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Langauge and Cultural Hegemony

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Das Geheimnis der Sprache ist groß; die Verantwortlichkeit für sie und ihre Reinheit ist symbolischer og geistiger Art, sie har keineswegs nur künstlerischen, sondern allgemein moralischen Sinn, sie ist die Verantwortlichkeit selbst, menschliche Verantwortlichkeit schlechthin, auch die Verantwortung für das eigene Volk, Reinerhaltung seines Bildes vorm Angesichte der Menschheit, und in ihr wird die Einheit des Menschlichen erlebt, die Ganzheit des humanen Problems, die es niemandem erlaubt, heute am wenigsten, das Geistig-Künstlerische vom Politisch-Sozialen zu trennen und sich gegen dieses im Vornehm - 'Kulturellen' zu isolieren; diese wahre Totalität, welche die Humanität selber ist und gegen die verbrecherisch verstieße, wer etwa ein Teilgebiet des Menschlichen, die Politik, den Staat zu 'totalisieren unternähme.

Thomas Mann, 1937

Contents

Ernst-Ullrich Pinkert: <i>The Responsibility for Language. Preface</i>	page 7
Henk van Dijk, Erasmus University Rotterdam: <i>Frontiers and Borders. The Idea of Homogeneity of National Cultures</i>	page 11
Alfred Opitz, The New University of Lisbon: <i>Language and Hegemonical Tendencies in Modern Utopian Literature</i>	page 29
Lisanne Wilken, Aalborg University: <i>One Union - Many Languages. Languages and Cultural Identity in the European Union</i>	page 43
Denise Van Dam, Namur University: <i>Social Struggles and Cultural Identities in Belgium</i>	page 61
Wolfgang Zank, Aalborg University. <i>The Ruling Language and the Language of the Rulers - Indigenous Non-German Languages and minorities in Germany</i>	page 71
Pia Jarvad, Copenhagen University: <i>Language Policy and Attitudes in Denmark</i>	page 95
Bente Liebst, Aalborg University: <i>Peoples and Languages in the Danish West Indies in the 18th Century. - Was There a Danish Language Policy?</i>	page 111
List of Participants	page 129

Ernst-Ullrich Pinkert

The Responsibility for Language

Preface

The notion of **Language and Cultural Hegemony** is one of the central and pervasive areas of study for scholars attached to the project *Language and Cultural Contact* at the Centre for Language and Intercultural Studies (CSIS) at Aalborg University. Thus, it was the subject of an international conference on 12-13 October 1994; the aim of which was to promote interdisciplinary cooperation in and around this important area of study.

Researchers from Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal and Denmark - from the fields of linguistics, anthropology, text and cultural history - addressed the complexities of *Language and Cultural Hegemony* from their own disciplinary perspectives and cultural contexts.

The conference dealt with the notion of *Language and Cultural Hegemony* as a dialectic between majority and minority cultures, between national and international structures and interests, between the principles of heterogeneity and homogeneity, and between Utopian castles in the air and bitter experiences.

According to Jürgen Habermas, *culture* is "the stock of knowledge from which the communication participants derive interpretations when trying to understand the world."¹ In accordance with this conception of culture, presenters at the conference offered their considered views on the meaning of "language" vis-a-vis "participants' interpretations", most especially when such "interpretations" are ineluctably coloured by differing experiences of cultural hegemony.

The present publication contains seven of the nine papers from the Aalborg conference.

*

Questions of *cultural hegemony* are not only topical in academic discourse; in many ways they represent an acute problem, only too cruelly highlighted through the situation in former Yugoslavia. In the years 1989/1990 a new political era

¹ This quotation and all the following quotations have been translated from German originals by the present writer. -

"*Kultur* nenne ich den Wissensvorrat, aus dem sich die Kommunikationsteilnehmer, indem sie sich über etwas in einer Welt verständigen, mit Interpretationen versorgen." Jürgen Habermas: *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Vol. 2: *Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft*. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1981, p.209.

had begun. And, as a consequence, US president George Bush and many others announced the emergence of a *New World Order*, reflecting the fact that the Cold War was over and the role of the Soviet Union as a global hegemonic power had ended. Today this very notion of *The New World Order* has almost disappeared from public debate, because the optimism and euphoria of 1989/1990 have vanished.

The optimism of the early '90s had a parallel in the years directly after World War II, and the German writer Thomas Mann, who had lived in exile in California since 1940, was one of the optimists. In a letter from September 1945 to a colleague in Germany, Thomas Mann expressed the hope that people after World War II would try to create "world wide conditions", in which "the national individualism of the 19th century could finally disappear." Thomas Mann's hope was caused by the "decreasing importance of political borders, [...] the awakening of humanity to the awareness of constituting an integrated whole, and an emerging conception of the United States of the World".²

The United States of the World - this was one of Mann's favorite ideas after the breakdown of the Nazi hegemony in Europe. In those months he dreamt of a "World Government"³, of "the dissolution of nations and [...] the shaping of the world as an integrated whole".⁴

But "national individualism" had not passed away, nor has it 50 years later. After the end of the Cold War and after the débâcle of the Soviet empire national individualism" has returned to Europe in various forms. The wars in former Yugoslavia may be seen as expressions of a return of that mortal national individualism which always implies the rise of different forms of cultural and political hegemony.

No doubt we have to face these aspects if we want to promote Thomas Mann's dream of the necessity of "the awakening of humanity to the awareness of constituting an integrated whole". In that context we have to be aware of the important roles that language may play in the process of creating cultural hegemonies and anachronistic "national individualisms": the language of agitation, the language of progaganda, the language of political seduction, the language of suppression, and even the suppression of languages.

Thomas Mann may have been quite naive when he talked about the necessity of shaping the world into an integrated whole, but as an antifascist writer in exile he knew a lot about the importance of language in creating and maintaining

² Thomas Mann expressed "die Hoffnung [...] auf einen Weltzustand, in dem der nationale Individualismus des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts sich lösen, ja schließlich vergehen wird" and expected "das Erwachen der Menschheit zum Bewußtsein ihrer praktischen Einheit, ihr erstes Ins-Auge-Fassen des Weltstaates". Thomas Mann: *Briefe 1937-1947*, S.Fischer: Frankfurt am Main 1963, p. 447.

³ Op. cit., p. 507.

⁴ "die Auflösung der Nationen und [...] die Vereinheitlichung der Welt ". Op. cit., p. 452.

inhuman political and cultural hegemonies. When the former president of the Third Reich's writers' union in Germany, Hans Friedrich Blunck, in 1946 wrote to Thomas Mann in order to obtain help from him in an attempt to exonerate himself from his Nazi past, he pretended that as a member of the German Academy in the Third Reich he only had tried to promote "the teaching of the German language in foreign countries". But Thomas Mann was implacable, because he knew better; therefore he underlined in his answer "that every child in the whole world knew" that the expression 'Teaching the German language in foreign countries' during the NS-time was "a euphemism" which had only one function - "namely to undermine the democratic powers of resistance, and to demoralize them through Nazi propaganda".⁵

In 1937, the University of Bonn had deprived Thomas Mann of his title as a Doctor honoris causa, at a time, when Mann was an immigrant in Switzerland. In his response to the Nazi Dean of the Philosophical Faculty in Bonn, Thomas Mann commented on this deprivation. In this context, he emphasized the writers' responsibility for the language and for the purity of language (compare the quotation on page 3)⁶. In the letter to Blunck, he took upon himself these responsibilities in 1946 - in a different situation of political and cultural conflict.

For Thomas Mann, "the responsibility for language and its purity" is "human responsibility as such, and the responsibility for one's own people as well"; in this responsibility he "perceives humanity as an integrated whole".⁷ This idea of "humanity as an integrated whole" has nothing to do with a political construction, but is a sense of moral and ethical responsibility. - In taking responsibility for the use of language we may, as Thomas Mann did, make a contribution towards the development of non-hegemonial patterns of thinking, acting and living.

⁵ Thomas Mann, letter to H. Fr. Blunck, July 22, 1946: "Und der 'Unterricht in deutscher Sprache im Ausland'! Jedes Kind in der weiten Welt wußte, was mit dem Euphemismus gemeint war, nämlich die Unterminierung der demokratischen Widerstandskräfte überall, ihre Demoralisierung durch Nazi-Propaganda." *Op. cit.*, p. 496.

⁶ *Op.cit.*, p.11.

⁷ *Loc. cit.*

Frontiers and Borders

The Idea of Homogeneity of National Cultures

1. Introduction

The history and formation of frontiers and boundaries is an important and topical subject. At the end of the Cold War, when the frontier between Eastern and Western Europe dissipated, other frontiers and boundaries seemed to gain more influence. Not only because uncertainties about the actual boundaries of Europe exist, and to what extent these borders should be closed to the many immigrants wishing to cross them, but also because new boundaries are coming into existence which were previously thought to have become obsolete. Many participants in the civil war in former Yugoslavia believe that their problems are, in part, related to the historical borders between the former Turkish empire and Islam on the one hand, and the former Habsburg monarchy and Christianity (not to mention Orthodox Christianity) on the other. Comparable arguments can be heard sometimes within the former Soviet Union. These boundaries are no longer motivated and dominated by political and economic arguments, but now focus on historical (sometimes with strong mythical overtones) and ethnic-cultural ones.

The concept of the boundary has mainly been linked to the territory of states. Although in the majority of cases that territory may have developed in a rather arbitrary way and was mainly influenced by military circumstances, people tended to see boundaries as a physical-geographic phenomenon. Particularly during the nineteenth century, geographers considered that boundaries were primarily related to geographical situations.¹ These geographical circumstances influenced linguistic and, therefore, cultural differences. The expansion of each state was mainly defended as a necessity to secure physical borders. Within Europe, however, no state can claim to possess natural boundaries only. This also applies to the United Kingdom. Besides the existing linguistic and cultural

¹ Schultz, H.-D., 'Deutschlands «natürliche» Grenzen' in: Demandt, Alexander ed., *Deutschlands Grenzen in der Geschichte* (München 1990) 32-93; Zeller, G., 'La monarchie d'Ancien Régime et les frontières naturelles', *Revue d'histoire moderne* (1933) 327f; Febvre, Lucien and Albert Demangeon, *Le Rhin. Problèmes d'histoire et d'économie* (Paris 1935).