

## **The power of Lingua Franca: the presence of the “Other” in the travel writing genre**

Maximiliano E KORSTANJE

University of Palermo, Argentina

E-mail: mkorst@palermo.edu

**Abstract:** Classic Edward Said’s term Orientalism was widely applied to those narratives and story-telling oriented to deride, subordinate and domesticate the “Non-Western Other”. Over centuries, Europe has developed an imperial matrix that is finely enrooted in an uncanny long-dormant paternalism where “the Other” was treated as a child to educate. The European expansion was ultimately feasible according to two combined factors. The knowledge productions by the hands of scientists occupied a great position in the entertainment of global readerships, and of course, the literary fiction embodied in the figure of travel writing. This literary genre was mainly marked by the presence of a European adventurer who launched to colonize an unknown (uncivilized) world. Travel writings spoke us of the native language of travelers who interrogated furtherly the natives. The present paperwork centers on what Derrida dubbed as “the axiom of hospitality” which means the power of language to control and domesticate the “Other”. The lingua franca not only represents the language of empire but also from the lords. In this way, world Language plays a leading role in giving a great cosmology of the surrounding world as well as legitimating the imperial expansion.

**Keywords:** Language, lingua Franca, Empires, Travel writings, Hospitality.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Without any doubt, empires have historically launched to index overseas territories for many reasons; over the recent decades, some studies focused on European colonialism as a result of economic and political interests. To some extent, their success was certainly based on two main factors: knowledge production, and arts (Dirks, 1992; Lehning 2013; de Zepetnek, 2018). The technological revolution transformed not only the European economic means of production but also the transportation system which means faster travels at lower costs (Korstanje 2017). As Mary Louis Pratt (2007) puts it, European travelers colonized the unknown world on basis of a strange combination between curiosity and the urgency to classify the world according to European cultural values. Science, as well as literature,

played a leading role in narrating the indigenous life while laying the foundations towards a new cultural entertainment industry, the travel writings. The description of this “Non-Western Other” was strictly subordinated and recreated by the traveler’s voice. The matrix of imperial discourse is never accepted unilaterally by locals. Having said this, travel writings –as an emerging form of literature- denounced the injustices and violence of the colonial system while assuming the superiority of Europeans over other human forms of organization. Colonialism would be never possible without a lingua franca as well as planetary consciousness created and proposed by western science. Travel literature and travel writing have occupied a central position drawing (describing if not interrogating) to the non-Western “Other” over centuries (Mills 1993; Burroughs, 2010). Published in countless forms, travel writings include guidebooks, novels, itineraries, ethnographies and routes only to name a few. Their descriptions often narrate the life in the new world lived by European settlers or any injustice derived from the authority of the colonial rule. The Eurocentric viewpoint over-valorizes those travels which are mainly marked by heroism, adventure, or even the sacrifice of the settle” as good travels. The notion of discovery, so to speak, is particularly vital in European ethnocentrism. Invariably these values led travelers to tell a biased story of their experience, even trivializing the “alterity” exacerbating some prejudices and stereotypes proper of the epoch (Anjum 2014; de Zepetnek 1999).

The present paperwork can be read in three different but connected sections. The first part is a short companion on the influence of the lingua franca organizing an unspoken racial hierarchy. This order will be based on the supremacy of whites as well as European mainstream cultural values over other human groups. The second section, complementarily, ignites a hot debate revolving around the travel writings as a new imperial literary genre oriented to “subordinate” the “Non-Western Other”. Captivity and travel writings acted historically not only as a mechanism of indoctrination but also of cultural entertainment that reminded the superiority of Europe over the rest of the world. Lastly, we place original Derrida’s insight on hospitality into the ground. With advantages and disadvantages, Derrida offers a clear snapshot that describes the intersection among language, hospitality and imperialism. His argument

leads us to re-think the philosophical dilemmas behind the concept of the “Other” and hospitality.

## BACKGROUND: EMPIRES AND LINGUA FRANCA

For some reason which is very hard to define here, the expanse of empires and the imposition of *lingua franca* are inevitably entwined (Phillipson 2008). Human history evinces how the centers cement their authorities over the periphery once the imperial language is ultimately inoculated and internalized. Salverda distinguishes between *lingua sacra* and *lingua franca*. At a first glimpse, *lingua sacra* refer to the language spoken in sacred rituals that keeps purity in the threshold of time. *Lingua franca*, rather, is often used to fill the gap between speakers of different languages. To achieve a global understanding among cultures, *lingua franca* resolves the dilemma leading speakers into a hybrid tongue. *Lingua franca* rises in the context of multilingualism which is favored by global trade or imperialism (Salverda 2018). Empires keep a *lingua sacra* in their symbolic core pushing the barbarians to the borders while imposing unilaterally a *lingua franca* in the margins to communicate with locals (Ostler 2005). Amy Turner-Bushnell (2002) explores the nature of primacy and authority within the imperial structures. As she eloquently observes, primacy not only results from the earlier symbolic core but from the imposed normative (rules) which are accepted by the periphery. Whenever several cultures share the same core (i.e. the Viceroyalty of Peru) the same language and normative remain. Having said this, the paradigm of power (authority) is given by the success in negotiating the imperial borders. The frontier or border is defined as a liminoid space where two cultures bolster a dialogue. Frontiers might be wilder or more civilized depending on their acceptance of the imperial tongue. Hence, Turner Bushnell (2002) holds the thesis an *ecumene* should be understood as a zone of mastery, a central settlement where the Lords exert their control. Many *ecumenes* form an imperial center. The colonial periphery is mainly marked by faraway areas where the authority of the center is abode and widely recognized. Lastly, the zone of marginality is a space of conflict and ongoing negotiations where the imperial rules (like language) is not unilaterally applied by negotiated by local voices. In this token, Robert Phillipson (2006) uses the term linguistic imperialism to recognize empires as socio-economic

construes that often erect their authority in creating a much deeper hegemony of language which is inexpugnable to the dominated eye. The current influence of English, French, Portuguese or Spanish shows the successful policies implemented by colonial powers in the occupied territories. Once the empire is fallen, language is conserved or not; how the language policy is implemented speaks us of its durability in the time. Language policy appears to be in midst of the pressures to speak the mother tongue as it was left by the colonial core and the bottom-up vindications to ensure a more rich language right. Josep Colomer (2007), in his book *Great Empires Small Nations*, acknowledges that small nations –given some conditions- have opportunities to expand as great empires. To a closer look, large empires comprise direct influence over a vast territory involving multi-level forms of governments. An empire should not be necessarily equated to tyranny or a dictatorship. Empires are united revolving around a lingua franca and several market agreements. A lingua franca should be understood as a fabricated form of communication that standardizes different cultures and backgrounds for the pursuance of similar interests or goals. To some extent, Colomer is also optimistic about the appliance of lingua franca. In some conditions, the lingua franca neglects, subordinates and ultimately eradicates to “the alterity”. In her seminal book, *Unspeakable Violence*, Nicole Guidotti Hernandez (2011) describes how ideologically language serves to hide the injustices and past of cruelty which is proper of European colonialism. It is safe to say that violence corresponds with standardized forms of practices culturally enrooted in the hegemony of language. The history not only is written by the winners or victors but also is written in their language. Based on the case of Mexico-US border history, she argues that the Americas suffered two types of colonization patterns. The kingdom of Spain and Portugal colonized part of Central and South America leaving the North to France and England. Here two cultural and political forms collide. The resistance in the US to Chicano (Mexican-American) and Indians (indigenous) is legitimated in a so-called superiority of the Whites (Americans). The concept of Whiteness is pitted against “an undesired alterity” which is baptized and marked. This whiteness is formed by countless European ethnicities that have been discursively unified to be opposed to Latin Americans, Afro-Americans and Indigenous people. All human groups are classified and organized according to an imperial matrix which is

legitimated by the language. Outsiders to this established order are systematically silenced or portrayed as evil-doers. In this respect, language (as well as literary) emanates a set of closed and stereotyped discourses disposed to keep the authority of the status quo. The sense of tragedy is distorted and offered to visitors as a form of tourist spectacle. Guidotti Hernandez calls attention to the trivialization of reality as a form of unspeakable violence finely-ingrained in the imperial language. This violence seems to be conditioned by an earlier racial hierarchy and racial positioning that are drawn by historical economic conditions. Through the borderlands, this ***unspeakable violence*** moves to idealize the national being. This national being is based on historical asymmetries cemented by the imposition of nation-states. What is more important, Nation-states have been arbitrarily designed as an efficient organization of economy and territory. Thousands of nomad ethnicities in the Americas, have been brutalized, exiled or eradicated because of their resistance to the project of nationhood. For the nation-state to keep its integrity, as Nicole Guidotti says, a much broader selective memory narrates some events while others are pushed to oblivion. Last but not least, race and language played a leading role in the construction of an idealized landscape where the real brutalities of the colonial past have presented and consumed as a tourist attraction.

## EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM AND LITERATURE

Although there is abundant literature that explains the origins of European colonialism, no consensus has been reached to date (Hobsbawm, 2018). Some voices argue that European colonial powers colonized the world according to internal economic drives which pushed them to expand their trade with overseas territories (Bryant, 2016; King 2015). Other scholars, rather, accept that the political nature of European colonialism was mainly moved by the need of accumulating power (Pagden 2005; Bagchi, 2015). Whatever the case may be, it is important to say that colonialism has taken many shapes and forms over the centuries. In a seminal book entitled *Lords of all the World*, Anthony Pagden (1995) suggests that European colonialism mutated in different forms according to the period and socio-economic backgrounds. In consonance with this, as he eloquently explains, any act of conquest is simply a rite of renovation, where colonizers impose not

only their cultural values but their ideologies. Spanish dispossessed Indians' lands assuming they were unfamiliar with the sacred law of hospitality, in which case their so-called inferiority was certainly probed, whereas the British focused on the hard work and Indians' laziness. Ideology plays a leading role by justifying the conquest recreating (if not inventing) historical conditions which never took place in reality. The historical facts, which are re-invented in narratives, are molded according to the imperial interests (Pagden 1995). From its inception, the legal construction of the modern nation-state was given by the significance of free transit and hospitality; in this respect, the "Others" who are unable to offer hospitality were labeled as sub-humans, inferior or simply irrational insensitive to the universal law. Hence, empires devoted considerable efforts and resources encouraged not only travels but also documenting the new landscapes, customs and human organizations each traveler (settle) comes across with. In the process, the language occupied a central position drawing the "Other" as a mirror of the European self. Ultimately, those vagabonds or nomad tribes that were not successfully re-educated and situated in the borders of the nation-state were practically effaced. For the colonial literature, the settler was compared to a hero, who sacrificing all in an inhospitable new world, struggles to expand European civilization. Travel writings and novels are part of this magic (but terrible) world Europeans daily deal with. The plots and narratives speak readership of how important the European values are as well as the cruelty of Indians against travelers (Korstanje 2017). This point suggests that travels and empires are inextricably intertwined. The invention of the "Other" is important to understand and legitimate the European expansion. Travel writings derived from an old literary genre, captivity writings. In these novels, aborigines are esteemed as an object of curiosity and fear in line with European ethnocentrism. Enumerating a set of risky situations travel writings describe acts of violence or humiliations faced by European settlers in the new world. Compared to the tragic hero who gives his life to protect others, Europeans were in quest of a sublime idea: the construction of a great nation (Strong 2018; Klarer, 2019). In a nutshell, captivity writing was ideologically designed to entertain and educate European readership, but at the same time, as an instrument of domestication for aborigines. In this literary genre, American Indians were portrayed as irrational savages who often seize and kill innocent women and children using them as slaves or exchanging for prisoners. The



captivity writing keeps a double purpose. On one hand, it legitimated the imperial practices of exploitation which was morally prohibited by religion. On another, it paves the way for a new form of entertainment where Europeans are situated as the objective gazers in a world which merit being saved and ethically re-educated through the action of hard work (Snader 1998). In her book *Writing Captivity in the early modern Atlantic*, Lisa Voigt (2009) holds a more than an interesting thesis.

Travel writings (like captivity writings) start from the premise the settler appears to be subject to a forced journey that ultimately redeems him. Suddenly seized by Indians without her-his consent, the captive is placed in a difficult position most likely in a liminoid space where its identity is reinvented. At a closer look, the captive lives in two contrasting worlds, neither as European anymore nor as a pure Indian. This point opens the doors to an identity crisis that follows the captive all her life. What is more important, captivity writing is associated with a new anthropological figure where settlers' vulnerabilities are culturally packaged and circulated to silence the European cruelties in the colonies. These novels alluded to the virgin space as a place that should be possessed and labored for the grace of the lord. Here the virgin space is as opposed to the civilized (enhance) space. Hence, captives were often white (virgin) maidens captured by Indians to be exchanged or slaved. Captivity and travel writing were a literary genre that widely marked much deeper ethnocentrism where the "Other" was invented to remind the European so-called supremacy; this "Other" who is subject to the Imperial law moves through ethnocentric hospitality that expanded the colonial frontiers as never before while greasing the rails towards global capitalism in the centuries to come.

As the previous argument is given, Myra Jehlen (1986) argues convincingly that the European observer debated between the civilized (European) and nature (a virgin world which was seen as abandoned by natives). In oppositional terms, not all writers embraced eurocentrism or racism in their texts, some of them even applauding the Indians' virtues. The problem lies in the fact that "the Non-Western Other" was symbolically dominated by so-called inferiority or lack of voice which subordinated to the writer's reasoning. Last but not least, the figure of degeneration played a vital role to depict "the Non-Western Other". Sometimes associated with the landscape or the soul, degeneration which means the process of degradation seems to be widely applied to the

materiality of the economy and the human soul in the travel writings. Classic Edward Said's term Orientalism was widely applied to those narratives and story-telling oriented to deride, subordinate and domesticate the "Non-Western Other". Over centuries, Europe has developed an imperial matrix that is finely enrooted in an uncanny long-dormant paternalism where "the Other" was treated as a child to educate. The European expansion was ultimately feasible according to two combined factors. The knowledge productions by the hands of scientists occupied a great position in the entertainment of global readerships, and of course, the literary fiction embodied in the figure of travel writing. This literary genre was mainly marked by the presence of a European adventurer who launched to colonize an unknown (uncivilized) world. Travel writings spoke us of the native language of travelers who interrogated furtherly the natives. The next section centers on what Derrida dubbed as "the axiom of hospitality" which means the power of language to control and domesticate the "Other". The lingua franca not only represents the language of empire but also from the lords. In this way, world Language plays a leading role in giving a great cosmology of the surrounding world as well as legitimating the imperial expansion.

#### DIALOGUES WITH JACQUES DERRIDA: OF HOSPITALITY

Doubtless, Jacques Derrida is a widely-cited scholar worldly recognized by his legacy in various fields of philosophy. But one of his best argumentations lies in his interrogations on the nature of hospitality. His book –in dialogue with Anne Dufourmantelle– synthesizes the structuration of language and hospitality in Derrida's argumentation. The question about foreigners (Xenos) is far from being resolved for modern philosophy. This invariably pushes Derrida to question the nature of the foreigner as well as its intersection with politics. In a hypothetical dialogue with Plato, Derrida says overtly that the foreigner is seen as someone who asks, interrogates others. The foreigner knows us more than we do. As a result of this, foreigners suddenly shake the reign of dogmatism. It is difficult not to resist the impression that guests are strangers who are speaking another different language, accompanied by a different culture. All western institutions rest on the figure of the stranger. In this token, Derrida reminds me how Plato (in his book *the Sophist*) signals to foreigners



are “Others” who do not speak my language. By speaking a language people share a similar understanding. Those who are unfamiliar with the hosting language are systematically excluded from society. He calls for the philosophical dilemma that involved Socrates when he is judged by persons who do not share his language. Socrates is ultimately trialed and condemned by judges who speak another language. He would opt for learning their tongue or looking for a translator, but he did nothing. In this vein, the translation is a bridge between the hosts and the guest. Like hospitality, language is given or negated. In this vein, Derrida recognizes that the language spoken by hosts interrogates violently to the guest imposing the home owner’s interpretation. At the same time, hospitality takes place when the guest’s words are translated. In the same way, hospitality is never granted to people who lack a name. As Derrida notes, nobody is well received if he is not recognized by his name. The hosting state asks two questions to strangers: who are you and what do you want? Most certainly the patrimony and the name are two key factors towards the acceptance of the “Other”. The question of whether strangers keep rights, Derrida goes on to say that any stranger is subject to the local laws –once welcomed-. Hospitality and hostility are two sides of the same coin. While the former signals to the stranger’s protection –if the law is respected- the latter takes place when the stranger trespasses the borders of hosts. To put the same in bluntly, hospitality remains in a quandary. The principle of hospitality calls for a paradoxical situation. Any stranger is invited knowing that sooner or later he will infringe the law. Here two assumptions should be made. On one hand, hospitality moves to affirm the social order through legal jurisprudence while putting all citizens in equal conditions. On another, it negates the idea of universal citizenship. For the sake of clarity, Derrida distinguishes between absolute and conditioned hospitality. Absolute hospitality is applied even when the guest has nothing to pay. Rather, conditioned hospitality is only given to those guests who can pay for the service. Derrida is strongly convinced that the rights of the foreigner start in the language. There are no rights that cannot be hosted in the language. This begs a more pungent question: is hospitality the precondition to neglect my language?

To answer this above-noted point, Derrida draws a conceptual bridge between language and birth-death sites. He cites Oedipus’s tragedy who died abroad as a self-imposed punishment. After his involuntary crime,

Oedipus decided to exile abroad beyond any law, tradition and right. As a self-sanctioned outcast, he gives some traces to his daughter Antigone who traces him. Oedipus wants to be remembered eternally and for that, he did not give any specification about where he plans to die. After several failures to find her father, Antigone finally commits suicide. For Derrida, the same applies to the stranger. The foreigner, who comes to the city as an emancipator, dreams of creating new rules simply because he comes from abroad; but as a stranger, he has a secret that threatens the authority of hosts. Hospitality moderates and regulates the host guests relations. When “the Other” becomes an undesired guest, invariably hospitality takes room. Derrida coins the term “parasite” to denote the “undesired guest” who is patrolled by security forces. Finally, hospitality –hosted in the language- takes a strict and wide sense. Whereas speaking in a strict sense denotes the fact nationality determines collective behaviour. In this way, citing Derrida, a French policeman has to do more than me than an Israeli philosopher (applying a wide sense of hospitality) but the opposite is equally true, an Israeli writer (in a wide sense) shares more with Derrida than a French workman. To cut the long story short, hospitality is a clear negation of the universal right widely sustained by Kant or Hegel. To put this in bluntly, hospitality and imperialism are inextricably intertwined. While the expansion of lingua franca, which is fostered by imperialism, persists in the time a conditioned form of hospitality –for those who can pay for that- is widely offered. The local has the option to accept or not the lingua franca. If this happens, the “Other” becomes in a “parasite” which should be traced and extirpated. Given things in these terms, the absolute hospitality is always a utopia impossible to apply in reality, simply because we speak different tongues and languages. Coming back to Derrida’s point, hospitality hosts in the language as well as in the possibilities of guests to abide the local law. Of course, colonialism is an inversion of this logic since Empires adopted unilateral decisions exerting violence on the aboriginal groups. In this case, imperialism evinces the perfect case where the strangers (Others) became in the masters whereas making the locals real strangers. We must add there is a “failed hospitality” where the guest dominates the “host”. In our previous books, we explained with detail how this failed (perverse) hospitality cemented the ideological core of Western civilization. Terrorism and the “War on terror” exhibits a dominant sentiment of terror surfaced when the “Other”

is negated. In the post-911 narratives, the terrorist is depicted as an internal enemy –a parasite- in many cases a Muslim second-generation born citizen who hates the society that welcomed his-her parents. These would-be enemies would have a brilliant future but they rather embraced a radical thinking. While in the imperial days, the “Non-Western Other” was an object of curiosity now just after 9/11, it is a threat which the nation-state should locate and efface. TV programs and documentary films daily offer a vast range of content widely associated with Security Forces or Police patrolling borderlands or airports while exiling illegal migrants. Examples of this point include *Immigration Nation* (Netflix), *Borderland*, or *Homeland*. All these documentaries have a same common-thread argumentation, so to say, the “Other” is – as a potential enemy for the social order- should be found and deported by the state (Korstanje 2017; 2019; Korstanje & George 2021). However, these are assumptions for next layouts.

## CONCLUSION

In this conceptual paper, we discussed critically the connection between travels (imperial voyages) which are carefully designed to describe an “unknown Other” and European colonialism. At the same time, we lay the foundations to construct a bridge between postcolonial literature and the role of hospitality and language to silence the “Other”. In so doing, we put Derrida’s argument into the foreground while drawing parallelism between hospitality and language. Derrida leads to thinking over centuries empires have constructed a cultural matrix to index (dominate) the overseas colonies. This matrix centers on the imposition of a lingua franca, which means a global tongue shared and spoken by the center and its periphery. However, as Derrida notes, this invention not only closes the Empire to the “Other” but also silences the dissident voices. In the colonial voyages which inspired the captivity and travel writings (as an emerging literary genre), the “Other” is depicted as irrational, lazy, or simply ruthless eager of European (virgin) blood. Travel writings not only described a fabricated landscape subordinated to Western rationality but also imposed an ideological discourse oriented to dominate “the alterity”.

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