obstacles can be the higher or lower degree of linguistic appropriation, a literary tool used by a writer to contrast social assimilation.

The transformation of English within the phenomenon of postcolonial appropriation renders translation even harder if we consider that the use of English inflected by native language elements is an intentional act by postcolonial writers who want to preserve and protect their cultural identity. The difficulties for the translator are amplified when the objects of translation are not lexical elements, but culture-bound elements with evocative powers which, as Meenakshi Mukherjee⁴² puts it, struggle to be captured in English - and much more so, perhaps, when the target language is different from English.

This is confirmed by one of the most important theorists in the field of Translation Studies, Eugene Nida, mainly known for being the developer of the 'dynamic equivalence' approach to translation of the Bible⁴³. In *Principles of Correspondence* (1975), Nida was among the first to state how the translation of a cultural element is much more complex than that of a linguistic element. Beside a perfect knowledge of the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL) the translator must deeply master both the Source Culture (SC) and the Target Culture (TC), so as to grasp each nuance of meaning, every allusion hidden within the text.

⁴² M. Mukherjee, 1974, *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of The Indian Novel in English*, Arnold Heinemann Publishers, New Delhi, p. 174.

⁴³ G.J. Kerr, 2011, *Dynamic Equivalence and Its Daughters: Placing Bible Translation Theories in Their Historical Context*, Journal of Translation, Volume 7, Number 1 <http://www-01.sil.org/siljot/2011/1/928474543391/siljot2011-1-01.pdf> (accessed 4 March 2012).

In order to conceptualize and develop this work, we must also turn to those ideas of translation developed by Walter Benjamin⁴⁴ and Jacques Derrida⁴⁵.

According to Benjamin, translation allows language to cross the boundaries within which every language is delimited, thus granting the “holy growth” of language. The goal of translation is neither to reproduce the Source Text (ST), nor to convey its sense. Information transfer is not implied in the translation process. The real ability that the translator must show is to transform, readapt, and enhance the ST, even modifying the SL, allowing all the languages to meet in a “third space”, that is to say, in the middle, in the interstices, where they can mingle with each other at such a high level that goes beyond mere communication. The translation of these cultural differences constitutes the main element of resistance to the translation process. In a postcolonial context it allows us to understand a key feature of the migrant experience, the untranslatability within translation. This is the paradox in the process of translation: as pointed out by Benjamin, we run on the road toward “die Reine Sprache”, the pure language, as we try to grasp it through translation. Reaching this pure language, the silent language of the origins, would mean disabling every function and utility of translation. The untranslatable feature of languages is expressed by Jacques Derrida since the title of his essay *Des Tours De Babel*: tours, turns, performances, returns; but also “detours”, meaning deviation or, figuratively, deception, circumlocution, wordplays. Babel also presents its problems of interpretation. Thus, language can be a trap for the translator, who will have to find from time to time the right meaning and the matching signifier to render the coherence of the ST. In short, “translation should be replaced by transformation: a regular transformation of a language into another language, of a text into another text”⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ W. Benjamin, 2000, “The Translator’s Task”, trans. H. Zohn in *The Translation Studies Reader*, L. Venuti (Ed.), Routledge, London, pp. 15-23.

⁴⁵ J. Derrida, 1985, “Des Tours de Babel”, trans. J. F. Graham in *Difference in Translation*, ed. J.F. Graham, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, New York, pp. 165-207.

⁴⁶ C.J. Sanga, 2001, *Salman Rushdie’s Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy, and Globalization*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, p. 48.

This interpretation of the process of translation builds a bridge across translation and metaphor, making intertwined through the etymological meaning of transfer and transformation. Inevitable losses in translation are never far away, and sometimes these losses are so deep that some scholars consider them as violent acts. But translation is not only about loss. Several strategies allow the translator to cope with such losses. Among the best-known translation strategies are those proposed by Peter Newmark⁴⁷. It is interesting how the procedures he proposes, range from a high(er) to a low(er) degree of ‘closeness’ to the ST, where transference and componential analysis are the opposite ends of the scale. According to Newmark, whilst transference conveys a “local color”, e.g. by maintaining the cultural names, componential analysis is

the basic comparison of a source language (SL) word with a target language (TL) word which has a similar meaning, but not an obvious one-to-one equivalent, by demonstrating first their common and then their differing sense components”⁴⁸

thus excluding the culture and highlighting the message. Apropos, an interesting example could be the ‘cultural transplantation’ of *Dupont et Dupond* in *Thompson and Thomson*.⁴⁹ By anglicising the French names, the translator “retains the[ir] connotation of commonness..., and reproduces the play on difference in spelling...”⁵⁰, even if a character/setting incoherence may occur. Thus, it is often possible to negotiate a translation that balances losses and gains, providing a usable and enjoyable TT. Even more interesting is the case in which a misreading of the ST, produces a mistake that ends up enriching the TT, as in the English translation of Umberto Eco’s *L’isola del giorno prima* by Bill Weaver: as Eco puts it, by translating the Italian term *ciurmerie* (a rare synonym for “deceit”) with “celestial crews”, clearly diverted by both the nautical context of the narration and the root *ciurma*

⁴⁷ Cfr. P. Newmark, 1988, *A Textbook of Translation (Vol. 1)*, Prentice Hall, New York.

⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 115.

⁴⁹ S.G. Hervey, I. Higgins, 1992, *Thinking Translation: A Course in Translation Method, French-English*, Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis Group, New York, p. 29.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

(“crew”), Weaver increases a dreamy, nautical isotopy whereas Eco meant to reinforce a less visible isotopy of deceit.

Moreover, Eco warns that, despite Weaver manage to balance ST and TT, his attempt of translation actually results in adaptation.⁵¹ “The aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar; and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text, often in highly self-conscious projects, especially where translation serves an imperialist appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas, cultural, economical, political.”⁵² As Peter Newmark points out, culture is

the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression. More specifically, I distinguish ‘cultural’ from ‘universal’ and ‘personal’ language. Die, live, star, swim and even almost virtually ubiquitous artefacts like mirror and table are universals – usually there is no translation problem there -. Monsoon, steppe, tagliatelle are cultural words – there would be a translation problem unless there is cultural overlap between the source language and the target language.⁵³

Cultural gaps can be dealt with by using several strategies. Newmark⁵⁴ states that, in order to render cultural items, translators can make use of:

- Literal translation and/or calque without considering possible misunderstandings
- Explanation in the text
- Foot notes or/and notes
- Substitution with elements known in the target culture
- Paraphrase
- Omission

⁵¹ Cfr. U. Eco, 2012, *Dire Quasi La Stessa Cosa: Esperienze di Traduzione*, Bompiani, Milano, pp. 116-118.

⁵² L. Venuti, 1995, *The Translator's Invisibility, A History of Translation*, Routledge, London and New York.

⁵³ P. Newmark, 1988. *A Textbook of Translation*, Prentice Hall, New York, p. 94.

⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 103.

What is important is that the element should represent, to the TC readership, what is represented to the SC readership, so that the effect is exactly the same. This implies that if, for instance, a ST contains an allusion, it should be respected by using either the same allusion or another that could be more familiar to the Target Readership.

The problem is that many times we find problematic areas that are hard to handle. Sometimes, it is very easy to grasp allusions in a text because of their well-known connotations. On other occasions, it is hard or even impossible for the translator to transfer the irony or sarcasm implied by statements featuring socio-cultural allusions unknown to a foreign reader. In translating similar sentences, strength and *nuances* of meaning are lost.

Translating does not mean saying something in a different language. It is not the simple transmission of a meaning. Translation is creation, enhancement, and transformation. When approaching a text, be it a very short sentence or a long novel, it is hardly ever enough to secure the meaning and then find equivalent words. There is nothing better than using an automated translator to confirm what just said. The ongoing development of the rules of speaking and writing not only affects the surface, the signifiers, the words; it's the deep structure of language that also determines the meaning of a word, of a text, an utterance, or a statement. Words are the latest shape of thoughts, feelings, behaviours, of our nature. A single word can both build or destroy, depending on the tone it is pronounced, the context in which is whispered or yelled, or the will of the speaker to be serious, funny or subtle.

2.2.1 The Transformation Of Postcolonial English

In 1993, Gayatri Spivak introduced the concept of postcolonial:

a broad cultural approach to the study of power relations between different groups, cultures or people in which language, literature and translation may play a role⁵⁵.

After the fall, there is only one chance: to be born again. This is what the countries of the old British Empire did as decolonization has spread, marking the beginning of the end of colonialism. Language is the main “conquering mark”, I would dare say. History shows that many times, people who had to surrender to more powerful countries at the end of the wars keep their dignity by preserving their own native language. Unfortunately, things can be more complicated than this: in the Caribbean, amongst those of African descent, ancestral languages were suppressed. Postcolonialism is a question of compromise and negotiation, of reciprocal respect toward the identity of the weakest countries of the world, but not the poorest ones.

This respect gave birth to a massive literary production by a large number of writers, poets, artists who released their attempt to articulate the world from their own vantage through their own language. After more than 60 years from the end of British colonialism, the linguistic journey from and to India, America, South Africa, New Zealand, Canada produced a corpus of works which reflect the writers’ will to regain their place in the world. Nowadays, postcolonial writers choose to write in both native and English language, but when they use English, it becomes a special language. Their New English has become their “freedom mark” and their journey through the English speaking countries has led and will lead to magnificent works written in a “blended language” that lets the reader discover how proud of their own origins, culture and language these people are.

⁵⁵ S. Mizani, *Cultural Translation*
<http://www.translationdirectory.com/articles/article1507.php> (accessed 7 June 2014).

This contamination becomes even more interesting if considered from the point of view of translation studies. The process of using English in such a creative way is called appropriation. In Bill Ashcroft words, appropriation is “the process by which the metropolitan language is taken and made to bear the burden of one’s own cultural experience”⁵⁶.

One of the main features of postcolonial literatures is the metonymic function of language variance. The language is metonymic of the culture, thus, linguistic variation stands for cultural difference. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin use the expression ‘metonymic gap’ to refer to ‘the cultural gap formed when writers transform English according to the needs of their source culture’⁵⁷. The English language is appropriated to signify difference, thus abrogating the privileged centrality of English. This occurs when postcolonial writers insert unglossed words or passages from a first language or when they introduce references and allusions that may be unknown to the reader. The gap is very different from the gaps that might inevitably emerge from the process of translation. The local writer is thus able to represent his or her world to the colonizer (and others) in the metropolitan language, and at the same time, to signal and emphasize a difference from it. The writer is saying, “I am using your language so that you will understand my world, but you will also know by the differences in the way I use it that you cannot share my experience”⁵⁸.

In cross-cultural writings there is often a kind of tension between sharing experience and holding something back. The postcolonial writer creates a life between two languages and differentiates his own text through several techniques. The strategies by which a colonial language is transformed are extremely varied. The cross-cultural writer will appropriate the colonizer’s language through the insertion of “untranslated” words, through the non-

⁵⁶ B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, 1989, *The Empire Writes Back*, Routledge, London, p. 38.

⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 174.

⁶¹ Ivi, p. 75.

standard use of punctuation and spelling, through allusion, glossing, syntactic fusion, particular discourse conventions and styles.

Let us pause for a moment on some of these appropriations, namely untranslated words, use of punctuation and spelling and allusion.

Untranslated words

The use of untranslated words has an important function to stress the lexical selection made by the author in order to preserve “a clear signifier of the fact that the language which actually informs the novel is an/Other language”⁵⁹. What follows is a passage from the novel *Visitants*, by the Australian writer Randolph Stow⁶⁰:

‘These taubadas,’ Naibusi said, ‘when will they come?’

‘Soon. Before night.’

‘They will bring food perhaps? Dimdim food?’

‘Perhaps.’

‘They might eat chicken,’ Naibusi said, wondering. I do not know. The dimdim yams are finished.’

‘E,’ said Misa Makadoneli, ‘green bananas then. They are the same as potatoes. And lokwai.’

‘They will eat lokwai?’ said Naibusi. ‘Perhaps it is not their custom.’

‘My grief for them,’ Misa Makadoneli said... ‘see what there is in the cookhouse.’

The writer introduces Biga-Kiriwini words in the text, refusing to provide a glossary or translation. This forces the reader into an active engagement with the culture in which the terms have meaning. The readers can get some idea about the meaning inferring from the context, but to reach deeper understanding they will have to expand their knowledge of the cultural situation beyond the text.

⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 63.

⁶⁰ R. Stow, 1979, “Visitants”, Secker & Warburg, in B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, 1989, *The Empire Writes Back*, Routledge, London, p. 63.

What is significant about the use of untranslated terms such as “lokwai” is that they constitute a specific sign of postcolonial discourse rather than a specific Papua New Guinean usage: the term “lokwai” in Biga-Kiriwini speech is one among many, but placed in the English text it signifies difference.⁶¹

The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* underline that the choice of inserting untranslated words in postcolonial texts can be seen as a political act, because “while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word, and thus the receptor culture, the higher status”.⁶² Having all these cultural, ethnic and political implications in mind involving English and the author’s native language, we might ask: how could a possible Italian translation be effective and thorough? As far as I know, this work has not been translated into Italian yet, and, of course, it can be translated, but there would be inevitable losses in cultural terms.

Punctuation, spelling and (ab)use of capital letters

The misuse of punctuation is an example of how important is the alteration of the rhythms of the language to make a different noise with English. Among postcolonial writers, Rushdie stands out for this technique.

I found I had to punctuate it in a very peculiar way, to destroy the natural rhythms of the English language; I had to use dashes too much, keep exclaiming, putting in three dots followed by semi-colons followed by three dashes. That sort of thing just seemed to dislocate the English and let other things into it.⁶³

⁶¹ B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, 1989, *The Empire Writes Back*, Routledge, London, p. 63.

⁶² Ivi, p. 65.

⁶³ Quoted in J. Santos, 2003, *Historical Truth in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children: A Question of Perspective*, Arizona State University, Tempe.

An example of this kind is found in Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*:

NOTICE!

NOTICE, IS. HEREBY; PROVIDED: THAT, SEATS!

ARE, PROVIDED. FOR; FEMALE: SHOP, ASSISTANTS!⁶⁴

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe how the gap between language and lived experience is indicated by the obsession with punctuation.

Allusion

Allusion is often used to register cultural distance in the postcolonial text. An example is offered by Ngugi wa Thiongo's novel *A Grain Of Wheat*. Gikonyo sings the following song:

'Haven't you heard the new song?'

'Which? Sing it'

You know it too. I believe it is Kihika who introduced it here. I only remember the words of the chorus:

Gikuyu na Mumbi

Gikuyu na Mumbi

Gikuyu na Mumbi

Nikihui ngwatiro

It was Mumbi who now broke the solemnity. She was laughing quietly.

'What is it?'

'Oh, Carpenter, Carpenter. So you know why I came?'

'I don't!' he said, puzzled.

'But you sing to me and Gikuyu telling us it is burnt at the handle'.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ V.S. Naipaul, 2012, "The Mystic Masseur", Pan Macmillan, in Ashcroft, B. et al., 1989, *The Empire Writes Back*, Routledge, London, p. 54.

⁶⁵ N. Wa Thiongo, 2012, *A Grain of Wheat*, Penguin, London, p. 92.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin proceed to explain the deep allusions of this passage, which is dense with cultural signifiers. Gikuyu was the first man of the Kikuyu tribe, the man from whom all the Kikuyu were descended, and Mumbi was his wife, the first woman. “Nikuyu” literally means that something is ready or cooked. “Ngwatiro” is literally a handle. When used together, the term means that someone is in trouble because the handle is too hot. The song as invented by Kihika means that the relationship between man and woman spells trouble.

The relationship is too hot to handle and as a chorus it has both sexual and political overtones. But Mumbi laughs because it foretells her reason for visiting Gikonyo: the handle of her panga (machete) has actually been burnt in the fire and needs repair.⁶⁶

The task of the translator is thus really challenging. He puts his own idea of the source text in the hands of the audience, who will declare the success or the failure of his work. The following chapter serves as an introduction to the pioneers of Caribbean literature, before approaching the detailed analysis of two acclaimed writers from the Caribbean, Marlene NourbeSe Philip and Linton Kwesi Johnson.

⁶⁶ B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, 1989, *The Empire Writes Back*, Routledge, London, p. 57.

Chapter 3 - Marlene NourbeSe Philip: “A Geography Of Voices”

Bio Note⁶⁷

Born on the southern Caribbean island of Tobago in 1947, Marlene Philip was named after the white German film star Marlene Dietrich — “which I think is quite hilarious,” she told the *Toronto Star*. “But she was political! That’s why I’ve never given it up.” Philip later took the middle name NourbeSe (pronounced noor-BEH-she), an African name meaning “marvellous child”.

When her family moved to nearby Trinidad, Philip was eight years old. Here, after the independence from Britain achieved in 1962, Philip attended high school and then college, graduating with an economics degree. Even if linguistically formed in a Standard English environment, she always showed a strong interest for the vernacular speeches of her motherland. The rebel attitude of the writer was shown particularly when she locked the school’s chancellor in his office during a demonstration protesting the presence of the American Central Intelligence Agency in the university’s orbit.

The personal diaspora continues in 1968, when Philip moves to Canada. She earned a master’s degree in political science and a law degree from the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, and began practicing law in Toronto. Her legal background, as this work will prove, affected part of her production, especially her latest publication *Zong!*. On the private sphere, Philip experienced a marriage break up in 1974, when her first marriage, to engineer Delf Omar King, ended in 1974. This was a crucial event for Philip, who discovered that writing could become her way of living, a proper career.

⁶⁷All information from:
Encyclopedia.com
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2873400056.html> (accessed 3 November 2014).
Nourbese.com
<http://www.nourbese.com/about/bio/> (accessed 3 November 2014).

Her literary debut was in 1980 with *Thorns*, a collection of poetry that focuses on the “distortions of selfhood resulting from colonial regimes in the Caribbean as well as from the racism encountered in Canadian cities”⁶⁸. In 1983 another collection of poetry is published, *Salmon Courage*, built upon the image of resistance that the salmons convey by swimming against the tide. In 1989 Philip publishes *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, which is awarded with the “Casa de las Americas Prize”. The last collection of poetry and the latest publication so far – 2008- is *Zong!*, of which, together with *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* I will widely discuss in the second chapter of this work.

Philip’s production includes also novels, *Harriet’s Daughter* (1988) and *Looking for Livingstone: an Odyssey of Silence* (1991) and essays, *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (1992), *Showing Grit: Showboating North of the 44th Parallel* (1993), *CARIBANA: African Roots and Continuities - Race, Space and the Poetics of Moving* (1996), *Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays* (1997).

⁶⁸ D. De Caires Narain, 2003, *Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry: Making Style*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 196.

3.1 Introduction: The ‘i-mage maker’

*Words will land on me,
then abandon me,
mangle, untangle me,
leave me on the floor*

U2, Winter⁶⁹

When Marlene NourbeSe Philip (henceforth Philip) started to write as a way of living, she “wasn’t no spring chicken”: “The last thing I expected to end up doing was writing, and when I upsed and left a decent profession (solicitor) for writing, I was the most surprised person”. This is how Philip introduces herself in the beginning of the essay ‘The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy’, the afterword of the collection of poetry *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. More than an afterword, *The Absence of Writing* is an introduction to the book and, to a wider extent, a way of showing an aesthetic of the Afro-Caribbean world, in which the artist is defined by Philip as an “i-mage maker”, bearing the burden of the society to and for whom he/she speaks. According to Philip,

Fundamental to any art form is the image, whether it be the physical image as created by the dancer and choreographer, the musical image of the composer and musician, the visual image of the plastic artist or (bold added for emphasis) **the visual image, often metaphorical, of the writer and poet.**⁷⁰

The unconventional orthography, the i-mage word in this instance, is one among the several strategies the writer uses to appropriate, deconstruct and re-i-magine the English language.

⁶⁹ U2, 2009, *Winter*, Universal-Island Records Ltd, New York.

⁷⁰ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women’s Press Ltd., London, p. 78.

English
is my father tongue.
A father tongue is
a foreign language,
therefore English is
a foreign language
not a mother tongue.

What is my mother
tongue
my mammy tongue
my mummy tongue
my momsy tongue
my modder tongue
my ma tongue?⁷¹

The extract above is taken from ‘Discourse on the Logic of Language’, an emblematic chapter of the book chosen for analysis, which perfectly suits the purpose of this work: that is to show how the linguistic changes in the writer’s mother tongue, Tobagonian Creole English, code-switched with and embedded in the father tongue, the colonizer’s Standard English, are used to shape the search for identity, rebellion, the silencing of black people forced to slavery, the inhuman treatments and the sexual violence to which black women were subjected.

Uncovering discourses and issues in Philip’s work has been for me one of the most challenging and fascinating tasks so far. Her tight bond with African oral tradition turns the reading of her works into a journey through images and rhythms, whose ultimate pursuit is the re-imagination of English language for her own sake. What makes Philip’s writing unique is, among the other things, her ability to enclose in her works a substantial part of Tobago history, her motherland. Indeed, just leafing through her books, it is possible to give a historical account of what her African ancestors experienced during the slave-trade, or of the impact the British colonization has had on her land, language, “landform of language”⁷².

⁷¹ Ivi, p. 30.

⁷² The ‘*landform* pun’ is productive in Italian, whereas ‘landform’ can be translated as ‘morfologia’, applicable to geology and linguistics.

3.2 From Oral To Written: The Kinetic Attitude Of Marlene NourbeSe Philip's Writing

Before delving more deeply into the linguistic analysis of Philip's work, a brief overview of the cultural development from oral to written communication is due, giving account of the unique ability of language to determine cultural (and also political and economic) development. Speaking is not the mere adoption of a linguistic system. Through language we "support the whole weight of a culture and civilization"⁷³. Oral and written storytelling traditions have had a parallel development, influencing each other. Crucial transitional figures in the passage from oral storytelling to written literature have been the ancient Egyptian scribes, or the Hausa and Swahili copyists and memorizers⁷⁴.

She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks, shows a tight link to this historical stage from the very first verse of the book (a quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*), which places the reader in the past, at the beginning of a journey, or better, of a quest. A parallel between confluent histories can be retrieved in this opening quotation: indeed, just as mother and daughter join each other in the mythical text of 'Discourse on the logic of language', so oral and written texts meet in contemporary African and other postcolonial production. What must be underlined here is the extent to which Philip has been influenced by oral tradition, and how this has affected her poetry: dressed up like an ancient storyteller, she unites image and idea and rewrites the past in terms of the present, keeping the reader awake from the dreaming tale by flagging the discourse with geographical elements as in 'Clues':

⁷³ F. Fanon, 1970, *Black Skin, White Mask*, Grove Press, New York, p. 17.

⁷⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/8275/African-literature/280667/Oral-traditions-and-the-written-word> (accessed 23 July 2014).

⁵⁹ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd., London, p. 4.

up where north marry cold I could find she –
Stateside, England, Canada – somewhere about,
“she still looking for you –
try the Black Bottom – Bathurst above Bloor,
Oakwood and Eglinton - even the suburbs them,
but don't look for indigo hair and
skin of lime at Ontario Place,⁷⁵

This synecdochical collection of places, faraway yet so close to each other, points to the diaspora experienced by the writer and her ancestors. In pursuit of her tongue/daughter, Marlene/Ceres walks through ambiguous name-places: Stateside, an informal adjective or adverb meaning "in the United States", England, Canada, catching the Bathurst, a streetcar route operating in Toronto, Ontario, calling at Bloor, Oakwood and Eglinton, some of these part of the Black Bottom, the term used to describe African American neighbourhoods in cities like Alabama, Detroit, Kentucky, Philadelphia or West Virginia. Moreover, Black Bottom refers to a dance that originated in New Orleans in the 1900s, a further reference to Caribbean folklore.

The display of authentic historical images through creative writing is another clue of the kinetic storytelling ability inherited by Philip. By referring to realistic spaces and times, she allows the target reader – the Afro-Caribbean people – to experience an empathetic reading, ending up being both fantastic and documentary in a way. This is much more powerful when these routes are supported by use of locals' vernaculars, creating a geography of voices.

This vocal geography is discernible in the essay *Caribana: African Roots & Continuities – Race, Space and the Poetics of Moving*, in which the writer traces the history of Toronto's Caribana, the Trinidad Carnival. Written in the kinetic Caribbean demotic, the essay is a rhythmical account of the kidnapping of the slaves, here embodied by Maisie and Totoben, of the present situation of black people in a world in which time is banned by *bekas'* (white people) beating drums:

riddim and beat
the beat
sweat like a ram goat
sweat for so
and push and shove and jostle and shove and move hip sway hip wine in
your wine and look how we enjoying we self -- move hip sway hip slap
hip big hip fat hip flat bottom big bottom sweet bottom wine-your-waist
bottom. Look we nuh, look how we enjoying we self right here in Canada
self and Toronto sweet sweet too bad -- but look me crosses! Is not
Totoben that? Begging your pardon, Mr. Emmanuel Sandiford Jacobs
himself, right here in Canada if you please, carrying on as if he don't give
a damn blast or shit. [...] For six cold-no-arse months he up at five cold or
no cold, travelling two hours straight, punching a clock, working like a
robot...But he don't mind, not Totoben, not today...for today Emmanuel
Sandiford Jacobs dead dead and Totoben in full sway, riding high, riding
hard on University Avenue, T-shirt pull up high high over his belly
which big round black and shining like it carrying six months of baby in
it a real don't-give-a-damn belly that walking down University Avenue,
drinking some rum with the boys, playing some marse and feeling like he
back home.⁷⁶

And later on in the book, the writer contextualises the carnival parade,
allowing the reader to go back and forth in time and to gain a historical
knowledge:

What connecting Maisie and Totoben on the slave ship to Totoben and
Maisie on University Avenue in Canada is moving – the moving of their
bodies. And the stopping of that moving. From the very first time when
the Europeans putting them in a slave coffle in Africa, holding them in
dungeons all along the coast of Ghana, and forcing Maisie and Totoben
onto the slave ship, the owners trying and controlling their moving –
where they going, what they eating, who they sleeping with. When
Totoben and Maisie entering the slave ship, they having nowhere to
move, and once again they moving under heavy manners. Once they
landing in the New World – Brazil, Tobago, the United States anywhere,
it don't matter – is the same thing.”⁷⁷ [...] “You must be starting in 1838
if you wanting and understanding this thing that Totoben and Maisie
doing; 1838, the year of emancipation for all the Totobens and Maisies in
the English colonies” when they were “finally free and doing what they
wanting [...] and MOVING where they wanting. Or so Maisie and
Totoben thinking.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ M.N. Philip, 1996, *CARIBANA: African Roots and Continuities - Race, Space and The Poetics of Moving*, Poui Publications, Toronto, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Ivi, p. 4.

⁷⁸ Ivi, p. 8.

Stories are told through images projected by unconventional, kinetic Caribbean demotic. All the main features of Philip's style, such as movement, rhythm, and mimicry, are disclosed. Before moving onto other issues, let me cite the Irish poet Eavan Boland to close this section. Her poem *The Oral Tradition* shows the domestic environment in which the writer assimilates and learns proverbs and sub-urban tales from the 'mother's mother, and all their mothers before'⁷⁹. It is an apprenticeship shared by Irish, Afro-Caribbean and all the writers who descend from an oral tradition. The poem shifts from present back to past times, to end up travelling towards the future, creating bright images of escape, of feminine decolonization, of self-replacement beyond the colonizer's barbed-wire fence.

⁷⁹ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 78.

3.3 Leafing *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*

Reading *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* is not easy. Along with an orthoepic ability, the reader is called for a great imaginative effort. This is due to the misleading linguistic rebellion that takes place in this book. Albeit writing almost always in Standard English, embedding with great efficacy words from what Philip called “demotic”, there is not a strong appropriation or distortion of language taking place. Rather, we find an invisible process of symbolic translation from English into English, through several strategies “which translated English into something different which looks the same”⁸⁰, a rewording of what Homi Bhabha called “almost the same, but not quite”⁸¹ in the context of colonial India.

The title itself, a verse from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, contains the first fundamental reading-key word: *softly*. This is how Philip deals with heavy and awkward issues such as racism, colonialism, exile, rape, language, slavery. This is a book that wants to be read slowly. And this is not by chance. It wants to be a reply to the oppressive and violent language imposition by the colonizer that the author puts to use, in a typical nonviolent resistance, from the gentle mouth of woman. In doing so, she achieves her goals by having a civil dialogue with the oppressor, using his language and challenging him with sudden strategies of diversion, turning him into the oppressed. Philip herself, in ‘The Absence of Writing’, introduces the main linguistic techniques she used through the book:

The formal standard language was subverted, turned upside down, inside out, and even sometimes erased. Nouns became strangers to verbs and vice versa; tonal accentuation took the place of several words at a time; rhythms held sway [but also different type faces, spacing, vertical texts, and multiply juxtaposed texts written in different typographical styles, Ed.]. Many of these ‘techniques’ are rooted in African languages; their collective impact on the English language would result in the latter being, at times, unrecognizable as English.⁸²

⁸⁰ I.A. Breto, 2008, “Translating English into English in a Case of Symbolic Translation: Language and Politics Through The Body in Marlene Nourbese Philip’s *She Tries Her Tongue Her Silence Softly Breaks*”, in *New Trends in Translation and Cultural Identity*, Cambridge Scholars Press, Newcastle, pp. 21-43.

⁸¹ H. K. Bhabha, 1994, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 89.

⁸² M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 83.

She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks is the story of a woman growing through adolescence into adulthood who becomes aware of language as a barrier to expression. ‘Questions! Questions!’ is the opening poem of the first part of the book, ‘Over every land and sea’, where mother and daughter are desperately looking for each other, a body torn in two by birth that claims to be one.

*Meanwhile Proserpine’s mother Ceres, with panic in her heart vainly sought her daughter over all lands and over all the sea.*⁸³

Here Philip takes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to introduce the relationship between Greek myth and the African grief at the loss of language. Yet, this is a way to recall how she and all the African writers adapted into their literary works the alien traditions of the colonizers (from the Dutch, English, French, Portuguese, Arabic and Spanish), making them their own by placing them into the African classical frames. She re-imagines the Roman goddess Proserpine as a Caribbean “ocean goddess”, “whose skin and hair colour reflect the Caribbean colours, vegetation and imagery: she has ‘skin green like lime, hair indigo-blue, eyes hot like sunshine time’ and lives by ‘friending fish and crab’ on an island”⁸⁴. The ocean image is more representative of the Caribbean landscape, whereas vast cornfields are a typical image of a European landscape. In this way the author manages to remodel the difference between the former colonized culture and the colonizer’s, a difference which had been a negative one for a long time, into a positive one, increasing the self-esteem of the (former) colonized people.

Where she, where she, where she
be, where she gone?
Where high and low meet I search,
find can’t, way down the islands’ way
I gone – south:
day-time and night-time living with she,
down by the just-down-the-way sea
she friending fish and crab with alone
in the bay-blue morning she does wake⁸⁵

⁸³ Ivi, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

By means of anaphora and elimination of the copula verb *be*, Philip renders the African rhythm and the non English-based syntax of Caribbean demotic. The syntactic reduction of the “wh- questions” is a typical feature of the dialectal variation of African American English, in which, as observed by Labov, copula and auxiliary “be” are absent wherever it can contract. Hendrick (1982) notes three constraints on the “wh-questions” reduction⁸⁶:

- 1, they seem to be unacceptable with *will* or *do*;
- 2, they are unacceptable with the first and third person singular;
- 3, they are unacceptable when the main verb *be* is deleted.

It follows that both the patterns “Where __ she gone? and I __ gone”, are predicted to be ungrammatical according to the point 2; moreover, the absence of the auxiliary “be” or “have” gives in the latter pattern a double simultaneous meaning of vanishing from and leaving a place.

Other particular uses of Creole are found in “**She friending** fish and crab with alone, day-time and night-time living with **she**, in the bay-blue morning **she does** wake”, which show the high frequency, particularly Trinidadian, of “she”. The latter, together with “friending”, the verbing of the noun “friend”, is used to express a continuum, an ongoing present action in a creative way, to render an image impossible to depict through any of the Standard English tenses.

She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks reveals another important non-verbal technique to be added to those listed in the introduction: silence. The unspoken grief, the unpunished abuse, the burning humiliation: all of these are softly represented in Philip’s oeuvre with the silence of the unwritten word. ‘Questions! Questions!’, like many other poems of the book, covers half of the page, allowing the unwritten to surround it, creating first of all an image of silence.

⁸⁶ R. Bayley, C. Lucas (Eds.), 2007, *Sociolinguistic Variation, Theories, Methods and Application*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 29.

I would like to make clear this unconventional use of “i-”, noted in *The Absence*, as rooted in the Rastafarian practice of privileging the “I” in many words, so explained by Velma Pollard:

The pronoun ‘I’ of SJE gives place to /mi/ in JC and is glossed as I, my, mine, me, according to the context. It is this ‘I’ of SJE that has become the predominant sound in the Rastafarian language, though its implications are far more extensive than the simple SJE pronoun ‘I’ could ever bear. Father Owens suggests that the rejection of the JC /mi/ is the result of a perception that “the pronoun ‘me’ as expressive of subservience, as representative of the self degradation that was expected of the slaves by their masters...As a consequence the pronoun ‘I’ has a special importance to Rastas and is expressly opposed to the servile ‘me’ in the singular or the plural (‘I an I’)...or the reflexive (Itself, Ian Itself...’).⁸⁷

‘For all the mothers’, the dedication opening *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, outlines the feminine – and feminist - viewpoint of the writer/narrator, who is looking for “She whom they call mother”⁸⁸. The deliberate mixtures of discourses, the logical and rational interruption of the research, allow the identification of different target readers and multi-angled narrative perspectives.

In *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, the narration goes on through the book, divided into nine chapters to recall the nine-month period of pregnancy, as a kind of *bildungsroman* whose goal is the retrieving of a mother, of a mother/land, of a mother tongue. These poems create a space in which the English reader is washed away. This is Philip’s space, one of collective memory - a heterotopic⁸⁹ space whose mother tongue is Silence. The use of these quotations create thus a parallel with the epic genre, which constitutes an image, a heterotopic *displace* from where the narrator speaks. It

⁸⁷ V. Pollard, 1994, *Dread talk: The language of Rastafari*, Canoe Press, Kingston, p. 11.

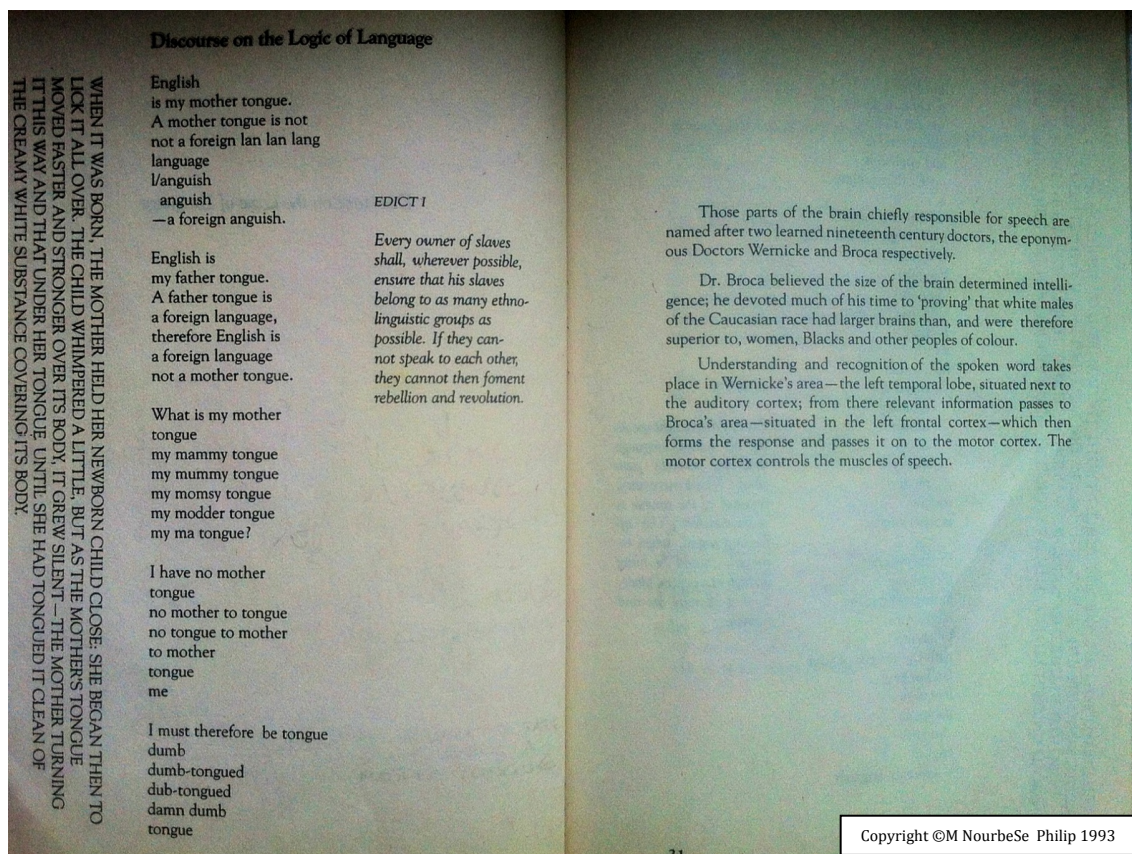
⁸⁸ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Heterotopy is a concept elaborated by Michel Foucault to describe places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions. These are spaces of *otherness*, which are neither here nor there, that simultaneously physical and mental. A typical heterotopy is the space reflected in the mirror.

is a voluntary displacement that in *Zong!* takes place in the ocean. (I will deal with the writer's use of silence later in this chapter.)

A double narrator is thus traceable, switching from the aphasic girl looking for her mother, to Philip, who, in the central parts of the book 'Discourse on the Logic of Language' and 'Universal Grammar', acts as a demiurge, stopping the research, detaching the reader from the unreal place of the epic journey and putting language at the centre of the colonial discourse. It is language the real protagonist, the one looking for a mother, which is threatened and mistreated by English, only a father tongue. In these two parts of the book, the writer achieves a change in perspective by means of strategic layout (which I will explain later) that consequently reduces the distance reader/story. All of a sudden, the reader is called for reflection and interaction, looking at the English – language and colonizer – as the real subaltern.

3.3.1 The Multiple Perspectives In ‘Discourse On The Logic Of Language’



‘Discourse on the logic of language’ is the central and perhaps most fascinating poem of the book, in which the reader deals with four different discourses unusually co-present on the page, so to find the reading unmanageable, a proper dilemma. The juxtaposed texts, featuring different styles and registers that switch from myth, poetry to law on just one page, give the reader multiple points of view: different perspectives and interpretations are at stake, giving the text that freshness that only a dialogic structure can achieve. Philip perfectly achieves this goal by utilising a vernacular which makes the discourse more spontaneous and casual, and from which it is still possible to gain knowledge. There are four different discourses used in this poem.

The Mythical text is presented in vertical on the side of the page,

THE MOTHER THEN PUT HER FINGERS INTO HER CHILD'S MOUTH – GENTLY FORCING IT OPEN; SHE TOUCHES HER TONGUE TO THE CHILD'S TONGUE, AND HOLDING THE TINY MOUTH OPEN, SHE BLOWS INTO IT – HARD. SHE WAS BLOWING WORDS – HER WORDS, HER MOTHER'S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE – INTO HER DAUGHTER'S MOUTH.⁹⁰

This text, written in capital letters, is a subversive attempt to reaffirm the centrality of the margin, a visual disruption forcing the reader to turn the book in order to be able to read it. It is impossible to read the other texts from this perspective and this gives the impression that the vertical text “is calling into question the relevance of the other discourses”. At the same time the position of this text “shows how important perspective is in reading, as in culture, and how one culture's margin is another culture's space in which to write”.⁹¹ Using this secret language called ‘mother tongue’ makes this ritual of passing female wisdom from mother to daughter. The Standard English with which the text is written shows how the author must resign to the fact that the mother tongue she is looking for, that of “her mother's mother and the mothers before”, has been violently replaced by the colonizer's English.

⁹⁰ Ivi, p. 32.

⁹¹ N. Guttman, 1996, *Dream of the Mother Language: Myth and History in She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS), Vol. 21, No. 3, Other Americas (Autumn, 1996), pp. 53-68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/467975> (accessed 21 February 2014)

This violence, affecting the Afro-Caribbean so that it is impossible for them to recover the language of the origins, is shown in the (invented) Edict I on the opposite side of the same page:

*Every owner of slaves
shall, wherever possible
ensure that his slaves
belong to as many ethno-
linguistic groups as
possible. If they can-
not speak to each other
they cannot then foment
rebellion and revolution.*⁹²

The author describes, by mimicking the colonizer's speech, how the colonized were forced to dismiss their language. This is what Spivak calls epistemic violence, wherein the

subaltern must always be caught in translation, never truly expressing herself, because of the colonial power's destruction of her culture, and the marginalization of her way of understanding and knowing the world.⁹³

Once again, silencing is the privileged weapon of control. Caught in the grips between Myth and Law there is Poetry, in which the innovative and aphasic language shows the refusal to accept English as a mother tongue.

English is
my father tongue.
A father tongue is
a foreign language,
therefore English is
a foreign language
not a mother tongue.

What is my mother
tongue
my **mammy** tongue
my **mummy** tongue
my **momsy** tongue
my **modder** tongue
my **ma** tongue?⁹⁴

⁹² M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 30.

⁹³ G. Spivak, 1988, "Can The Subaltern Speak?" in C. Nelson, L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and The Interpretation of Culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 271-313.

Locked in between the English words there are, here in bold for emphasis, different variants of the word ‘mother’ in Caribbean dialects. The dismantling action is mainly carried out by means of metaphoric allusions to colonized culture-bound elements. *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* is for the most of it written in Standard English, with items from Creole *continuum* suddenly embedded in the middle of the verses. Why this choice? As a reply to colonizer’s definitions of nation language – Bad English, Broken English, Patois, Dialect— Philip defines English itself “a tainted language which claims to be the norm”, adopting a continuum between Standard English and Demotic – the language of the ancient Egyptian people opposed to the hieratic style, which is the solution to a sharp choice between SE or Demotic. According to Philip, language must always present a dilemma, and the choice between SE and Demotic would lead to bad writing, in the name of linguistic validity. The author confirms her choice in ‘The Absence of Writing’, when she affirms:

To say that the experience can only be expressed in standard English (if there is any such thing) or only in the Caribbean demotic (there *is* such a thing) is, in fact, to limit the experience for the African artist working in the Caribbean demotic. It is in the continuum of expression from standard to Caribbean English where the veracity of expression lies.⁹⁵

By affirming this, Philip acknowledges her impossibility to refuse English language being part of her upbringing. This continuum plays havoc with Standard English, giving the writer the chance to i-magine an Afro Caribbean experience and exploit the SE for spreading the message, even if by using this endemically hostile language.

⁹⁴ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 30.

⁹⁵ Ivi, p. 84.

English
is my mother tongue.
A mother tongue is not
not a foreign lan lan lang
language
l/anguish
anguish
-- a foreign anguish.⁹⁶

Typographical pauses and aphasic productions here symbolize the *babbling* process that the Afro-Caribbean must experiment with, a stage of their upbringing in the colonizer's language environment.

This way of transforming language, which means speaking it imperfectly from the colonizer's viewpoint, reinforces the need of a different perspective if we want to understand the new discourse set up by the colonial subject. Defining "babbling" this kind of writing, a kinetic transcription of an oral language into poetry, uncovers once more the ambiguity of Philip's language.

Firstly, as defined in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (2 ed.), "babbling" indicates the vocal sounds of infants, **especially involving repeated syllable-like forms** [bold added for emphasis], before the development of anything recognizable as speech. Below is a more detailed definition of the word:

Verb

1 talk rapidly and continuously in a foolish, excited, or incomprehensible way: *they babbled on about their holiday*

• [reporting verb] utter something rapidly and incoherently: [with direct speech]: 'Thank goodness you're all right,' she babbled

• reveal something secret or confidential by talking carelessly: *he babbled to another convict while he was in jail*

2 (usually as adjective **babbling**) (of a stream) make the continuous murmuring sound of water flowing over stones: *a gently babbling brook*

⁹⁶ Ivi, p. 30.

Noun

1 [*in singular*] the confused sound of a group of people talking simultaneously: *a babble of protest*

- foolish, excited, or confused talk: *her soft voice stopped his babble*
- [*mass noun*] background disturbance caused by interference from conversations on other telephone lines.

2 the continuous murmuring sound of water flowing over stones in a stream: *the babble of a brook*

Each definition reinforces what has been said about Philip's appropriation of language in this book, her own "Calibanesque" use of language to displace the colonizer: from the repeated syllable-like forms in 'Discourse on the Logic of Language' – lan, lan, language -- to the continuous murmuring sound of water pervading in *Zong!*. Incidentally, being "babbling" a stage in child development and a state in language acquisition, it clearly fits the stage of enhancement of language through the 9 sections of pregnancy in which the book is divided. The fundamental importance of the kinesis in Philip's poetry emerges from the audio recordings of the book, performed by the author herself. In fact, completed by African drums and music in the background, the Law and Medicine texts are read out loud simultaneously by a polyvocal chorus, overlapping with each other. Philip says in an interview: "In order to destroy the lyric voice - which was typical of British poetry - what I had in fact done was replace it with a polyvocal, multivocal chorus"⁹⁷. Yet, this way of performing the poem is useful to let the rhythm enter the poetry, enhancing its communicative power, in order to allow a full understanding, the reasons behind this structural choice. These overlapping voices, these monologues coming from different times – mythology, early colonial impositions and postcolonial poetry – and languages, create on the page a democratic space where different voices are spoken.

⁹⁷ K. Mahlis, 2004, *A Poet of Place: An Interview with Marlene NourbeSe Philip*, Callaloo, Volume 27, N.3, Summer 2004.
<https://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/callaloo/v027/27.3mahlis.html>
(accessed 16 March 2013).

By playing with the word “lan, lan, language” the author gives way to the reader to imagine language as a land in which the colonized finds his place from where to speak. She seems to be aware of the strangeness of the English language in the second stanza, where English becomes a father tongue, thus a foreign language, not a mother tongue. The stuttering structure is the clue of the aphasiac discourse, deriving from the violence exposed in the Edict II, in which the offending organ, the tongue, is threaten to be removed.

Broca’s aphasia, explained in the opposite page, explains how the speaker affected by aphasia has trouble finding the correct words, speaks haltingly and ungrammatical and is aware, often embarrassed, by his difficulty in making himself understood. The success of this stuttering layout is measured by the aphasic reading shown by the English native speaker. Moreover, this aphasia is the result of rape and violence which caused lesions to brain cortex. So, Caribbean demotic speech reflects the damage and the resistance to that damage, expressed in this poem through linguistic tools such as word fragments, syllabic repetition, line-breaks and gaps in the page.

In the multiple choice text on the following page, read by a Caribbean female voice, the colonized dismantles the tools the colonizer uses to accomplish his violent goals of oppression. This sarcastic reading, more than making the austere tone of the English speaker ridiculous, shows the ability of the colonized to produce a sharp analysis of language, that is, a systematic structure of language rooted on a valid theoretical model.

In the third stanza, as language must always present a dilemma, the author chooses to express her search for a mother tongue by using words nor from dialects neither from demotic, but a continuum, passing from acrolect “mother”, to mesolect “mammy, momsy, modder”, to basilect “ma”, to conclude, few lines underneath, “I must therefore be tongue dumb”, resigning to her impossibility of retrieving her mother tongue, her consciousness, her identity.

3.3.2 Resignifying Standard English: The Semantic Shift In Marlene NourbeSe Philip

“There are no facts, only interpretations.”

F. Nietzsche

In ‘Universal Grammar’, Philip shows another canny technique, by using Standard English words to assign connotations never ascribed to them by the colonizer. This is clear from the first page of the poem, when the author parses Standard English words adding to them features that explain how these words change meaning when applied to the colonized.

Smallest – adjective of quantity, superlative degree, qualifying the noun, cell (unsuccessfully)⁹⁸

Through the redefinition of Standard English words by using Standard English, Philip proves how those meanings are not firm and stable, but changeable and indeterminate like all meanings. Here (unsuccessfully) is both a reference to Dr Broca’s attempt to show how “the white males of the Caucasian race had larger brains than, and were therefore superior to, women, Blacks and other peoples of colour” and a way to discarding the imposed way in which sentences must be parsed and the words defined. In such a way, the standard link between signifier and signified is dismantled and a new i-mage is built.

The poem is thus set up like a parsing exercise. “To Parse”, according to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, is “to describe the grammar of a word when it is in a particular sentence” (Longman 1029). In the fifth part of the poem, the definition of parsing is different from the dictionary meaning and clearly contains allusions to the colonial situation, in which the colonizer aspired to eradicate the African languages and cultures:

⁹⁸ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 36.

Parsing – the exercise of dis-membering language into fragmentary cells that forget to re-member.⁹⁹

Philip redefines the parsing process as a dis-membering one, challenging the colonizer's whole categorization and definition system. Language as used by colonizer fulfils what Fowler calls the 'role of expression of the discriminations which a culture needs to make, but its role goes further than that'¹⁰⁰. Accordingly, Philip goes further, discriminating the colonizer by means of his own words.

This is how the writer exposes the way in which science, through a tainted language such as English, allowed violence and rape in pursuit of progress, an ambitious project of expansion in which reality is distorted by means of linguistic imposition, but unable to reach the heart of the foreign experience. Foreign language acting in such a way produces distorting meanings, creating a false world in the name of the logic of imperial discourse. Philip continues replying to structural linguistics, by juxtaposing recursion to her definition of language.

Man is
The tall man is
The tall, blond man is
The tall, blond, blue-eyed man is
*The tall, blond, blue-eyed, white-skinned man is*¹⁰¹

This excerpt shows the linguistic property of recursion thanks to which, as theorized by Noam Chomsky, the unlimited extension of any natural language is possible using the recursive device of embedding clauses within sentences for forming new strings.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Ivi, p. 41.

¹⁰⁰ R. Fowler, 1996, *Linguistic Criticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

¹⁰¹ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 37.

¹⁰² N. Chomsky, 1965, *Aspects of The Theory of Syntax (Vol. 11)*, The MIT press, Mass., Cambridge.

Contrary to this theory strictly based on syntax and system, Philip gives her own definition of language through the following definition:

MANY FACTORS AFFECT AND DETERMINE THE ORDER OF WORDS IN A SPOKEN SENTENCE: THE STATE OF MIND OF THE SPEAKER; THE GENDER OF THE SPEAKER; HIS OR HER INTENTIONS; THE CONTEXT OF SPEECH; THE IMPRESSION THE SPEAKERS WISHES TO MAKE; THE BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN SPEAKER AND LISTENER AND, NOT LEAST OF ALL, THE CONSTRAINTS OF UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR.¹⁰³

Here she privileges the pragmatic aspect, the social function of language, recalling in the end the Optimality Theory perspective, a linguistic model proposing that the observed forms of language arise from the interaction between conflicting constraints.

¹⁰³ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 37.

3.3.3 How To Dismantle The English Norm

The unlimited power claimed by English language is denied by giving power to linguistic constraints, which enable the human being to learn language. In fact, it is the strict imposition of rules on language use that builds boundaries and walls around English itself, “floundering in the old” as affirmed in ‘Lessons for the Voice’, the poem part of ‘The Question of Language is an Answer to Power’. The author revisits by means of phonetic explanations of Afro-Caribbean traits the influence of English on the actual Creole. Again, Philip empowers herself to criticize the inability of English to renew itself, slave of its own rigid rules. This allows the Creole speaker to escape by the siege and retrieve in the Creole continuum, a language that standardises and dignifies “nigger slave coolie” dialects, its oral legacy. It is from oral literature that appropriation emerges.

According to Ashcroft, “orature itself is a form of ‘inscription’”¹⁰⁴, a form of literary language, which may standardize a certain dialect form. The language variation operating in the post-colonial is potentially unbounded, except that it operates, whether consciously or not, under the constraints of a purpose that is essentially political. One of the way in which colonization may ‘arrest the natural flow of standard language’¹⁰⁵ is by putting their dialects into written form. Philip achieves a higher peak by avoiding any use of well-defined language, and disabling the colonizer to “grammarize” her language. The section is closed by a quotation from a (invented) book, ‘Mother’s Recipes on How to Make a Language Yours or How Not to Get Raped’,

Slip mouth over the syllable; moisten with tongue the word.
Suck Slide Play Caress Blow -- Love it, but if the word
gags, does not nourish, bite it off-at its source-
Spit it out
Start again¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ B. Ashcroft, 2008, *Caliban's Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 11.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 41.

The rude meaning of these verses is diminished by a punctuation that creates a maternal rhythm of protection and safety. The recipe clearly sets up a relationship between the offending word redefined and identified in the raping male sexual organ, both cast as tools of violence and oppression. The manipulation of the signifier, the code mixing and the evaluation of her own mother tongue are shown again from a perspective point of view:

The tall, blond, blue-eyed, white-skinned man is shooting

*an elephant
a native
a wild animal
a Black
a woman
a child¹⁰⁷*

As previously seen in ‘Discourse on the Logic of Language’, it is the reader, whether black or white, determining the positive or negative connotation of the signifier “man”, in standard English used as a neuter term as in mankind, manhood or manhunt, which, in a colonial context, can only be referring to a tall, blond, blue-eyed and white-skinned person, whilst “a Black” and “a wild animal” are considered hyponyms of colonizer. In ‘Testimony Stoops to Mother Tongue’ the adult cyclamen girl has reached the threshold of awareness.

The poem opens with a verse from Robert Browning’s *The Ring and The Book*:

*‘Tis a figure, a symbol, say;
A thing’s sign: now for the thing signified¹⁰⁸*

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ivi, p. 52.

This quotation shifts the attention of the reader on the physical feature of the signified, the body of the Afro-Caribbean woman. With mind and body concentrate in an attempt to tidy the messy room of the past, she produces an absent i-mage of the woman she is becoming by giving a positive connotation to derogative terms used by white colonizers to define African people:

as the word
 kinks hair
 flattens noses
 thickens lips
 designs prognathous jaws
 shrinks the brain¹⁰⁹

Here the stress is put on the manipulative action of language, which physically affected African people, as if their use of non-standard English had been an obstacle to a proper evolution into a human being. Their “odd” lineaments seem like being an anathema, due to their refusal to be fully absorbed by English language and society, which deformed their jaws and flattened their noses, cursed to live in a black-shaped, breathless prison of words, from which she tries to escape in the following lines:

the prison of these walled tongues
--speaks
 this/
 fuck-mother motherfuckin-
 this/
 holy-white-father-in-haeven
 this/
 ai! ai!
 tongue
that wraps
 squeezes
the mind round
 and around¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ivi, p. 53.

The imprisoned tongue cries out, exploding in a frustrated “ai! ai!”, an “exclamation of indignation, distress, surprise or pleasure”¹¹¹, fenced by a single word, “tongue”, which squeezes and wraps the black body and mind. But the smallest cells remember, and so does the girl, now a grown woman, who finally tries her tongue in the final poem, in a desperate attempt to shape her absent image through memory.

If memory is essential to survival, what should be the language of memory? Which tongue should the cells speak? Is writing the only tool to ensure a future for the forthcoming generations? And what if the tongue flattered again and got forever stuck into silence, too weak to be born again on the page?

At the end of the book, as if the woman was forced to find a way out before time elapsed, she frees herself by turning her body into a musical instrument, where polyphony and rhythm fill the empty skull coming out from the ribcage, depicted as a “harp of accompaniment, strung with the taut in gut; Flute or drumstick the bones”. And when the music is over, myth and the present are brought together in the echo of silence, leaving the woman, as a modern Philomela, dreaming if she might *sing/continue/over/into/...pure utterance*.

¹¹¹ L. Winer, 2008, *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago: On Historical Principles*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal & Kingston.

3.3.4 The Silent Space: A Postcolonial Heterotopy

Silence is a crucial perspective for writing in the postcolonial field. In her work on the uses of silence in literature, Sarah Dauncey uncovers some prototypical characters that opened new paths of writing, traceable in Philip's style. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* represents silence by a subversive use of graphic and typographical means – dashes, asterisks, blank pages or missing chapters -- with which he mocks the conversational voice and highlights the artificial nature of the text. The social urge to speak is thus hushed by narrative ellipsis, the only possible way to describe some particular actions. Another way to express the social use of silence is found in Fanny, the taciturn protagonist of Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Her being the moral centre of the novel especially comes out if juxtaposed with the other noisy characters: her silence is rooted in her condition as the subaltern in the household and in her fear to speak out of place, in a way that clearly recalls how the colonizer sets the subaltern colonized out of social domain of language¹¹².

In *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, this voiced-silence takes shape through different verbal and non-verbal techniques and linguistic appropriations. As regards Philip's use of silence, it represents ideological processes of subjugation from the colonizer's perspective, in order to affirm the silent other. In subverting the narrative perspective, Philip makes the colonizer feel silent, other in his own realm, unable to articulate speech, the worst lack ascribed to blacks. In this silent space, Afro-Caribbean people, apparently devoid of consciousness due to the lack of a mother tongue, acquire power and dictate the rules. This is what happens in the empty spaces of the pages, the white space on which it is the black word speaking.

¹¹² S. Dauncey, 2003, *The Uses of Silence - A Twentieth-Century Preoccupation in the Light of Fictional Examples, 1900-1950*, Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies, University of Warwick, Warwick.

In *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* the reader is called for a creative, performative, visual reading. The blank space allows him to stop and breathe again after emerging from the waterfall of words and get an image in mind produced, among several strategies, by use of staggering, scattering writing as in ‘Dream-skins’, the fifth step towards the rejoining of mother and daughter in ‘Over Every Land and Sea’.

The long search which began in ‘Clues’ comes to an end and mother and daughter join each other in language, as the daughter’s search for her mother (expressed in standard English) and the mother’s search for her daughter (in Creole) soon fuse and become one: in the mother’s words: “She gone—gone to where and don’t know / looking for me looking for she” and physically, “I suckle her / suckling me.” The question of creolisation is presented in ‘Afterbirth’:

Afterbirth

one breast
white
the other black
headless
in a womb-black night
a choosing—
one breast
neither black
nor white¹¹³

Again, use of broken syntax and aphasic hyphens stress the tainted nature of English language, its hybrid collocation between ‘axes of identity, geographical spaces, linguistic and cultural traditions, and histories’. In this context, “black” and “night” are deprived of their fearful connotation, with being linked to “womb”, a place of safety, of assurance. The black womb is that of the black Mother Africa, in which develops the daughter, namely all the Africans who entered the New World to become orphans of language and liberty.

¹¹³ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 7.

‘Cyclamen Girl’, the second section, deals with the issue of colonial education and imposition of Christian values. Here Christianity is seen as a means of destruction of Caribbean female identity, a denial of African spiritual integrity. The flower girl, recalling the myth of Apollo who metamorphosed Hyacinths in the eponymous flower, attends the White Ceremony, a traditional western ceremony in which the bond with church is solidified by receiving the Holy Spirit. The cyclamen girl, symbolizing the Caribbean people forced to Christianity, is catechised, given instructions that she passively learns by heart ending up being “dubbed dumb”. The Eucharistic ritual is mocked by defining the host a sowbread ‘spliced and spiced into a variety of life and lies’, eventually refused in the end of the poem ‘Vows’, where the girl promises to believe in the only true “triune majesty – /sunshine/ black skin &/ doubt”. In ‘The Catechism’ the cyclamen girl tries to stand up between the two languages, swinging like “a skilled trapezist” from “the code of Victoria”, written in Standard English, and “the code of mama”, written in dialect. In ‘Transfiguration’ the process ‘of renaming with the name of the stranger’ is illustrated, leading to a havoc that ends up in a silent disorder, a lack of language able to shape a clear identity. The transfiguration of which the title speaks is not the change in appearance showed by Jesus, but a girl becoming a woman, another forbidden ritual in Christian Church¹¹⁴. Moreover, by calling out loud the goddesses of the African tradition, the African people managed to recover their own spirituality showing that they are not accepting passively this attempt by the colonizer to estrange them from themselves.

¹¹⁴ Through much of its history, Jewish, Greeks and Romans have considered women ritually unclean. The taboo of the menstrual contamination deprived women of the right to participate in religious rituals.

The following verses show how they resist by remembering components of the African culture:

Remembering
First the drums
Then the women
Called out her name

Atabey!

Her other name

*Oshun!*¹¹⁵.

Rhythm
Song!
*Drum!*¹¹⁵

The poem is closed by the exclamation “Name her!”, closing the crescent pace of the ritual. In many West African countries a child was not seen as having human identity until it was named. So, in the end, she is recognized as a human being, this time purified by a blessed blood. The ceremony is over and the “newly arrived” woman is to receive her name. But, again, silence softly breaks on the page.

¹¹⁵ Ivi, p. 16.

Mahogany-tipped breast catches
The glare of the fires
Women of the moon feast and fast
And feast again

Name her

Aphrodite! Mary! Atebey!
Orehu! Yemoja!
Oshun!

For ner newly arrived wound
Name her!

3.4 Introduction: Redemption Zong!

*And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow:
And yet to times in hope, my verse shall stand
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.*

Shakespeare, (fragment of dismembered) Sonnet LX¹¹⁶

Marlene NourbeSe Philip's goal of dismantling English as a predominant language continues in *Zong!*. Coherent with the writing techniques and issues revealed by *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, this time the author focuses on a precise historical fact, namely the murder of some 150 African slaves by throwing overboard from the ship Zong in 1781. On the background of racism, slave trade and violence (mainly towards African women), the book is a further development of the themes pervading *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, which is useful to sum up before going ahead with the analysis of *Zong!*: the translation of English into English, a fascinating strategy uncovered by Alonso Breto¹¹⁷, the importance of naming in African traditions, the shaping of a collective memory through writing, the attempt to shape the mythical discourse in the contemporary society, the dismembering process of language and bodies, the rebirth, the loss and research for one's own roots, the eternal rolling to the shore of past and present and other matters I will be dealing with throughout this section. In *Zong!*, all of this is supported by a staggering writing full of repetitions, overlapping words, switching, fading fonts and empty spaces recalling the echoes of stories from a past that, in Philip's parlance, "cannot be told yet must be told".

¹¹⁶ W. Shakespeare, 1990, *I sonetti*, Garzanti, Milano, p. 80.

¹¹⁷ I.A. Breto, 2008, "Translating English into English in a case of symbolic translation: language and politics through the body in Marlene Nourbese Philip's *She tries her tongue her silence softly breaks*", in *New Trends in Translation and Cultural Identity*, Cambridge Scholars Press, Newcastle, pp. 21-43.

The analysis of *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* moved from a sort of parsing of the title. In *Zong!*, the blurb which appears on the book jacket, is one way to sum up the historical events, the sources and the writing strategies – the visible ones -- adopted by using the author's own words, sometimes ambiguous and deceptive:

In November 1781, the captain of the slave ship *Zong* ordered that some 150 Africans be murdered by drowning so that the owners of the ship could collect insurance monies. Relying entirely on the words of the legal decision *Gregson vs. Gilbert* – the only extant public document related to the massacre of these African slaves – *Zong!* Tells the story that cannot be told yet must be told. Equal parts song, moan, shout, oath, ululation, curse, and chant, *Zong!* Excavates the legal text. Memory, history, and law collide and metamorphose into poetics of the fragment. Though the innovative use of fugal and counterpointed repetition, *Zong!* becomes an anti-narrative lament that stretches the boundaries of the poetic form, haunting the spaces of forgetting and mourning the forgotten.

3.4.1 Acknowledgments: A Planned Inaccuracy?

*Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.*

Shakespeare, (fragment of dismembered) Sonnet LX¹¹⁸

The question mark above, which recalls the exclamation mark of the title, is here necessary due to missing clues. But such inaccuracies that appear in the very beginning of a book like *Zong!*, where even the radius of the empty spaces is calculated, deserve particular attention.

Firstly, let us consider the uncertain figure of “some 150” slaves murdered. It could be argued that this is a straightforward report, like a newspaper headline providing the reader with a first general account. The exact number of slaves thrown overboard the *Zong* is actually unknown, but, as the author puts it in the notes to the book, “The exact number ... remains a slippery signifier of what was undoubtedly a massacre”¹¹⁹ to which Philip replies with 229 (invented) names buried in ‘Os’, vanishing in ‘Dicta’, written in a smaller font which “reinforces the historical marginality of the Africans in relation to the Europeans”¹²⁰.

Secondly: “Suzanna Tammimen’s interest in, and support of, my work, as well as her patience over the years I have been working on *Zong!*, have **been been** indispensable to the completion of work.”¹²¹ Is the ‘been been’ here emphasized in bold just a typing mistake or a voluntary use of reduplication, again, to emphasize her acknowledgment in Tobagonian Creole language? Reduplication is one among the twelve lexical progresses identified by

¹¹⁸ W. Shakespeare, 1990, *I Sonetti*, Garzanti, Milano, p. 80.

¹¹⁹ M.N. Philip, 2008, *Zong!*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, p. 208.

¹²⁰ T. Williams, 2009, *Zong!(review)*, *African American Review*, 43(4), John Hopkins University Press, St. Louis, Missouri, pp. 785-787.

¹²¹ M.N. Philip, 2008, *Zong!*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, p. xi.

Hancock ¹²², a characteristic morphological process of Trinidadian and other English-lexicon Creoles, according to which a base word is repeated twice for intensity. Examples could be found in expressions such as /slo-slo/ “very slow” or /krai-krai/ “cry constantly”.

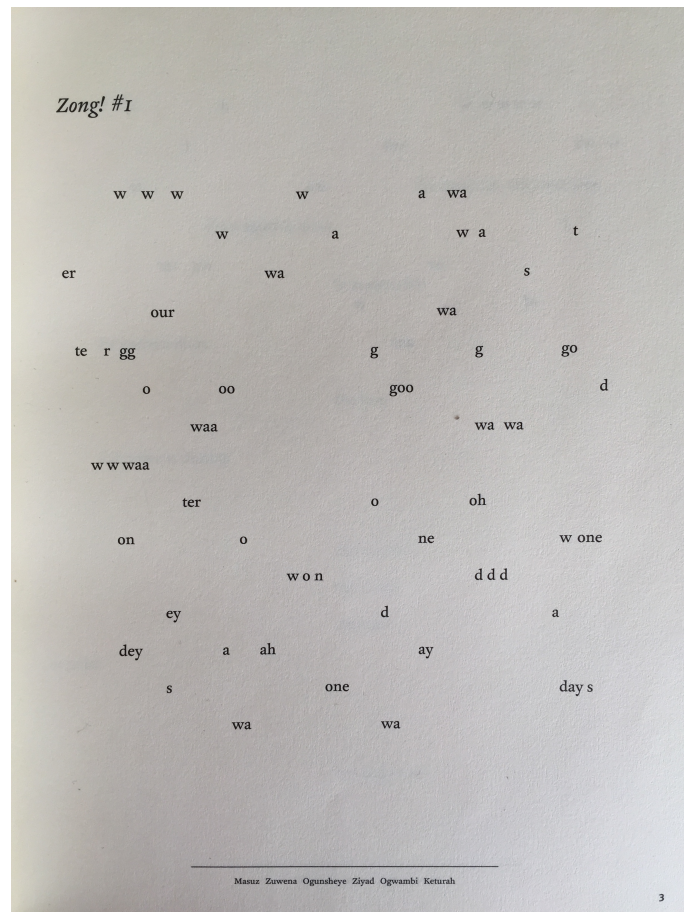
¹²² B. Kortmann, E.W. Schneider (Eds.), 2004, *A Handbook of Varieties of English, A Multimedia Reference Tool, Volume 1: Phonology, Volume 2: Morphology and Syntax*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin.

3.4.2 The Innovative Writing In *Zong!*

*Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.*

Shakespeare, (fragment of dismembered) Sonnet LX¹²³

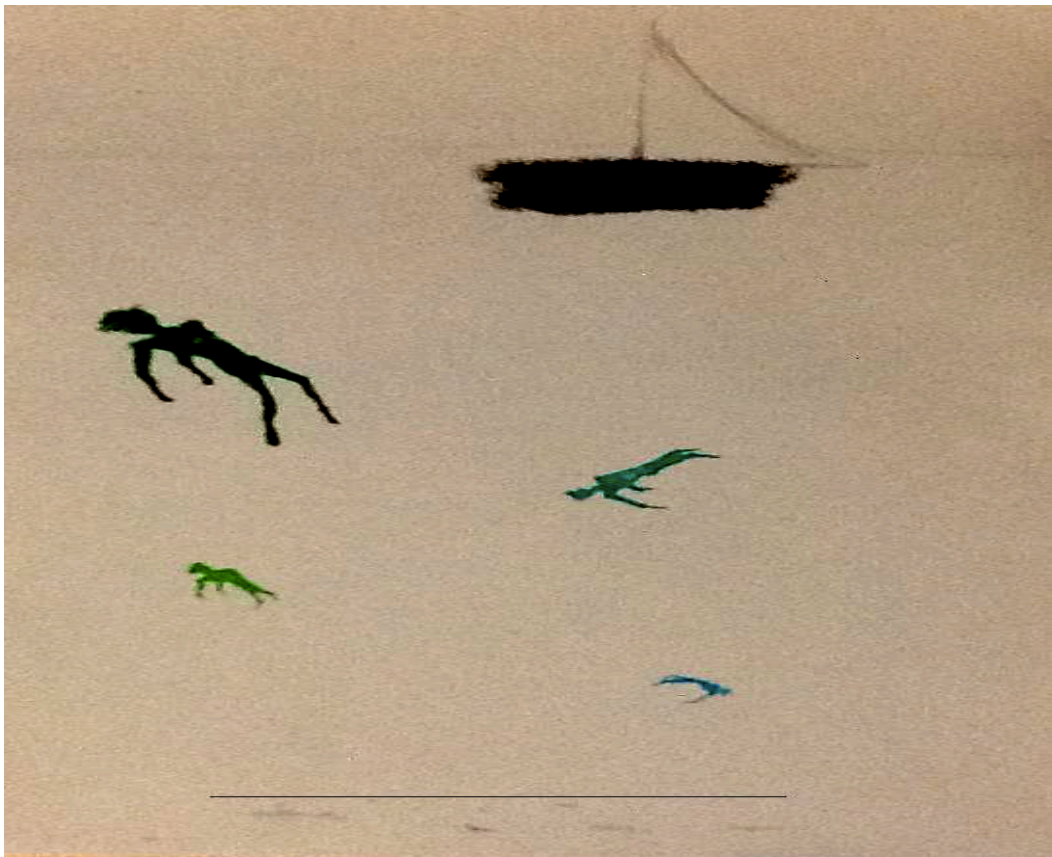
Efficacy and preciousness of language are among the most distinguishing features of Philip's writing. The unconventional nature of her writing reaches its climax in *Zong!*, as shown in the following excerpt, 'Zong #1'¹²⁴, where repetition, form and sonority, imagination and fragmentation, seek to tell the untold:



¹²³ W. Shakespeare, 1990, *I Sonetti*, Garzanti, Milano, p. 80.

¹²⁴ M.N. Philip, 2008, *Zong!*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, p. 3.

This stuttering writing acts like a slow-motion device. It makes the short journey of the drowning slave last longer. It becomes unhurried, dignified. Right there, in the circle on the centre of the page the body is lying still for a while, in a last battle for life, exhausted. Free at last, the body seems to explode, pouring out the last broken words from the mouth, which even if “dubbed-dumb” by water, speaks. Death comes and the slave can join his grave, embraced by a foreign mother “l/and” on the seabed, right below the line at the bottom of the page.



Drawing by Lili Sloboszlai

This verbal technique, along with many others -- comparison, metonymy, symbolism etc. -- is what Philip pursues to build the image out of words, to fulfil the function of “enabling the artist to translate the i-mage into meaningful language for her audience.”¹²⁵

¹²⁵ M.N. Philip, 1993, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, The Women's Press Ltd, London, p. 78

Living in the New World, the Afro-Caribbean experienced how the English language lacked words suitable to express them, failing to fulfil the main function of the language. They were forced to speak in a language etymologically hostile and expressive of the non-being of the African.

As previously stated, visible, superficial themes and techniques are summarized on the book's back cover. As it reads, the book is 'relying entirely on the words of the legal decision *Gregson vs. Gilbert* – the only extant public document related to the massacre of these African slaves – *Zong!* tells the story that cannot be told yet must be told'.

Let us pause for a while on how this story is told, on the non-narrative account of the Zong massacre. The non-narrative structure, a rearranging of the two-pages account of the "slaves ledger", is visible in the opening poem 'Os' (from Latin, *bone*) from 'Zong #9' until the last one. Here, words are reduplicated in an attempt to fill the gaps, in order to humanize this cold list of "dicta man" or "meagre woman": failing. Marlene again comes across the limits of a language, English, used as a soulless, mechanical tool whose only purpose is to quantify and value bodies, arms, wombs. Only tears, silent tears are left to this cargo of merchandising to differentiate themselves from animals. This is another silent voice coming out from the empty spaces of *Zong!*, the suffocated screaming of a slave deprived of dignity, of roots, of language, even of his own name.

This is how the author attempts to tell a story about which there is no account, no accurate historical report – or, at least, about which not enough has been written or said. The effort is to create a narrative tissue out of a two-page accounts ledger, in which Africans were listed - deprived of any specificity - according to their market value: generally 30 pounds sterling. The first thing Philip achieves is the retrieval of the names of the slaves: lying under the line at the bottom of the page, just like buried bodies, they are written in a very small font as if the reader is looking at them from above,

placed the same level, equal in death. The resistance to any narrative structure, coherence and, thus, sense is expressed by the random rearranging of words here standing for the unnamed Africans listed in the logbook. This is the first of many paradoxes that constitute the fundamental reading key of *Zong!*: the indissoluble relation between slave and its price gives the only logical connection found in the ledger. The illogical sequence of words is clearly mirroring this issue.

The analysis of *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* and *Zong!* highlights how these two books are grounded on multiple parallelisms. If in the former, this parallel structure involves the plot and is disclosed throughout the narration – e.g. Marlene/Ceres looking for her mother tongue/daughter. In *Zong!*, it affects the whole layout: a seemingly nonsensical, illogical story of the murder of 150 people to collect insurance monies can be told just through a nonsensical, illogical writing. “To wit”, Philip creates her work by writing a book that cannot be read. The parallel reading of the texts proceeds according to another analysis approach, the corpus linguistic one. In *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* madness pervades the writing, a “grief gone mad with crazy” during the search all over the sea and land. In *Zong!*, the “foul and leaky” structure of the book, recalls how “foul and leaky” was rendered the Zong ship. It is a madness that Philip shows by repeating many times some particular words, like only a fool would do. This is useful to understand the issues the author is mainly engaged with.

The author herself expressed her obsession for language in an interview given to Serah Acham¹²⁶ (emphasizing bold is mine):

SA: Is there any recurring subject or theme that you like to focus on in your writing?

MNP: **Language. Language in all of its manifestations.** What do I mean by language? I think what intrigues me is the fact that for many of us, particularly African people in the Caribbean, we lost our languages and historically there was the intent to split different linguistic groups, split up the groups so that they couldn't talk to each other, they couldn't work together to revolt and so on. **There was this deliberate destruction of one's linguistic heritage and coming out of that you have this, what I call mother tongue English which is also a father tongue in the sense that it is the language of oppression, domination, empire, all those things.** And we have to master this language, literally to prove that we are as good as our former owners and oppressors, so starting from that, exploring issues of what language do we use in writing. Do we use Standard English? Do we use the vernacular? Is that a language? Will people want to hear it? So language in all those permutations, you know? And how do I work with that? What language do I work in? Do I work in the vernacular? That can affect market. Because if you write something in the vernacular, the publisher might feel that it's not going to sell. You want something that's more Standard English.

The interesting thing about English is that English is itself a vernacular language. It's a mixture of Celtic, French, Anglo-Saxon words, German words and so on. You have different kinds of English. In the last couple of decades there's much more acknowledgement of what people call pidgin patois and people have been writing in it now, so all those issues fascinate me. What happens, or certainly what happened to me, is that the issue chooses you and then you're condemned to keep rehearsing it, exploring it from different vantage points.

¹²⁶ UWI Today, The University of The West Indies
https://sta.uwi.edu/uwitoday/archive/march_2010/article10.asp (accessed 4 April 2013)

Below, a statistical clue in support of Philip's answer, a word frequency sort list – some are omitted - from *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*:

1	the	411	7,3275 %
2	of	208	3,7083 %
3	And	165	2,9417 %
4	in	140	2,4960 %
5	a	96	1,7115 %
6	To	94	1,6759 %
7	I	69	1,2302 %
8	Is	67	1,1945 %
9	she	64	1,1410 %
10	her	62	1,1054 %
11	tongue	61	1,0875 %
12	It	53	0,9449 %
13	with	51	0,9093 %
14	As	49	0,8736 %
15	Word	44	0,7845 %
16	that	39	0,6953 %
17	not	36	0,6418 %
18	For	33	0,5883 %
19	on	30	0,5349 %
20	my	29	0,5170 %
21	language	25	0,4457 %
22	or	25	0,4457 %
23	this	25	0,4457 %
24	all	24	0,4279 %
25	by	24	0,4279 %
26	mother	24	0,4279 %
27	if	23	0,4101 %
28	me	23	0,4101 %
29	Am	22	0,3922 %
30	from	21	0,3744 %
31	words	21	0,3744 %
32	Where	18	0,3209 %
33	they	17	0,3031 %
34	white	17	0,3031 %
35	yours	17	0,3031 %
36	man	16	0,2853 %
37	into	15	0,2674 %
38	sound	15	0,2674 %
39	you	15	0,2674 %
40	Again	14	0,2496 %
41	be	14	0,2496 %
42	mouth	14	0,2496 %
43	memory	14	0,2496 %
44	name	14	0,2496 %
45	silence	14	0,2496 %
46	their	14	0,2496 %

47	Up	14	0,2496 %
48	When	14	0,2496 %
49	whose	14	0,2496 %
50	how	13	0,2318 %
51	like	13	0,2318 %
52	Girl	12	0,2139 %
53	His	12	0,2139 %
54	them	12	0,2139 %
55	Black	11	0,1961 %
56	down	11	0,1961 %
57	speech	11	0,1961 %
58	slaves	11	0,1961 %
59	voice	11	0,1961 %
[...]			
72	English	9	0,1605 %
73	meaning	9	0,1605 %
74	MOTHER'S	9	0,1605 %
75	no	9	0,1605 %
76	noun	9	0,1605 %
[...]			
83	loss	8	0,1426 %
[...]			
96	father	7	0,1248 %
97	grief	7	0,1248 %

This data gain importance if supported by another statistical outcome from *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, which reveals the use of 1772 unique words in the text, whose total number of words is 5609. A great accuracy in choosing words that outlines the effort the author made at giving a specific weight to each word. These 1772 unique words represent the 31,59 % of the total, each single word the 0,0180 %, so much more than those used twice (299) or three times (111): a precious writing by an author, I dare say, “one of a kind, in a class of one’s own”. What must be noticed here is how just the higher percentage of repetitions is found in the poem ‘Discourse on the logic of language’, a further proof of how a form of aphasic, hesitating discourse comes into play when the author tries her tongue in pursuit of the mother tongue: an example is given by the words “mother” and “tongue”.

Mother, repeated throughout the text as follows, is almost always used as a modifier of tongue or language:

d sea Meanwhile Prosperine's mother Ceres, with panic in her heart
 od lost - She whom they call mother, I seek. It would take a long
 memory, The great stone-bird mother Sweet-balmed with honey Drops
 on the Logic of Language THE MOTHER THEN PUT HER FINGERS INTO HER
 LOWING WORDS - HER WORDS, HER MOTHER'S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S
 MOTHER'S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHER
 WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE
 nd revolution English is my mother tongue. A mother tongue is not
 nglish is my mother tongue. A mother tongue is not not a foreign la
 not a mother tongue.
 What is my mother
 my ma tongue? I have no mother tongue no mother to tongue no
 ? I have no mother tongue no mother to tongue no tongue to mother
 mother to tongue no tongue to mother to mother tongue me I must the
 tongue no tongue to mother to mother tongue me I must therefore be
 er tongue and english is my mother tongue is my father tongue
 glish -- another tongue my mother mammy mummy moder mater macer
 tongue me mothertongue me mother me touch me with the tongue of
 is a foreign anguish The mother then put her fingers in her ch
 blowing words. Her words her mother's words those of her mother's
 r mother's words those of her mother's mother and all their mothers
 s words those of her mother's mother and all their mothers before h
 all working together. b) A mother tongue. c) The overseer's wh
 Start again from Mother's Recipes on How to Make a Lan
 ueen." Testimony stoops to Mother Tongue* * Robert Browning: The
 III the somewhere of another mother's tongue tongues licks into no
 peaks this/ fuck-mother motherfuckin- th
 ims and claims again or in my mother's mouth shall I use the father
 r's tongue cohabit in strange mother incestuous words to revenge th
 t on the pyres of silence a mother's child foreign made by a to
 touch her newborn child, the mother will have nothing to do with

Highlighted in red is the occurrence of “mother” only in the poem ‘Discourse on the logic of language’. The word is repeated 22 times, that is, the 0,3968% on the total words. Other occurrences of the word are “mothers” 0,0721 %, “MOTHER'S” 0,1443 %, “mother tongue” 0,0361%, “fuck-mother” 0,0180 %, “motherfuckin” 0,0180 %, with a relevant figure of 1,0641% on the total words. The last two occurrences show how efficacy is also pursued by using bad words, vernacular forms which, in my opinion, do not affect the elegance of the poems.

“Tongue”, totally repeated 61 times (1,0875%), occurs in ‘Discourse on the logic of language’ – in red - as many as 38 times:

And I, call and response in tongue and Word that back up in str
 BUT AS THE MOTHER'S TONGUE MOVED FASTER AND STRONGER OVER
 AY AND THAT UNDER THE TONGUE UNTIL SHE HAD TONGUED IT CLEAN
 CING IT OPEN; SHE TOUCHES HER TONGUE TO THE CHILD'S TONGUE, AND HOL
 HES HER TONGUE TO THE CHILD'S TONGUE, AND HOLDING THE TINY MOUTH OP
 lution English is my mother tongue. A mother tongue is not not a
 is my mother tongue. A mother tongue is not not a foreign lan lan l
 is my father tongue.
 A father tongue is
 not a mother tongue.
tongue
 my mammy tongue
 my mummy tongue
 my momsy tongue
 my modder tongue
 my ma tongue? I have no mother tongue no m
 ma tongue? I have no mother tongue no mother to tongue no tongue
 no mother tongue no mother to tongue no tongue to mother to mother
 tongue no mother to tongue no tongue to mother to mother tongue me
 no tongue to mother to mother tongue me I must therefore be tongue
 tongue me I must therefore be tongue dumb dumb-tongued dub-tongued
 tongued dub-tongued damn dumb tongue but I have a dumb tongue t
 mb tongue but I have a dumb tongue tongue dumb father tongue
 but I have a dumb tongue tongue dumb father tongue and engl
 tongue tongue dumb father tongue and english is my mother ton
 ue and english is my mother tongue is my father tongue is a f
 mother tongue is my father tongue is a foreign lan lang lang l
 nguish is English -- another tongue my mother mammy mummy moder
 mummy moder mater macer moder tongue mothertongue tongue me moth
 er moder tongue mothertongue tongue me mothertongue me mother
 mother me touch me with the tongue of your lan lang language
 cing it open. She touches her tongue to the child's tongue and hold
 hes her tongue to the child's tongue and holding the tiny mouth ope
 here necessary removal of the tongue is recommended. The offending
 ibes a) The penis. b) The tongue. c) Neither of the above.
 th of the above. In man the tongue is a) The principle organ of
 d) All of the above. The tongue is a) An inter-woven of stri
 t word requires a) The lip, tongue and jaw all working together.
 rking together. b) A mother tongue. c) The overseer's whip. d
 brief as Sappho's tremble of tongue on the brink of ex/ (when the
 consonant is called) plosive tongue on the brink of ex/ (prefix -
 ite-skinned man is shooting tongue trembles on the again and agai
 er the syllable; moisten with tongue the word.
 d freedom of the blade of the tongue affects their quality. When pr
 Testimony stoops to Mother Tongue* * Robert Browning: The ring a
 mmon in us - anathema - touch tongue to tongue release the strange
 - anathema - touch tongue to tongue release the strange sandwiched
 he strange sandwiched between tongue and cheek and lip III the so
 somewhere of another mother's tongue tongues licks into nothing the
 ai! ai! tongue that wraps squeeze
 and around IV this tongue that roots deep in yank pull t
 w a head (Gorgon - to turn my tongue to stone) a tail a haunt the a
 wait VI shall I strike under tongue and foot them -these words hol
 outh shall I use the father's tongue cohabit in strange mother ince
 upon the word She tries her tongue, her silence softly breaks Sh
 softly breaks She tries her tongue, her silence softly breaks Al
 wonder blackened stump of a tongue torn out withered petrifie
 r's child foreign made by a tongue that cursed the absence in l
 whose property this lack of tongue forgive is always to have mer
 mory; That body might become tongue Tempered to speech And where
 ilence is Abdication of word tongue and lip Ashes of once in what

Following Philip's example, who reveals "I white out and black out words"¹²⁷ writing about the conceptualization of *Zong!*, I had to "red out" some words in the list which are indirectly related to language. Indeed, it is because of the **white** colonizer's imposition of a **father** tongue, **English**, that the **Black slaves** suffered a mad **grief**. The **grief** of the **loss**. The **loss** of **memory**, of **voice**, of **speech**. As I explained in paragraph 2.1, 'Leafing *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*', it is both through a process of **renaming** and a translation from English to English that Philip gives new **meaning** to certain significant words, realizing one of the main strategies of postcolonial writing, the semantic shift. Another interesting word found throughout the text is "sea".

ers And over every land and **sea** Meanwhile Prosperine's mother
er all lands and over all the **sea**. Where she, where she, where
down by the just-down-the-way **sea** she friending fish and crab w
at And I recognize the salt **Sea** the yet else and...something
hat leave is seven dream-skin:**sea**-shell, sea-lace, feather-skin
s seven dream-skin:sea-shell, **sea**-lace, feather-skin and rainbow
reaming: (in two languages) **Sea**-shell low low over the hills
lying up up from the green of **sea** She rise esmerald skin fish b
merald skin fish belt weed of **sea** crown she Feather-skin lizar
enormous with milk and child **Sea**-lace In one hand the sun the

This is useful for two reasons. Firstly, it sets up the story in the marine element, the main field of the search for the mother tongue. The dynamic and never-ending rolling of the waves, its breaking on the shore, recalls in a way the pace of the writing, from time to time broken, reduced by reflections (e.g. in 'Discourse on the logic of Language' and 'Universal Grammar') which stop for a while the journey of the cyclamen girl. Secondly, the word "sea" establishes a tight link with the deepest and widest seas navigated by the *Zong*, the slave ship that Philip's book is named after.

¹²⁷ M.N. Philip, 2008, *Zong!*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, p. 193.

Absent cohesion/coherence and disjointed words delete the possibility of a proper machine driven analysis so that the system collapses. In order to get a reasonable corpus to realize a statistical, mechanical collection of data, the text and the disjointed words should be re-joined in pursuit of any sense: but, on the contrary, the lack of conjunctions, the random and repetitive use of words, the asyndetic listing of items – verbs, adjectives, nouns -- end up showing the non-sense, the drifting structure achieved by the author. Moreover, such a study would be rather blasphemous towards Philip's aims of non-sense, a scientific attempt to scheme the disorder, to rewind a voluntary entropy. Along with some similarities between *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* and *Zong!*, there are also some differences of fundamental importance occurring: if in the first, accuracy and uniqueness of words shaped a text with high dynamism, in the latter, repetition, echoes, unreadable pages turn the reading into a staggering reading in order 'to resist the urge to make sense'.¹²⁸

Let us turn next to the fundamental feature of this book, namely its musicality. As explained by Philip in the chapter called 'Notanda',

the fugue [...] was a frame through which I could understand *Zong!* In the musical sense of the word, *Zong!* is a counterpointed, fugal anti-narrative in which several strands are simultaneously at work. In a similar fashion *Zong!* is a sustained repetition or reiteration of various themes, phrases and voices, albeit fragmented.¹²⁹

The following definitions of fugue¹³⁰ let us better understand the evocative features of the structure, the fantastic state that this writing technique discloses:

- dissociative disorder in which a person forgets who they are and leaves home to create a new life; during the fugue there is no memory of the former life; after recovering there is no memory for events during the dissociative state

- a dreamlike state of altered consciousness that may last for hours or days

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ivi, p. 209.

¹³⁰ Wordnik, WordNet 3.0 Copyright 2006 by Princeton University
<https://www.wordnik.com/words/fugue> (accessed 23 June 2013)

This oneiric state of escape takes shape in the last chapter of the book, 'Ebora'. In Robert Rudnicki's parlance, the fugue achieves a dissociative disorder, "an escape from one mode of consciousness to another, and a literal escape from home to a new or unfamiliar place".¹³¹ Ebora, according to the definitions listed in the section called 'Manifesto', defines the underwater spirits haunting the sea. Here, the shift of consciousness from present to past times is pursued by blacking-out the gaps on the page, retrieving words coming both from the slaves and the crew. The fading font of the words filling the page, a far echo of stories untold, suggests the detachment of the writer from the journey and her new commitment to grab the words that come from Boateng's lips, wrote in a chaotic cluster of words and sounds.

But there is an order in all of this disorder. Looking carefully at the layout, another technique is retrieved, pointed out by the writer in 'Notanda': the "haiku" poem, whose main features of musicality and imagery are the groundwork of Philip's writing. Haiku poems are a short form of Japanese poetry. Thanks to Matsuo Bashō, they evolved from the "haikai" poems into a literary genre. Made of 17 syllables in 3 lines, its "genesis can be seen in the 'waka', a Japanese song made of thirty-one syllables in five lines".¹³²

Haiku are characterized by the juxtaposition of two images and the use of a "kireji" ("cutting word") between them, translated into English with a sort of verbal punctuation mark. Examples are found both in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, where the pause is expressed by means of dashes, and *Zong!*, where the disjointed phrases recall the most common kireji of the Japanese haiku tradition, aiming at conveying both rhythm and a sense of interruption which calls the reader to complete.

¹³¹ R.W. Rudnicki, 1999, *Percyscapes: The Fugue State in Twentieth-Century Southern Fiction*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge.

¹³² Y. Hakutani, 2009, *Haiku and Modernist Poetics*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

This freedom given to the reader constitutes, among the others, a fundamental principle of the Language (or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E)¹³³ poets' style, to whom Philip can be aligned. The performative reading, a criticism to passive reading, is the consequence of a disjunctive writing which erases the traditional idea of sign and emphasizes on the unlimited possibilities for the reader to build new meanings out of the poems. In support of this, a pioneer of the movement such as Gertrude Stein, affirms in a pure Language writing style:

There is a sound that came and made
the agreeable deplacement of no sign.¹³⁴

¹³³ L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, from the name of the magazine edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, published in New York from 1978 to 1982.

¹³⁴ G. Stein, 1922, *Geography and plays*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, p. 85.

Examples of this style can be seen in the work of Bruce Andrews, among the pioneers of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry. Below, is an excerpt from *Edge*¹³⁵, his first book:

(16)

eel

I'd say refuse

gal

blue water

to mooove into

& gypsy into

biscuit

insinuatingly

Narragansett Lager

hey!

In this sort of staircase writing, the reader's perspective, his way of reading phrases, words or sentences together, determines new images, new meanings, increasing the fugue of emotions from the fragments.

¹³⁵ B. Andrews, 1973, *Edge*, Some of Us Press, Washington DC.

Another technique implicitly mentioned is the “cut up”. On page 192 of *Zong!*, Philip writes: “*One approach was literally to cut up the text and just pick words randomly*”. Developed by William S. Burroughs across the 1960s, the cut-up technique is

an aleatory literary technique [...] performed by taking a finished and fully linear text and cutting it in pieces with a few or single words on each piece. The resulting pieces are then rearranged into a new text.¹³⁶

In *Zong!*, this stylistic device gains importance on a translation viewpoint. Examples of how this technique resists any kind of translation will be given in the following paragraph.

¹³⁶ W. Burroughs, 1963, “The Cut Up Method”, in L. Jones (Ed.), 1963, *The Moderns: an Anthology of New Writing in America*, Corinth Books, New York, p. 345.

3.4.3 There Is No Telling This Story, It Must Be Translated

*Love is drowning, in a deep well,
all the secrets, and no one to tell.*

U2, Love is Blindness¹³⁷

The polyvocality of the book is also achieved through polyphony, a fugal structure that turns the poetry into a song. Just as many songs, written with a clear historical reference have become universal anthems of peace and non-violent politics (e.g. *Imagine* or *Blowing in the Wind*, written mainly against the Vietnam war), so *Zong!* acts as an anti slave-trade/racism/violence composition.

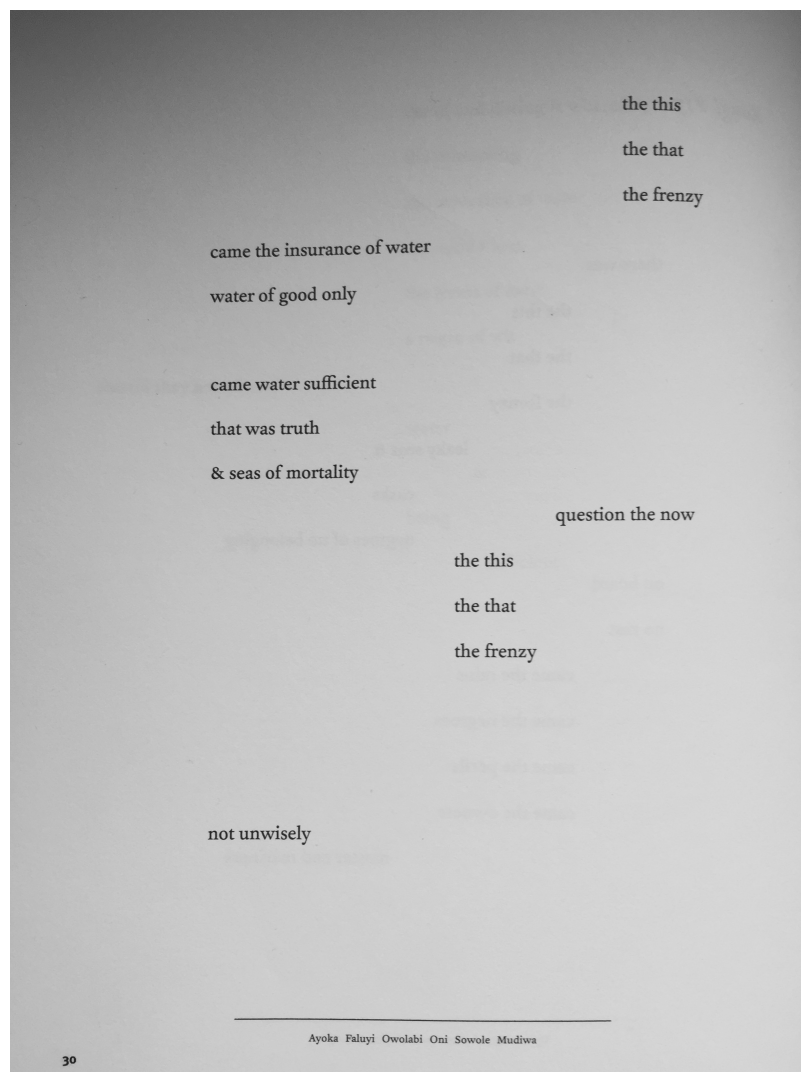
In an attempt to translate *Zong!* into Italian, the book presented some insurmountable problems, concerning its untranslatability. The idea of untranslatability came along little by little: the more I tried to translate it into Italian - in the etymological sense, trying to translate both language and experience across the postcolonial borders - the less I felt at ease translating a book that does not want to be read. I felt challenged when I tried to grab this language and catch a minimal sense in order to achieve a coherent translation into any language other than English.

The title of the paragraph reveals the paradoxical nature of the book, the challenge for the translator: the more s/he tries to find the matching words, the more s/he finds her/himself diverted by the i-mages that the book reveals, the echoes of past overlapping stories, the fundamental importance of what is not written in the text/accounts ledger: the stories of families killed off and dreams torn down, the humiliation of being unnamed. And then, pages full of empty words, loss of sound and images, voices from a home that is not my home. More importantly, if I respected in translation the random rearrangement of the legal decision using the same words, we would certainly preserve the incoherence and nonsense Philip wanted to put at the forefront, but, at the

¹³⁷ U2, 1991, *Love is Blindness*, Island Records Ltd, Jamaica.

same time, we would conclude with a denial of *that* strategy, given *that* many English words, e.g. 'that', metamorphose themselves into many different Italian words. Thus, the wordplays found in the first part of the book would be totally lost. Even worse, there would be too much sense and order.

The above considerations allow the cut-up technique to be brought back into the analysis. Let us pause for a while on the choices the translator could make to find the Italian corresponding item of the word *that* in the 'Os' and 'Dicta' sections, the ones in which the legal text is cut-up and rearranged. The following example¹³⁸ taken from 'Zong! # 17' shows the untranslatability - into any language other than English - to which any book featuring this kind of writing technique is subjected:



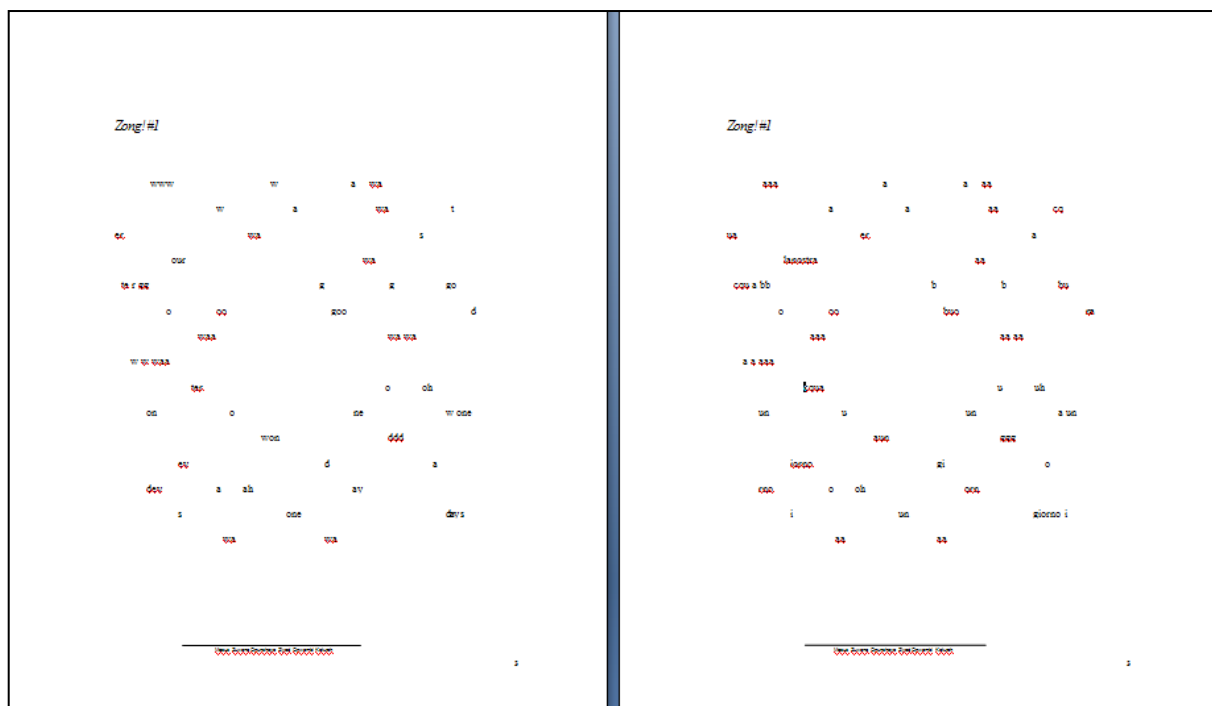
¹³⁸ M.N. Philip, 2008, *Zong!*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, p. 30.

The following list shows the contexts in which *that* appears in ‘Gregson vs. Gilbert’:

thrown overboard, it was held *that* these facts did not support a statement in the declaration, *that* by the perils of the seas, and the water on board was spent, *that* some of the negroes died for water. The declaration stated, *that* by the perils of the seas, and spent on board the said ship: *that* before her arrival at Jamaica, c. and on divers days between *that* day and the arrival of the said ship on board of which the *that* the ship on board of which the by mistake got to leeward of *that* island, by mistaking it for Hispaniola, a sufficient necessity did not exist, *that* the loss was not within the time specified, *that* at the time when the first slaves were taken to the other islands. The declaration states, *that* by perils of the seas, and consequently; but no evidence was given *that* the perils of the seas reduced to a necessity. The truth was, *that* finding they should have a bad market for their slaves, they took these means of transferring the loss from the owners to the underwriters, *that* a portion of our fellow-creatures were destroyed in consequence of contrary winds, *that* in consequence of contrary winds [234] other islands might have been obtained at Tobago; but at *that* a supply of water might have been obtained at Tobago; but at *that* place there was sufficient for the purpose, *that* mistake, it appeared that the loss was not within the time specified, *that* the currents were stronger than stated in the declaration, *that* the slaves were destroyed in consequence of contrary winds, *that* this is not a loss within the time specified, *that* the ship was retarded by peril, *that* the loss was primarily caused by the perils of the seas, *that* the evidence does not support the proposition, *that* certainly was not the cause of the loss, *that* stated in the declaration. *that* laid. It would be dangerous to say that a loss happening by the negligence of the defendant could not raise *that* point. Rule absolute on payment.

Once the legal text is translated, this list could help the translator to choose the word according to the context. But, actually, this is impossible because of more specular reasons. In the case above, ‘*Zong! # 17*’, translating *that* into the Italian conjunction *che* seems to be the right solution. Indeed, the line *that was truth* seemed not to give any difficulty, it being traceable in the line 43 of the legal text: ‘The *truth was, that* finding they should have a bad market for their slaves, they took these means of transferring the loss from the owners to the underwriters’, translated into Italian as: ‘La *verità è che*, intuendo che avrebbero ottenuto uno scarso guadagno dai loro schiavi, essi utilizzarono queste motivazioni per trasferire la perdita dai proprietari agli assicuratori’.

The rest of the text does not give the same certainty because of the incoherent and random sequence of words, which does not permit a logical approach to the text. The challenge was to find the Italian equivalent, of *that* and all the other rearranged words, according to the closeness of the words in the legal text, but this strategy is not always reliable because it is weakened by the disproportionate number of *that* in the legal text and in the ‘Os’ and ‘Dicta’ sections, so a decisive ratio of 1:1 is not applicable. In fact, the 34 occurrences of *that* in the list above do not match the 9 in the ‘Os’ and ‘Dicta’ sections. Finally, if the English word *that* can belong to more parts of speech maintaining the same form and sound, in Italian it would be translated into several words with a different sound – *che, cui, quello* etc. Here, the untranslatability involves the form, and, in *Zong!* the form is the point. Adopting a literal translation, where diffusion or condensation¹³⁹ are expected, works in the pages where the form of the words play a decisive role, as explained at the beginning of this chapter in relation to the i-mage disclosed by ‘Zong # 1’. Below, the source text on the left is compared to the Italian translation on the right:



¹³⁹ Cfr. J. L. Malone, 1988, *The Science of Linguistics in The Art of Translation: Some Tools from Linguistics for The Analysis and Practice of Translation*, SUNY Press, New York.

The visual impact is not affected at all. Zooming in on the pages, plenty of problems are revealed, mainly concerning the performance:

- Translating *water* into *acqua*, produces a change from the choked sound of the voiced labial-velar approximant *w*, to the clear sound of the (low) central unrounded vowel *a*, less suitable, if not inappropriate to the image of drowning given to me by the page;
- Accordingly, the ratio *water/acqua*, *our/la nostra*, *good/buona*, *day/giorno*, is contrary to this image;
- Finally, observe the phonetic play on words in the source text:

w w waa

ter

o oh

on

o

ne

w one

won

ddd

ey

d

a

dey

a ah

ay

s

one

days

Dismembered words are here fading one into the other. The *w* of *water* turns *one* into *won*, the lost *e* breaks into *dey*, whose *a* explodes into repeated sounds on the same line. And then we see that *h*, the voiceless glottal *h*, a single letter for the last breath of the slave, one in the middle of the page, the other at the bottom, before the body can rest voiceless, *dead*. Phonemes that dismember and rewrite the words, the text, supported by a polyvocal melody, produce a phonetic balance that is totally lost if translated into Italian.

a a aaa

cqua

u uh

un

u

un

a un

aun

ggg

iorno

gi

o

giorno

o oh

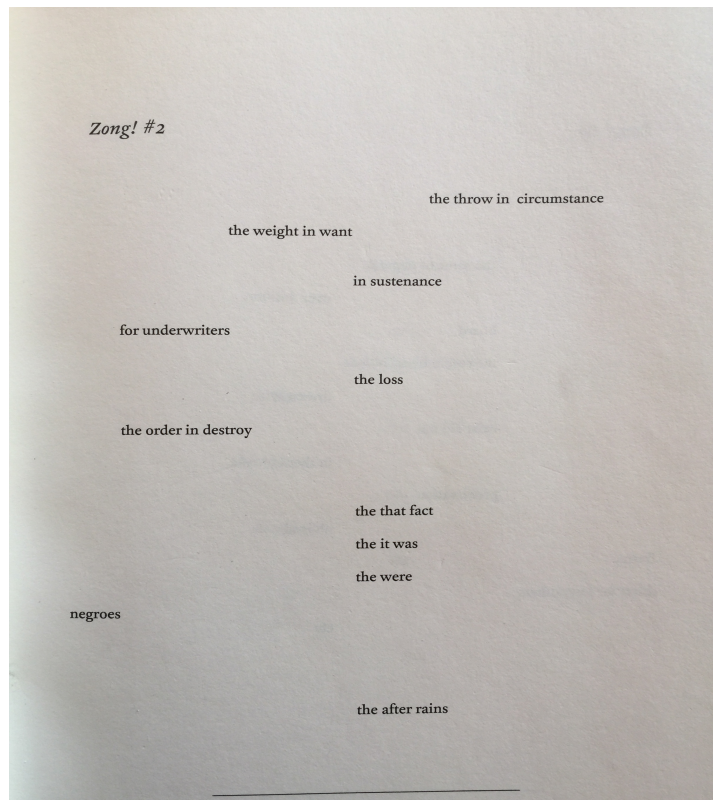
orn

i

un

giorn i

Finally, let us turn to the strange case of ‘the weight in want’ in ‘Zong! # 2’¹⁴⁰:



¹⁴⁰ M.N. Philip, 2008, *Zong!*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, p. 5.

Out of any canonical translation strategy, the following example of translation by assonance allows the book to achieve the previously mentioned aims of sonority and uncovering of this historic and historical moment, while, allowing the telling of sub-stories featuring their own characters, like Eve, Grace, Ruth, Sue and all the other ‘WOMEN WHO WAIT’¹⁴¹.

An intuition achieved by translating ‘the weight in want’ according to the scheme [(ENG-ENG)-ITA], as explained below:

‘the weight in want’ /ðə weɪt ɪn wɒnt/



‘the waiting womb’ / ðə ‘weɪtɪŋ wu:m/(sub-story disclosed through assonance)



‘il ventre in attesa’ (literal translation into Italian)

The English to English translation is grounded on a “slant rhyme”:

Slant rhyme (sometimes called imperfect, partial, near, oblique, off etc.) is a rhyme in which two words share just a vowel sound (assonance – e.g. “heart” and “star”) or in which they share just a consonant sound (consonance – e.g. “milk” and “walk”). Slant rhyme is a technique perhaps more in tune with the uncertainties of the modern age than strong rhyme.¹⁴²

Such a translation opens itself to further implications: the weight of a desire or a need, a lyrical burden, is shifted to another desire, another burden, the foetus of a pregnant black woman. Or, as the accounts ledger reads, only a “ditto woman”¹⁴³ on board the *Zong*. The static nature of the text thus gains dynamism through this particular kind of translation. Philip’s urge to make sense, from the points of view both lexical and systemic, demands that forgotten stories be uncovered, history revisited and unheard words shaped.

¹⁴¹ Ivi, p. 186.

¹⁴² Daily Writing Tips

<http://www.dailywritingtips.com/types-of-rhyme/> (accessed 11 April 2014).

¹⁴³ M.N. Philip, 2008, *Zong!*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, p. 194.

3.4.4 Breaking Silence: In Conversation With Marlene NourbeSe Philip

As above said, the 'Notanda' section of *Zong!* revealed the strategies and the writing techniques behind the book. As a completion to this section, this paragraph reveals the fundamental role translation plays in *Zong!*, as explained by the author herself. Below is the email exchange between Marlene NourbeSe Philip and me.

October 2013

Roberto: NourbeSe, what do you mean by 'translation relates to much I was doing with *Zong!*'? How translation (untranslatability) perspective affected the writing of the book? I love to use the word 'translation' in its etymological meaning and it is just what I am trying to get from the translation of the book, to bear the burden of the Afro-Caribbean across the borders, toward a non-postcolonial reader. Until now, failing. I am very interested in this idea, and I would love to have your opinion about.

MNP: First I was struck by the fact that so often the same arrangement of letters could mean very different things in different languages -- the similarity and sameness yet difference -- so what is language really doing. For the most part in translation the words are different -- they look different, they sound different but what I was noticing was different -- I was noticing sameness in difference. Then of course you have the fact that the slave ship is a multilingual, multi-ethnic universe that, to use that literal meaning of translation, is carrying bodies and embodied tongues -- unwilling bodies and tongues -- over the ocean from one place to another -- translating and transplanting, but those on board the ship have to interface with each other -- their languages rubbing up against each other and needing to find a way to support that translation. When you hear a collection of letters that sounds like something you know in your language what do you do? How do you translate the overwhelming silence that exists on board the *Zong!* - Babel personified. Do you find another way of rendering silence, are words the only means of translation?

There are a couple of other levels.

One is the breaking open of the words as a form of translation because particularly in the last section, Ferrum, where language degrades, it is only in carrying out that act of - what resistance, vengeance on the English language, only in that way is another meaning, a translation allowed to happen because when I read that section you begin to hear another language floating under the English. That too is an act of translation - breaking the stranglehold of a language to release another mother's tongue in an act of deep self-redemption.

Finally, I was interested in how one, I could translate non-meaning into meaning. What do I mean by this: the massacre on board the Zong! has meaning as a legal case but what meaning would the victims and the descendants of the victims assign it. What is the meaning of the transatlantic and trans Saharan slave trade in African bodies? Did the world need this enormous horrific sacrifice of human life, to what end. It seemed ultimately meaningless to me and I set out to explore whether there was any meaning to meaninglessness. In other words, how would I translate the non-meaning of the Zong case. Could I? Should I? Because isn't that what we do when we try to find meaning, we are carrying over ideas, understanding, perceptions from one - place? dimension to another. It's something I think we humans are cursed and blessed with; the desire for meaning, to find meaning in all around us. Translation is the carrying over of meaning from one language to another - in its most basic sense.

I have said that we can never know what happened on board the Zong as we never will about slavery, but perhaps the one thing we know happened is that language happened and where you have language you have translation.

Now in terms of your challenge, what I have found in the last year or so is that performing Zong! helps with carrying over that meaning from the text, from the history, from the memory to those who come from other cultures. I will send you a couple of clips of performances of sections. I myself have been performing with jazz musicians -- we take a few lines and see where they take us. It is quite marvellous.

Roberto: I love the idea - because every book has ONE big idea behind - on which Zong! is grounded and how it is expressed in such an alternative way. I have always took as a basis your legal background, the importance of how words are used - words that build or destroy - and your anger towards history: a lawyer who cannot appeal against history, if not through a backward linguistic research which unfortunately must stop at a given point. That point of no return I see in Ferrum or Ebor. Where the echoes of grief from the people destroyed - I mean also the relatives of the slaves murdered through the 550 years of slavery - and the will of sharing this with whom 'postcolonial is not'. A paragraph of my thesis is called 'Redemption Zong!', as I felt redeemed by knowing what happened.

I understood how, for once, the semantic omnipotence of language could not find the right words to explain something that is inexplicable. A catachresis accomplished in and by Silence.

MNP: Thank you for your lovely letter. Your point about the inability to appeal history from a legal perspective is brilliant. Hadn't thought that, although I have thought that there is a sense in which although I stopped practising law I continued to advocate on behalf of those who were unable to speak. In that sense I continue my role as lawyer and advocate; this time appealing to the Present on behalf of the Past in service of the Future, perhaps?

Best,

NourbeSe.

3.4.5 A Vision Over Visibility

According to what above said, it can be argued that curse and revenge are two words unhelpful to the people who suffered colonial subjection, who prefer to respond with kindness, strength and dignity to journey through their past, their heritage, keeping it to find relief from the inhuman and degrading treatments. Indeed, to use Judith Butler words, “a passionate attachment to subjection is necessary to subject-formation”¹⁴⁴. The soft and stinging dismantling of the language by Philip acts as a trait d’union between present and past, when she privileges use of dialect, as “a dialect is where the life of languages lies”¹⁴⁵, and present and future, when she claims for a place in the hosting Country, Canada in her case, thankful for the chances she is given to freely express herself, to speak for her people, to go on affirming her valuable cultural legacy, to re-i-magine a new identity out of imagination.

¹⁴⁴ J. Butler, 1997, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

¹⁴⁵ B. Ashcroft, 2008, *Caliban's Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 10.

Chapter 4 - Linton Kwesi Johnson: “Dub, Language and Riots”

Bio Note¹⁴⁶

Linton Kwesi Johnson was born on in 1952 in Chapelton, a small town in the rural parish of Clarendon, Jamaica. He came to London in 1963 where studied Sociology at Goldsmiths’ College. Soon involved in politics, he was still at school when he joined the Black Panthers: here, he organised a poetry workshop within the movement and developed his work with Rasta Love, a group of poets and drummers. In 1974, *Race Today* - a monthly (later bimonthly) British political magazine - published his first collection of poetry, *Voices of the Living and the Dead. Dread Beat An’ Blood*, his second collection, was published in 1975 by Bogle-L’Ouverture and was also the title of his first LP, released by Virgin in 1978. That year also saw the release of the film *Dread Beat An’ Blood*, a documentary on Johnson’s work. In 1980 *Race Today* published his third book, *Inglan Is A Bitch*, named after his most famous song, in which Johnson portrays how Caribbean immigrants experience life and work in London. The jobs listed in the poem, the dishwasher and the bellboy in a hotel, depict a traditional working-class disappointed by the English society who try all their best to make ends meet.

According to R.J Stewart,

The title ‘Inglan is a bitch’, then, suggests not a retreat from an unpleasant experience but a determination to engage the "bitch" in a struggle for a full exercise of civil and political rights and for the reversal of working class alienation.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ All information from
Lintonkwesijohnson.com
<http://www.lintonkwesijohnson.com/> (accessed 3 November 2014)

¹⁴⁷ R.J. Stewart, 1993, *Linton Kwesi Johnson: Poetry Down a Reggae Wire*
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41849496> (accessed 29 May 2013)

Due to the high popularity of this poem and the important number of reviews and analyses made, I decided to exclude it from this work to concentrate on less known poems/songs. Among the many awards Linton Kwesi Johnson collected, it is essential to say that he toured all over the world, his recordings are among the top-selling reggae albums in the world and his work has been translated into Italian and German and, finally, he is known as the world's first reggae poet.

4.1 Introduction

Pioneer of the art form known as “dub poetry”, whose poetic relies upon the non-acceptance of Eurocentric concepts of gender, politics and culture, the analysis of Linton Kwesi Johnson’s poetry (henceforth Johnson) constitutes the *file rouge* with Marlene NourbeSe Philip’s previous chapter. Again, issues such as slavery and colonialism, the collision of oppressor and oppressed and, especially, the linguistic opposition “vernacular vs. Standard English”, supply a fertile source for sociolinguistic and discourse analysis.

The average Jamaican language is usually described as a patois, creole or bad English, depending on the viewpoint of the describer, be it proud or spiked with disdain. English is the official language of the country, mostly heard only in formal situations, when the dwellers adopt the so-called “speaky-spoky”, the term they refer to the Queen’s English. Linguists identify a pure Jamaican, with regional differences, as an amalgam of Seventeenth century English and West African syntax and vocabulary, with some influences from Spanish, Portuguese, Scottish and Irish. This multi-coloured heritage is due to the colonial history of Jamaica, as the majority of the population are descendants of slaves brought from West Africa first by the Spanish, then learnt English by their British owners, overseers, adventurers and missionaries. Today, about five million people speak Jamaican, a language that preserves itself thanks to its ability to Jamaicanize English words and a strong attitude to neologisms.¹⁴⁸

Jamaican language owes its popularity to reggae music. Bob Marley and Peter Tosh above all, achieved the status of pop stars in the middle 70’s, establishing this “rootsy” music as the freedom marker of Jamaican people. Developing from the same root, dub music is considered a subgenre of reggae, slightly differentiating from it for its emphasis on the “riddim”, the drum and bass parts of reggae songs, where the vocals are “dubbed out” of the song.

¹⁴⁸ Cfr. Jumieka.com
<http://jumieka.com/> (accessed 6 October 2014)

In Luke Ehrlich's parlance,

that special moment in a version when the band drops back in from the acappella vocal passage is especially thrilling. This rhythmic suspension creates a mounting anticipation in the listener for full body motion. When the driving drum and bass drops back in, he lets himself go with the music and experiences a sort of catharsis.¹⁴⁹

This is the very dub moment. From this basis, dub poetry developed into a hybrid art form, in between musical and literary genre, in between just like its diasporic exponents. Oku Onuora defined dub poetry

a poem that has a built-in reggae rhythm — hence when the poem is read without any reggae rhythm (so to speak) backing, one can distinctly hear the reggae rhythm coming out of the poem.¹⁵⁰

Despite being considered as one of the most important representatives of this genre, Johnson rejected the definition claiming that it would too strictly categorize his production. In his own words, Johnson defines himself as a dub lyricist, that is

the dj turned poet. He intones his lyrics rather than sing them. Dub-lyricism is a new form of (oral) music poetry, wherein the lyricist overdubs rhythmic phrases on to the rhythm background of popular songs.¹⁵¹

The language they use is the “nation language” firstly defined by Edward K. Brathwaite:

the Africanised “kind of English spoken by people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in by the conquistadors”¹⁵².

¹⁴⁹ K. O. B., Chang, W. Chen, 1998, *Reggae Routes: the Story of Jamaican Music*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, p. 76.

¹⁵⁰ E. Doumerc, 2014, *Jamaica's First Dub Poets: Early Jamaican Deejaying as a Form of Oral Poetry*, Kunapipi, University of Wollongong, Australia Vol. 26, Issue 1, Art. 13, p. 129.

¹⁵¹ L.K. Johnson, 1976, *Jamaican Rebel Music, Race and Class, Vol. XVII, N°4*, Institute of Race Relations, London, p. 398.

¹⁵² K. Brathwaite, 1984, *History of The Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*, New Beacon Books, London, p. 260.

The language used by Johnson over three decades is a mix of 17th-century colonial English, West African from the slaves, and a smattering of the indigenous Caribbean tribal dialects.

Language is about identity, and when I began to write in verse, I knew I wanted to use the kind of language that could best convey the experiences I wanted to articulate and I knew that was not going to be the rarefied language of classical English,” Johnson explained to a Scottish newspaper. “For me, one of the defining characteristics of poetry is authenticity of voice and my natural voice is the ordinary spoken Jamaican language.¹⁵³

In his introduction to *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, Russell Banks writes:

Jamaican Creole is a language created out of hard necessity by African slaves from the 17th century British English and West African, mostly Ashanti, language groups, with a lexical admixture from the Caribe and Akawak natives of the island. It is a powerfully expressive, flexible and, not surprisingly, musical vernacular, sustained and elaborated upon for over four hundred years by the descendants of those slaves, including those who have migrated out of Jamaica in the second great Diaspora for England, Canada and the United States. Fortunately, its grammar and orthography, like that of the pre-18th century British English, have never been rigidly formalized or fixed by an academy of notables or any authoritative dictionary. It is, therefore, a living, organically evolving language, intimately connected to the lived experience of its speakers.¹⁵⁴

Thus, just like the previously analysed Tobagonian Creole and the other “broken Englishes”, the Jamaican patois acted (and acts) as a means of rebellion. In Brathwaite’s parlance,

it was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master, and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ *Jamaica Gleaner*

<http://www.jumieka.com/wademase.html> (accessed 26 November 2014).

¹⁵⁴ R. Banks, 2002, “Introduction”, in L.K. Johnson, *Mi Revalueshanary Fren: Selected Poems*, Penguin, London, p. iii.

¹⁵⁵ K. Brathwaite, 1971, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 237.

As in Philip's *Zong!*, Johnson's dubbing acts as a performative poetry addressing a community with which the author shares a diaspora experience. According to Mervyn Morris,

the term "performance poem" is usually taken to signify the poem which, though it may be available in print, seems to be (or is) designed for presentation to an audience rather than for private perusal by the isolated reader. It may involve music (melody and/or rhythm), voices that insist on being sounded, some element of mimicry or wit or humour or strong emotion which can feed on the responses of an actual audience.¹⁵⁶

A definition that perfectly matches Johnson's production, who, in live performances, acts as a storyteller supported by the beating rhythm of his music, aligning himself with the African oral tradition. In her seminal study entitled *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, Ruth Finnegan wrote about the importance of the mode of composition in the oral tradition, to which she referred as composition in performance, that is, composition that takes place during the very performance of the poem. The concept of "Composition in performance" was first developed by the American scholar Milman Parry and his assistant Albert Lord, who struggled to prove that Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were in fact oral poems which had been composed orally according to the 'formulaic' method, namely by stringing together well-known phrases, clichés and formulae from the oral tradition, a method that characterizes both Johnson and dub poets in general.¹⁵⁷

When performing on stage, Johnson used to divide the show into three main categories: "Seventies Verse", "Eighties Verse", and "Nineties Verse". The purpose of the following section is, indeed, to unveil the current historical and socio-political changes depicted in Johnson's work by analysing some emblematic poems covering the three decades above mentioned.

¹⁵⁶ M. Morris, 1992, "Printing the Performance: "Them" and "Us"?", in: G. Collier (Ed.), 1992, *Us/Them: Translation, Transcription and Identity in Post-Colonial Literary Cultures* (Vol. 6). Rodopi, London, p. 241.

¹⁵⁷ R. H. Finnegan, 1979, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social context*, Cambridge University Press Archive, Cambridge, p. 58.

4.2 Seventies Verse - All Wi Doin Is Defendin

All wi doin is defendin is the closing track of *Dread Beat an' Blood*, the first album released by Poet and The Roots (where the poet is Johnson) in 1978. The song foresees the 1981 Brixton riots after years of persecution by the police towards black people¹⁵⁸. The lyrics "Send in the riot squad quick because we're running wild" and even more "All we need are bottles and bricks and sticks" which, indeed, were the principal weapons used by rioters, attest the long view Johnson had about the forthcoming social developments. Johnson himself experienced in 1972 the racist violence of three Brixton police officers:

Far, Leavers and Bloom were the names of the three police officers. I was brutalized by these police officers, because I saw them brutalizing some other black people and I tried to get their names and addresses so that I could inform their parents (some young people). And just because of my concern for these people I was racially abused and beaten and charged, framed by the police officers! They charged me with two counts of assault and GBH grievous bodily harm when in fact it was they who assaulted me and subjected me to grievous bodily harm. I won the case.¹⁵⁹

This is the kind of experience on which is grounded this and all the other songs in *Dread beat and blood*. Also, the lyrics allow the retrieving of some basic linguistic features appropriate for a preliminary approach to "Jimiekn Langwij".

¹⁵⁵ For further reading about Brixton riots, I would recommend Henri Kurttila's Master's thesis in English philology, *Brixton 1981-2011: rioting, newspaper narratives and the effects of a cultural vanguard*, 2014, University of Oulu, Finland.

¹⁵⁹ Classical Reggae Interviews
<http://www.classical-reggae-interviews.org/> (accessed 30 November 2014).

All wi doin is defendin

war... war...
mi seh lissen
oppressin man
hear what I say if yu can
wi have
a grevius blow fi blow

wi will fite yu in di street wid we han
wi have a plan
soh lissen man
get ready fi tek some blows

doze days
of di truncheon
an doze nites
of melancholy locked in a cell
doze hours of torture touchin hell
doze blows dat caused my heart to swell
were well
numbered
and are now
at an end

all wi doin
is defendin
soh get yu ready
fi war... war...
freedom is a very firm thing

all oppression
can do is bring
passion to di eights of eruption
an songs of fire wi will sing

no... no...
noh run
yu did soun yu siren
an is war now
war... war...war...

de Special Patrol
will fall
like a wall force doun
or a toun turn to dus
even dow dem think dem bold
wi know dem cold like ice wid fear

an wi is fire!

choose yu weapon dem
quick!
all wi need is bakkles an bricks an sticks
wi hav fist
wi fav feet
wi carry dandamite in wi teeth

sen fi di riot squad
quick!
cause wi runin wild
wi bittah like bile
blood will guide
their way
an I say
all wi doin
is defendin
soh set yu ready
fi war... war...
freedom is a very fine thing¹⁶⁰

The lyrics switch between Jamaican mesolect (e.g. lissen, dat, dandamite...) and Standard English. Firstly, it must be noticed the absence of the auxiliary in the title: again, “as observed by Labov, copula and auxiliary *be* are absent wherever it can contract”¹⁶¹. The diaspora experienced by the poet, the hard times lived by a Caribbean living in Brixton since the age of eleven, is reflected by the large use in his body of work of the pronoun “we”, here written in the Jamaican basilect form “wi”, in some ways adding another suggestive connotation to the use of “I” explained by Velma Pollard in the Philip’s chapter. “Wi” can be found in the “Bazilek” form also to replace the pronoun “us”, as in “ihn laik wi” (he likes us) and in the form “fiwi” for the possessive our/ours, seemingly a construction formed by “fi” + “wi”, that is “for” + “us”. From a phonetic point of view, the very first word of the song (war) opens to some reflections upon the differences in ‘pronongxieshan’ between Jamaican creole and Standard English.

¹⁶⁰ Poets and The Roots, 1978, “All wi doin is defendin”, in *Dread Beat an’ Blood*, Frontline, Peterborough, UK.

¹⁶¹ Cfr. p. 8.

Below, a chart of the Jamaican phonetic alphabet:

Jamaican pronunciation¹⁶²

a	aa	ai	b	ch	d	e	er	f	g	h	i
[a~ə]	[ɑ:]	[aĩ]	[b]	[tʃ]	[d]	[ɛ]	[ɜ]	[f]	[g/ɔʒ]	[h]	[i]
ie	ier	ii	j	k	l	m	n	o	oo	p	r
[iɛ]	[-iə]	[i:]	[dʒ]	[k]	[lʰ]	[m]	[n]	[ɔ~o]	[o:]	[p]	[r~]
s	sh	t	u	uo	uor	v	w	y	z		
[s]	[ʃ]	[t]	[u]	[uɔ]	[-uɔ]	[v]	[w]	[j]	[z]		

Below, some basic differences between the two languages in case:

	Standard English	Jamaican Creole
War	/wɔːr/	/waː/
Wall	/wɔːl/	/waːl/
Fall	/fɔːl/	/faːl/
The	/ðə/	/de /
Them	/ðem/	/dem/
Have	/hæv/	/hæv/ or /æv/

Thus, according to this grid, the phoneme “a” in the context [SV/V/C + _ + C] is pronounced /aː/. It can be observed that in words such as “say”, thus in the context [_ + V/SV], “a” maintains the same pronunciation as the Standard English /seɪ/. The voicing of the phoneme “t”, perhaps the most typical and audible characteristic of Jamaican and of many African rooted languages, is shown in the second example. The last example is useful to acknowledge the non-compulsory aspiration of the phoneme “h”, usually if placed before words beginning with vowels and especially when the preceding word ends with a vowel.

¹⁶² Omniglot
<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/jamaican.php> (accessed 21 October 2014).

Away from this analysis, supported by data from reliable sources, it is important to remember that Johnson, as Louisa Olufsen Layne puts it,

is a distinctively English phenomenon. The language he uses, and the reality he describes, is closer to the urban street life of London than to the Jamaican folk tradition, even though the two are in dialogue. Johnson's poems are set in Brixton, not in Jamaica.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ L. Olufsen Layne, 2013, *The Aesthetics of Bass - Aesthetics and Postcolonial Politics in Linton Kwesi Johnson's Poetry*, Master's Thesis in Comparative Literature Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, University of Oslo, p.15.

4.3 Eighties Verse – Making History

After the prophetic nature of the previous production, Johnson's *Making History* is a call-for-action collection written in response to the Brixton riots. This is soon visible in the lyrics of *Di Great Insohreckshan*, which displays the pride of the author about his belonging to the rebel black community and his regrets for his absence at the riots.

it woz in april nineteen eighty wan
doun inna di ghetto af Brixtan
dat di babylan dem cauz such a frickshan
dat it bring about a great insohreckshan
an it spread all owevah di naeshan
it woz truly an historikal occayshan

it woz event af di year
an I wish I ad been dere
wen wi run riat all owevah Brixtan
wen wi mash-up plenty police van
wen wi mash-up di wicked wan plan
wen wi mash-up di Swamp Eighty Wan
fi wha?
fi mek di rulah dem andastan
dat wi naw tek noh more a dem oppreshan

The Eighties were marked by a number of intimidating and repressive actions perpetrated by British police against black communities all over UK. Particularly in London, many of them often ended in a massacre. It is the case of the unjust accusation of George Lindo, to whom Johnson dedicates *It Dread inna Ingran*, or the intrusion at Yvonne Ruddock's birthday party in South London in 1981, where fourteen blacks died and many more were injured in what is recalled as the *New Cross Massacre*. The racial hatred was a distinctive sign of Thatcherism. It is weird how, after the Iron Lady's death in 2013, Barack Obama paid tribute to "one of the great champions of freedom and liberty and a true friend to the US"¹⁶⁴, whilst in South Africa is remembered as a supporter of the Apartheid regime.

¹⁶⁴ "Barack Obama: Margaret Thatcher was true friend of America", *The Guardian*, 8/4/2013
<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/08/barack-obama-margaret-thatcher-friend>
(accessed 23 October 2014).

The making of the album was characterized by the critique, in particular, of the English “Sus law”¹⁶⁵ that justified mistreatments or even imprisonment only on a suspect basis. Johnson exposes this abuse in *Sonny’s Lettah (Anti-Sus poem)*.

Sonny’s Lettah (Anti-Sus poem)

Brixton Prison
Jebb Avenue
Landan south-west two
Inglan

Dear Mama,
Good day.
I hope dat wen deze few lines reach y’u
they may find y’u in di bes’ af helt.

Mama, I really doan know how fi tell y’u dis,
cause I did mek a salim pramis
fi tek care a lickle Jim
an’ try mi bes’ fi look out fi him.
Mama, Ah really did try mi bes’
but none-di-les’
mi sarry fi tell y’u seh,
poor lickle Jim get arress’.

It woz di miggles a di rush howah
wen everybody jus’ a hus’le an’ a bus’le
fi goh home fi dem evenin’ showah;
mi an’ Jim stan-up waitin’ pan a bus,
nat causin’ no fus’,
wen all an a sudden a police van pull up.
out jump t’ree policeman,
di’ hole a dem carryin batan.
Dem waak straight up to mi an’ Jim.
One a dem hol’ aan to Jim
seh him tekin him in;
Jim tell him fi let goh a him
far him noh dhu not'n

¹⁶⁵ In England and Wales, the sus law (from "suspected person") was the informal name for a stop and search law that permitted a police officer to stop, search and potentially arrest people on suspicion of them being in breach of section 4 of the Vagrancy Act 1824.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sus_law (accessed 23 October 2014).

an him naw t'ief, nat even a but'n.

Jim start to wriggle,
Di police start to giggle.
Mama, mek Ah tell y'u whey dem dhu to Jim.
Mama, mek Ah tell y'u whey dem dhu to him:
dem t'ump him in him belly, an' it turn to jelly.
dem lick him pan him back, an' him rib get pap.
dem lick him pan him he'd but it tuff like le'd.
dem kick him in him seed, an' it started to bleed.

Mama, Ah jus' could'n' stan-up deh an' noh dhu not'n:
so mi jook one in him eye an' him started to cry
me t'ump one in the mout' an' him started to shout
mi kick one pan him shin an' him started to spin
mi tump him pan him chin an' him drap pan a bin
an' crash,
an de'd.

Mama, more policeman come dung
an' beat mi to di grung;.
dem charge Jim fi sus,
dem charge me fi murdah.
Mama, doan fret.
doan get depres' an' doun-hearted.
Be af good courage
till I hear fram you.

I remain,
Your son,
Sonny.

The letter is written from Brixton Prison by a black man who is under arrest for the murder of a policeman while defending his brother. It is remarkable the passage, through the poem, from the epistolary to the description of the events, from the narrow walls of a jail to the street, an ability Johnson has to suddenly increase the pace of narration and deliver a poem that makes the reader able to see and live the event, the scuffle with police. Be noticed the address on the right. In the 80s, the Brixton prison was the symbol for oppression of people of ethnic minority, often turned into 'exotic' or demonised as terrorists.

Very interesting is the register of the letter, how the formal beginning and closing (Dear Mama Good Day / I remain your son), a language condemned to politeness, constrained by the walls of a jail (charged with all its metaphorical connotations), abruptly switches to the authenticity of dialect. The affectionate way in which Sonny promises to his mother “to tek care a lickle Jim / an try mi bes fi look out fi him”, is also a way to break the (English) stereotype of black criminals and, as far as law is concerned, to highlight the brutality of a law, the Sus law, based on mere prejudice.

4.4 Nineties Verse - Tings An' Times

One among the foregrounding issues of *Tings an' Times* is the visible changes in Brixton after the 1981 riots, when working-class Black and Asian immigrants teamed up with punks, both living economically and politically marginal lives, to fight against the high rates of unemployment and police brutality. This is how the poet remembers those days:

I walk down those streets nearly every day. The first change is you notice is on Railton Rd. A lot of the old slum houses are gone after the 81 riots and there's an adventure playground on one side of the street. I remember when black families would live in one room. Now people own their own houses or council housing. It's not uncommon to go to a court and see the prosecuting lawyer is black and the defending lawyer is Asian or black. We have our people in Parliament and even a Government minister, so that's a measure of how far things have changed.¹⁶⁶

Poems such as *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* and *Di Good Life* develop the Marxist background of the collection, putting Johnson on the frontline against despotism. The poet reflects upon the collapse of the Soviet bloc through different discursive tools. Let us pause for a while on these two poems. Before attempting to translate into Italian both poems, it is necessary, in order to supply an intelligible text to an Italian native speaker as I am, to translate these creole texts into Standard English first. Some might ask, why not to translate the original creole text, thus a dialectal composition, into another dialect? Why should the origins and the cultural strength of such lyrics be hidden by transforming them into a Standard(ized) English poem? Despite this objection might sound rightful within its own logic, it can be argued that choosing an equivalent dialect into which translate these texts, would be a linguistic and cultural murder as well.

¹⁶⁶ Elsewhere
<http://www.elsewhere.co.nz/writingelsewhere/1763/linton-kwesi-johnson-interviewed-2004-the-poet-speaks-of-tings-and-times-a-changin/> (accessed 25 October 2014).

Translating poetry involves many levels other than the mere linguistic one: Benjamin, in his *The Translator's Task*, mentions the importance to keep the “incomprehensible, the secret, the poetic...which the translator can render only insofar as he — also writes poetry”¹⁶⁷. Thus, as far as poetry is concerned, translation is not about the transmission of a message. Its main purpose is to preserve the emotions, the uniqueness of the style. It is also true that in the case of Johnson's poetry, the message – political, revolutionary – still keeps the starring role, to the detriment of the pure aesthetic. Here the choices of the translator come into play: what to preserve when translating for an audience so far from the language and the cultural environment of the ST?

The process of translation of poetry is defined by Ranga Rao as the transmission of creative energy: “[as with] the more mundane electrical energy, the longer the distance over which it is transmitted, the greater the scope of loss”.¹⁶⁸ A literal reading of this statement makes me think about a translation of Johnson's or any other postcolonial author's work, into one among the dialects spoken in Italy. The scope of loss would be remarkable. The tight knot that pulls together a dialect with the roots of a community would be untied in absence of a shared postcolonial background and a consequential anti-colonial literary mood. To put it simple, the clash Jamaican Creole/ English, with its colonial implications, does not match, for example, the Neapolitan/Italian one. Creole languages express the belonging to a land, not to a flag or a nation. They are the main tools through which postcolonial aesthetic is learnt and then developed by an artist.

¹⁶⁷ W. Benjamin, 1997, “The Translator's Task”, Trans. by Steven Rendall in *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction: Etudes sur le Texte et Ses Transformations*, 10, 151-65.

¹⁶⁸ R. Rao, 1995, “Occasional Thoughts on Translation of Short Stories, Problems and Practice: Towards an Indian Protocol”, in Rao, Ranga, 1995, trans. and ed., *Classic Telugu Short Stories*. Penguin, New Delhi, pp. 263-270.

As D'Aguiar puts it,

While a land mass remains crucial to shaping the artist, a nation bears little significance to the artist even if nationality may exert an influence on the expression of that artistic talent. For example, the artist owes everything to the land and nothing to the nation. The nation changes but the land remains the same magnetic force allied to artistic temperament. [...] The artistic vision originates from an engagement with the land and not with the politics played out on the land.¹⁶⁹

Unlike national languages, dialects circumscribe the history of a people, defining and shaping their identity through unwritten speech rules transmitted from generation to generation: an oral tradition that come full circle, but it is not enough to address the Italian translator toward choosing among the dialects for the translation, even if it is clear how this choice would preserve the specificity, the otherness of a linguistic group within a wider socio-cultural frame labelled as English or, in the case in point, Italian speaking.

Thus, a great loss must be taken into account. Back to the question of what the TL should be and what should be preserved, not secondary is the fact that Johnson's poems have become songs, available for a wider audience, showing the will of the poet to spread his message out of the poetry niche. Being the lyrics of a song much more linked to rhythm than a poem, their translation in any language other than English becomes even harder, very often ending up being unaesthetic and out of tune. But the possibilities given by language, combined with the ability of the translator, to transmit the 'source message' allow the translator to step out of the sound constraints and to focus his work on reproducing the images that the lyrics evoke and their ultimate meaning. First, to do this, it is thus necessary to translate the Jamaican Creole lyrics into Standard English.

¹⁶⁹ F. D'Aguiar, 2007, *A Theory of Caribbean Aesthetics*, Anglophonia – French Journal of English Studies. Divergences & Convergences, Presses Universitaires du Mirail, Université de Toulouse – Le Mirail, p. 91.

Written in 1991, it is a bridge across the fall of the mentioned communist leaders in 1989 and the 1994 South African elections that ratify the formal ending of the apartheid, visible in the tense shift at the end of the refrain, when “will have to go” turns into “(will be) soon gone”. This writing, basically a phonetic transcription, reaffirms the performative nature of this literature. The target reader is clear, the call for action too. The poem is a very dynamic one.

Mi Revalueshanary Fren

mi revalueshanary fren is nat di same agen
 you know fram wen?
 fram di masses shatta silence –
 staat fi grumble
 fram pawty paramoncy tek a tumble
 fram Hungary to Polean to Romania
 fram di cozy cyaasle dem staat fi crumble
 wen wi buck-up wananada in a reaznin
 mi fren en up pan di same ting
 dis is di sang im love fi sing:

Kaydar
 e ad to go
 Zhivkov
 e ad to go
 Husak
 e ad to go
 Honnicka
 e ad to go
 Chowcheskhu
 e ad to go
 jus like apartheid
 will av to go

awhile agoh mi fren an mi woz taakin
 soh mi seh to im:

wat a way di eart a run nowadays, man
 it gettin aadah by di day
 fi know whey yu stan
 cauz wen yu tink yu deh pan salid dry lan
 wen yu teck a stack
 yu fine yu ina quick-san
 yu noh notice ow di lanscape a shiff
 is like valcanoe andah it
 an notn cyaan stap it

My Revolutionary Friend

My revolutionary friend is not the same again
 You know from when?
 from the silence of the gangsters
 he started to grumble
 from the party paramountcy took a tumble
 from Hungary to Poland to Romania
 from the cozy castle they started to crumble
 when we buck-up each other in a reasoning
 my friend ends up on the same thing
 this is the song he loves to sing:

Kadar
 he had to go
 Zhivkov
 he had to go
 Husak
 he had to go
 Honecker
 he had to go
 Ceausescu
 he had to go
 just like apartheid
 will have to go

a while ago my friend and I were talking
 so I said to him:

what way the earth runs nowadays, man
 it’s getting older by the day
 to know where you stand
 ‘cause when you think of the solid dry land
 when you take a gun
 you find yourself in a quicksand
 you don’t notice of the landscape a shift
 it’s like a volcano under it
 and nothing can stop it

cauz tings jusa bubble an a bwoil
doun below
strata sepahrate an refole
an wen you tink yu reach di mountain top
top
is a bran-new platow yu goh buck-up

mi revalueshanary fren
shake im ed an im sigh
dis woz im reply:

Kaydar
e ad to go
Zhivkov
e ad to go
Husak
e ad to go
Honnicka
e ad to go
Chowcheskhu
e ad to go
jus like apartheid
will av to go

well mi nevah did satisfy
wid wat mi fren mek reply
an fi get a deepa meanin in di reaznin
mi seh to im:

well awrite
soh Garby gi di people dem glashnas
an it poze di Stallinist dem plenty prablem
soh Garby leggo peristrika pan dem
canfoundin bureacratic strategems
but wi haffi face up to di cole facks
im also open up pandora's bax
yes, people powa jus a showa evry howa
an evrybody claim dem demacratc
but some a wolf an some a sheep
an dat is problematic
noh tings like dat yu woulda call dialectic?

mi revalueshanary fren pauz awhile
an im smile
den im look mi in mi eye an reply:

Kaydar
e ad to go
Zhivkov
e ad to go

'cause things just bubble and boil
down below
strata separate and refold
and when you think you reached the mountain
it is a brand new plateau you got to buck-up

my revolutionary friend
shook his head and sighed
this was his reply:

Kadar
he had to go
Zhivkov
he had to go
Husak
he had to go
Honecker
he had to go
Ceausescu
he had to go
just like apartheid
will have to go

well I was never satisfied
by my friend's reply
and to get a deeper meaning in the reasoning
I said to him:

well alright
so Gorbaciov gave glasnost to the people
and it posed plenty of problems to Stalinists
so Gorbaciov let the perestroika go over them
confounding bureaucratic stratagems
but we have to face up the cold facts
he also opened up pandora's box
yes, people power is shown every hour
and everybody claim them as democratic
but some are wolf and some are sheep
and that is problematic
a thing like that would you call dialectic?

my revolutionary friend paused a while
and smiled
then he looked in my eyes and replied:

Kadar
he had to go
Zhivkov
he had to go

Husak
e ad to go
Honnicka
e ad to go
Chowcheskhu
e ad to go
jus like apartheid
will av to go

well mi couldn't elaborate
plus it woz getting kinda late
soh in spite a mi lack af andahstandin
bout di meanin a di changes
in di east fi di wes, nonediless
an alldow mi av mi rezahvaeshans
bout di cansiquenses an implicaeshans
espehshally fi black libahraeshan
to bring di reaznin to a canclueshan
ah ad woz to agree wid mi fren
hopein dat wen wi meet up wance age
wi coulda av a more fulla canvahsaeshan

soh mi seh to im, yu know wat?
im seh wat? mi seh:

Kydar
e ad to go
Zhivkov
e ad to go
Husak
e ad to go
Honnicka
e ad to go
Chowcheskhu
e ad to go
jus like apartheid
soon gaan

Husak
he had to go
Honecker
he had to go
Ceausescu
he had to go
just like apartheid
will have to go

well I couldn't elaborate
plus it was getting kinda late
so in spite of my lack of understanding
about the meaning of the changes
in the east because of the west, nonetheless
and although I had my reservations
about the consequences and implications
especially about black liberation
to bring the reasoning to a conclusion
and I was to agree with my friend
hoping that when we meet up once again
we could have a more fuller conversation

so I said to him, you know what?
he said what? I said:

Kadar
he had to go
Zhivkov
he had to go
Husak
he had to go
Honecker
he had to go
Ceausescu
he had to go
just like apartheid
will be soon gone

Through a sort of geographical isotopy, Johnson maps the Socialist dismantling by listing the names of some emblematic heads of state, metonymical representation of the communist countries they had been governing: Kadar, Zhivkov, Husak, Honecker and Ceausescu, respectively the last communist leaders of Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Romania.

It is interesting how even the names of these leaders are orthographically “incorrect”: another clue of the personal attitude of the poet, and the dub poet in general, to adopt the kind of spelling he prefers. This choice has a double root: first, the orthographic freedom is given by the lack of a universally acknowledged transcription system of Jamaican Patois; second, opting for a standard English transcription would deny the “postcoloniality” of all creole languages, their will to divert the English readers, making them feel like strangers in their own land and language. It must be said that the use of creole in such a way, ends up being a sort of reminder of British hegemony.

As soon as the text is translated into Standard English, and the choice to preserve the political message - despite the obvious loss of rhythm - of the lyrics is made, it is easier for the Italian translator to do his work.

My Revolutionary Friend

My revolutionary friend is not the same again
you know from when?
from the silence of the gangsters
he started to grumble
from the party paramountcy
took a tumble
from Hungary to Poland to Romania
from the cozy castle they started to crumble
when we buck-up each other in a reasoning
my friend ends up on the same thing
this is the song he loves to sing:

Kadar
he had to go
Zhivkov
he had to go
Husak
he had to go
Honecker
he had to go
Ceausescu
he had to go
just like apartheid
will have to go

Il mio Amico Rivoluzionario

Il mio amico rivoluzionario non è più lo stesso
sapete da quando?
del silenzio dei gangsters
cominciò a brontolare
da quando la supremazia del partito
cominciò a ruzzolare
dall'Ungheria alla Polonia alla Romania
dal comodo castello si cominciarono a sgretolare
quando ci rallegriamo a ragionare
il mio amico conclude sempre col solito stornello:
questa è la canzone di cui ama il ritornello:

Kadar
doveva cadere
Zhivkov
doveva cadere
Husak
doveva cadere
Honecker
doveva cadere
Ceausescu
doveva cadere
proprio come l'apartheid
dovrà cadere

a while ago my friend and I were talking
so I said to him:

what way the earth runs nowadays, man
it's getting older by the day
to know where you stand
'cause when you think of the solid dry land
when you take a gun you find yourself
in a quicksand
you don't notice of the landscape a shift
it's like a volcano under it
and nothing can stop it
'cause things just bubble and boil down below
strata separate and refold
and when you think you reached
the mountain top
it is a brand new plateau you got to buck-up
my revolutionary friend
shook his head and sighed
this was his reply:

Kadar
he had to go
Zhivkov
he had to go
Husak
he had to go
Honecker
he had to go
Ceausescu
he had to go
just like apartheid
will have to go

well I was never satisfied
by my friend's reply
and to get a deeper meaning
in the reasoning
I said to him:

well alright
so Gorbaciov gave glasnost to the people
and it posed plenty of problems to Stalinists
so Gorbaciov let the perestroika go over them
confounding bureaucratic stratagems
but we have to face up the cold facts
he also opened up pandora's box
yes, people power is shown every hour
and everybody claim them as democratic

tempo fa io e il mio amico stavamo discutendo
così gli dissi:

ma da che parte ruota la terra oggi, amico
sta invecchiando di giorno in giorno
cercando di capire da che parte stai
non appena pensi al solido terreno arido
impugni una pistola e ti ritrovi
nelle sabbie mobili
non ti accorgi del cambiamento del paesaggio
è come un vulcano al di sotto
e niente può fermarlo
perché tutto si gonfia e ribolle nel sottosuolo
strati che si separano e si ripiegano
e quando pensi di aver raggiunto
la cima del monte
sarà solo un altro terreno di cui prendersi cura
il mio amico rivoluzionario
scosse la testa e sospirò
questa fu la sua risposta:

Kadar
doveva cadere
Zhivkov
doveva cadere
Husak
doveva cadere
Honecker
doveva cadere
Ceausescu
doveva cadere
proprio come l'apartheid
dovrà cadere

non ero mai soddisfatto
delle risposte del mio amico
e per capire meglio il significato
di quella discussione
gli dissi:

si, d'accordo
dunque Gorbaciov diede trasparenza al popolo
causando molti problemi agli stalinisti
dunque Gorbacion diede inizio alla ricostruzione
confondendo stratagemmi burocratici
ma dobbiamo guardare in faccia la realtà
Gorbaciov aprì anche il vaso di Pandora
sì, il potere del popolo è sempre in mostra
e tutti si proclamano democratici

but some are wolf and some are sheep
and that is problematic
a thing like that would you call dialectic?

ma alcuni sono lupo e altri pecora
e questo è un problema
e questa la chiameresti dialettica?

my revolutionary friend paused a while
and smiled then he looked in my eyes and replied:

il mio amico rivoluzionario fece una pausa
e sorrise poi mi guardò negli occhi e rispose:

Kadar
he had to go
Zhivkov
he had to go
Husak
he had to go
Honecker
he had to go
Ceausescu
he had to go
just like apartheid
will have to go

Kadar
doveva cadere
Zhivkov
doveva cadere
Husak
doveva cadere
Honecker
doveva cadere
Ceausescu
doveva cadere
proprio come l'apartheid
dovrà cadere

well I couldn't elaborate
plus it was getting kinda late
so in spite of my lack of understanding
the meaning of the changes
in the east because of the west, nonetheless
and although I had my reservations
about the consequences and implications
especially about black liberation
bring the reasoning to a conclusion
and I was to agree with my friend
hoping that when we meet up once again
we could have a more fuller conversation

beh, non riescivo a elaborare
inoltre era quasi ora di andare
così malgrado non riuscissi a comprendere
il significato dei cambiamenti
nell'est a causa dell'occidente, nonostante
e sebbene avessi delle esitazioni
a capire le conseguenze e le implicazioni
soprattutto dei neri la liberazione
portai a termine la discussione
e fui d'accordo col mio amico
sperando che quando ci fossimo incontrati di nuovo
avremmo potuto avere una più ampia conversazione

so I said to him, you know what?
he said what? I said:

così gli dissi, sai che c'è?
lui disse cosa? E io dissi:

Kadar
he had to go
Zhivkov
he had to go
Husak
he had to go
Honecker
he had to go
Ceausescu
he had to go
just like apartheid
will be soon gone

Kadar
doveva cadere
Zhivkov
doveva cadere
Husak
doveva cadere
Honecker
doveva cadere
Ceausescu
doveva cadere
proprio come l'apartheid
a breve cadrà

As far as translation is concerned, further considerations arise if the Italian translation ‘Il mio amico rivoluzionario’ (my attempt of translation) is read taking for granted that “No poem is meant for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience”¹⁷⁰. If I had to follow this axiom, and the one mentioned before in this chapter, by Walter Benjamin, I should have put the political commitment apart, escaping the historical frame to which the lyrics refer to, that is, refusing a literal translation as the one proposed for the sake of metrical harmony and sound beauty diverting from the very reason of Johnson’s writing, the social protest through his nation language. Luckily, I managed to keep the original language alive in the TT, mainly by keeping grammatically incorrect forms such as “more fuller” (I found that this form is used also by British speakers in highly informal contexts or in ads to magnify a product) and, when possible, preserving the rhyme, despite some debatable solutions. In *The Translator’s Task*, Benjamin also wrote:

What does a poem "say," then? What does it communicate? Very little, to a person who understands it. Neither message nor statement is essential to it. However, a translation that seeks to transmit something can transmit nothing other than a message - that is, something inessential. And this is also the hallmark of bad translations. But what then is there in a poem - and even bad translators concede this to be essential - besides a message? Isn't it generally acknowledged to be the incomprehensible, the secret, the "poetic"? That which the translator can render only insofar as he also writes poetry? This in fact leads to another distinguishing mark of bad translation, which can be defined as inexact transmission of an inessential content.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ W. Benjamin, 1997, “The Translator’s Task”, Trans. by Steven Rendall in *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction: Etudes sur le Texte et Ses Transformations*, 10, 151-65.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Although not being myself a poet, this translation proved how sometimes it is possible to provide an exact transmission of an essential content. The lyrics of *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* reveal the metaphor that defines the relationship between power and people like a shepherd with his flock. In *Di Good Life*, Johnson creates a discourse in which allegorical constructions and mystical imagery depict the actual political situation. It is not by chance that this poem appears on *Tings an' Times* right after *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, that, as explained above, celebrates the fall of Eastern Europe regimes as a prelude to the fall of the South African apartheid even if the author/persona had reservations about the consequences and implications especially about black liberation.

Di Good Life

sowshallism

is a wise ole shephad

im suvvive tru flood

tru drou

tru blizad

some people she

im a two hundred an add years ole

addah people she

notn noh goh soh

dat im a jus seventy add years ole

some she im is a ghost

some she im is a sage

but nohbady noh really know

im riteful age ar whey im come fram

fateful is im flack

fram di ewe to di ram to di lam

rite tru tick an tin

dem mostly cling to im

awftah all

no him guide an sheltah an proteck dem?

(sometime a dem haffi proteck im dow

like ow a dem haffi proteck im now)

look ow im stretch out pan im back

pan di brown grass

di white hair pan im branze hed

like a kushan genes di weepin willow tree

lookin bedraggled an tin
like she life done wid im
like she im is totally at peace widin
noh baddah goh feel sorry fi im
ar goh tink poor ting
nat a ting noh dhu im

all dat really happn
is dat due to di heat a di time
like lickle bwoy blue im drap asleep
an a dream lickle bow peep

an wan an two a im flack dem drif a way
while di addah ism dem
jus a watch an a peep
jus a crawl an a creep
an noh baddah ask if dem naw mek fun
fi canfuse an consume all di stray dem

but evryting is jus fi a time
soon di flack wi tek a stack an surmise
ow far fram di fole dem a stray
wen dem site ow di pack jus a staak dem
dem wi come back togeddah wance agen
an shephad di sage to a highah groun
whichpawt di grass is greenah an sweetah
whichpawt di breeze blow is like a balm
whichpawt di stream run quietah an coolah
whichpawt life can be pleasant can be calm

Acting as a storyteller, the persona (sarcastically) praises socialism by telling the tale of the wise old shepherd, that is socialism, and his flock, all its followers, whose unknown age bestows it of a mythical aura. The poem can be split in two narrative moments: the first stanza tells us of how the shepherd survived through flood, drought and blizzard, taking care of his flock against the “addah ism”, the other ideologies, that come into play in the second half of the song, when it is the flock who has to take care of his old leader. The scene moves from the chaotic list of natural disasters, to the quiet sleep under a willow tree, where, due to heat and time, the shepherd rests. In the end, the author accompanies the walk of the shepherd toward the higher ground where the grass is green and sweet, the breeze like a balm, life pleasant and calm.

It can be argued that the shepherd/flock metaphor is not a very original one, but it is used in a way that confirms d'Aguiar's idea of aesthetic as resulting from the absence of national borders that, being created by mere political agreements, do not reflect the landmass to which every artist is tied up and that feeds his sensitivity toward artistic forms of expression. Furthermore, even if the socialist period can be delimited in a given space and time, the form of the poem, its mythical-mystic nature, develops a literary imagery that suspends the linear time and space.¹⁷² The utility of such metaphors in dub poetry and the prestige of the dub movement, have been underestimated by some critics since its early days. In a review of the anthology *Dub Poetry: 19 Poets from England and Jamaica* edited by Christian Habekost appeared on the 1988 issue of *Jamaica Journal*, Victor Chang¹⁷³ writes:

The notion that poems are elevated to 'artistic impressions' by means of 'useless metaphors' is strange. What we are left with, after shearing all the 'useless metaphors' away, is a language that is simple and clear to get the meaning and message across to anyone.

Chang then goes on affirming both the strength and the weakness of dub poetry:

It is very public poetry, poetry for performance in truth. Its strengths lie in shrill denunciation and protest, polarized stances, confrontational postures... When it tries another tack, such as love poetry, it doesn't quite come off. While dub poetry covers a range of topics, its tonal range as represented here is essentially limited: protesting, threatening, accusatory.

Being not love poetry the focus of this work, but, indeed, the rebel attitude against racism and oppression of dub poetry, the latter statement by Chang ends up being a supporting evidence of the heart of our matter. As Johnson puts it, dub poetry and Jamaican music "the spiritual expression of the historical experience of the Afro-Jamaican"¹⁷⁴.

¹⁷² Cfr. F. D'Aguiar, 2007, *A Theory of Caribbean Aesthetics*, Anglophonia – French Journal of English Studies. Divergences & Convergences, Presses Universitaires du Mirail, Université de Toulouse – Le Mirail.

¹⁷³ V. Chang, 1988, *Review of Dub Poetry, 19 Poets From England and Jamaica and From our Yard: Jamaican Poetry since Independence*, *Jamaica Journal*, Vol 21, Kingston, pp. 49-52.

¹⁷⁴ L.K. Johnson, 1976, *Jamaican Rebel Music, Race and Class, Vol. XVII, N°4*, Institute of Race Relations, London, p.398.

Closing Remarks - Until The End Of The Word

What is most fascinating about translation, and this work has proved it, is its attitude as a discipline to arise questions to which no “scientific” answer is given. Throughout this dissertation, it was clear the direction towards untranslatability. Indeed, especially in this days of automatic translators and other innovative tools, it is the untranslatable, the opaque text which gives the translator even more value. Once a given text is submitted, a computer would give always the same solution, being it unable to catch the semantic opacity of a sentence, a metaphorical reference or else. Often, there are too many components involved in a discourse to allow a literal, univocal translation: it is the nuance that makes the difference.

The different strategies adopted in the chapters above also proved how the real text and the purpose of the translation affected the choices of the translator. *Zong!* is definitely not a best-selling project, rather an alternative literary invective of slave trade, a modern *j'accuse* achieved through skilful linguistic evolutions. For the translator, a fertile source for new strategies, as confirmed by the two examples on page 78 and 81 of this work, respectively ‘*Zong! #1*’ and the “weight in want” case.

Everything is translatable, but not everything is transferrable. To clarify this statement it is enough to mention jokes and texts alike: it is possible to translate every word, every sentence, even the most culturally-bound expression in a joke preserving the most subtle irony but irremediably losing, among the others, its basic element, immediacy. In the chapter dedicated to *Zong!*, it was the visual immediacy, full of metaphorical references, to be lost in translation. In Johnson’s lyrics, it was basically a metrical issue. Here, the human translator, in an empathic feeling with the author, manages to reinvent and transform the text into something different.

It is also true that sometimes the right to untranslatability should be respected, or even defended from desecrating translations, in order to fulfil the intentions of the author who hides in the enigmatic writing his will to be incomprehensible, infinitely interpretable. A clever strategy to intrigue the reader and encourage further readings and analysis.

According to Derrida, untranslatability is the necessary condition, the real motivation for the translator to try and satisfy the need of knowing the other. He states that, to survive, a text should not be neither totally translatable, because the meaning would survive destroying the body, nor totally untranslatable, because it would cease to be a text. A full translation would deny the meaning of the language as a real means of communication, what makes tangible and shareable any meaning. Equally, how would the translator behave before a text in which body and meaning be the same thing, a sort of whole-idiomatic language? Communication would be impossible even for the speakers of a same language, for the lack of any possible rephrasing or substitution in the system, every sign would refer to itself, denying its own essence. The language would be incomprehensible and could not constitute the element of intersubjectivity, of identity of a people.

As far as poetry is concerned, it is interesting to quote Benedetto Croce, who recognizes in the different historical collocation and personal attitude of author and translator an unfixable issue, as “su questa nuova situazione sentimentale sorge quell cosiddetto tradurre, che è il poetare di un’antica in una nuova anima”.¹⁷⁵ Croce also recalls how impossible, due to aesthetic obstacles, is to transfer into a target text the style and the tone of Plato or Giordano Bruno or Montaigne: after all, “La poesia è il linguaggio del

¹⁷⁵ B. Croce, 1993, “L’Intraducibilità della Rievocazione”, in S. Nergaard (a cura di), *La Teoria della Traduzione nella Storia*, Bompiani, Milano, pp. 215-220.

sentimento; la prosa, dell'intelletto; ma poiché l'intelletto, nella sua concretezza e realtà, è anche sentimento, ogni prosa ha un lato di poesia".¹⁷⁶

In this work, besides the linguistic restrictions, the cultural boundaries, the space-time coordinates, the national identity – to have or not to have a postcolonial legacy- and other features have been taken into account, which allowed the translator to give many solutions, many answers, but, luckily, not *the* answer. The beauty of a discipline like translation is just this, every new text and every different solution bring new unanswered questions, which will open to brand new ideas and theories, and so on, until the end of the word.

¹⁷⁶ B. Croce, 1908, *Estetica come Scienza dell'Espressione e Linguistica Generale: Teoria e Storia (Vol. 1)*, Laterza, Bari, p. 30.

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