

poesía - Deciphering Home

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I)

I was born
as a consequence of exile
self-chosen
on both sides
but painful nevertheless
at least
for my mother
who was (in contrast to my dad)
dismembered of
both place and voice
a fremde Sprache¹
twisting her tongue and
leaving her speechless
for some time
as she was desperately trying
to make sense
and home
out of this new
configuration of strange sounds.

¹ (die) fremde Sprache: foreign language

II)

Deutsch ist
meine Muttersprache²
ali moj prvi jezik
je bio srpski³
- Serbian was my
first mode of speech
before
my language became forked
into two
codes of unequal strength
as my mother's tongue eventually
was subjugated to a
quite different
more official
mother tongue
(the borders between which remained
quite blurry for
a while
as 'molim' and 'laku noæ' were just
as much
a part of Deutsch as
'bitte' and 'Gute Nacht'⁴.)

² Deutsch ist meine Muttersprache:
German is my mother tongue

³ ali moj prvi jezik je bio srpski: but my
first language was Serbian

⁴ molim (Serbian)= bitte (German):
please; laku noæ (Serbian)= Gute Nacht
(German): good night

III)

At school I learned
a lot of things but
Fremdsprachen⁵ I liked best:
English
Latin
French
Spanish
I also learned that
my mother's tongue was only
eine Gastarbeitersprache⁶
a stigmatized language
void of significance
and space
within a hegemonic German center
although
it was the Yugoslavs and Turks
and many more non-western 'others'
who helped create
das deutsche (and the Austrian) Wirtschaftswunder⁷
a miracle without too many wonders
awaiting those who filled
positions others wouldn't take
exhausting their bodies
while diluting and silencing
their very names.
I learned that
I was privileged
for being born without
my grandpa's dark brown skin
and that
to have an accent other than
French, English or Italian
was a misfortune rather than
a gift
and that
in order to be(come) a whole
I was supposed to
make a choice
between one
and another part
of me.

⁵ (die) Fremdsprache(n): foreign language(s)

⁶ eine Gastarbeitersprache: a guest worker's tongue. Migrant workers in Germany and Austria are often referred to as Gastarbeiter (guest workers).

⁷ das deutsche Wirtschaftswunder: the German economic miracle (a widely used term for Germany's ability to successfully rebuild their economy in the post-World War II years).

IV)

So I became
 an Österreicherin⁸ and
 I was taught
 important history
 such as the glorious life
 of Prince Eugen of Savoy who
 from the time of 1683
 became famous and immortalized
 for courageously defending
 not just
 the Austrian Holy Roman Empire
 but all civilized and cultured parts of Europe
 (i.e. the world)
 against the looming threat of
 a not quite so holy
 Ottoman invasion.
 Or I learned about
 this day
 June 28, 1914
 when a young man
 Gavrilo Princip
 a Bosnian Serb
 shot and killed
 the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand
 and his betrothed wife Sophie
 upon their visit to Sarajevo, Bosnia
 a place that
 only few years earlier
 had lost itself as
 a mere trophy to the Austrian crown.
 That this assassination was
 a desperate attempt to shed
 the shackles of imperialistic greed
 was never told as vigorously as
 the 'fact' that one of Serbian descent
 was ultimately seen not just
 as trigger but
 as the cause of World War I and that
 his 'Serbishness' somehow had been
 inscribed in him through the
 uncivilized aggression

he displayed
 a trickster
 using violence against
 instead of for
 the ruling class of
 colonizing imposition.

⁸ (die)
 Österreicherin:
 (female) Austrian

V)

I thus learned to understand
the Austrian way
ali onda nisam mogla razgovarati⁹
my grandparents
my uncle
and many untold stories
anymore
as I obediently learned to grow
oblivious to
the more distant spheres of
home.

⁹ ali onda nisam mogla razgovarati: but
then I wasn't able to understand

VI)

And then I learned
to study English
a language that
at first
seemed to distract me further
from the intangible terrains of home
by exposing me
to other myths and hi/stories
and by eventually
making me drift
apart and far
away from the safe shore
that all along had been
not much more than
a restless floe
trying to hold on and
to belong somewhere
on the vast seas of
entangled subjectivities.
Eventually
the distance that I sought
and do still keep
from (parts of) my familiar surroundings
drew home
not just away
but brought it closer back
to me
through the assistance of
this mediating tongue
that helps me find
a space
a fragile Heim¹⁰
not finished yet but
in the making still
a place uneasy but sometimes also
the only way to give
vent to my broken feelings of (be-)longing
that otherwise seem to elude
my limited emotional inflections
in the regulated corners of
my mother('s) tongue

¹⁰ (das) Heim: home

