

FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

The search for the Adamic language and the emergence of transcultural aspiration in the aftermath of the European maritime discoveries

Ewa Lukaszuk^{1,2}, Marie-Luce Demonet³

¹ LE STUDIUM Institute for Advanced Studies, 45000 Orléans, France

² University of Warsaw, Poland

³ CESR, University of Tours, France

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Fellow: Ewa Lukaszuk

From University of Warsaw

Host laboratory in region Centre-Val

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Host scientist: Marie-Luce Demonet

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ABSTRACT

The main hypothesis of this project is connected to the notion of pre-cultural origins of the humanity, situated in the paradisaical reality, not only before the fall, but also before the invention of the human language (Adam naming the animals created by God). The myth of the pre-lapsarian unity of the human kind became crucial to the development of the European relationship with other peoples in the aftermath of the maritime discoveries in the 16th c. The examination of this topic is an important element of the projected transcultural humanities, searching to establish a comprehensive outlook of the cultural inscription and limitations of the human thought.

1- Introduction

The medieval and early-modern speculations on Adamic language (*lingua adamica*, the tongue spoken in the Garden of Eden) are related both to the question of paradisaical origins of man and the essential unity of the human kind. During the Middle Ages, the belief in the existence of a primordial tongue spoken in Paradise spread across cultural and religious denominations around the Mediterranean (among Jews, Muslims and Christians). This perfect language was supposed to be lost in the biblical episode of the Tower of Babel. Nonetheless, in all those contexts and across the divisions, heterodox individuals dreamt of going beyond their « cultured » condition to explore their common participation in the universal intellect and even speak the language of angels (*locutio angelica*). What is more, increased mobility and new contacts established in the early-modern period, both across the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and

the Indian Ocean, brought a new hope of reconstructing the common language of the humanity against the « confusion » of Babel, leading to the recuperation of the unspoiled condition of man and of the world (*restitutio omnium* in the thought of Guillaume Postel). Nowadays, the search for Adamic language stands for the interrogation concerning not just the hypothetical pre-cultural origins, but even more importantly, the post-cultural becoming of man, exploring the perspectives of non-hegemonic universalism and opening a new chapter of transcultural humanities.

2- Experimental details

The aim of the project consisted in introducing a historical perspective into the state-of-the art reflection on transcultural perspectives in the present-day humanities. This aim has been achieved, in the first place, through the textual analysis of the works of the French heterodox thinker Guillaume Postel, as well as the

historical context of his activities, that permitted to evaluate the weight of transcultural transgression and the inscription into the political projects of his time. A special attention has been paid to the stakes and implications of his Oriental project, implying both philological work of Postel, such as his grammar of Arabic, and his activity related with his participation in the French embassy to Turkey.

The stake of the project was to put in the limelight the early-modern origins of the universalist ideas, concentrating on the unfalsified aspect of translocal / transconfessional / transcultural collaboration in pursuit of a crucial, common intellectual cause that in the early-modern epoch was epitomized by the recuperation of the primordial language of the humanity. The aspect focused has been the relationship between the problem of the lost primordial tongue and the valorization of intellectual activity beyond the cultural frontiers as well as the idea that the lost path of truth (*via veritatis perdita*) can only be found through the confrontation with otherness. The charismatic figure and the writings of Guillaume Postel exemplify a coherent line of thinkers that are to be found not only in France, but even more importantly in the Iberian Peninsula (Lull, Barros, Vieira) that saw the necessity of transcultural and transreligious dimension in their intellectual activity.

The central hypothesis of the project concerned the early-modern emergence of the transcultural aspiration, i.e. the desire of crossing the cultural frontier in search of intellectual or spiritual accomplishment. Such terms as “transculture”, “transculturation”, “transculturality”, “transcultural” (writing, comparativism, etc.) have already entered the current language of humanities; nonetheless, the predominant optics associate the transculturality with the present-time conditions of global mobility. This is why it has been crucial for this project to treat transculture as a phenomenon of the past and study it in a diachronic perspective: as a tradition forming a consistent stream of ideas binding together not only the European, but also the Mediterranean history of ideas. What is

more, this Mediterranean and Iberian phenomenon finds its global projection in the aftermath of the European maritime discoveries.

Apparently marginal topic, such as the search for the Adamic language and the idea of generalized restitution (*restitutio omnium*) through language, defended by Guillaume Postel, served as a way of retelling Euro-Mediterranean and global transcultural past.

3- Results and discussion

Two conference papers concerning the work of Guillaume Postel has been presented at the international conferences in Kiev (Ukraine) and Ljubliana (Slovenia). Even more importantly, an international conference organized in the framework of the project, “Transcultural Mediterranean: in search of non-orthodox and non-hegemonic universalism(s)” (Tours, Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, 30-31.05.2018) permitted to foster the discussion of transcultural transgression among the colleagues specialized not only in European Renaissance, but also in the Oriental studies, focusing on the Mediterranean understood as a region defined, in the first place, by the phenomena of exchange and circulation of ideas. The proposed approach permitted to identify the spheres of interference between the Islamic and Christian worlds (contemplated in their plurality and mutual inter-penetrability). Tracing a relation between culturally locatable origins and the hypothetical transcultural consequences of such processes of interference, the participants aimed at conclusions valid not only for the history of ideas as an academic discipline, but also for the contemporary perception of the shared Mediterranean heritage.

On the other hand, the definition of transcultural condition implied in the project has been presented during one of LE STUDIUM Thursdays (“Defining the symbolic space. From a cluster of transcultural case studies to a topological conceptualisation”, Tours, CESR, 2.11.2017).

4- Conclusion

The aim of my project was to introduce the historical perspective into the emergent field of transcultural humanities. The projected impact of this research is thus to cross the boundaries of the discipline in the narrow sense, such as the Renaissance studies, in order to open new interrogations in the reflection on the perspectives of the global (trans)culture.

5- Perspectives of future collaborations with the host laboratory

Based on the research and reflection in the framework of the project, I planned a future research proposal under the title “Poetics of the Void. Mystical insight and transcultural transgression in the Mediterranean”. This forthcoming project is inscribed in the same field of reflection; at the same time, it aims at enlarging the scope of the existing research, proposing to treat Epsteinian “transculture” as a phenomenon that may be traced back to remote periods of history and associated, in the first place, to individualistic, primarily non-communitarian phenomena (even if some form of “community of individuals” is utterly derived from it). Individual transcultural aspirations, as I claim, are not born either with modernity nor post-modernity; on the contrary, they may be found in medieval and early-modern past of the Mediterranean world understood as a crossroad of traditions connected to major monotheistic religions. I claim that as early as the beginning of the second millennium CE transcultural aspirations had been present in specific parts of the Mediterranean world, namely al-Andalus, and that they formed a distinct line of “counter-tradition” that cannot be entirely inscribed in any cultural context in particular and is based on the will of disruption of the existing cultural patterns and boundaries. What is more, this line appears as alive and productive today, shaping, in a significant way, the contemporary Euro-Mediterranean world.

While in the current project I worked predominantly with French and Romance

sources which are in the focus of the host institution (CESR), the continuation of this research will accentuate the Islamic and Hebraic aspects of the studied problems and hopefully will be realised at the LUCIS Centre for the Study of Islam and Society, Leiden University in the Netherlands. The perspectives of the future collaboration with the host laboratory (CESR) consist in fostering a cross-cultural approach to the cultural past that till now was a marginal aspect in this institution. This aim may be achieved through further exchange of experiences and ideas based on the contacts and discussions held in the framework of this project.

6- Articles published in the framework of the fellowship

E. Lukaszyc, “*Congregatio mundi* today. New perspectives on Guillaume Postel (1510-1581)”, *Primerjalna Književnost*, no 41, 1/2018, p. 191-199. ISSN 2591-1805.

The lecture given during the “Le Studium Thursday” (“Defining the symbolic space: From a cluster of transcultural case studies to a topological conceptualization”), presenting the general lines and targets of my theoretical innovation and situated my research on Adamic language in relation to this larger project, has been published in Polish as the first chapter (“Emergencje”) in E. Lukaszyc, *Humanistyka, która nadchodzi. W poszukiwaniu kondycji transkulturowej* [The coming humanities. In search of the transcultural condition], Warszawa, DiG, 2018, p. 11-29. ISBN 978-83-286-0031-7

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