

*This piece is dedicated to all the linguistic in-betweeners, to all those told to tame their wild tongues and to all those whose ancestral languages were lost due to colonial violence.*

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I was once told by someone who reviewed my essay that despite all the structures being grammatically correct it is clearly identifiable that it was written by a migrant. They did not mean it as a compliment. Back then, as someone trying three times as hard as my Anglo peers to succeed in the unfamiliar tertiary education system in a new country, I was heartbroken and disappointed at myself for my 'deficiency'. As a child born in Eastern Europe just a few years before the collapse of the Eastern Block, I vividly remember the change of narrative reflecting the political and economic shift and our new alliances. A part of that narrative was the necessity to master English. At English classes they anglicised our first names and those of us with distinctly Slavic names were given entirely new ones. It took me a year or so to learn to react to this arbitrary, bizarre collection of sounds. It took me even longer to be able to open my mouth during these classes out of fear of being ridiculed for speaking 'incorrectly'. But what took me the longest was the realisation of the violence behind the privileged position of English as a *lingua franca* - deaths and devaluation of countless indigenous languages, lost wisdom, lost connections to culture and families.

I began to wonder how we as migrants, diasporic and indigenous people can resist the tyranny of English, how can we perform linguistic interruptions that decentre the influence of the dominant language? After all English has been forced upon us so don't we now have all the rights to reclaim it, transform it, bastardise it, add in the beautiful metaphors rooted in the linguistic structures that shape our worldviews? Gloria Anzaldúa and Irena Klepfisz, both my literary heroines, are just two of the countless diasporic writers who actively practiced linguistic disruptions in their writing. Both queer women, both experienced living in between cultures and languages, both write bilingually and blur the boundaries between conflicting worldviews - Gloria Anzaldúa a Chicana from Texas straddling indigenous, Mexican and Anglo cultures, Irena Klepfisz, a Polish-Jewish Shoah survivor who settled in North America and relearnt her once lost mother's tongue Yiddish as an adult. As migrant and

diasporic people they have learnt to navigate the spaces in-between, to disrupt, question, enrich and hybridise the worldviews and languages they carried within them.

The moment I realised I could no longer express myself as freely in the language my grandmother sang lullabies to me something has shifted. I too became the in-betweener. I possess a number of, often conflicting, worldviews and I gradually become more comfortable navigating them in that unique way that monoculturals and monolinguals will never understand. I suspect this is why they are so scared of us. I suspect this is why the comment about my writing sounding 'migrant' was not meant as a compliment. But I choose to trust Gloria Anzaldúa (2012, p. 102) when she says: 'En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestizo. Because the future depends on breaking down of paradigms, it depends on straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos - that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the way we behave - la mestiza creates a new consciousness.'

So next time you say I sound like a migrant I will sure hold my head up high.