

*suspicious of his own tongue—a wretchedly lazy organ*

—Frantz Fanon  
(*White Skin, Black Masks*)

*More recent claims of xenoglossy have come from reincarnation researchers who have alleged that individuals were able to recall a language spoken in a past life.*

—Wikipedia

*Language belongs to no one; it belongs to no one and I know nothing about anyone.*

—Abdelkebir Khatibi  
(*Love in Two Languages*)

My language has a baby whose language is without words. My language communicates affection to her baby by fluttering her lips, twisting her tongue(s), and babbling inchoate sounds, syllables her baby seems to understand. Her baby won't stop laughing; my language is hilarious.

My language is searching for a language capable of expressing in words the magnitude of the love she feels towards her son; soon he will demand words of her. This inevitable human expectation makes my language anxious.

My language is an anxious language.

Languages who become mothers typically pass down the language their mothers spoke to them, a so-called "mother tongue," but my language doesn't speak such a language. My language speaks many languages—French, Italian, Arabic, Spanish, and English—none of which she can call home. Like other languages originating in histories of colonization, my language always had a language problem, something akin to the evacuation of a "first" or "native" tongue—a syntax endemic to the brain and to the heart.

When she has time—my language barely has any time—my language wastes it googling etymologies. "Etymology," "analysis of a word to find its true origin"; Etymos: "true, real, actual." "Native" and "nation" share a common "etymology," from the Latin "nativus," "innate, produced by birth," but nations belonging to the nation-state system aren't innate; they are the outcome of ongoing territorial wars, man-made borders oblivious to pre-existing ecosystems in which language and land evolved symbiotically.

The “nation” of the modern, settler-colonial nation-state is premised on the eradication of groups and languages predating its formation; it turns land into territories that stand for a nation’s monolithic identity (nationalism) (monolingualism). Native languages, like other endangered species, are going extinct. On January 4, 1984, for example, the last speaker of Yavitero—an Arawakan language spoken near the Atabapo river in Venezuela—died together with the last Yavitero words.

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My language isn’t dead, but she suffers episodic bouts of systemic melancholy. She comes from two nations (Lebanon and Venezuela) that are terrible at being countries—economically devastated nation-states on the brink of irrecoverable collapse. As she writes this, people in Beirut are rioting, torching symbols of wealth accumulation like banks and partially built condos promising luxurious lives in English. The government has defaulted on its debt, 50% of the population is predicted to sink below the poverty line and into hunger, prices of bread and other basic goods have skyrocketed overnight, all of it compounded with dysfunctional public infrastructures in which basic services like water and electricity are irregularly supplied, if at all. In Venezuela, in May 2020, the inflation rate was 2296.6 %.

My language can’t entirely blame her countries or their criminally corrupt political class for their dramatic failures at being countries. Formerly colonized territories inherit from the “mother” country a poisoned legacy whereby their survival is contingent on the adoption of a state system and

the enforcement of a colonial language. Fanon, an author who has shaped my language’s understanding of herself, talks about “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” in *The Wretched of the Earth*. There he describes how the bourgeoisie of recently liberated countries do terribly at emancipation; to become a country is akin to replicating colonialism’s social and economic disparities:

National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case, an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been.<sup>1</sup>

My language calls Beirut in English on the weekends. “We are becoming Venezuela,” her aunt sighs. My language doesn’t know what to say. Her two countries converge along a godless, collapsing nexus. Subjected to US sanctions, considered threats to the stability of their respective geographical regions, Lebanon and Venezuela are paying the cost of their non-alignment. Crumbling economies and devastated ecosystems are political in nature and nature is never natural. All mother tongues are ideological. In Beirut, posters of Hugo Chavez represented next to Hassan Nasrallah are pasted on the highway’s serpentine cement walls. The poster says: “The symbols of international resistance.” Triangulations between Lebanon, Iran, and Venezuela haunt America’s worst nightmares while people on the ground struggle for survival.

My language speaks of her countries in statistical and geopolitical terms because she wants to talk about love.