

“Bosnie neighborhood, Brussels, Earth”: shifting geography, polyphonous environment, subjective approach

Aside from French (the language most spoken and one of the two official languages), Flemish (the other official language of the capital) and English the Brussels-Capital Region has an amazing diversity of foreign languages.

In the streets, shops or public transport ... you'll be amazed by the number of often unknown languages that latch onto the dominant languages.

This multilingualism is no coincidence. Over time the demography of the Brussels-Capital Region has been influenced by successive migration waves, which have become increasingly diverse: workers from Italy, Spain, Morocco, Turkey, Poland...; political or economic refugees from Latin America, France... or war-ridden countries. Brussels has become a ‘multicultural’ region (...).”; A city in which the majority of the population is multilingual.

Between 2013 and 2015 we worked to make this mixed, multilingual, cosmopolitan and multiethnic reality audible, paying special attention to minorities. By focusing on a specific environment with a diverse population, the Bosnie quarter of Saint-Gilles, we tried to grasp this superdiversity. We worked on an audio collection of words, which are fantasized, heard or read in the streets. *Vagabundo, brol puteler marchas. Portaial angifique Odessalavie!* The lexicon shows a fragmented and subjective portrait of a multifaceted neighborhood in transformation.

Public conference,
31 August 2015,
“Brussel, kruispunt
van culturen”, Prof.
Eric Corijn (Vrije
Universiteit Brussel)
<http://www.adt-ato.brussels/nl/event/s/tien-grote-uitdagingen-voor-brussel/conferentiecyclus>

Public conference,
31 November 2015,
“Brussel, kruispunt
van culturen” «Le
Multilinguisme –
Dis-moi quelles
langues tu parles, je
te dirai quel
Bruxelles tu seras»
par le Prof. Dr.
Philippe Van Parijs
(Université
Catholique de
Louvain – UCL)

We met people who shared with us their tales of migration and hybridization. Mustafa from Tanger, who now runs shoe repair shop *Le Marteau rouge*, remembers Saint-Gilles in the seventies as a leftist commune with several radical bookstores. Jorge, who first learned French and later Portuguese, left Portugal for economic reasons and now supervises the launderette *Bosnilav*. Rocio is the first female Ecuadorian political refugee to lead Hispano-Belga, a not-for-profit organization. José Manuel organizes *rana* competitions in the basement of restaurant *Picos de Europa* and makes traditional Asturian cider. Silvia, who is a musician and clown, speaks a mix of French and Italian with her son. Because she didn't like the Italian word for hug (*coccole*), she uses *calino*.

Among the 200 collected words you'll find many illustrations of language and its liveliness and ability to change. Words that resist (*cespuglio*), untranslatable words (*fodasse*), false cognates (*ti amo, pór, faits d'hiver*), bastardizations (*vamos à la cava!, birou*) and dysortography ("*en fête*" instead of "en fait").

Words also create connections between stories and cultures. The word *bistrot* in French is a place where you can have a drink, according to Iouri it originates from a Russian word which means speed. Iouri enjoys eating out with his friends at *Boteco's* because it reminds them of the cuisine of their Russian homeland.

New voices also create new kinds of places for meeting, debating and politics. Expressions such as *marché gratuit* (free market) at the Bethlehem square, *magasin gratuit* (free shop) in the squat building *l'Armada* or the *menu anti-crise* (anti crisis menu) in restaurant Chez José Manuel are all proposals to rise up against a certain way of doing things, a certain of seeing society. They encourage us to reflect on the meaning of the words 'free' and 'crisis', while reinventing them.

Ah oui, le fait divers, celui-là, c'est pareil. Je l'ai appris il n'y a pas longtemps. Faits divers, pour moi le son c'était *faits d'hiver*, la saison. Et je me demandais pourquoi les faits divers s'appellent les *faits d'hiver*, qu'est-ce qu'il a à voir l'hiver là dedans?

Maintenant j'ai un mot qui me vient à l'esprit: dans ma famille, et entre nous et je crois aussi pour les Sud Américains, par exemple, on dit: «On va à la cave». En espagnol ce mot c'est «el sótano». Mais nous, à force d'avoir tellement mélangé le français et l'espagnol, on dit: «*Vamos à la cava*», parce que bon, c'est un mot qu'on entend et on le mélange. Il y en a plusieurs comme ça. Mais c'est vrai, c'est la multiculturalité. Je n'aime pas trop parce que j'aime bien différencier, mais bon, c'est bien la preuve qu'on vit dans un système multiculturel.

The collection led to a number of artists' interventions. First in the neighborhood: public walking tours and small audio portraits in local stores. Secondly, through artists' contributions to this publication, which is equally multi-faceted, many-voiced and polyglot.

We invite you to discover this polyphonous space and the hybrid voices with their complex identities. 'Saint-Gilles' is the language of multiple worlds.