


The Torn Language Between Identity and the Global in Amin Maalouf's *In Murderous Identities: A Sociolinguistic Analysis*

La langue écartelée entre l'identitaire et le globale chez Amin Maalouf à travers une analyse sociolinguistique de son essai *Les identités meurtrières*

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Abstract

Murderous Identities is a self-reflexive essay where the linguistic question is central. In this essay, the "translingual" writer Amin Maalouf offers a profound vision of what the language of identity and the global language is in the era of globalization. The question of language greatly determines the choice of a language in a multilingual context. This research provides us with data parameters and hypotheses to address in developing our understanding of sociolinguistic issues. In addition, the ideas developed by the author are new which spark inspiration and research on the subject. Between an identity language and a global language, there is a large gap which manifests itself in a space of progress compared to the past and a space of regression in human relations. In the end, two languages are not enough, you need a second language, freely loved, embraced and chosen.

Keywords: identity language- global language- murderous identities- sociolinguistics-bi-plurilingualism.

Résumé

Les identités meurtrières est un essai autoréflexif où la question linguistique est centrale. Dans cet essai l'écrivain « translingue », Amin Maalouf propose une vision profonde de ce que c'est la langue identitaire et la langue globale à l'ère de la mondialisation. La question de la langue détermine grandement le choix d'une langue dans un contexte plurilingue. Ces recherches nous ont données des paramètres et des hypothèses à traiter dans le développement de notre compréhension des questions sociolinguistiques. En outre, les idées développées par l'auteur sont nouvelles qui suscitent de l'inspiration et de la recherche sur le sujet. Entre une langue identitaire et une langue globale, se place un grand écart qui se manifeste en un espace de progrès par rapport au passé et un espace de régression dans les relations humaines. Au final, les deux langues ne suffisent pas, il faut une deuxième langue, librement aimée, épousée et choisie.

Mots- clés : langue identitaire - langue globale - *les identités meurtrières* - sociolinguistique -bi-plurilinguisme

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Introduction

In Amin Maalouf's *In Murderous Identities*, language is an integral part of identity, a fundamental element in any linguistic and cultural exchange. Identity itself remains a complex concept, not limited to a single affiliation. Given the multiplicity of affiliations that contribute to an individual's identity, the author assigns language a prominent and unique place in his essay. He argues that language is the sole criterion of identity that rivals religion in significance. For Maalouf, "words," while appearing clear, are "often the most treacherous," and he identifies them as false friends, with "identity" being a prime example. He views language as an element that contributes to the definition of culture and "identity." It is through his personal experience, shaped by linguistic diversity and multifaceted belonging, that Maalouf will demonstrate the configuration of these two elements in the face of the fractures and dangers brought about by "globalization" or even the concept of a "global village," where the mother tongue seems threatened by universality. Maalouf writes: "Nothing is more dangerous than trying to sever the umbilical cord that connects a man to his language" (Amin Maalouf, 1998:154).

Therefore, how can we consider the notion of identity and language today, in the era of globalization, which seems to be "homogenizing and impoverishing"? How can we confront the symbolic violence of the West? What language (cultural, national, global, of the Other, maternal) is used to negotiate identities in a multilingual context?

Language could then become a tool of deception, disillusionment, and humiliation because the world belongs to the Others, the world of the majority. It is these Others who dictate the rules and laws. However, language, if better planned and developed, could be a means to dismantle the borders and walls of resentment and hatred between the inhabitants of the planet: Jews/Arabs, Europeans/Africans, the West/Islam.

It is precisely this question of the coexistence of multiple languages, cultures, and affiliations that Amin Maalouf seeks to answer in his essay. His work functions as a humanist plea for peaceful language contact and an invitation to openness towards the other, as well as to cultural mixing in a context where one-sided globalization prevails. This type of globalization is becoming increasingly worrisome and threatening due to the rise of identity exclusivism, particularly religious extremism, which often leads to violence.

A sociolinguistic analysis of this theme will lead us to new definitions of identity and language within more compatible linguistic communities. This analysis aims to foster the emergence of a balanced bilingualism, a more adaptable multicultural awareness, and a harmonious code-switching practice, free from any form of linguistic domination or insecurity.

1. The Concept of "Identities" and "Language"

To arrive at his reflection on "identities," Amin Maalouf starts from a simple observation: "How many times have I been asked, with the best intentions in the world, if I felt 'more French' or 'more Lebanese'" (Amin Maalouf, 1998:07). How can one answer this question? Can one choose between such and such a belonging? Then, on a daily basis, what do we mean by the phrase "this person has an identity"? A singular word that shows that he is inscribed, like his semblables, on an administrative document constituting his deep essence, and it is this consciousness that counts for him.

Considering the author Amin Maalouf's (1998) conception of identity, it is first of all: "what makes me not identical to any other person...and which should not lead to confusion" (Amin

Maalouf, 1998:16). Paradoxically, an identity is our human side that brings us closer to others, but at the same time it is what makes us singular and unique.

In modern times, the notion of "identity" linked to language in a multicultural context has been raised by several theorists and researchers (Vinant 1994, Morley & Robins 1995 Hall, Huntington 1999, Malenkov 2004, Preston 2004). These works contain great ideas that have proposed multiple "Identities," all different and interesting. According to these researchers, "identity" is far from being a stable and invariable element. It is constantly constructed and reconstructed, remaining the product of dynamic relationships between individuals and the social context with all its variables. Because identity is an element that is not innate but has to be constructed, it has to do with one's free will.

For some, "identities" are "intellectual constructions that are formed little by little according to the social, political, and historical conditions of each era" (Maratou-Alifani & Galinou, 1999: 13). "Identities" are made up of choices, multiple events, and elements of context that are not obviously listed on official registers, such as belonging to a village, a neighborhood, a clan, a gang of friends, a union, a parish, a company, an association, or a community of people who share the same preferences and perhaps the same ills, a sports team or a professional team, but which are conjugated and mixed with our existence that goes back to existentialist philosophy; we are not born who we are but we become who we are.

Since language is one of the constitutive elements of identity, it plays the role of mediator between cultural and linguistic relations. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the object of language is seen as:

“Comme un réseau minimal (du point de vue linguistique) de variétés (en quelque sorte un système de systèmes) identifié par un même terme et une conscience linguistique spécifiques. Autrement dit, des individus et/ou groupes d’individus décident, selon une dynamique sociale qui peut être fort diverse, de survaloriser des traits de proximité entre variétés (et non plus de faire l’inverse) pour construire la conscience d’une intelligibilité suffisante pour activer les discours métalinguistiques permettant son amplification et le sentiment d’une unité identifiante ; qu’ils proposent ou choisissent de dénommer ce processus, alors implicite, pour le distinguer des autres processus d’identification, fait de ce processus une langue. (Philippe Blanchet. 1998 : 50) ”

From this situation results the practice of code-switching and the choice of languages according to conventional situations by bilingual or multilingual speakers. Amin Maalouf, on the contrary, presents language for migrants as a source of domination, hegemony, and exacerbation of identity behaviors. The author confirms that:

“... Lorsqu’ils parlent avec un Occidental, c’est toujours dans sa langue à lui, presque jamais dans la leur ; au sud et à l’est de la méditerranée, on trouve des millions de personnes capables de parler l’anglais, le français, l’espagnol,

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l'italien. En face, combien d'Anglais, de Français, d'Italiens ont jugé utile d'étudier l'arabe ou le turc ? (Amin Maalouf, 1998 :87) "

The author approaches language to show the role that this identity element can play under the yoke of "globalization" or "modernity that comes from the Other"; either committing crimes in the name of ethnic, religious, or national identity or bringing together multiple cultures and linguistic communities. It should be noted that Amin Maalouf himself is one of the migrants who live "on the border of two countries and two or three languages, of several cultural traditions" (Amin Maalouf, 1998:07).

Amin Maalouf's Reflection on the Question of Language and Identity in His Novel *Les Identités Meurtrières* (1998)

Amin Maalouf, a Franco-Lebanese writer, presents his writing as a rich contemporary literary contribution to Francophone literature. Among the major themes of his writing are: the Orient and the Occident, History, memories and souvenirs, exile, and the question of language. His concern was to create a bridge of rapprochement between the East and the West, between Christian and Muslim civilization, between the self and the Other, between diverse cultures, between the local language and the global language, and the choice of a second language between the two. He chooses to treat in depth the question of identity in his novel.

The figure of the man with multiple affiliations who refuses to be confined to a single identity, leaves Lebanon because of the civil war raging there, and then takes refuge in France. He has been constantly torn apart by a minority condition that has considerably modulated his conception of identity as well as his way of seeing the world. Amin Maalouf, having lived on both shores of the Mediterranean, refuses to conceive of identity as a fixed thing but as a set of elements "of which I deny none" (Amin Maalouf, 1998:23), he emphasizes that: "Would I be more authentic if I amputated part of myself?" (Amin Maalouf, 1998:07). Thus, he places his conception of identity far from the unique meaning and immutability of identity, this notion becomes for him an evolutionary process that is constructed from many elements and the totality of affiliations.

In *Les Identités Meurtrières* (*Murderous Identities*), Amin Maalouf builds a bridge between the country of origin and the host country, between the West and the Arab world, between the past and the present, between the language of oneself and the language of the Other. However, a fruitful dialogue must be established between multiple cultures, and it is in this direction that his writing strategy goes to reflect his free and committed thought that raises the question of the fragmented identity, in order to finally denounce the reductive identity visions that imprison human identity. Amin Maalouf insists on the possibility of not being recognized by the characteristics of his country of origin but rather by all the elements that are there and that are to come in the composition of his identity. The founding ideas of his work are sharing, universality linked to his experience of multiculturalism, coexistence, as well as the intercultural reaction towards the Other.

In a precise and profound way, Amin Maalouf deals with the notion of identity in connection with (compound identity) and all its repercussions on the migrant man. This identity depends on the space, whether geographical (a Turk born in Germany, an Algerian born in France is also of African and Maghreb origin), the fact of seeing (a "Black" in the United States can be considered mixed-race in Angola), or historical (a Yugoslav becomes a Serb or Croat from one

year to the next), or even the person's choices (a Christian in Lebanon has the choice of putting forward his Arab identity shared with millions). In these example cases, the most regrettable is the fact of reducing this notion of identity to a single block, to a single affiliation. He denounces the danger engendered by the unique and fixed identity conception, which can become murderous.

Considering the following case: the migrant from Germany sees himself first and foremost as European or Protestant, this fact occurs before he is even a supporter of Bayern Munich. However, if this identity freezes around a distinct affiliation that defines it, then it is the tribal conception that dominates the mind to allow a new pattern to emerge that is drawn between "them" and "us". This difference will construct the identity of the Other in the negative, at the slightest provocation, injustice, humiliation, we witness murderous riots.

From another point of view, Amin Maalouf praises multilingualism by comparing it to religion. The comparison shows that language, unlike exclusive religion, can be used in any context and by any user by borrowing from a variety of languages and dialects. To finally frame the idea of the practice of cultural and linguistic reciprocity, Amin Maalouf proposes a "third language" which is not a neutral language but a language of dialogue, a language of empathy, a language of the heart, a language that is not exclusive but inclusive, a language that is neither Arab nor French but a language of the human being.

2 Towards a Sociolinguistic Turning Point

For Amin Maalouf, languages, both Christian and Muslim, are an obligatory passage for communication and a basic condition for understanding the Other in all its dimensions, cultural, religious, ethnic, social, etc. For the author, linguistic and textual issues cannot be dissociated from all the languages of the world: host language / mother tongue, minority / majority language, dominant language / dominated language, idiolect / sociolect, bilingual or multilingual. The basic postulate of multilingualism is to consider all languages with respect and with the idea that they all belong to the "same humanity," even if "languages are not born equal [...] they have the right to respect for their dignity." (Amin Maalouf, 1998:156).

By a deep feeling of linguistic insecurity ¹: "all the inhabitants of the island speak their language when they are among themselves, and as soon as they have contact with a foreigner, they have an interest in knowing English well" (Amin Maalouf, 1998:158). Thus, this behavior and this shared/differentiated view of languages lead us directly to W. Labov's pair of linguistic security/insecurity, which allows us to see the social status reserved for the language of the island's speakers and the supremacy of English in the international sphere. Due to the lack of valorization of their local or regional language, the inhabitants of the island prefer English as a prestigious language, a global language. They are forced to modify their language to integrate into globalization. In this context, the choice of English is dictated by the dominant international linguistic community, which imposes its oral habits and thought patterns.

¹ Selon J.L.Calvet le phénomène de sécurité linguistique se produit lorsque, pour des raisons sociales variées, les locuteurs ne se sentent pas mis en question dans leur façon de parler, lorsqu'ils considèrent leur norme comme la norme. A l'inverse lorsque les locuteurs considèrent leur façon de parler comme peu valorisante et ont en tête un autre modèle. » J.L.Calvet. 1993. La Sociolinguistique. Paris :PUF

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The author's autobiographical writing manifests his frank word on the notion of Pierre Bourdieu's habitus: "socialized humans are neither absolutely determined nor completely free of their actions and their thought patterns... They are governed by their habitus" (p. Bourdieu, 1977:17/34). This concept is taken up at the narrative level, when the author tells us about the example of Iceland: "no Icelandic mother would think of speaking to her son in English" (Amin Maalouf, 1998:158). This oral habitus (the Icelandic language on a daily basis) when it is put on the linguistic market, for example: the language of an Icelandic publication will be evaluated as a legitimate language or even a "capital," but ousted for a reason as simple as it is sad. The international readership cannot understand this language and the majority of publishers opt for English rather than Icelandic, which in turn can create or reinforce "this inequality of languages" (Amin Maalouf, 1998:157) and engender in another time a "symbolic violence."

Linguistic Domination or Symbolic Violence

From this perspective, we begin a most thought-provoking analysis in A. Maalouf's essay on the situation of languages in the context of globalization. This part reveals a literary discourse denouncing linguistic hegemony, cultural hegemony, and even "glottophagy" (Louis-Jean Calvet, 1979: 21), where languages "eat" others, "some are already disappearing. Languages cease to be spoken with the death of their last speakers." (Amin Maalouf, 1998:150). This concerns the domination of some languages over others. It is customary in the era of globalization for a supreme language to be dominant alongside other dominated languages, a language of the exercise of power, of business. According to Bourdieu's theory, symbolic violence takes the form of the discourse of authority, like English today. It is more subtle than force, the dominant impose their values on the dominated: "The national language will soon serve only for domestic purposes, its domain will shrink, and it will end up becoming a vulgar local dialect." (Amin Maalouf, 1998:158). This example suggests that the author draws his ideal of wisdom from the reality of the reign of "globalization" where English has become emblematic, the first language of the world connoted as dominant.

The discourse exposes the deep idea of the debate on multilingualism, which explains A. Malouf's intentionality and his vision of the world. It is generally accepted that "English is today necessary if one wishes to communicate with the whole planet, it is an evidence that it would be in vain to contest." (Amin Maalouf, 1998:159). But things get complicated if one thinks that "English is enough" (Ibid.:159). The following passage highlights his point of view and his position towards language policy, precisely in relation to the dominant language, English: "even if it perfectly meets some of our current needs, there are others that it does not meet; notably the need for identity..." (Ibid.:159). He applies himself to projecting through his experience the dangers and threats that come from imposing English as an identity language, this fact becomes a matter of astonishment because for:

" les Américains et les Anglais, et quelques autres, il est, bien sûr, la langue identitaire mais pour le reste de l'humanité, soit plus des neufs dixièmes de nos contemporains, il ne peut jouer ce rôle, et il serait dangereux de lui faire jouer, sauf à vouloir créer des légions d'êtres désaxés, égarés, à la personnalité distordue. (Ibid.:159) "

The autobiographical aspect is translated by the introspective process, the author embodies his vision of the world to cultivate heterogeneity, to show the coexistence of languages and the tolerance of diverse cultures as central values. The enriching aspect according to him is the relational ethic that imposes total respect for the Other, whatever his religion, his language of origin, his culture, etc. What enhances this vision is the fact that the immigrant individual, even overwhelmed by other languages, must keep his identity language because "Separating the linguistic from the identity seems to me neither possible nor beneficial." (Maalouf.A. 1998:153). It is difficult to imagine a "distorted" personality within society because of a bilingualism that is handicapped, misunderstood, and applied. Language proves to be a factor of identity par excellence! The best would be to transcend sterile situations and value cultural and linguistic diversity as a shared wealth while recognizing legitimate linguistic mutation.

A. Maalouf, this worried humanist does not hide his fear in the face of the magnitude of the threat of "modernity which has arisen in different terms [...] modernization has constantly involved the abandonment of a part of oneself." (Amin Maalouf, 1998:150). A. Maalouf's writing is committed to showing the twilight of human communities under the bitterness and humiliation of one-way globalization, where the individual is called upon to abandon a part of himself, to lose his bearings to end up with a feeling of denial: "human communities that had forged an original culture during History [...] are threatened to lose their land, their language, their memory, their knowledge, their specific identity, their dignity." (Amin Maalouf, 1998:150). The author's concerns reflect the "Mistrust" of the 20th century "a century of unforgivable crimes and disappointed hopes [...] Mistrust, also, of everything that appears to be global, worldwide or planetary" (Amin Maalouf, 1998:111) and also to take care of "the domineering West or the unbearable America" (Amin Maalouf, 1998:11

3 Between Identity Language and Global Language: Choosing a Middle Ground Language

In this conception of the choice of languages linked to identity in the reign of globalization, which "would be only a disguise, a camouflage, a Trojan horse, under which would be hidden an enterprise of domination." (Amin Maalouf, 2008:133), a globalization that rejects a priori everything that is related to identity. To counter domination, the author responds with an open humanism to the notion of linguistic identity, explaining that identity is built and nourished by several languages: identity, global, and between the two is the language of choice. The sole objective is to avoid the fear of the other and its negation, to avoid tensions and the unleashing of violence in the name of the cultural and linguistic difference of the Other, to assume with ease and freedom one's diverse affiliations, to refuse all forms of planetary uniformity and tribal withdrawal.

So, if the local language is linked to identity, which falls into the order of the same, the global language is linked to otherness, which falls into the order of the Other. What language to speak in the family? What language to write in? What language to communicate with the world in? To do this, is it necessary to recognize and remember that "Nothing is more dangerous than trying to break the umbilical cord that connects a man to his mother tongue." (Maalouf.A. 1998:154). In fact, we are all certain that we cannot do without our mother tongue, we all claim this identity link. Amin Maalouf's discourse remains inhabited by the mother tongue even if he

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expresses himself in French "His works reveal a deep love for his origins, a nostalgia for the past that manifests itself in a hybrid writing resulting from a deliberate contact of languages." (Maya Khaled.2013). A magico-linguistic operation emerges, even if it stays as close as possible to the French language and its genius, the Arab-Muslim proper names, the registers of his texts, the articulations between oral/written, the collective memory, the style of speaking in his novels, the expressions of the Arabic popular register reveal a transparent writing where the Arab reader is brought to meet his language in watermark. "Preserve one's own identity language, never let it fall by the wayside," (Maalouf.A. 1998:163). The stake, in this perspective, is the mother tongue, this "umbilical cord" that slips into the fictional and imaginary discourse to become a matrix language, reflecting the constitutive facet of identity that becomes -what is it currently? -? Visibly sensitive to what is happening in the global village with regard to the mother tongue, the author tries to go to the heart of the linguistic problem in the densest of global language policy. At present, it must be said that for peoples who have kept: "contact with the rest of humanity [...] When they speak with a Westerner, it is always in his language, almost never in their own." (Maalouf.A. 1998:87).

Throughout the narrative, Amin Maalouf presents a synthesis of contemporary language policy, he makes a precise case for the encounter of a dominant language with another dominated language. The mark of power becomes surprising, so intolerant "to the south and east of the Mediterranean, there are millions of people able to speak English, French, Spanish, Italian." But, on the other side, this term reminds us of symbolic violence, of the way the dominant field treats dominated languages, "on the other side, how many English, French, Spanish, Italian people have found it useful to study Arabic or Turkish? The negative answer shows the linguistic gap, even the limping bilingualism and the inequalities of languages in the world.

Throughout his essay, *Les identités meurtrières*, he describes an identity with multiple affiliations and a human community threatened by the dangers of globalization: "to see languages, traditions, cultures disappear little by little..." (Amin Maalouf, 2008:133). If language is approached as an identity symbol, but what language will still have its *raison d'être* with English dominating in global space?

"It will always be a handicap not to know English" (Amin Maalouf, 2008:163).

English, a dynamic, easy and creative language, its words are two syllables compared to French words that go up to four syllables, but one language is not enough, the author for his part affirms that "but it will also be, and more and more so, a serious handicap to know only English" (Ibid.).

So, English quickly infiltrated the Maalouf family home: "Family tradition rather advocated English. We were an exception," the writer emphasizes. "Today, I still frequently speak English with the rest of my family and read it a lot, but I will never write in English." ([amin-maalouf-un-humaniste-inquiet.php](#)). Far from doubts and hazardous assumptions, Amin Maalouf confirms in this interview his own friendly relationship with the English language. He alludes to the place given to English within his family, as a language of discussion, family tradition, expression, but in the end he cuts the knot by specifying that it will never be his language of writing.

Despite the privileged place of English, he marks an escape and a renunciation of oneself to fall in love with another language, French. "French remains for me the language of expression and imagination." (Ibid.). In this declaration on the language of writing, he embraces French, "the

main foreign language since school", as a perfect Christian-Muslim, the French language reveals itself to be "the language of the heart, the adoptive language, the married language, the loved language..." (Amin Maalouf, 2008:162). The language of the Other, the language of writing only speaks if it is animated by this deep feeling of love that gives identity.

A vision of assumed freedom in which he specifies his position as a translanguing writer, "I am thus on the border of two countries, of two or three languages, of several cultural traditions. Is that my identity?" (Amin Maalouf, 2008:07). This position allows the author to dialectically join his Arab-Christian roots, opening the way to the diversity of languages and not denying any part of his identity.

Writing has gained a legitimate position in this tumultuous, embarrassing linguistic choice, in the literal sense. In literature, what matters "is the expression of the soul. When it is there, cultivated, revalued, it is the fundamental thing, whatever the language in which it functions." (Patrick Chamoiseau, 1992:24/30)

It is French, which the author calls "the soul", a third language placed between the mother tongue, identity and English, the global language, to take part in a modern language policy, because

"il y aurait ainsi, dans les années à venir , à coté des « généralistes » , qui connaîtraient seulement leur propre langue et l'anglais , des « spécialistes » qui posséderaient , en plus de ce bagage minimal, leur langue privilégiée de communication, librement choisie selon leurs propres affinités , et par laquelle s'accomplirait leur épanouissement personnel (Amin Maalouf.2008 :163)."

The fact of being between the choice of several languages is a richness but at the same time a difficulty that weighs on the individual, especially if "globalization threatens [...] in particular the diversity of languages" (Maalouf.A. 1998:145). To solve this complex phenomenon, which leads us to an opposite reality of welcome and unwelcome globalization, generates in the author the feeling of "fighting" against any attack on human freedom, his beliefs, his culture or his language of origin, the author proposes a rich and polyssemic solution.

A reflection arousing the precision of banishing "a monocord and infantilizing world" (Maalouf.A. 1998:125), a reflection that imposes the laws that found respect for the same humanity without the slightest difference because currently the speaking or writing subject needs, obviously, at least three languages. If the first is identity, original, the third would be English par excellence, but between the two is the language necessarily promoted, chosen in all freedom and conscience, learned with thirst and not necessarily European.

In order to achieve a global linguistic cohabitation, it is necessary to understand the phenomenon of globalization. This explains that it is quite possible to go back to the causes exacerbating identity behaviors and to define how to make them less murderous in the bath of cultural globalization.

Conclusion

This exploration of Amin Maalouf's portrayal of local and global languages reveals a harmonious coexistence of these linguistic categories. In an era defined by globalization, the notions of local (particular, original) and global (universal) languages are not destined for mutual elimination but rather are compelled to coexist in a negotiable manner. Maalouf's works

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attest that it is not about domination or symbolic violence; the world's languages have no interest in excluding each other and becoming antithetical. From this perspective, globalization becomes less perilous and threatening as no individual can belong to a "pure" homogeneous, sanitized universe. Identity is never one-dimensional; we are all products of multiple affiliations, hybrids, which is the defining characteristic of contemporary identity assertions. Our affiliations are both global and rooted in our personal, particular terrains. The mother tongue, this emblematic language, must coexist with all the world's languages in a spirit of free and assumed choice.

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