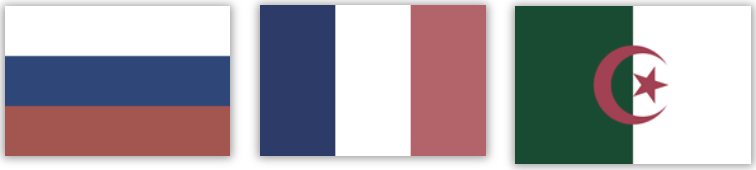
2014

Ruth A. Snetselaar



« Je n'ai qu'une langue, or ce n'est pas la mienne. »

[“LA LANGUE FRANÇAISE” IN A POSTMONOLINGUAL WORLD]

Two Francophone Novels against the Backdrop of the Monolingual Paradigm

«Étrangement, ou plutôt tout à fait logiquement, c'est dans ces moments-là en me retrouvant entre deux languages, que je crois voir et sentir plus intensément que jamais...» A. M. «La voix qui interroge en moi vogue des mots français à ceux de ma mère..., elle vacille, hésite d'une langue à l'autre, d'une rive à l'autre... » A. D.

La Langue Française in a Postmonolingual World

Two Francophone Novels against the Backdrop of the Monolingual Paradigm

Ruth Snetselaar
MA Thesis Literary and Cultural Criticism
Universiteit Utrecht
Nov. 10th, 2014

under supervision of dr. Birgit M. Kaiser

My heartfelt thanks to Ewoud van Duijn and Hilde Visser,
for believing in me and pulling me through this –
you guys are the best!

{ Contents }

{ Introduction }

I was recently asked why I have chosen literary studies. Not being able, at that moment, to formulate an eloquent answer, I later realized that my interest in literature is closely linked to my interest in languages and cultures. People of every language and culture enjoy creating narratives. Stories are remembered and retold; they survive generations and allow us to connect with people across borders. As stories are created within a certain temporal and cultural context, they also reflect the values and belief systems of that particular time and society. Indeed, we could say there is a mutual correspondence between a culture and its literature: society produces literature, but literature also influences society. Therefore, to gain insight into a culture of a certain time-period (be it our own or one that is temporally or geographically distant), it is useful to study the literature this culture has produced. Studying how the literature was received and interpreted will further help us to understand its position in relation to the most widely accepted norms of that particular society.

A question that often arises is, to what cultural group of people does a piece of literature belong? One obvious way to classify literature is by language or by country. It has become habitual to associate literature with nations; therefore we speak of "national literary traditions" or a "national literature" (Damrosch 513). That is, we speak of English literature as a whole but also distinguish between British and American literature, as well as African literature in the English language. In other words, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* do not fall into the same literary tradition. Nations and cultures claim stories and writers for their own, as they do languages. Today, the "national language" (in some cases languages) is a significant and essential part of a nation's self-perception and sense of identity. Thus, to both individuals and nations, language is an essential identity marker. Speaking of this, Yasmine Yildiz writes, "Individuals and social formations are imagined to possess one 'true' language only, their 'mother tongue', and through this possession to be organically linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation" (2). The terminology of possession used, indicates that language is seen as property as well as a significant mark of belonging. The term *mother tongue* carries the connotation of a language that is acquired naturally and legitimately; it is a language we can rightfully claim as "our own" through our birth into an ethnic group, a culture, a nation.

However, when a writer decides to cross over national and linguistic boundaries and write in a language which is not their first language, or perhaps even in two languages simultaneously, this

presents a problem to the system of national literary traditions. The question of belonging is not just a formal issue: many bilingual writers have expressed a sense of being somehow illegitimate or of not belonging. For example, Ariel Dorfman, an Argentine-Chilean-American novelist, speaks of being "double and somewhat homeless" (33); Isabelle de Courtivon, who writes in English and in French, feels like "a linguistic transvestite" (163). Anton Shammas, a Palestinian writer and translator of Hebrew, Arabic, and English, describes himself as a "linguistic refugee, a fugitive from three languages"(123). These reflective comments communicate the unease which often befalls the writer who no longer fits into the categories established by society. Thus, these multilingual writers, by questioning their identity and legitimacy and place of belonging, highlight the widely accepted notion that a writer belongs to a homologous nation, language and culture . This frame of reference is what Yasemin Yildiz has termed the *monolingual paradigm*, which she probes into and questions in her book *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (2012).

Monolingualism was not always so self-evident in Europe. Indeed, in the Middle Ages it was quite normal for a writer to write in more than one language; and the choice of language, never an arbitrary one, depended on the subject to be treated: "every linguistic act involved a choice, and this choice in turn implied a political, social, or more broadly cultural statement" (Boldrini 43). Even into the 17th century, the European literary elite commonly wrote in Latin and either Dutch, Italian, French or German (see Yildiz 112). This multilingual situation began to change as, over time, political power was centralized. By the late 18th century, the idea of a homogenous nation-state had crystalized in Europe, and concurrently, the idea of a national language: a language belonging to a certain people, a certain nation.

This new paradigm brought to the forefront the native language and the ethno-national identity of writers. Just as a language was now an essential part of a *nation's* identity (schools and printed books did much to establish one vernacular as the national language, the language of learning and of power, throughout the state), it also became an essential part of the *writer's* identity. Many writers by now considered that writing creatively in a language other than the "mother tongue" was fairly impossible, and even illegitimate. This thought carried on into the 19th and 20th centuries. Even though, by this time increased mobility caused by travel and exile resulted in more bilingual or multilingual writing, it was more the exception than the norm. In 1813 German philosopher Friedrich Sleiermacher claimed that "every writer can produce original work only in his mother tongue, and therefore the question cannot be raised how he would have written his works in another language" (qtd. in Yildiz, 8-9). A century later, Anglo-Irish poet William Butler Yeats reacted quite harshly to the fact that the Bengali poet Tagore had ventured to translate some of his own poetry into English: "Nobody can write music and style in a language not learned in childhood and ever since the language of his thought," thus W.B.

Yeats (Kellman ix-x). Likewise, his contemporary George Bernard Shaw claimed that full capability in *one's own language* precluded *mastery* of another (2). Again, we can see the possessive terms used when speaking of the native language, suggesting that only a language learned from childhood can be rightfully possessed and thus legitimately used. It is not surprising that many authors who moved across borders clung to their first language.

Even in the 21st century Europe, the monolingual paradigm is changing only slowly. As already mentioned, writers who do venture to write in a second language still may feel a certain unease about their doing so. Regarding this phenomenon, linguist Uriel Weinreich spoke of language-loyalty, or a deep-seated attachment many people feel towards their mother tongue (Firmat 89). For many, the mother tongue is still an essential part of their national and personal identity. Take the example of Paul Celan, who, though he came to write in German after passing through Romanian, French, and Russian, still felt that "only in one's mother tongue can one speak one's own truth" (Kellman 3). Writing in any other language, then, would seem an imposture, an imitation, as opposed to an authentic and original creation.

Nevertheless, there are many examples of authors who do chose, for differing reasons, to write in a second language. I have chosen to research two French-language novels written by authors born outside of metropolitan France. Not only are these authors bilingual themselves, but the chosen novels portray bilingual characters as their primary protagonists. My main questions as I read these novels are: how are these characters portrayed as relating to their mother tongue and their second language (French)? Is the text itself bilingual; that is, is the author's French writing marked by his or her mother tongue? And finally, do these novels problematize the monolingual paradigm?

My choice for two French-language novels is motivated in part by my own affinity with the French language, but also by the fact that France's long-time concerns for a pure national language make it an interesting case study. In my first chapter, I will go deeper into the question of monolingualism, drawing mainly on Yildiz' analysis and on the writing of Jacques Derrida. I will bring this in relation to the question of francophone literature – literature written in French by authors originating outside of France. A historical overview of France's linguistic politics will show why Francophonie is such a heated topic today. I will then go on to analyze Asia Djebar's francophone novel *La disparition de la langue française* in the second chapter. The novel has as its background the complex colonial relationship between France and Algeria and the process of Arabisation which took place after Algeria's independence. The protagonist returns to Algeria after years of exile in France, only to find that his home country and his mother tongue are no longer uncompromised places of belonging. This novel will help to elucidate the difficult relationship of Maghreb writers to the language of their former

oppressor, often the only language of writing available to them, and to their mother tongue. The novel also reveals the weaknesses inherent to the monolingual paradigm's assumption of corresponding linguistic and national identities. The third chapter deals with Russian writer Andreï Makine's novel *Le testament français*. It is a bilingual's *Bildungsroman*, detailing how a young boy learns to come to terms with his two languages. Unlike in Djebar's case, there is no colonial background to Makine's choice to write in French; and the novel deals mainly with the double vision provided by bilingualism, and the poetry which can arise out of the confrontation of two languages. Despite the fact that it thematizes bilingualism, however, the novel contradicts the monolingual paradigm less than might be expected. The French language is consistently related to the country of France, and the Russian language with life in Russia. In my conclusion, I will provide a comparison between these two novels and reflect upon their position in a postmonolingual world.

{ Chapter 1 }

A Critical Look at the Monolingual Paradigm and Francophonie

As has been shown in the introduction, the monolingual paradigm conceives of individuals and social groups as having a mother tongue, which identifies them with a unique ethnicity, culture, and nationality. This paradigm shapes European thinking at such a fundamental level that it informs identity construction by individuals but also the formation of institutions, as well as our notions of nations and cultures. Belief in the monolingual paradigm has also led to "active processes of monolinguialization" (Yildiz 2), such as the linguistic policies of France described later on. Central to the monolingual paradigm is the concept of the mother tongue, which stands for "a unique, irreplaceable, unchangeable biological origin that situates the individual automatically in a kinship network and by extension in the nation" (9). Thus, the mother tongue limits and directs our place of belonging, our nation of belonging. As the language we learn first, and in which we first construct an idea of self, it is assumed that this is the language in which we can we can most authentically express ourselves. Additionally, it is this language that should be the locus of our affections and loyalty – it occupies a place of emotional meaning that no second language could or should ever take on. An assumption that flows from these notions of authenticity and loyalty is that a writer cannot and should not write a creative work in a language other than his or her mother tongue.

The problem with this conception of the mother tongue, however, is that in many cases it is too simple to accurately describe an individual's relationship to language. Though many people may claim a single mother tongue by which they identify themselves, there are those who cannot even say which language they spoke first, or which comes most naturally. In other cases, speakers feel that the only language they do speak is not legitimately theirs, incoherent with their ethnic identity, and thus not a place of unquestioned belonging. Jacques Derrida has probed into this issue in his book *Le monolinguisme de l'autre, ou la prothèse d'orgine* (translated as *Monolingualism of the Other, or, the Prosthesis of Origin*). *"Je n'ai qu'une langue, ce n'est pas la mienne*," (13) he writes. An Algerian Jew who grew up speaking only French fluently, Derrida was suddenly dispossessed of his only language when the Vichy regime withdrew French citizenship from Algerian Jews for a few years. This situation highlighted the fact that language possession (and monolingualism) is often linked to the power of one party to impose language on or withhold it from another party. Under imposed monolingualism, the

relationship of an individual his or her language is clearly different from the natural bond assumed by the notion of the mother tongue. Yildiz summarizes Derrida, saying:

> What he describes, in other words, is the painful revelation that a subject's relationship to his or her language is institutionally mediated and can be ruptured. "Having" a language, even if it is one's only language, does not ensure recognition of one's claims on it. This "other" monolingualism lacks the attributes ascribed to the mother tongue: the sense of an almost organic, intimate link to a language that results in socially sanctioned and reproduced identarian claims. (41)

Thus, in Derrida's situation, where French monolingualism was imposed by the colonial government, his only language was not one that was coherent with his ethnic identity as an Algerian Jew. The temporary revoking of his French citizenship only underscored the fact that language does not always imply nationality, and vice versa. His reaction therefore was to call into question the idea that any nation or individual can rightfully lay claim to, or appropriate, a language.

An idea central to this discussion is the conception of language as property, which can be owned and even stolen from another through the exertion of power. This is quite different from the "mother tongue" idea of language as an identity marker that one is naturally endowed with at birth, just as ethnicity. Within this view of language as property, Yildiz distinguishes between *language depropriation* and *language appropriation* (40). The first model conceives of language as a 'universal good' that no individual or nation can claim as their own. This is, according to Yildiz, the idea that Derrida expresses in his *Monolinguisme de l'autre*. The second model conceives of language as a universal good that anyone can appropriate and use to create a personal language: language can belong to multiple groups at once. In other words, the concept of language appropriation "redefines which identities are produced and mediated through a given language and thereby undermines the notion of a simple homology between one language and one identity" (40). As an example, she names the Jews living in Prague in the 19th century, who appropriated German without truly assimilating into German culture, retaining their Jewish identity. In a certain sense, they made of German a Jewish language and "a site of Jewish identity" (39).

Seen through either the lens of depropriation or appropriation, language as a universal good undermines the assumption of a "wholesome unity" between language, ethnicity, and nationality (Yildiz 205). The dynamics of language politics and imposed monolingualism in Derrida's situation also call into question the simplicity of the assumption that all individuals have a mother tongue to which they legally *and* naturally belong. In this way, the mother tongue is unmasked as a narrative of belonging, completeness and naturalness which upholds the monolingual paradigm, but which simply does not apply in a significant amount of situations.

Monolingualism and Francophonie

Perhaps nowhere have the debates on the homology between language, nationality, and identity been as heated as in France, a country known for jealously guarding its cultural heritage and linguistic purity. Indeed, for many centuries the heart of the French literary movement was Paris, the city of culture. Yet the world has inevitably changed, and colonialism has done much to spread the French language throughout the world, and especially in Africa. With its count of 96.2 million French speakers, Africa is now home to more French speakers than Europe is (www.francophonie.org). With the increase of native-born, literate French speakers outside of the "Hexagon," therefore, French culture can no longer define itself by its exclusive relationship with the French language. However, as will be shown in my discussions of Bensmaïa, Apter, and Hiddleston ("Francophonie" (2003), "Theorizing Francophonie" (2005), *Reinventing Community* (2005)), France has long held on to the view of itself as the core of the French-speaking world.

The coinage of the term "Francophonie" can in a certain sense be understood as an attempt to negotiate this sense of loss of a linguistic monopoly. When applied to literature, Francophonie designates works written in French by authors of "foreign" origin (usually African or Caribbean). Interestingly, it is not common to make the same kind of distinction between English and "Anglophone" literature. We do speak of British or American literature, but neither term carries the connotation of an original, authentic literature at the center with minority literatures evolving from it and revolving around it on the peripheries. Francophonie can thus be related to a certain quality of franco-centricism in French culture.

A critical look at Francophonie

Several critics have engaged with the term "Francophonie" and French language politics, and the three I have chosen to discuss, each use Derrida's *Monolinguisme de l'Autre* to develop their thinking on Francophonie. They each highlight different aspects of this work: Bensmaïa traces the ignoring of Francophone literature in academics to the monolingual politics of the colonial education system, described by Derrida. Apter draws on Derrida's notion of the inherent multiplicity in language to dismantle the monolingualism implied by Francophonie. Lastly, Hiddleston shows by Derrida's argumentation that no language is ever pure or singular. These critics' involvement with Derrida's text show to what extent post-colonialism informs discussions on Francophonie today. Derrida (born in Algeria in 1930) and his contemporary Abdelkebir Khatibi (born in Morocco in 1938), who is also invoked by Hiddleston, are both language theorists whose writings have been shaped by their

experiences as colonial subjects. The identarian confusion ("trouble de l'identité," Derrida writes [32]) resulting from colonialism influences their conceptions of and writing on monolingualism and multilingualism.

This is an important element which must be taken into account when using their writings to reflect on bilingualism and writing. Assia Djebar, whose novel *La Disparition de la langue français*e I will analyze in the first chapter, has had experiences with French monolingualism similar to those of Derrida and Khatibi. By contrast, the Russian author Andreï Makine, whose novel *Le testament français* is the subject matter of my third chapter, presumably has a different relationship to his second language, French. While for Maghreb writers French denotes a history of oppression, trauma, and unequal power relations, for Makine, as will be shown in the third chapter, French is associated with high culture, literary tradition, and refinement. As a Russian writing in French, he places himself in a long tradition of intellectual exchange between two countries, based on equal power relations and mutual respect. By presenting both Djebar and Makine in my analysis of bilingualism in literature, I mean to show two facets of the vast category which encompasses Francophone literature.

As mentioned, most of the debates surrounding Francophonie revolve around colonialism and its aftereffects on contemporary international relations. In order to understand the emotional "baggage" surrounding these debates, it is important to have an understanding of France's history of linguistic policies, first enforced within the hexagon and later in its colonies. A view of the French language's position within the global context is not complete without due consideration of this France's colonial heritage.

Francophonie and the critics

Professor Emeritus Réda Bensmaïa, in an essay entitled "Francophonie", published in *Yale French Studies* in 2005 (an essay which Apter refers to as "important and polemical" [289]), recounts that when he first began teaching French literature in the USA in 1981, he was expected to teach "pure French writers… who belonged to a purely French literature" (18). This meant that French-language authors from Africa did not enter the curricula: African authors seemed to belong "to an entirely different intellectual order, another 'era' of thought and culture" (19). Bensmaïa explains this "black out", as he aptly calls it (19), as a process of scotomization: in other words, a forgetting of the francophone literature written by ex-colonial subjects as a way to forget a painful and problematic past. In his essay, he marks this scotomization visually by superposing a large X over the word "Francophonie."

Derrida, he argues, identifies the colonial educational system as the source of this scotomization

process, because this system allowed for no differences, especially concerning the language and literatures that issued from it. The "monolingualism of the Other" then, is an artificial monolingualism imposed by a colonial power, through a law originating elsewhere, articulated in the language of the Other. This law reduces language to the One, the true: namely, French. The censorship involved in colonial education subtly also became engrained in the thinking of Western academics; consequently universities applied this censorship to the literature they taught as "French." Bensmaïa describes that writing on Maghrebi Francophone literature at the time felt like a clandestine activity (22), and he was supported by only a few pioneers in the academic field (19). A disruption in the general conception of Francophonie was needed before scholars could start presenting Francophone[1] literature without making the mistake of attaching such condescending labels as exoticism or folklore. This disruption came, writes Bensmaïa, in the late 1980s, with the rise of feminist studies and cultural and postcolonial studies. These movements prompted a "rethinking of the relations of inequality, hierarchy, subjections, and domination" (22).

Emily Apter further expounds on the concept of Francophonie in her article "Theorizing Francophonie" which was published in 2005 in *Comparative Literature Studies*. Francophonie, she points out, is defined in relation to what it is *not*: it is not from the Hexagon, it does not belong to the French canon, it does not originate in a distinct geographical territory. Though languages are constantly conceived of in relation to nations in the monolingual paradigm, Francophonie problematizes the "isomorphic fit between French as the name of a language, and French as the name of a people" (289). France as a country has throughout its history invested much into claiming French as its national language. I will expound on this in my discussion of Hiddleston's writing further on.

Apter speaks of Derrida's notion of an "aporia within ipseity" – the self-contradiction that is lodged within the idea of identity and "an estrangement in language as such" (302). According to Apter, this "Other" is always present within monolingualism. She uses the idea of aporia to deconstruct the "nationalist nominalism of language names," (302) or in other words, the identification of a language with a specific nation. Even when a single language is imposed from above, there always remains an "Other" within the community of those speaking the same language. Additionally, a speaker of French may or may not be a French national; there is no absolute two-way correlation between these groups: within the totality represented by Francophonie, French nationals are only one group of the many. If one takes this into account, then France can impossibly construct its identity as a nation around an

[1] There is an ongoing debate around the term "Francophonie" itself, as it can be understood to imply a difference between French-speaking and "Francophone-speaking" writers, thus perpetuating the France-centered perspective. Compare "francophone literature" to, e.g., "literatures in English." The writers of the manifest mentioned at the end of this chapter propose the term "littérature-monde en français" : world literature in French.

exclusive relationship to the French language. Instead, France is related to each of the other French-speaking countries on the basis that each national community is simply a "borrower" of the French language (no one country has exclusive rights to possession of the French language). In Apter's reading, then, Derrida's *Monolinguisme* shows that there cannot be a one-on-one relationship between languages and nations, regardless if they share the same nomenclature.

Contrary to Bensmaïa and Apter, Hiddleston chooses in her writing to go beyond the opposition between French and Francophonie. Her observations are useful because they touch on bilingualism. Chapter 3 of *Reinventing Community* (2005), entitled "The Identity of the French Language and the Language of French Identity," is headed by a quote of Mikhail Bakhtin in which he announces the end of national languages. Bakhtin, as explained by Hiddleston, conceives of language as a system of meaning that is constantly mutating as it interacts with other dialects. No language is a closed unity but any language is always open to change as a result of contact with other languages and cultures. This view is at odds with the traditional view of the French language, which has been formed by policies centering on "notions of unity, purity, and homogeneity" (Hiddleston 86).

The association of French with logic, clarity, and reason can be traced back to several developments in the course of French national history. As has been discussed, nationality has long been conceived of in relation to a common language and culture. In France, this idea took a very specific political form as successive governments strove to unify the country's inhabitants into a single nation (by the 19th century, all citizens were supposed to speak French) (87). The first legal undertaking to this end was the edict of Villers-Cotterêts in 1539, which established a "unified French language" in which all legal documents were to be published. Approximately a century later, the Académie française was established with the task of standardizing and safeguarding the purity of the French language. Descartes's writing of his *Discourse de la méthode* in French also worked to further associate the French language with logic and reasoning, investing it as "a symbol of both rationality and universal inclusion" (87).

Towards the end of the 18th century, the attempt at securing communicability among citizens resulted in an ideology that tended to suppress any dialects still spoken in France. During the Third Republic, Jules Ferry's secularization of the educational system meant that schooling was to be conducted in French. This Republican ideology, a means to binding a diverse country together under a centralized state, was further promoted and perpetrated in the Colonial Empire. Native languages were suppressed to make room for French as the language of politics and education. Because the colonies were considered to be a part of France, the ideology of monolingualism was extended to and reinforced in these areas, most notably in Algeria (Hiddleston 89). Language was the tool by which

Africa would be "civilized", through assimilation into French culture. These politics resulted in unequal and oppressive relations, implicated through the French language. Because of this, the French language is still associated with a legacy of oppression and inequality in former colonies (90).

Even as the Empire declined, the French government still sought to teach and spread the French language overseas, as is evidenced by the institution of the "*Haut commité pour la defense et l'expansion de la langue française*" in 1966. Today, Apter observes, France's protective and expansionist attitude towards French is still evident in French hostility towards the infiltration of English words into the French language, which "betrays a deep-rooted fear for the self-contained unity of French itself" (90). Increased multilingualism in France in the latter part of the 20th century, however, has put into question the hegemonic conception of nationality and language and calls for "a more fluid way of understanding the relationship between language and national or cultural identity" (91).

Hiddleston uses Derrida's *Monolinguisme* to undermine the Republican notions of a pure language, showing it to be incompatible with the reality of cultural plurality. Though Derrida spoke only French, he did not unproblematically belong to the culture it signified. He expresses a paradoxical existence, one of possession and of non-possession, of belonging and not belonging, simultaneously. He then makes two statements that seem to contradict:

1. *On ne parle jamais qu'une seule langue – ou plutôt un seul idiome.*
2. *On ne parle jamais une seule langue – ou plutôt il n'y a pas d'idiome pur*. (Derrida 23)

Hiddleston reformulates the first postulation as, "Everyone has a singular way of speaking, even if this can involve different language systems," and the second as "it is impossible to isolate any one idiom from other traces and influences; indeed, an idiom is never pure but presumably necessarily composite" (93). In other words, colonialism can never truly eradicate alterity by means of a single imposed language because languages are always plural. Derrida's own identity as a Franco-Maghrebi Jew represents this "presence within the monolingual of traces of irreducible cultural differences" (93).

His contemporary Khatibi, who was born in Morocco where colonization was less oppressive than in Algeria, wrote on multilingualism as an alternative to monolingual language dominance (97). In his conception, two languages are neither fused nor separate, but in a relation of interaction and negotiation, thus deconstructing the view of the French language as a fixed unity by problematizing its borders. As a bilingual writer, Khatibi experienced a double alienation resulting from a separation from

his mother tongue, which was amplified by the experience of being a colonial subject. Unlike Derrida, he acknowledges that despite this alienation, hybridity may be a site of greater creativity and vitality. He expresses the desire to transform the traumatic associations of colonized peoples with the French language (Hiddleston 104).

In conclusion then, Derrida and Khatibi problematize the monolingual paradigm by showing the *internal* difference inherent in any language. In one sense we are all multilinguals; our language is never free from influences from other languages and cultures. In another sense we all speak a unique, personal language, regardless of which language(s) we express ourselves in. These two facets account for a diversity within languages, which makes the distinction between any two idioms less clear. To assume that there is a strict homology between linguistic, national, and ethnic belonging, is to ignore these disparities and to deny the potential of a confluence of different idioms to construct new identities and result in new artistic creations. My readings of Djebar and Makine in chapters two and three will show that literature can arise precisely out of the negotiation and interaction between two languages.

Francophonie in literature today

As evidence that French monolingual politics still has an effect on literature today, I would like to mention a polemical article which was published in *Le Monde* in March 2007 by forty-four French-language authors (both of foreign and of native birth). The manifesto, entitled "Pour une littérature-monde en français", was incited by the fact that in the fall of 2006, five out of seven prestigious French literary awards were given to writers of non-French origin. This event called into question the logic of the French/francophone distinction: how could France continue to see itself as the center of the literary movement when most of the innovative writing in French was being done by authors from "outside"? They pointed out that it was time to change the Franco-centric paradigm, which assumed that the French language belonged first and foremost to France as a nation:

> Le centre jusqu'ici, même si de moins en moins, avait eu cette capacité d'absorption qui contraignait les auteurs venus d'ailleurs à se dépouiller de leurs bagages avant de se fondre dans le creuset de *la langue et de son histoire nationale*: le centre, nous disent les prix d'automne, est désormais partout, aux quatre coins du monde. Fin de la francophonie. Et naissance d'une littérature-monde en français. (Italics added. "Pour une littérature-monde en français," March 15th 2007, *Le Monde*)

In the past, these writers asserted, French-language writers from other countries and origins were forced to discard their foreign cultural baggage before merging into the French literary scene. As

indicated by the italics, they speak specifically of the language and its "national" history. However, they now proclaimed, this Francophonie is outdated. The center of the French literary scene, the innovative nucleus, is now everywhere, scattered across the world.

The manifesto unclenched a storm of reactions: public debates, academic articles, literary conferences. One of these reactions was from the General Secretary of the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF), Abdou Diouf. Though he applauded their recognition of the diversity which now marks French literature, he also deplored their desire to "bury" Francophonie, accusing them of confounding Francophonie with Franco-centrism ("Francophonie, une réalité oublié", published on March 19th 2007 in *Le Monde*). Yet, he also stated clearly: "La langue française n'appartient pas aux seuls Français, elle appartient à toutes celles et à tous ceux qui ont choisi de l'apprendre, de l'utiliser, de la féconder aux accents de leurs cultures, de leurs imaginaires, de leurs talents" (Diouf). In other words, Diouf expresses here that the French language may be appropriated by anyone who chooses to cultivate it within his or her own culture and imagination.

A constant back-drop to this discussion is the monolingual paradigm, struggling to give way to the *postmonolingual condition* of which Yildiz speaks: "a field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to assert itself and multilingual practices persist or reemerge" (5). The two novels I will now proceed to analyze emerge from this field of tension between monolingualism and multilingualism. Djebar's protagonist is a bilingual character facing growing monolingualism in his home country. While in a process of rediscovering his mother tongue, he finds that he cannot go without his second language, however problematic its colonial associations. Makine's protagonist is a young boy who learns to come to terms with his bilingualism and the difference it imputes to him. The novel is not only interesting as a bilingual's *Bildungsroman* – on a meta-level, the discussions surrounding the novel and its author reveal the ways in which assumptions concerning monolingualism and the mother tongue inform literary discussions.

{ Chapter 2 }

Assia Djebar : Multiple Mother Tongues in *La disparition de la langue française*

Introduction

Assia Djebar was born Fatima Zohra Imalyan on August 4, 1936, in the seaport town of Cherchell, Algeria (Déjeux 99). Though it was at the time unusual for Algerian girls to pursue an education, her father took her to a French school as of age five, where she learned to speak and write French fluently (see *Ces voix* 73). Thus, from an early age she lived the competition ("concurrence") of two languages: French, associated with her father, education, and emancipation; and Arabic, associated with her mother and with tenderness and eloquence, the language being rich with subtleties and nuances (73). At the age of eighteen she continued her education in France, where she, instead of taking her Bachelor's exams in 1956, wrote her first novel in the short space of two months (Déjeux 99). She later gained a doctorate degree at the University of Rabat, Morocco (1959-62), and subsequently pursued activities in the academic literary field, as well as cinematography and theater, moving between Algeria and Paris. In 1977-1978, she shot her first film, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont-Chenoua*. She currently lives and writes in New York.

Djebar's works are markedly multicultural, containing many references to European literature and philosophy, as well drawing deeply on the Arabic and Berber cultures as a source. In this sense, her writing problematizes the monolingual paradigm by including different national and cultural referents in one language: Djebar's writing negotiates multiple national identities. She appropriates the French language and infuses it with multiple external influences to create writing in a new language which fits neither French nor Algerian national literature. To this effect, Anne Donadey speaks of Djebar "de-territorializing the French language" (34), making it "fully multilingual" (29). Djebar's earlier works deal mainly with the search for an Algerian identity and a specifically feminine genealogy. Her later works, according to Hiddleston's analysis in *Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria* (2006), take a new turn, exploring the country's "internal otherness according to Derrida's ethics and poetics of hauntology" (5). Thus, Djebar still positions herself as an Algerian national writer, but one who is increasingly distanced from her native country by changes which are occurring in the country's culture and politics. Of her later books, *La Disparition de la language française* (2005) "forms a culmination, in that in this epoch still haunted by colonialism and ravaged by the newly oppressive Islamist culture prevalent in Algeria, both identity and language are figured as ghostly, dispossessed, beyond the grasp of the francophone

writer" (*Out of Algeria* 5). Algeria is shown to have undergone an essential change in identity, having become more divided and full of internal contradiction.

The book is set in the 1990s, at a time when civil unrest between Islamists and militaries culminated in a civil war. The civil strife had much to do with language and imposed Arab monolingualism. Following Algerian independence in 1962, the implementation of classical Arabic became a major political and ideological endeavor (Algeri 18). As Arabic was imposed in the national educational system, French and local dialects were forbidden at schools. The "authentic Algerian identity" (18) was constructed around a knowledge of the Arab language, Islam, and the anti-colonial struggle. Opposition to French culminated in an interdiction of French at universities. Thousands of francophone Arab intellectuals disappeared during this time: some, like Djebar herself, fled to France; others, like protagonist Berkane, were hunted down by those wanting to enforce Arabisation.

As Hiddleston points out, Djebar's choice to write in the French language causes a separation between her and her Algerian compatriots, as well as "places her in an ambivalent position in relation to colonialism, and to Arabisation" (14). While Hiddleston analyses *La Disparition* mainly in the light of Derrida's poetics of hauntology, I want to give a reading that focusses on its treatment of multilingualism and the mother tongue, and the questions of identity and belonging that arise out of living "between" two languages and cultures. I will do this by zooming in on the main character Berkane and the way in which he experiences his bilingualism, taking into account the use of non-French words in the text. I will complement this analysis with Assia Djebar's personal reflections on being a bilingual (francophone) writer, drawing from her bundle of essays entitled *Ces voix qui m'assiègent … en marge de ma francophonie* (1999). Finally, I will reflect on how the text undermines the notions central to the monolingual paradigm, using Yildiz's and Derrida's thoughts to develop my analysis.

Berkane: the rediscovery of a problematic mother tongue

From the very start, the text presents itself as conscious of language and the interaction between languages, figuring the word "Homeland" (in English) in the first sentences. Why would the narrator of this French text use the English version of this word? It creates a certain distance, suggesting "homeland" as a concept, an idea, and perhaps even an unrealistic ideal. The narrator is Berkane, a middle-aged man who has just returned to his native country Algeria after twenty years of living in exile in France. Indeed, Berkane will discover that his hometown has changed irrevocably. The heart of the city of Algiers, referred to by him as the "Casbah" (the old town center, as opposed to the

"European" quarters later built by the French), is no longer a place of refuge but a place of danger and dilapidation. In his years of absence, his memory had constructed a vision of his hometown as a site of glorious hybridity, of coexisting multiple identities. However, he comes back to find the city put under pressure by the rise of a politics of Arabic monolingualism imposed by Islamic fundamentalists.

Berkane himself is fully bilingual, at home in both French and his native Arabic dialect. As his former French girlfriend Marise will surmise towards the end of the book: Berkane needed his two languages, and he would never have chosen to abandon one of them for political reasons. His two languages constantly float in and out of his mind, his Arab dialect closely associated with memories of his mother, and French as the language of his writing and political resistance.

The opening scenes are exemplary of the rest of the book: Berkane's mind is a constant clamor of voices. Very often he is hearing the voices of absent women: his mother, Marise, and later Nadjia. The female voice thus connotes intimacy, affection, desire, and safety. Opposed to these are the voices of political upheaval: cries heard on the streets, the violent voices of Islamic leaders in the media. In the midst of all these voices, Berkane seeks to find his own, his writerly voice: we learn that he has long ago given up writing his own "roman de formation" (20) and that he has now retired early in order to devote all his time to writing in solitude in his home country (22). This writing he invariably carries out in French, yet in a French sprinkled with Arab words, which reveal the Arab language and culture as the source of his writing, while also indicating the insufficiency of one language to accurately capture his bilingual experience.

Musing on his memory of the voice of the departed Nadjia (an Arab woman who stays at his house for a few days "in between" travels), Berkane speaks of "displacing" her words, spoken in their mother tongue, and "gliding" them into French in order to preserve them: "déplacer ces mots arabes, les faire glisser pour les garder en langue seconde" (Debar 2003, 170). French is thus a medium of preservation, while, ironically, it is the French language that is slowly disappearing from Algeria due to the rise of Arab monolingualism.

His "mother's tongue" is itself a hybrid creation, a mix of multiple influences – not a "pure" national language. He recalls with affection "son parler à elle, un mélange de dialecte de la rue algéroise, parsemé de mot raffinés, à consonances andalouses" (20). It is a language he turns to in his mind for comfort after his separation from Marise. The description of its internal difference supports Derrida's postulation that no language is ever pure – "On ne parle jamais qu'une seule langue" (23).

The first Arab word used in the text is, tellingly, the word for nostalgia: *el-ouehch*. It is not used in relation to his homeland, but, interestingly, he expresses by it his longing for the French Marise. "Je

dis, pour toi et pour que te le lises, ma nostalgie – *el-ouehch* de toi," Berkane writes (31). Just as his two languages mingle in his mind, so both cultures hold a grasp on his life: France, impersonated by the young actress he had a relationship with but is now separated from, and Algeria, represented by his mother who has now passed away. So Berkane seems to inhabit a no-man's land between two cultures and two languages, appropriating both French and Arabic without belonging wholly to either language or nation. Like him, Nadjia is a nomad, holding two passports and fluent in three languages, the embodiment of multiplicity. Yet, their shared mother tongue (though they speak with slightly different accents and vocabularies) allows them to express themselves subtly and meaningfully, bringing them close together in an extremely short time. By contrast, Berkane remembers that Marise's disability to understand his "babellage arabe" (30) during their lovemaking leaves him with a certain sadness (24). While together they create a unique shared language, a "metissage" (30) of his dialect and her French, one senses that his communication with her was not as fulfilling as that with Nadjia.

Yet, while Berkane has appropriated both languages, he cannot unproblematically belong to either. In a sense, he is also deappropriated of both. French is haunted by its colonial past and the associations of oppression that cling to it; Berkane is still the "Other" in relation to it. But his native language is increasingly becoming "other" as well, deformed as it is by Muslim fundamentalists. Berkane could thus say, in a slight rewording of Derrida: "J'ai deux langues, or ils ne sont pas les miens" (Derrida 13).

Initially, the rediscovery of his native dialect gives Berkane a renewed sense of identity. Rachid, the fisherman who provides his daily supply of fresh fish, speaks the same dialect, which creates an instant sense of complicity between the two (27). He expresses excitement at the recovery of so many lost words, "une sorte de danse de tant de mots perdus" (29). At the same time, in the background to this story of Berkane's reconciliation with his mother tongue is the linguistic drama played out by fundamentalist politicians, the "fous de Dieu" as Nadjia calls them (154). Frustrated and angered, Nadjia cries that the deformed, violent Arabic used in the media has nothing to do with the subtle, elegant literary Arabic she has come to love: "Leur langue arabe, moi qui ai étudié l'arabe littéraire, celui de la poésie… moi qui parle plusieurs dialectes des pays du Moyen-Orient où j'ai séjourné, je ne reconnais pas cet arabe d'ici. C'est une langue convulsive, dérangée, et qui me semble déviée!" (157). It is a different language than any type of Arabic she has heard in her travels throughout the Middle East. Thus, the mother tongue is no longer a refuge but rather a site of abuse and violence, and the monolingual paradigm's myth of the mother tongue as place of unquestioned belonging is undone.

To Berkane, therefore, no one language is the basis of his identity. His two languages mix together, forming an intricate knot. Upon rediscovering his mother tongue, he temporarily loses his power of

speech. “J’ai senti que je n’allais pas parler, ni m’attarder, comment lui dire que, à cause de tous ces mots écrits ou remémorés, j’avais perdu ma propre voix, mes deux langues soudain brouillées, confondues, emmêlées, comment lui expliquer ce nœud en moi … ? ” (140) Thus, neither his mother tongue nor French is a closed entity, and, as Derrida and Khatibi have pointed out, the Other is always present in his language. Hiddleston writes: “This jostling around for position between French and Arabic means that not only Berkane, but language itself becomes detached from identity, from any secure cultural and political position, and emerges different from itself, containing unfamiliar associations” (Hiddleston 171).

Djebar: relating to multiple mother tongues

The novel reflects in many ways Djebar’s own experiences as an Algerian woman writing in French. The title of her collection of reflective essays, *Ces voix qui m’assiègent*, could very well be applied to Berkane, who also seems to be constantly beleaguered by voices: “La voix qui interroge en moi vogue des mots français à ceux de ma mère” (Djebar 2003, 35). In *Ces voix qui m’assiègent,* Djebar asks herself, what does it mean to be a francophone writer? To her, it means more than being an Algerian who writes in French; it involves transcribing into French the voices of her native culture, creating room within the French language for her multiple mother tongues: “[J]e prends conscience de mon choix définitif d’une écriture francophone qui est, pour moi alors, la seule de nécessité: celle où l’espace en français de ma langue d’écrivain n’exclut pas les autres langues maternelles que je porte en moi, sans les écrires” (Djebar 1999, 39). Like Berkane who records Nadjia’s story in order to preserve her voice, Djebar’s francophone writing is a recording of voices from her native land. In this sense, she writes, she is not actually a “francophone voice,” but a multiplicity of voices (Djebar 1999, 26). Or, as Donadey writes, she “reappropriates French by inscribing within it the trace of oral Arabic, creating a bilingual palimpsest” (Donadey 29).

Perhaps more than being a francophone voice, though, she practices a “franco-graphie,” writing with an Arab or Berber ear against a background of multilingual mumbling (29). She describes herself as writing from the margins, refusing to go to the very center of any one language. In other words, she does not identify herself with any one language (30). Instead, like Berkane, she inhabits a sort of no-man’s land, a space in between languages. A metaphor she frequently uses to describe this experience is that of vacillation between languages, or a “tanguage des languages” (11, 13, 15). It is a position of vulnerability; abandoning Arab to write in French engenders the risk of losing those characteristics unique to the Arab language: the subtleties, the ironies, its melodiousness. While French frees her of the confines imposed by Arabic and the traditions of Muslim culture, it also leaves her rootless, “sans

ancrage" (12). Thus she writes at the constant risk of losing her balance. Like dancing or navigating a boat, writing "Entre deux mondes / Entre deux cultures" involves the delicate art of keeping one's balance: "Tourner sans se retourner eh bien quoi danser / sans renoncer à l'une des langues / de ce corps tressautant" (15). It is in this precarious dance between two languages that a new language is created, as it were: "French takes on a slightly foreign ring for native readers, as Djebar pushes it beyond its limits. In her hands, it welcomes Arabic words and concepts, as she reterritorializes French to make it more hospitable to arabophone readers" (Donadey 34). Thus, she uses her two languages to create a new, literary language. In the end then, Djebar does not truly choose between the two languages; rather, her French becomes impregnated with Arabic (Algeri 30).

Djebar's example shows that a writer can have more than one mother tongue – that a second language can evolve to become as important as the mother tongue. Or differently, a second language can become so infused with the mother tongue, that it is futile to try to draw a clear distinction between the two. Exactly the same thing happens to the protagonist of *La Disparition*: "Mais le fait d'écrire en français, qui, tout en étant influencée par la langue arabe, est désormais au rang de la langue maternelle, devient, dans le contexte historique où se situe le roman, un choix politique qui met en périle la vie de Berkane" (Algeri 25). As he indicates in his letter to Marise, the structure of his French bears traces of Arabic : "(tu trouveras mes phrases trop longues qui vont et viennent, « en arabesques », disais-tu, quand, par indulgence, tu cherchais à me faire plaisir…)" (Djebar 2003, 22).

Conclusion

To conclude then, both Djebar and her fictional protagonist Berkane find their identities closely tied up with their mother tongue, an Arabic dialect. However, this mother tongue becomes so intricately caught up with the language in which they write, that a clear distinction can no longer be made. Additionally, their Arabic mother tongue itself is internally multilingual. As Derrida wrote, "On ne parle jamais qu'une seule langue." This shows, therefore, that homogeneity between the mother tongue and national identity is not as simple as the monolingual paradigm assumes. But Djebar's writing goes a step further than simply bringing to light the shortcomings of the monolingual paradigm: it shows that the mother tongue and a second language can come together to form something new, a language that encompasses or embraces two cultures and two nationalities at once.

Berkane comes back to a country which, still recovering from its bout with imposed French monolingualism, is now bent under the weight of Arabic monolingualism. Monolingualism is hereby shown to be an artificial and imposed construct, which is enforced to the detriment of multiple other

"mother tongues". *La disparition de la langue française,* set in an Algeria forcibly set on its way to becoming a monolingual Arab nation, nevertheless shows the ruptures and internal schisms of the monolingual paradigm, thus exemplifying the state that Yildiz has termed the postmonolingual condition.

{ Chapter 3 }

Andreï Makine's *Le testament français* : A Bilingual's *Bildungsroman*

Makine, a Living Myth

A writer shrouded in mysteries, Andreï Makine has become somewhat of a myth. Born in Krasnoïarsk, Siberia on September 10, 1957, he had already built a successful academic career when he arrived in France in 1987, requesting political asylum (Nazarova 12-16). Despite having been denied asylum, he decided to remain in France; but the first years were particularly difficult. Without a fixed home, he worked on his first novel sitting on park benches, having nothing but coffee and bread for food (18). Initially, no French editors were willing to publish work by a Russian who wrote his novels in French. This finally led Makine to present his novels as translated from Russian, inventing a fictitious translator by the name of Albert Lemmonier (named after Albertine Lemmonier, great-grandmother of the narrator in *Le testament français*) – in one case, he even had to create the Russian "original" in order to convince the publisher (Safran 246). His first publications went largely unnoticed, until his life took an epic turn with the publication of *Le testament français* in 1995. The novel was awarded two of France's most prestigious literary prizes, the Prix Goncourt and the Prix Médicis, an honor no writer, even of French origin, had ever been granted (Nazarova 19). The book was also awarded the Prix Goncourt des Lycéens. After this instant success, Makine received French citizenship by special order of François Mitterrand (19).

Despite his fame, Makine remains an enigmatic figure. According to Safran's description in her article "Andreï Makine's Literary Bilingualism and the Critics" (*Comparative Literature*, 2003), he still lives in an undersized Paris apartment, from which he frequently disappears for a visit to his hand-built Russian "izba" in the countryside. Furthermore, he "seems to spend no money on himself, and appears to devote every waking thought to literature" (246). One thing that is revealed across different interviews is his concern for linguistic purity and a refined writing. He has denounced the hybrid French spoken by the young immigrant population in Paris and has pronounced his judgment on modern French literature, which he described as "drowning in sperm and fecal matter" (qtd. in Wanner 2008, 670). In an interview with a French Canadian journalist in 1997, he said to the detriment of Anglo-Saxon culture that "There are only two great occidental literary languages: Russian and French. That is, only two great literatures" (qtd. in Wanner 2008, 672-3). He thus presents himself as a foreigner who "validates the superior status of French culture," having even published a lengthy

essay in 1996 in which he "exhorts his fellow citizens to return to the roots of their Frenchness" (673). With such statements, and by his own highly stylized novels in French, Makine takes up the cause for a classical literary French.

Makine and his critics

With his purist stance concerning language and such an epic background to boot, Makine forms an easy target for reviewers interested in giving some greater meaning to his status as a bilingual writer. Safran points out that his largely autobiographical *Le testament français* has been an occasion for many reviewers to articulate their broader ideas about bilingual writing. French reviewers tend to present him as an example of successful assimilation into French culture. His choice for the French language, apparently free from any colonial discourse, is appealing to a nation concerned with the status of "its" language in global relations. On the other hand, Russian reviewers have treated him as an example of how "self-defeating and unproductive" it is for a writer to leave his native culture (Safran 252-253). His novels, which remain largely untranslated into Russian, have been criticized as kitsch and stereotypical by his compatriots.

These reactions to Makine's translingualism reveal that certain assumptions characteristic of the monolingual paradigm are at work in both cultures. Wanner, who writes on three translingual Russian authors in his article "Russian Hybrids: Identity in the Translingual Writings of Andreï Makine, Wladimir Kaminer, and Gary Shteyngart" (*Slavic Review* 2008), points out that the vehemence of several of Makine's Russian critics betrays a "psychological unease with Makine's translingual project," springing from more than a mere disappointment in his portrayal of Russia (666). He quotes one critic as having called Makine "a philological mongrel, a cultural hybrid, a linguistic chimera, a literary basilisk" – scathing words, which characterize him as a type of unnatural cross-breeding between two cultures, resulting in an unclassifiable abnormality. On the contrary, the in-depth critical work of Nina Nazarova (*Andreï Makine, deux facettes de son oeuvre*, 2005), a Russian academic of Makine's generation (and, perhaps significantly, also fluent in French from an early age [11-12]) – vouches for the authenticity of Makine's portrayal of his native country: "malgré le choix d'une langue étrangère, il sait preserver et exprimer sa perception du monde russe" (7). These highly differing judgments of Makine's writing indicate that there could be a larger issue at stake here than simply a pronouncement on the authenticity of his writing. This issue could be unease with his ambivalent status as a bilingual writer or concerning his national loyalties.

When asked to what extent he still considers himself Russian, Makine has pointed to the linguistic and ethnic diversity included in the nomination "Russian," indicating the internal multilingualism and multiculturalism of Russia. "Russia is so big that it contains within itself an entire universe, counting hundreds of people, languages, and cultures. Having united Europe and Asia, north and south, it can be considered universalist" (qtd. in Wanner 2008, 671). Thus, while he crusades for French linguistic purity, he does not seem particularly concerned with claiming a certain national identity. Rather, he seems to propose the idea of French as a "universalist" language, a "literary language par excellence" (Safran 249). This idea, as Safran describes, is that of a language that is not bound to a single nation or ethnic group, but one that can belong to whoever chooses to own and use it. If this is so, then Makine exemplifies Yildiz' model of language appropriation, making the French language his own despite his Russian cultural background. On the other hand, Makine's decision to immigrate to France and become a French citizen can also be seen as an act of augmenting his identity as a French-language author with French nationality, thus conforming once more, after a phase of transition, to the monolingual paradigm.

However the case, Makine's literary artistry arises out of his bilingualism, as will be shown in the analysis of *Le testament français*. His writing emerges from the double perspective provided by two languages. Perhaps this double vision creates a certain duality, which has led his critic to denounce him as a "cultural hybrid" and a "literary basilisk": as evidenced by interviews and in his classical French writing style, Makine pursues a purist French, while still drawing his main inspiration in terms of setting, plot, and characters from his Russian background.

The *Bildungsroman* of a bilingual writer

Le Testament français, the novel with which Makine achieved his instant fame, is a story which highly foregrounds bilingualism and the French language. Like *La disparition de la langue française*, it is a narrative full of voices and stories being told. Most important are those of the narrator's French grandmother, Charlotte Lemmonier. The narrator is a young boy who lives in an unnamed industrial Russian city, but spends his summers with his grandmother on the edge of the Siberian steppe. It is from her that he learns to speak French fluently, a process mediated by her history stories recounted in French. French thus becomes not his mother tongue but his grandmother tongue, or "langue grand-maternelle" (Makine 17). Through Charlotte's stories, French attains for him a mythical status, associated with the elegance and refinement of French high culture, by contrast so different from the harsh realities characterizing life in Russia. Trapped in the context of the vast and lonely Russian wilderness, Charlotte's stories of a faraway civilization called France seem like a lost city of Atlantis in

the minds of the young boy and his sister: “D’une dame aux obscures origins non russes, Charlotte se transforma, ce soir-là, en messagère de l’Atlantide engloutie par le temps” (42).

The stories, not surprisingly, deal with the age-old relationship between France and Russia, starting with the marriage of Henri I with the Russian Anna Iaroslavna (51). The French language and its association with refinement are in this way “grafted into” the narrator. He recounts the moment that the French stories allowed him for the first time to reflect objectively on the Russian language, providing an external view: that of Russia seen through the eyes of the French. This epiphanic moment causes a rupture in his thinking that is both acute and exalting (57-58). From that moment on, he decides to submerse himself in French, appropriating it as much as possible. Upon returning to his school in the city, however, he finds that his French graft is a nuisance rather than an asset. His knowledge of French and the external perspective it provides him, makes him an easy target for the mockeries of his fellow students. He comes to envy the other children for their singular vision on life, a vision and experience defined by the limits of a single language: “Comme c’est si bien de ne pas porter en soi cette journée de grand vent, ce passé si dense et apparament si inutile. Oui, n’avoir qu’un seul regard sur la vie. Ne pas voir comme je vois” (66). He realizes suddenly that he has a double vision thanks to his bilingualism, but he has not yet come to appreciate the value of it – it appears to him rather useless and unnecessarily complicated. He remarks, for example, that the Russian word “царь” carries a whole different set of connotations than the French word “tsar”. The Russian evokes a cruel tyrant, while the French evokes the ballroom dinners and elegantly dressed ladies of Charlotte’s Atlantis (66). As Murielle Lucie Clément points out, the narrator’s bilingualism is not simply a case of two languages which confront each other in the boy’s mind, but two apparently irreconcilable cultural universes. The stark difference between these two worlds makes it impossible for him to assimilate his two languages and allow them to interact along the notions of Bakhtin and Khatibi. Rather, they make him “péniblement conscient de soi”, painfully aware of his position between two cultures (Clément).

As he grows older, the narrator nevertheless continues to be drawn to French, and reading about all things French becomes a time-consuming pursuit. The French language is, in his mind, the essence of France as a country and a culture – a vision of language in keeping with the monolingual paradigm. At age fourteen, he suddenly realizes that his grandmother can have nothing left to teach him, and a deep disenchantment settles over him (Makine 167). He realizes, too, that he is no longer a child (174). Concurrent with this disenchantment, however, he feels the beginnings of a “new language” germinating within him. This new language is a “literary, poetic idiom distinct from the ordinary language of everyday life” which arises out of the meeting of two languages (Wanner 2002, 118) . However, he only later comes to understand the precise nature and potential of this new idiom.

Around this time, both his parents pass away. The untimely death of his parents, which he brings directly into relation with the hardships and suffering inflicted on their generation of Russians, awakes in him a sense of Russian identity and national pride, which conflicts with his grafted French identity:

> La Russie, tel un ours après un long hiver, se réveillait en moi. Une Russie impitoyable, belle, absurde, unique. Une Russie opposée au reste du monde par son destin ténébreux.
> Oui, si, à la mort de mes parents, il m'arriva de pleurer, c'est parce que je me sentis Russe. Et que la greffe française dans mon cœur se mit à me faire, par des moments, très mal. (204-5)

It is at this emotional juncture in his life that another story-teller enters: Dmitrich, the father of his aunt's children. Dmitrich is everything Charlotte is not: he is coarse, blunt, vulgar, and aggressive. His horrific stories of the oppression exerted by the totalitarian regime have a double effect on the narrator. At the same time as they reveal a whole new Russia, a country of censorship encircled by barbed wire, they also arouse in him a deep passion for this, his country. Again, this causes a schism in the boy's conscience: "Ce qui me fit le plus souffrir aux cours de leurs aveux nocturnes, c'était l'indestructible amour envers la Russie que ces confidences engendraient en moi" (207). The more he discovers of Russia's dark secrets, the more his love for the country grows but also becomes problematic. He clings to his new Russian identity, believing it will eclipse his "illusion française" (208).

One day, however, he overhears his peers speaking of him as a "Frantsouz": a Frenchman in Russia (246). Realizing he has not succeeded in shaking off his difference, all his anger concentrates on his grandmother Charlotte, and he boards the next train to Saranza in order to confront her: "Je voulais qu'elle s'explique, qu'elle se justifie. Car c'est elle qui m'avait transmis cette sensibilité française – la sienne –, me condamnait à vivre dans un pénible entre-deux-mondes" (249). Once there, however, Charlotte's calm voice and her apparent fragility, and the expansive steppe, have a calming effect on him. While they converse, Charlotte admits to being the permanent stranger in Russia, and to having moments that she understands nothing of the country. Other moments, however, she senses she understands the country better than the native Russians themselves (262-3). Her two languages, Russian and French, seem to give her an abstract way of thinking which allows her to see farther than others. It is this personal confession of his grandmother that helps the narrator to finally come to terms with his two languages, his double identity: "Un grand calme, à la fois amer et serein, se repandait en moi. Je n'avais plus à me débattre entre mes identités russe et française. Je m'acceptai" (263).

Following this reconciliation with the French language, he realizes that his months of rebellion against it have changed his perception of French: at once he realizes that he is speaking a *foreign* language (270). Because of this quality of foreignness, it becomes a useful tool for him. His heightened

sensitivity to the particularities of the French language gives him a deep intuitive sense of style, "une intuition pénétrante du style" (272). He continues, "Le français, ma langue 'grand-maternelle', était, je voyais maintenant, cette langue d'étonnement par excellence" (271-2). In other words, the element of foreignness which still resides in French for him, despite his fluency in it, allows him to see and describe the world from an artistic viewpoint precisely because it is not so natural, so evident and unsurprising, as his native Russian. Living between two languages, he realizes, opens his eyes to the beauty of the world around him. He surmises, "Étrangement, ou plutôt tout à fait logiquement, c'est dans ces moments-là en me retrouvant entre deux languages, que je crois voir et sentir plus intensément que jamais" (272). Thus, the narrator (mirroring the experience of author Makine, presumably) finally discovers with excitement the potential inherent to hybridity. And it is precisely in the confrontation of two languages that this "langue d'étonnement" is created, and he feels his first impulses to start writing: "Et c'est ce jour-là que, pour la première fois, cette pensée exaltante me traversa l'esprit: 'Et si l'on pouvait exprimer cette langue par écrit ?' " (279).

Despite the narrator's bilingualism, the novel does not necessarily refute the monolingual paradigm. The narrator has concluded that Russian, his native language or mother tongue, comes most naturally to him, and it is precisely for this reason that he chooses to create a literary language in French. The element of the foreign (and the "Other") in French serves as a tool to distance himself from day to day associations and create something fresh and poetic. The novel does show, however, that the notion that a writer writes best in his mother tongue (an idea many writers and philosophers have expressed), is not always true.

The use of two languages – or rather, a differing language and culture - takes shape on a meta-level in the novel itself: it portrays the world of Russia, through the French language. The distance of the French language from the Russian experience is what enables the author to lift the Russian experience out of the drudgery of everyday life and mold it into something literary. Arguably, a highly personal reworking of his mother tongue could provide an equal level of abstraction needed to create poetry. However, in *Le testament français*, it is bilingualism which first transports the narrator to a more abstract and poetic way of thinking. Assuming Makine himself has undergone a similar development, it is in this light that we can understand his comments that Russian is "too loaded subjectively" while French is "not mired in routine things […] a literary language, free from the prosaic and the vulgar" (qtd. in Safran 249).

Conclusion

The novel ends with the narrator moving to France, where, through a period of homelessness and depression, he suddenly achieves fame as an immigrant writer. He sets up a plan to bring Charlotte back to France. However, this plan is thwarted by both the refusal of French citizenship and the passing away of Charlotte Lemmonier. A letter she leaves him contains an unexpected revelation: his mother was not, as he believed, the half-French daughter of Charlotte. Instead, she was a Russian woman imprisoned in a war camp. He was adopted, and thus does not have a drop of real French blood in his veins. Through his engagement with the French language, however, he has very nearly become French, lacking only an official passport to prove it. Safran writes:

> The central irony of the book becomes clear in the last pages: a man who by birth was Russian thought he was French, and so he became French to such a degree that he managed to turn himself into a French writer – to enter into French literature and culture. Language, it would seem, can provide all the nationality one needs, so long as one accepts its artificiality and contingency. (262)

This implies that language does determine one's national belonging – however, it also implies that it is not necessarily one's mother tongue that determines national belonging. A second language can also be appropriated to such an extent that one becomes, say, French enough to by accepted by the French as French.

Makine's own example, an immigrant author who was granted French citizenship after he had proved his mastery of the French language by obtaining two prestigious literary awards, underscores this conclusion. Though French is not his mother tongue, he has managed to appropriate it to such an extent that he has "earned the right" to become French. His situation is therefore opposite from that of Derrida, who lost his French citizenship despite being a monolingual French speaker. Interestingly, Derrida admits to having an obsession with pure French despite his criticism of monolingualism[2] (see Derrida 78). Likewise, Makine's French is modeled on examples of classical literature and scarcely influenced by Russian, his native language. Unlike Djebar's French, it is not internally multilingual, but a closed unity. It is tempting to surmise about the source of linguistic puritanism with both Derrida and Makine. It could, perhaps, be traced it to a concern for "proving" their French identity or their successful mastery (appropriation) of the French language.

Finally, both Makine and his narrator are bilingual beings who decide to write in a second language. Their bilingualism, however, does necessarily contradict the monolingual paradigm. Both Russian and French remain associated with separate and specific national and cultural identities. The convergence

[2] He speaks of "ce goût hyperbolique pour la purété de la langue" as having been fostered by his colonial education, though he must initially have himself had a propensity towards it (Derrida 81).

of these two disparate identities initially causes confusion in the boy Aloicha, until he discovers that it offers him a double vision which enriches his view of the world and his ability to translate it into literary creation. This is creation is nevertheless carried out in a French that remains clearly demarcated from Russian. The trace of the "Other" is felt not in the infusion of Russian elements into French (aside from a culturally-specific words such as "isba" and "samovar"), but rather by the hyper-classicality of Makine's French language.

{Conclusion}

La disparition de la langue française and *Le testament français* : two francophone novels which deal with bilingualism and monolingualism on a thematic level. I have examined these novels in relation to the monolingual paradigm, or the assumption that individuals possess one true language, the mother tongue, and that this language forms a coherent unity with their national, cultural, and ethnic identity. Both these novels are the product of writers who have ventured, despite the notion that a writer is at the height of his or her creative linguistic potential when writing in the mother tongue, to write in a second language. They have done so for different reasons: for Assia Djebar, French is the language of her education and the language of liberation from the constraints imposed by Arabic. For Andreï Makine, French is a literary language par excellence, and one that provides enough estrangement from the banal realities of everyday life to conduce poetic creation.

These authors also differ in their use of the French language: while Djebar's French is essentially multilingual, infused with Arabic and Berber voices, words, and structures, Makine writes in a purist French, modeled on the classics, very little influenced (if at all) by his native Russian. Thus, while Djebar's writing gives evidence of the Other inherent in monolingualism, of which Derrida speaks, Makine exemplifies a writer who has appropriated the French language but does not seek to transform it from within. As Makine has become a naturalized citizen of France following his success in writing *Le testament françai*s, he in a sense implicitly underwrites the monolingual paradigm; his personal story suggests that one can attain nationality by fully mastering the language associated with that nation.

Thematically, the novels differ significantly in their treatment of the mother tongue. In *La Disparition*, Berkane's mother tongue is unavailable as language of writing (due to his education in French), and it has undergone an estrangement under the abuse of a violent politics of monolingualism. In *Le testament*, the narrator's native language Russian is the language of his education, yet he chooses French precisely for its degree of foreignness, a choice based on his personal poetics of estrangement.

There is also a difference in how these protagonists experience their bilingualism: in Berkane's mind, French and Arabic constantly mix, forming an inextricable knot. "La voix qui interroge en moi vogue des mots français à ceux de ma mère[…], elle vacille, hésite d'une langue à l'autre, d'une rive à l'autre," he writes (Djebar 2003, 35). Like Djebar herself, he seems to have multiple mother tongues,

and they are not always clearly demarcated entities within his mind. In this way, he underwrites Derrida's postulation that no language is ever pure, but is always under the influence of other idioms. The novel thus problematizes the assumption of a single mother tongue.

By contrast, French and Russian describe vastly different realities in the mind of Makine's protagonist. He must slowly come to terms with the fact that he is a bilingual being and that this knowledge of two languages provides a double vision of the world. However, he discovers the redeeming value of this internal schism, stating in the end that it is at those moments that he finds himself in between languages that he feels and sees most intensely: "Étrangement, ou plutôt tout à fait logiquement, c'est dans ces moments-là en me retrouvant entre deux languages, que je crois voir et sentir plus intensément que jamais" (Makine 272). However, these languages still represent two different cultures: Russian remains closely associated with banal realities of day-to-day life in Russia, while French carries all the connotations of his mythical vision of France as a land of elegance and literature.

Thus, though both these authors are francophone writers, they seem to relate differently to their mother tongue and to the French language. Djebar shows that the mother tongue is not always a place of belonging and identification, and writes in a French infused by her "other" mother tongues: "[J]e prends conscience de mon choix définitif d'une écriture francophone […] où l'espace en français de ma langue d'écrivain n'exclut pas les autres langues maternelles que je porte en moi, sans les écrire" (Djebar 1999, 39). Makine, on the other hand, uses a pure, classical French, despite the fact that his novels center around Russian life.

To conclude then, these novels clearly fit into the "postmonolingual condition" of which Yildiz speaks, that "field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to assert itself and multilingual practices persist or reemerge" (5). They prove that it is too simple to assume that all individuals have a mother tongue to which they unproblematically belong, and also show that it can be productive for a writer to leave his or her mother tongue to write in a second language. The confrontation of two or more languages may initially lead, as in the case of Berkane, to a temporary loss of voice or to a depropriation of both languages. Or, as is the case with Makine's narrator, it may be difficult to reconcile the opposing views on life that two languages present. However, in both their cases, bilingualism finally leads to inspiration and the creation of literary writing. However, this is not an innocent choice and does not remain without consequences: in Berkane's case, his adherence to the French language presumably leads to his disappearance, making him one of the many francophone intellectuals who were captured and tortured during the political upheaval of the 1990s. In *Le testament*, the choice of French engenders les grave consequences – the narrator is eventually drawn to France, where he lives as a vagabond until he publishes a successful French book. As in Makine's

own case, French publishers are initially unwilling to publish a French text written by a Russian. Thus, whether internal or external, there are multiple challenges, assumptions, and fears the bilingual writer must confront and overcome in writing in a second language. However, these two novels testify that Assia Djebar and Andreï Makine have, despite their differing motivations and methods, successfully appropriated the French language and created their own poetic language within its confines (or, as in Djebar's case, enlarging its confines). Bilingualism is thus in their hands a powerful tool by which to experience and consequently put into words the universal human existence.

{ Bibliography }

Algeri, Veronic. “De la language de l’Autre à l’autre langue : L’écriture polyphonique d’Assia Djebar dans La Disparition de la Langue Française.” *Francophonia : Studi e ricerche sulle letterature di lingua francese*. 30.58. Exilées, expatriées, nomades… (2010):15-32.

Apter, Emily. “Theorizing Francophonie.” *Comparative Literature Studies*, 42.4. *Between Languages* (2005): 297-311. Penn State University Press. Web. 15.10.2014.

Barbury, Muriel, et.al. “Pour une littérature-monde en français. ” *Le Monde des livres on web* 15.03.2007. 01.09.2014. http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/03/15/des-ecrivains-plaident-pour-un-roman-en-francais-ouvert-sur-le-monde_883572_3260.html.

Bensmaïa, Réda and Alyson Waters. “Francophonie.” *Yale French Studies,* no.103. *French and Francophone: the Challenge of Expanding Horizons* (2003): 17-23. Yale University Press. Web. 15.10.2014.

Boldrini, Lucia. “Translating the Middle Ages: Modernism and the Ideal of the Common Language.” *Translation and Literature* 12.1, *Modernism and Translation* (2003): 41-68. Web. 8.09. 2014.

Clément, Murielle Lucie. “Poétique du multilinguisme chez Andreï Makine.” *Écrivains multilingues et écritures métisses. L’hospitalité des langues.* Axel Gasquet and Modesta Suárez, eds. Clermont-Ferrand : Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2007. Web. 17.10.2014.

Damrosch, David. “World Literature, National Contexts.” *Modern Philology* 100.4 (2003): 512-531. Web. 8 Sept. 2014.

De Courtivron, Isabelle. “Memoirs of a Bilingual Daughter.” *Lives in Translation: Bilingual Writers on Identity and Creativity*. Isabelle de Courtivron, ed. USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. [xxx]

Déjeux, Jean. *Dictionnaire des auteurs maghrébins de langue française*. Paris : Éditions Karthala, 1984

Derrida, Jacques. *Le monolinguisme de l’autre, ou, la prothèse d’origine*. Paris : Éditions Galilée, 1996.

Djebar, Assia. *Ces voix qui m’assiègent … en marge de ma francophonie*. Paris : Albin Michel, 1999.

-------. *La disparition de la langue française*. Paris : Éditions Albin Michel, 2003.

Diouf, Abdou. “La francophonie, réalitée oubliée.” *Le Monde on the web* 19.03.2007. 01.09.2014. http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2007/03/19/la-francophonie-une-realite-oubliee-par-abdou-diouf_884956_3232.html.

Donadey, Anne. "The multilingual Strategies of Postcolonial Literature : Assia Djebar’s Algerian Palimpsest.” *World Literature Today*, 74.1 (2000): 27-36.

Dorfman, Ariel. “The Wandering Bigamist of Language.” *Lives in Translation: Bilingual Writers on Identity and Creativity*. Isabelle de Courtivron, ed. USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. [xxx]

Firmat, Gustavo Pérez. “On Bilingualism & Its Discontents.” *Deadalus* 134.3 (2005): 89-92. Web. 8.09.2014.

Hiddleston, Jane. *Assia Djebar, Out of Algeria*. 2006. Cambridge: Liverpool University Press, 2011.

-------. “The Identity of the French Language and the Language of French Identity." *Reinventing Community: Identity and Difference in Late Twentieth-Century Philosophy and Literature in French*. London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2005. 84-113.

Kellman, Steven G. *The Translingual Imagination*. USA: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

Makine, Andreï. *Le testament français*. Paris : Mercure de France, 1995.

Nazarova, Nina. *Andreï Makine, Deux facettes de son œuvre*. Paris : L’Harmattan, 2005.

Safran, Gabriella. “Andreï Makine’s Literary Bilingualism and the Critics.” *Comparative Literature* 55.3 (2003): 246-265. Web. 16.09.2014.

Shammas, Antony. “The Drowned Library (Reflections on Found, Lost, and Translated Books and Languages).” *Lives in Translation: Bilingual Writers on Identity and Creativity*. Isabelle de Courtivron, ed. USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. [xxx]

Wanner, Adrian. “Gained in Translation: Andreï Makine’s Novel *Le testament français*.” *Literary Imagination: The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics* 4.1 (2002): 111-26. Web. 17.10.2014.

-------. “Russian Hybrids: Identity in the Translingual Writings of Andreï Makine, Wladimir Kaminer, and Gary Shteyngart.” *Slavic Review* 67.3 (2008): 662-681. Web. 17.10.2014.

Yildiz, Yasmin. *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*. USA: Fordham University Press, 2012.