Speaking in Future Tongues: Languaging & the Gifts of Spirit

Dan-el Padilla Peralta

In this essay, an ancient historian imagines 2050 as awash in languages: ancient, modern, alien. Animating that vision are memories of teenage weekends spent praying in tongues, and of an ancient Mediterranean text foundational to the adult (re)appraisal of those weekends: Acts of the Apostles. I work through an exposition and reading of Acts 2, concentrating on the scene of glossolalia at Pentecost in order to mount a case for diasporic languaging as a spark to worthy excess – of speech and of difference. Shuttling from the autobiographical to the historical and back again, the essay's insistent refrain is that diasporic vertigo is not merely a force for good but a good in itself. *In the struggle against the commodification and imperialization of language, we can stake out and strive toward a future of flourishing linguistic expressivity, provided the material conditions for that expressivity are secured and safeguarded.*

May 2050 bring blessings to the guardians of languages.[1] May their labor be sanctified, protected, and valued. May the languages in their care be kept safe from harm. From ancient to modern, from Arctic Circle to Southern Sea, may human languages multiply and ramify, and old forms give rise to new.

This prayer is born from the union of travel and screentime, and from that hankering for futuristic cinema that comes over me whenever I fly. Then and only then, hurtling across time and space, do I submit to that grandiose sentiment usually kept under wraps, through some combination of ironizing distance and active hatred: rapture at the sight of new worlds, new life-forms, new languages.[2] It is the last of these that holds me most tightly in its grip. In the clutches of rapture, I recognize the stirrings of an older desire that, in Tennysonian fashion, first impelled me decades ago "to follow knowledge like a sinking star / Beyond the utmost bound of human thought" by studying languages – hoping that through their acquisition I would find hints, however faint or elusive, of worlds yet to be imagined and futures still to be conjured.[3]

You would think, then, that the characters in sci-fi films who resonate most strongly with me are the linguists. Yet the Louise Banks of *Arrival*, formidable linguist though she is, holds less visceral appeal for me than the synthesis of multi-

https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED.a.14

lingual suavity and Bene Gesserit mind control of Paul Atreides in *Dune* and *Dune: Part Two*.[4] Really and truly, I want the Voice. Or rather, the kind of speech whose multilingual dexterity parries any one language's constraining particulars. Because what pokes at me most days, even as or perhaps because I was raised bilingually, is the fraudulence of linguistic mastery that Jacques Derrida isolates in *Monolingualism of the Other*: the absurdity of possessing any language, or of even claiming a language as exclusively one's own.

In retreat (flight?) from that fraudulence, I give myself over most fully to those futures that teem with languages. And I pray (to whom, or what, I am unsure) that, come 2050, there will be still more languages to appreciate and befriend, not in disembodied but in fully enfleshed form. That we bring to a halt those linguicides and genocides that impoverish each and every one of us, no matter how distant these are from us geographically – and however strenuous our disavowal of complicity in them. And that our shared future proves capable of sustaining a multiverse of languages in and through cared-for bodies, under material conditions of abundance and conviviality, within a politics of radical democratic flourishing.

In the struggle to locate and envision that future (and it is a struggle in this present to escape the hold of despairing vaticination), I am drawing increasingly not only on flights of futuristic fancy but on the deeply internalized resources of my immigrant past. I am turning, inwards and backwards, to childhood and adolescent episodes of electrifying transport into the realms of spirit and tongue. I offer in this speculative essay first a swing back to the moments of my spiritual languaging; then another swing, deeper in time, to a text and a history of language's encounters with imperial power, and with the prayer that derived force from that imperial power, even as that same prayer conjured the courage for its critique.

It was as a teenager, reared and sustained within the Dominican American diaspora, that the force of prayer in the spirit first overcame me. It was a heady time, of responsibilities repeatedly deferred until they had to be grudgingly accepted. The main responsibility was pedagogical: I was tasked with teaching my own peers at Sunday School, never far away from the immigrant parent who was herself being certified to teach CCD. Like Efrain Agosto, writing for a volume on Latino/a biblical hermeneutics, I was in the room with friends and their younger siblings, "doing biblical interpretation and teaching, struggling with the text, teaching theologies often imposed on us by the dominant, white denominational structures, but nonetheless reflecting on these together and questioning them, sometimes more unconsciously than consciously."[5]

One set of memories from those years keeps hailing me. Heeding Shea Watts, for this essay's opening movement, I lead with those memories in analyzing the interplay of interiorized affect and exteriorized ritual.[6] The exposition of these memories also represents a tentative first step in tracing the movements of spirit

across gradients of cultural and temporal difference. I purpose the autobiographical mode as a structure for historical comparison and the future visions that might be coaxed from it.

Early one fall, Mass had just concluded at Harlem's Resurrection Catholic Church. The other altar boys and I were stowing away our apparel after a morning of services, first in English and then in Spanish. A few of them were talking about their plans for the afternoon. It seemed so invitingly open, this Sunday afternoon, until I remembered that I wasn't going to join them for shooting hoops at the nearby playground or idling at the Polo Grounds Projects or the Charles Rangel Houses. My family stacked activities after Mass like IHOP pancakes. Some weekends, I ran errands for the Legion of Mary, whose local chapter my mother had a hand in coordinating. Other weekends, we packed into cars and headed to the Centro Carismático Católico (CCC) at St. Anthony of Padua Church in the Bronx. This would be a charismatic weekend.

In the worship sessions at the CCC, I was more amateur anthropologist than active participant. On my family's first visit there, my younger brother mostly napped while I stood and prayed with my mother and her friends. There was laying of hands, and screaming in the spirit, and tumbling to the ground. There was song and dance too, with guitar and drums to guide the rhythm. It was all very agreeable to my mother and her Resurrection friends, several of whom had migrated from Catholicism to Pentecostalism to Catholicism again. Services at CCC seemed to scratch that itch of worship in the spirit, to *feel* something more than what the regular Sunday Mass offered them.

Most Sundays, on the car ride up to St. Anthony's, I distracted myself with thoughts of baseball, or with reminiscences of my first few years in the States: I'd gone to kindergarten in the Bronx and taken my first halting steps toward learning English there. Seclusion in the warmth of my memories usually continued well after arrival at St. Anthony's. I felt mostly estranged from the proceedings despite being nudged into a semblance of attentiveness by admonitory facial expressions from my mother. But one aspect of the multihour prayer marathons and the ceaseless singing earned first my partial and then my full focus. It was the buzz of language, the uninterrupted stream of words in so many tongues. What was at first an overwhelming and undifferentiated din eventually resolved into polyphony, as I learned to recognize the distinct linguistic cadences of the faithful. The main languages for the CCC's Sunday afternoon programming were English and Spanish, but I picked up exclamations in Kreyòl and Maya and Tagalog and Quechua, not to mention the full spectrum of English and Spanish dialects.

The prayer marathons were a multilingual universe. I stood in the middle as its student.

The CCC's programming included readings and interpretations of passages from the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes, the readings were chosen from the

Mass selections for that weekend. But the organizers appeared to have broad discretion in their choices, and in general, they favored readings that described episodes of spiritual rejuvenation and effervescence. Ezekiel 37 ("Son of man, can these bones live?") was a mainstay in the rotation. But on the early fall Sunday that stands out most sharply in my recollection, the choice was Acts of the Apostles 2.

> When the day of Pentecost had begun, they were all assembled in one place; and suddenly there came from heaven a sound like the rushing of a great wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. There appeared to them tongues, like tongues of flame, distributed so that a tongue settled upon each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, after which they began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.
>
> And there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men of every nation under heaven; now, when this sound was heard, the crowds came flocking, and they were struck with awe because each man heard them speaking in his own language. They were filled with astonishment and said:
>
> "Are not all those who are speaking Galileans? How is it, then, that each of us hears them speaking his own language which he has heard from early childhood – Parthians, Medes and Elamites, and those who come from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus, and the province of Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and those parts of Libya that are near Cyrene, and Romans living here, Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians – **how is it that we hear them speaking of the great works of God in our own languages?**" And they were all of them astonished and bewildered, and they said to one another: "What does this mean?" But others taunted and said: "They are drunk on sweet wine!"[7]
>
> 2:1 Καὶ ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς πεντηκοστῆς ἦσαν ⸂πάντες ὁμοῦ⸃ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό, 2 καὶ ἐγένετο ἄφνω ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἦχος ὥσπερ φερομένης πνοῆς βιαίας καὶ ἐπλήρωσεν ὅλον τὸν οἶκον οὗ ἦσαν καθήμενοι, 3 καὶ ὤφθησαν αὐτοῖς διαμεριζόμεναι γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ πυρός, ⸂καὶ ἐκάθισεν⸃ ἐφ᾽ ἕνα ἕκαστον αὐτῶν, 4 καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν ⸂πάντες πνεύματος ἁγίου, καὶ ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ⸂ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς⸃.
>
> 5 Ἦσαν δὲ ⸂ἐν Ἰερουσαλὴμ κατοικοῦντες Ἰουδαῖοι, ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν· 6 γενομένης δὲ τῆς φωνῆς ταύτης συνῆλθε τὸ πλῆθος καὶ συνεχύθη, ὅτι ⸂ἤκουον εἷς ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν· 7 ἐξίσταντο ⸂δὲ καὶ ἐθαύμαζον ⸂λέγοντες· ⸂Οὐχ ἰδοὺ ⸂πάντες οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ λαλοῦντες Γαλιλαῖοι; 8 **καὶ πῶς ἡμεῖς ἀκούομεν ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ᾗ ἐγεννήθημεν**; 9 Πάρθοι καὶ Μῆδοι καὶ Ἐλαμῖται, καὶ οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν, Ἰουδαίαν τε καὶ Καππαδοκίαν, Πόντον καὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν, 10 Φρυγίαν τε καὶ Παμφυλίαν, Αἴγυπτον καὶ τὰ μέρη τῆς Λιβύης τῆς κατὰ Κυρήνην, καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι, 11 Ἰουδαῖοί τε καὶ προσήλυτοι, Κρῆτες καὶ Ἄραβες, ἀκούομεν λαλούντων αὐτῶν ταῖς ἡμετέραις γλώσσαις

> τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ. 12 ἐξίσταντο δὲ πάντες καὶ ⸀διηπόρουν, ἄλλος πρὸς ἄλλον λέγοντες· Τί ⸀θέλει τοῦτο εἶναι; 13 ἕτεροι δὲ ⸀διαχλευάζοντες ἔλεγον ὅτι Γλεύκους μεμεστωμένοι εἰσίν.

Much has been written about the sociohistorical background to this passage. And much has been argued, and will continue to be argued, about the paradigmatic function of the episode for the early church, for the church(es) that would claim descent from it, and for the debates within the early Christian movements about ecstatic speech.[8] But on first encounter, I did not have these contexts for interpretation available to me, and I did not have ancient Greek. I had only the roar of prayer in tongues. And while I vaguely apprehended the individuating force of that prayer – recognizing myself *as myself* while buffeted by sounds on all sides – I had less certainty about where and how to locate that self in relation to the communities around me.

The first question to emerge for me, in adult contemplation of my Pentecostal youth in the Catholic Church's bosom, involves the frictions of language and alterity. It intrigued and confounded me that many of those gathered in the CCC's cavernous auditorium spoke languages that were not my own. Their access to those languages made them different from me. But I was not sure, at the time or since, that I had full control over those languages that seemed on some days to be mine and other days not to be. These were the years of encountering Gustavo Pérez Firmat's verse about bilingualism in Junot Díaz's collection of short stories *Drown* and shuddering at the realization that I too existed in a diasporic limbo of linguistic (dis)identification.[9] These were also years of being racialized as a speaker of English and Spanish. I fell to wondering, in that self-pitying yearning typical of adolescence, whether there were others like me for whom conditions of linguistic expressivity were inexorably bound up with their status as racial subjects. (Of course, this is not how my teenage self would have worded it: if I'd had the courage to step out from behind my tough skin of resolute impassiveness, I would have talked about my loneliness.)

Nowadays, I approach the analysis of those conditions through attention to the function of languaging in the constitution of the racialized subject/object. Taking after the biblical scholar Ekaputra Tupamahu, I keep company with the literary critic Rey Chow, whose book *Not Like a Native Speaker* lays down some foundations for investigating "the crucial link between racial objectification and the work of language."[10] Among the most conspicuous sociohistorical structures for the expression of this link is colonialism. In the book's opening pages, Chow details how she will propose to recover the dialectic of languaging in its colonial manifestation: "From the experience of language as a foreign object with which the colonized must wrestle in order to survive, the colonized is arguably more closely in touch with the real-

ity of languaging as a type of prostheticization, whereupon even what feels like an inalienable interiority, such as the way one speaks, is – dare I say it? – impermanent, detachable, and (ex)changeable."[11] As Chow later details, this dimension of languaging materializes not only in an expressly colonial context, but in postcolonial and/or diasporic contexts that bear the imprinting of colonial encounter. There, too, the tug between the presumably inalienable aspect of one's own subjective experience of language and the separability and indeed commodification of linguistic performance is hard to miss – so long as you are trained to look for it.

For my purposes, however, Chow's most energizing intervention contribution comes in the form of an appreciatively critical reading of Jacques Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other*.[12] Chow's take on what Derrida posits as the indivisibility and noncountability of languages calls into question the plausibility of my attempt earlier to isolate and specify the various languages spoken at the CCC.

> Derrida's astute othering of monolingualism, turning it into an expansive, incalculable phenomenon, is in many ways a remarkable intervention in the more fashionable contemporary debates about languages and literatures. In such debates, monolingualism is almost always invoked with derogation, the implication being that it is a sign of provincialism and lack of culture as opposed to the cosmopolitan sophistication of multilingualism. "Oh, I grew up speaking French, Arabic, Japanese, and Spanish!" Offhand announcements of this type often create the impression that the multilingual person has to be superior to, say, the hick in Kansas who knows only one language. For Derrida, this neoliberal attitude toward multilingualism, which treats languages as individuated commodities, to be discretely enumerated and labeled like items of jewelry or parcels of real estate, falls short of grasping what is at stake.[13]

Two points merit closer scrutiny. The first, more immanent one is about multilingualism as a signifier of cosmopolitan sophistication. Derrida is moving against that, for sure; but the unresolved business in the background is *which kinds of multilingualism*, and which scenes of multilingual practice and encounter, are recognized as holding social and material capital under a liberal cosmopolitan order. The second, and the one that bears more insistently on the work that I propose to do in the remainder of this essay, concerns the triangular relationship of language, commodification, and value. Is linguistic pluralism's value capable of being decoupled from the dictates of a global capitalist market that assigns more weight to the "cosmopolitan sophistication of multilingualism" than to the provincialism of the monolingual?

My next move engages with this question by pressing hard on Acts 2 as a proof-text for monolingualism and multilingualism's interface with racialization and individuation. To execute this task, I need first to be clear about the anticipated force of this reading. Rubén Dupertuis tees up the cultural dynamics of Acts, and their characterization in modern scholarship, succinctly:

> The setting of Acts . . . is strikingly broad in scope, covering almost the entirety of the Mediterranean world, as the reader follows the spread of the Christian mission from Judea into Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and finally, to the very center of the empire, Rome. Despite the "transcultural" setting, detailed attention to the role of cultural identity – and perhaps especially ethnic identity – has, until very recently, not been a prevalent aspect of the critical study of Acts.[14]

As Dupertuis then goes on to explain, those scholars who do engage the evidence for ethnic differentiation in Acts tend to see it as subordinated to the text's vision of a universalizing church; on this reading, the narrative arc of Acts bends toward overcoming differentiation and particularism.

It has been standard practice to mine Luke–Acts for evidence of pro- or anti-Roman imperial sentiment within the early Christian community. The consensus, such as it is, that its author was (originally) a Hellenized Jew has sharpened its focus around the cultural tensions operative in the text. As classics scholar J. L. Moles has observed:

> Luke highlights contradiction. Christians obey Rome, pay tribute/tax, embrace peace, reject violence, insist on their compatibility with Judaism and with Roman law, decrees, and the Caesars, and on their entitlement to Roman legal protection; Romans repeatedly judge Jesus and Paul innocent. But Jesus brings fire and division; Jesus, not Caesar is Lord and king; Christian mission repeatedly produces disorder, alike social, political, and economic, alike in Jewish, pagan, Roman, and mixed contexts; opponents' accusations, whether Jewish, pagan, or Roman, have some purchase; Romans execute Jesus and Paul. Pragmatic obfuscations (rare) and palliations (more substantial but localised) do not erase the contradiction. *Luke represents conflict as inevitable*.[15]

This is true, up to a point. Acts is rife with conflict, and the progression of events after the scene at Pentecost will drive home for readers that the imperial environment within which the early Christian movement took shape regularly fomented disagreement and strife – isolated moments of successful cross- and transcultural negotiation notwithstanding. But if the promise of membership within the Roman imperial order does not entail nonconflictual incorporation into its workings, then the horizon of irenic universal integration under the banner of Christ-worship is bound similarly to prove elusive, perhaps even unrealizable. I'm not claiming that Luke–Acts figures the aspirational universalism of the early Christian movement as necessarily and unavoidably mirroring the universalizing ambitions (and failures) of the Roman Empire itself, even if some analogies manifest themselves. It would be more in keeping with Moles's point in the above-quoted passage to stress instead the workings of *contradiction*.

Contradiction can be mapped onto Luke–Acts in a variety of ways. For Moles, contradiction appears to be synonymous with the (apparent) paradox, poten-

tially even the hypocrisy, of a movement with separatist and/or transcendental aims nonetheless remaining vested within the imperial order. But other models of contradiction may serve us as well, if not better, for reframing the generativity of intercultural conflict at the heart of Luke–Acts. Lorgia García Peña's writing on *dominicanidad* can help us to conceive of contra*dictions* as rooted in *diction*: "stories, narratives, and speech acts . . . that go against the hegemonic version of national identity and against the mode of analysis we tend to value as historically accurate or what most people call truth."[16] This definition holds value for me partly because it contests the presumption that claims to truth ought necessarily to be backstopped by or derive their legitimation from state power. On a first application of this idea, we might look askance at the specification of ethnicities and/or racialized entities in Acts 2, anchored as these are to the facts of Roman imperial power. The "Parthians, Medes and Elamites, and those who come from Mesopotamia" all hail from beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, but these ethnicizing categories themselves are made intelligible through the paratactic contrast with those communities that are *within* the Empire: "Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus, and the province of Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and those parts of Libya that are near Cyrene, and Romans living here, Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians."[17] To list these communities is, in the first instance, to establish their contiguity and proximity under the sign of empire: it is empire that organizes them spatially and semantically.

Jewish and proselyte interconnectivity across the lines of empire was very real, as Simcha Gross has underlined in a recent and excellent study of the Great Revolt.[18] Originating in that interconnectivity is a rich resource for defying the constraining and circumscribing forces of empire, whether Roman or Parthian. Unfortunately, here is where language and languaging trip us up. In the case of Luke–Acts, after all, these various communities are enumerated not only according to an imperial geography that moves in a kind of concentric swirl, but in Greek: lingua franca of the Roman Empire in the East, and continuously adapted and refined for precisely this species of ordering and list-making by Roman magistrates and emperors in the decades before and after the composition of Luke–Acts. The charge of languaging is arguably even more acute for a Hellenized Jewish author writing at the same time that Luke–Acts was taking shape: Josephus, who in the preface to his narrative history of the Great Revolt of 66 CE explains that he had chosen to translate a work into Greek that had originally been written "in the language of his country" for the benefit of the barbarians living in the interior – that is, beyond the borders of the Empire – specified as "Parthians and Babylonians and the remote tribes of Arabia with our countrymen beyond the Euphrates and the inhabitants of Adiabene."[19] In the work of translation – which, as Josephus details elsewhere, directly depended on the labor of others, possibly even enslaved others – the reification of communities under the sign of empire occurs.[20] We are seeing here what Brian Rainey, drawing

on several decades of research in social psychology, has labeled "entitativity": the propensity to perceive groups of people as discrete identities.[21]

To swerve back to Luke–Acts, entitativity is very much the name of the game. But the open question for me is whether the friction arising from languaging's carve-up of the faithful into racial/ethnic constituencies is best understood primarily as a reflex of the inescapability of oppressive racial and settler-colonial assignment or, alternatively, as a move toward a liberationist particularism. The first possibility has been well thumbed in Ashon Crawley's treatment of "tongues" in *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, which explores via Derrida the prospect that, at the site of glossolalia and xenolalia, language becomes implicated in "settler colonial logic."[22] Key to imagining alternative possibilities for interpretation is recognition of the sheer chaos that is unleashed by the linguistic excess of spirit-talk: Crawley moves several pages later to the argument that "glossolalia not only enacts a disruption of grammar and lingual form but also enacts spatiotemporal incoherence, produces a 'floating nowhere' for celebratory speaking, for ecstatic praise against the very violence and violation that animated, and animates today still, our political economy. Glossolalia is the surplus of language and a line of flight."[23] The detail in Acts 2 that each person heard the languages in which they had been reared attempts to stabilize under the sign of language all that was excessively and unboundedly *extra*-linguistic, and therefore insusceptible to the ordering and taxonomic precepts of the Roman political economy. The excess is not merely auditory, indeed not even merely sensorial: it signals a more general tension between appropriation and excretion, between heaping together and pushing out.

In terms of the utterances themselves and their quality and/as language, glossolalia in trance-states is the focus of a richly veined theological and anthropological literature.[24] I will set to the side the acerbic judgment of some spectators of Pentecost, for whom the glossolalia could not be anything other than intoxication. This judgment marks the opening to another, skeptical mode for engaging with the sight of spirit at work in the context of imperial hegemony. But my preference is to linger on the affective purchase of the event for those who may have experienced comfort at the sound of their own languages in the rush of spirit, as I did many years ago at the Centro Carismático. We might understand this affective dimension as proceeding in part from the validation of being confirmed as a linguistic *subject* in conditions of diaspora. On this reading, the Pentecostal encounter derives its emotional force from the pendulum swings between individuation and collectivization: the re-recognition of one's own language, and of the subjectivity that molds around an understanding of oneself as speaking that language, unfolds within a group context where that language as a medium of connectivity with others jostles for acoustic space with other languages that connect other Others. Yet it is not only the linguistic but the extra- and translinguistic that imprints on this dynamic of subjectivization.

In my earlier account of those Sundays, I omitted one dimension. I referenced the shouting, the music, the sonic/auditory exuberance. But I failed to mention that my other dominant sensory memory is of sweating, and of the fans whirring like mad in the partially underground meeting hall to keep the congregated faithful from overheating. Now, replaying these scenes of prayer in my mind, I see them as so thick with excess, with a Bataille-style super-abundance of sensuous gratification. This excess overcame normative constraints on speech and body decorum. To language in tongues was not just to excrete sound but substance, and in that excretion of substance to initiate the messy but necessary work of according other bodies a fuller recognition.[25]

Believe me when I tell you that our futures depend on the languaging of spirit. And not in some archly Hegelian sense, but in the embodied sense of melanated sweating and singing: of tongues descending upon us.

A first version of this essay was envisioned under the title "The Force of Constant Prayer," in simultaneous homage to sermons on this theme and to Simone Weil's *The Iliad, or, the Poem of Force*.[26] As I saw it activated in the Centro Carismático, constant prayer gained its force through an unrelenting conviction of speech's capacity to transmute and transform across the boundaries of the intelligible and unintelligible. But the more I contemplated in my mind's eye the scenes of my adolescence, the more enticing other dimensions of the full-bodied sensorium of the CCC became. It was as bodies, after all, that we stood to receive the spirit, and from bodies worn down by the travails of diasporic life that we proclaimed the message in many languages. Hence the urgency of thinking more about the "languages of the body in their choreographic and extra- and para-linguistic manifestations."[27]

In a church basement prone to overheating, enfleshment and linguistic pluralism converged in the service of a potential emancipation. I say "potential" because, like any good historical materialist, I'm fighting for the radical transformation of those material conditions that impinge on the flourishing of my people. Such emancipation as may be attainable would proceed from the assumption that languaging of the kind that I have described can be severed from the operations of capital, and indeed from the violence of commodification that streaks through Derrida's account of the monolingual. For this to occur, languaging under the auspices of the spirit need not disavow its drive to particularism, so long as it never loses sight of the many sweaty bodies.

Come 2050, may prayer in tongues unite me with the speech of so many others, sweating and striving alongside me. And may each of us hear the languages in which we were raised, forever and ever.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan-el Padilla Peralta is Professor of Classics and Associated Faculty in African American Studies at Princeton University. He is the author of *Undocumented: A Dominican Boy's Odyssey from a Homeless Shelter to the Ivy League* (2015), *Divine Institutions: Religions and Community in the Middle Roman Republic* (2020), and *Classicism and Other Phobias* (2025); the editor of *Rome, Empire of Plunder: The Dynamics of Cultural Appropriation* (with Matthew Loar and Carolyn MacDonald, 2017) and *Making the Middle Republic: New Approaches to Rome and Italy, c. 400–200 BCE* (with Seth Bernard and Lisa Mignone, 2023); and a volume editor for the *Cambridge History of the African Diaspora*. In 2026, he will join the faculty of Arizona State University's School of International Letters and Cultures.

ENDNOTES

[1] The phrase "guardians of languages" I take with appreciation and homage from Robert Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1988).

[2] On hate as a species of aesthetic self-control, see Joshua Billings, "Hate-Reading: Fragments from a Damaged Tradition," *Helios* 50 (2) (2023): 117–128.

[3] Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses," *Poems* (London: Edward Moxon, 1842).

[4] Denis Villeneuve, dir., *Arrival* (Paramount Pictures, 2016); Denis Villeneuve, dir., *Dune* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2021); and Denis Villeneuve, dir., *Dune: Part Two* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2024).

[5] Efrain Agosto, "What Does It Mean to Be a Latino/a Biblical Critic? A Latino Pentecostal Perspective, with Reflections on the Future," in *Latino/a Biblical Hermeneutics: Problematics, Objectives, Strategies*, ed. Francisco Lozada, Jr. and Fernando F. Segovia (SBL Press, 2014), 44.

[6] Shea Watts, "Dancing in the Spirit: Exploring Pentecostalism at the Interarticulations of Affect and Ritual," *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry* 3 (2) (2024): 159–170.

[7] Acts of the Apostles 2:1–13. I provide the Anchor Bible translation: Johannes Munck, ed. and trans., *The Acts of the Apostles*, rev. William F. Albright and C. S. Mann (Doubleday & Company, 1967). For the Greek text, I use *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*, ed. Michael W. Holmes (Society for Biblical Literature, 2010).

[8] Craig S. Keener, *Acts* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary, 2020), 136. On ecstatic speech, see Ekaputra Tupamahu, *Contesting Languages: Heteroglossia and the Politics of Language in the Early Church* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

[9] Gustavo Pérez Firmat's poem, "Dedication," published in the collection *Carolina Cuban*, is reprinted in Roberto Durán, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *Triple Crown: Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Cuban-American Poetry* (Bilingual Press, 1987), 127: "The fact that I / am writing to you / in English / already falsifies what I / wanted to tell you. / My subject: / how to explain to you / that I / don't belong to English / though I belong nowhere else, / if not here / in English."

[10] Rey Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 2. On Chow as a critical resource for New Testament studies, see Tupamahu, *Contesting Languages*, 183–185.

[11] Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker*, 14–15.

[12] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford University Press, 1998).

[13] Ibid., 31.

[14] Rubén R. Dupertuis, "The Challenges of Latino/a Biblical Criticism," in *Latino/a Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Lozada Jr. and Segovia, 137.

[15] John L. Moles, "Accommodation, Opposition, or Other? Luke–Acts' Stance towards Rome," in *The Collected Papers of J. L. Moles, Volume 1: Studies in Dio Chrysostom, Cynic Philosophy, and the New Testament*, ed. John Marincola (Brill, 2023), 729–730; emphasis mine.

[16] Lorgia García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* (Duke University Press, 2016), 1–2.

[17] Munck, ed. and trans., *The Acts of the Apostles*.

[18] Simcha Gross, "Hopeful Rebels and Anxious Romans: Jewish Interconnectivity in the Great Revolt and Beyond," *Historia* 72 (4) (2023): 479–513.

[19] Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War* [*Flavius Josephus's Books of the History of the Jewish War Against the Romans*] 1.3, 6. See Gross, "Hopeful Rebels and Anxious Romans," 502–503.

[20] In *Against Apion*, Josephus declares that he had "relied on some assistants for the purpose of the Greek" (1.50: χρησάμενός τισι πρὸς τὴν Ἑλληνίδα φωνὴν συνεργοῖς). How volitional their assistance was is not specified, nor is their status (enslaved? free?).

[21] Brian Rainey, *Religion, Ethnicity and Xenophobia in the Bible: A Theoretical, Exegetical and Theological Survey* (Routledge, 2018), 29–30.

[22] Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (Fordham University Press, 2017), 221.

[23] Ibid., 224.

[24] See the essays in *Speaking in Tongues: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Mark J. Cartledge (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012).

[25] I am working here with excess as described in Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), and especially the essay "The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade (An Open Letter to My Current Comrades)," 91–102.

[26] Simone Weil, *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*, trans. Mary McCarthy (Pendle Hill, 1956).

[27] Watts, "Dancing in the Spirit," 161.