Linguistic Rights:
An Interview with Carles Torner, July 2018

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Peter McDonald: I couldn't help noticing that 2018 is an auspicious anniversary year in which to talk about PEN and the question of language rights and linguistic diversity. It is 70 years after the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948, and 40 years after the formation of PEN's Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee in 1978. There are also some less decimally perfect dates worth recalling at the outset too: 22 years have passed since the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* in 1996, 17 years since the UNESCO *Declaration on Cultural Diversity* in 2001, nine years since PEN's *Girona Manifesto on Language Rights* in 2011, three years since its *Quebec Declaration on Literary Translation and Translators* in 2015 and two years since the Donostia Protocol of 2016. All these initiatives and documents are interrelated but I'd like to focus mainly on the 1996 *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* and its consequences. Before I do so, however, could I ask you to give us a sense of your own personal interest in these issues and some background on why it is you came to play such a key part as a champion of linguistic rights?

Carles Torner: There's another important date: it's the 90th anniversary of the PEN International Congress in Oslo in 1928, where, from what I have read, it was decided that PEN Centres would be recognised not according to states but according to literatures. For me, this is very important, and helps explain my involvement, because this creates another world map. Our main poet Carles Riba of the time participated in those debates when PEN created a vision of the world in which, people like us, the Catalans, could feel at home in PEN as Catalans. Though this seems normal from the outside, for us it's a privilege because we can be acknowledged as Catalans in very few international forums. This is different to the debate about independence, which for me is an important one, even more so today, but it's not central to that issue. PEN made it possible for cultures that do not have the support of a state, cultures that as I would say that have no embassy—when we travel we have no embassy acknowledging us, supporting us—to participate in the debate with full rights.

In the Catalan context, my biography is very peculiar because, by chance or by personal commitment, I have been involved in international life since I was very young, from the age of nineteen. My first full-time work was international. I was based in Paris, travelling round the world with UN consultative status and participating actively in UNESCO and the Human Rights Council and the UN. I've been working in international structures all my life, non-stop, sometimes full-time, sometimes part-time. But the reality is that I have a completely exceptional experience of international life because all these

organisations, all three in which I have worked, acknowledge Catalan identity at an international level, alongside Spanish. So I have always been an international worker, an international representative. I've had different offices: I've been President, I've been International Secretary, I've been Director, but I have never represented Spain, never. This again makes me quite peculiar because I feel at home in a kind of internationality that for 99% of my friends and for the citizens of Catalonia does not exist. For them international life always goes through Madrid and always with a lot of obstacles that I simply have never felt. It has been a real privilege for me and when I explain this in Barcelona, my friends say 'you're really making it up'. They say I am exaggerating but I'm not! I have never found myself having to confront Spain at an international level; also I have never been supported by Spain at an international level. So that is very peculiar and that explains why, as a Catalan writer, I have felt at home in PEN from the first day and able to participate fully in its singular international life.

PMcD: Can you just remind us of the date? When did you start working for PEN?

CT: I became a member of PEN – and I've never checked but I have the card so I could check – I became a member of PEN when I published my first two books of poetry, aged twenty-one. They were written in different periods but they were published in that year, 1984. For me and my literary friends, it was a given that as soon as you publish a book you become a member of the Catalan Writers Association and Catalan PEN. It was about becoming part of the literary community. I don't really remember why, I just remember that our elders were part of it, it was our tradition. You could dig and I could work it out but frankly it was quite automatic.

PMcD: Catalan PEN was one of the earliest Centres, not so?

CT: Yes, it was the third. You have London in October 1921, and then you have Paris, I think January/February 1922, and then the Catalan Centre. We have the records of a meeting in February where they were already debating it, and a letter from one of the founders of Catalan PEN to English PEN on 28 February announcing the creation of the centre. There are many ways of explaining it: there was a generation of young Catalan poets and essayists who were connected internationally, reading the English press, and who probably read there that English PEN had been created. There is a nice story, the poet John Langdon-Davies was in London in 1921 when PEN was created, and his sister owned a small hotel in the Costa Brava. He then travelled to see her there in spring when he was also translating an anthology of Catalan poetry with one of the main translators of English poetry at the time, Marià Manent. So Langdon-Davies and Manent met together with Carles Riba and that's where the idea of creating the centre came from. Then on 19 April there was a dinner in the Ritz and we know everyone who was at the table—very fascinating—including John Langdon Davies. In fact, it was a young generation of authors who wanted to have international connections and PEN was a friend and became a platform. This is why we have the funny set up at the first Congress in London 1923 with a table for Barcelona and a table for Madrid.

PMcD: A good test to show PEN was not a national or a state body from the start.

CT: There is another side to my personal story. When I was young, in fact still now, I was a member of a religious movement, the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS). This is a movement created in 1921, acknowledged by the Vatican, very active during the Vatican II years, the years when the Church completely reformed itself. But to me what is more relevant is the Liberation Theology in Latin America was born of that movement. The 1971 book *Liberation Theology* by the Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez, comprising the speeches he gave to the Catholic students in Peru when he was the Chaplain, is especially important because it made the connection between theology and social issues which had a huge impact and we were the channel for that impact at a student level.

PMcD: This was in the mid-80s?

CT: Well I started when I was sixteen or seventeen so that means in 1980. I had the personal fortune of going to a school where I ended more or less mastering four languages—English, French, Catalan, Spanish—and this opened many doors for me. In the first meeting of that Catholic student international movement, which was in Slovenia in 83/84, at the time still under Communist rule, they proposed me as international President and I said yes. So my first work when I was 23 entailed living in Paris for five years, working non-stop as President of that movement. I travelled a lot, more than with PEN, always staying with students in student dorms and families, never in hotels, sharing their lives and struggles. The trips were really long, and I was also moving between Paris and Geneva for the Human Rights Council and UNESCO - so it was really this International experience.

On the Human Rights Commission (the name of the council at the time), I represented IMCS in many issues. Our movement in Guatemala had been a target and some student leaders were killed. Also Bishop Gerardi had started to keep a record of all the human rights violations against the indigenous communities Guatemala. And when, finally, the military dictatorship ended, he chaired the National Reconciliation Commission that drafted a report about the killings during the years of the war against the guerrillas. We had a consultative status on the Human Rights Commission, exactly like PEN. I took the floor, saying that a woman student, one of our leaders, had been killed in very troubled circumstances, probably under police interrogation, and reporting on the human rights situation and how it affected students in Guatemala. I then gave the floor to Bishop Gerardi and he would also address the Commission. Those are sad memories for me, because Gerardi was assassinated two days after publishing his report *Guatemala, Never More* with detailed accounts of all human rights victims during the Guatemala civil war.

So it was in that context that I found myself among other NGOs and people like Rigoberta Menchú, and it was with her and others that I started to share in the process of drafting what would eventually become the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous*

Peoples (2007), reading more and using my knowledge to help. I was involved from early on, because I did this work as president of IMCS from '86 to '91.

Then at the end of 1991 I went back to Barcelona, having been very lucky to have won a grant to write a novel. That allowed me to devote one full year to writing. After five years of non-stop travelling, that was really a gift. So I spent '92 just sitting, reading and writing! But it was also in April that year that the International Congress of PEN took place in Barcelona. I was completely disconnected from PEN for the five years I'd been away but I was still a member receiving information from them. So I saw there was a Congress and many literary events. I thought: 'Oh that's very interesting! I have my free time, I am devoted to writing. I'm a writer again!' So I attended the events, listened to the conferences and the debates, and talked to all of the Catalan writers who were members of PEN.

Two other elements were important for me at that point: the President of the Catalan PEN Centre Jordi Sarsanedas was my teacher in secondary school, my French Literature teacher, and for me he was a fantastic poet. He was really someone I looked up to, who really helped me in my writing. There was also a woman poet Maria-Mercè Marçal with whom I felt very close because of her involvement in feminist and cultural issues. She helped to found the PEN Women Writers Committee at the Congress in 1992 and I participated in the poetry event where we announced this.

The other element is that before I stopped working as president of IMCS, I was supposed to participate in a congress in Croatia in '91. But then in Autumn '91, the invasion of Croatia by the Yugoslav army began, we say the Serbs but it's not the Serbs—the Yugoslav army. After the Yugoslav army occupied Vukovar, the Congress was cancelled. I was very good friends with a Croatian psychiatrist who was organising that Congress but who then committed suicide. This was a personal shock for me—a very good friend who committed suicide just before the invasion, but he could sense it. That is a long story, but for me, what was happening in Croatia was personally very important so I followed it in the newspapers. I read everything that was being published and, having just got back to Barcelona, I started to write. All my first articles in the newspapers were about the war in Croatia. The PEN Congress then took place in Barcelona in June '92 and at that point Jordi Sarsanedas asked me to join the board Catalan PEN. I was very cautious because finally I had succeeded in having a year for writing. But he said 'I would like you to join the board, because you've been writing about the war in Croatia and we would like you to take part in the PEN Congress which will be in Dubrovnik the next spring.' He was offering me a way to intervene, as Catalan PEN, in solidarity with the victims of the so-called ethnic cleansing. So then I said, immediately, yes! And that is how I got involved in PEN.

As a member of Catalan PEN, I was asked to serve on PEN International's Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee too. But I was more interested in the Congress in Dubrovnik and the human rights work of PEN at that point. None the less as secretary of the international committee, I organised the meeting a in May '93 in Majorca. It was not

a big meeting—25-30 people from all over the world. There were a couple of Africans, from Ghana and Kenya, and all the old European nations, Welsh and Scots, Basques, Romania, Hungary, Quebec—this was the membership. The committee dealt non-stop with complaints! The Kurds denounced what was happening to them, the Kenyans—where the Kikuyu language was forbidden at the time—shared a parish newsletter, the only publication published in that language but which the authorities had just seized. It was just one denunciation after another. And in the debate, at the end, as secretary, I said, 'Well it's very interesting all this sharing but frankly it's very difficult to see how we are going to work together apart from expressing solidarity. We need some kind of advocacy. Why don't we try to prepare a document of international law that would make all of us share the same struggle, why don't we draft a Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights.' I had in mind the *Indigenous Rights Declaration*. Of course, everyone said yes, what a good idea and agreed to make this the subject of the next meeting. The unexpected thing for me is that we were interviewed the day after by the main Catalan newspaper. We explained we'd just had this meeting in Majorca where we said we were going to work towards a Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights. They then published a page about it with the title 'Towards a Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights'.

The same day I started receiving phone calls. The first was from a Catalan research and training centre on issues of nationality, culture and linguistic rights called CIEMEN. They offered their support, which I welcomed. The next call was from the President of the UNESCO Centre of Catalonia saying not only that they were interested in supporting this, but that they had already started to work on these issues within UNESCO. So without contacting the press we were already round the table with three institutions: the research world, all the writers and translators of PEN, and UNESCO officially acknowledging and not only acknowledging but offering the first economic support of the project. So I found myself slightly thrown onto a galloping horse! It was very interesting. Of course as Catalan writers we had been reading a lot about these issues but then suddenly we did so with greater concern.

PMcD: The list at the back of the final *Declaration* gives the names of everyone involved?

CT: Yes, exactly. We had two main research meetings, first in Girona and then in Gandia, Valencia, with a lot of debates where we began the process of drafting the *Declaration*.

PMcD: I definitely want to focus on the development of the document as well as its afterlife and consequences. But before we get onto the details, there are two more general, quasi-philosophical things I'd like to touch on if I may.

As you know our research project is mainly about the history and effects of PEN as an advocate for free expression, but as John Ralston Saul, the Canadian writer-philosopher and former President of PEN International, said about the *Girona Manifesto*, linguistic diversity and free expression are inseparable. As he put it, 'the loss of one's language, and through that the loss of much of one's culture, can be seen as the ultimate removal of

freedom of expression.' I'm aware that I'm talking to you not just as an activist but as a poet and a writer in Catalan, so I would like to know how you, again speaking more personally, understand the relationship between these rights both of which are central to PEN: free expression and language?

CT: Well, for a poet who becomes aware of the process of writing, ideas, poetry, literature, even thought, takes place in a language, in a concrete language, rooted in a community, in a context, in a tradition. This view is not so easy to defend nowadays, because we all think that ideas flow and everything is sharable. But ideas, images, poetry, if they are rooted in human experience, in the human body, in the human community, take place in a language. And in a language which is, with very few exceptions – which are interesting to study but which are exceptions – a language which is the 'mother-tongue', even if I know that this a disputed phrase! So let's say the tongue of the mother or the father or the grandmother, the tongue that you receive from your community when you are a child. This deep language cannot be erased by all the insistence today on international languages, on international culture. It shapes your consciousness. Yet this is why for me it's so important that the PEN committee is not the Committee of Linguistic Rights: it's the Committee of *Translation* and Linguistic Rights. Because, at the same time that I really believe that ideas, poetry, images, feelings take place primarily in a language, I also think they immediately get translated since there is no isolated language. We live in a world where languages overlap all the time. So as soon as expression takes place, it's grounded, but then the next step is translation. For me these go together. What we start with, however, is the language of every community, of every person. Literature is really the voice of a person who has found the shape, the form to express himself or herself. But this expression is always in a language which is shaped by the person thinking and by the community. It's never just personal: it's always part of a flow which is inside the community.

This philosophical root is not easy to find nowadays, but for us writers it's really essential. It has a lot of implications for the work we have been doing in PEN too. In my poetry, I try to reflect on this. For example, the best way of reading a foreign poem is to translate it. I am the kind of poet who is always aware of the structure of the language, of the metre, if I can I try to write with clear metre and rhyme. So one thing I love to do is – with a few others – to translate rhyming poetry into rhymed translation, a Byzantine type of entertainment but it's one of the best pleasures! When you really find a shape it's extraordinary. I'm trying to do it with English this summer with a friend who has given us this exercise: he has sent one sonnet in English and one sonnet in French to 40-50 poets for us to translate in different ways. I will translate with rhyme but I have actually done few translations, mainly from French, and I am not a professional translator. None the less, my whole life I've been translating non-stop from one language into the other.

PMcD: What you say about the larger philosophical question concerning our embodied experience of language is in fact borne out by the latest neuroscience which is giving a new meaning to the old phrase 'mother tongue'—the evidence shows we pick up the

song of our mother's voice in the womb, for instance. But to touch briefly on one other philosophical aspect of Ralston's comment which takes us to the text of the 1996 *Declaration* itself: he also raises the taxing question of the relationship between language and culture. The *Declaration* puts it this way in the first clause of Article 7:

> 7. All languages are the expression of a collective identity and of a distinct way of perceiving and describing reality and must therefore be able to enjoy the conditions required for their development in all functions.

CT: Article 7 is important but the issue of language and culture is set up in Article 1, which also happened to be the focus of the biggest debates during the drafting process:

> 1. This Declaration considers as a *language community* any human society established historically in a particular territorial space, whether this space be recognized or not, which identifies itself as a people and has developed a common language as a natural means of communication and cultural cohesion among its members. The term *language proper to a territory* refers to the language of the community historically established in such a space.

As soon as we agreed a definition of 'linguistic community' that could be the subject of right, then everything fell into place.

PMcD: And in the final *Declaration* this involves a distinction between linguistic *groups* and linguistic *communities*, not so?

CT: Yes, and there was a lot of debate about that too. But once we reached a consensus about the linguistic community being the subject of right, then there was no further debate.

PMcD: The term 'language proper to a territory' in Article 1 refers to the language of the community historically established in such a space. This goes back to your initial comments about Catalan, which fits that formulation.

CT: It fits but the wording also captures the rights of linguistic communities of indigenous peoples in Africa, in Latin America and in India who are nomadic: they are in the territory, but they lead a nomadic life. Then there is the experience of groups who, because of history, have had lots of overlappings and intersections. But once we all agreed on the phrase 'linguistic community'—not any other formulation, not the nation, not the people—with language as the unifying element, then everything was easy—for instance, the idea of a 'collective identity' in Article 7 followed quite easily.

Of course I was chairing those meetings, acting in a presidential role, if you like, so I was not in charge of the writing and the follow-up. We should really talk to the others who participated in the process in Barcelona. As they are linguists or sociolinguists and academics and as they were preparing a draft, they will remember the issues very clearly. The text went through 11 drafts. At one point, we had about 300 pages of amendments

because a huge network of about 40 PEN Centres plus about 60 international NGOs was involved. The World Congress of Indigenous Peoples also had a commission in one of their meetings and they sent not two pages of proposed amendments but ten or twelve. But everything was finalized by about twenty people at the two meetings of the Scientific Council, one in Girona and one in Gandia.

PMcD: None of those involved in the drafting process were state representatives. Again that was key, not so? I'm thinking about an international organization like UNESCO, where there is a whole history to do with the fact that it's essentially a forum for state representatives.

CT: Exactly, though the support of UNESCO was very important because it meant it was not just a PEN project, it was a UNESCO project too. This made it easy to bring all the people who had been working on different issues of linguistic diversity within UNESCO to the table with us. Of course, there was also a direct connection with Federico Mayor Zaragoza, the General Secretary of UNESCO at the time, and a Catalan. He put this on the agenda of the Executive Committee of UNESCO. So we managed to move quite smoothly for the two years from 1994-1996 when we were drafting the *Declaration*. At each of the meetings in Girona and Gandia, we also had Joseph Poth who was the representative of UNESCO and we had among the experts the UNESCO Centre of Burundi, for example, Ignace Sanwidi, so there was a clear alliance.

PMcD: At the risk of taking us on another detour, there is an interesting pre-history about languages and UNESCO, going back to its precursor organisation in the League of Nations, the International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC)—a body I discuss in my book *Artefacts of Writing* (2017). Unlike UNESCO, the ICIC was an advisory body with the membership serving in their own right, not as state representatives. One of its first interventions in the 1920s concerned the question of international languages. The League was being lobbied by many language advocates, the Esperantists above all, and the ICIC had to decide whether or not the League, whose own official languages were English and French, should support one of them. Their recommendation, which the League accepted, was not to adopt Esperanto but rather to support translation between what they called 'national languages', understanding the phrase in very statist terms. But from what you are saying it looks like this debate was long forgotten by the 1990s. Was anyone talking about Novial, Volapük, Esperanto or any of the other international languages of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century?

CT: Certainly no one was talking about this in the *Declaration* debates. But when I became chair of the Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee in PEN we did have an application for an Esperanto PEN Centre. I cannot say exactly when this was: 1993, 1994? I remember that for some close colleagues in PEN, it was clear that Esperanto was not a viable candidate for centre status. Personally, I have never thought about studying it, nevertheless, it's something to be respected. There is a community of writers in Esperanto; I have had colleagues who were Esperanto writers and translators of Catalan

literature into Esperanto and from Esperanto into Catalan. So when this proposal came, I thought that as chair of the committee, it was not my role to oppose. If there is a community of writers who are writing in Esperanto, who think this is the way to express themselves, why not? That's why we have an Esperanto PEN Centre that attends all the meetings of the committee. For some it is a logical contradiction—if you promote Esperanto why are you participating in a committee promoting translation? But there is a community of writers, they have their publications, their books, they are part of our committee and they have a PEN Centre based in Switzerland. For me, however, this was the only moment when this question emerged. There was no discussion of any international languages during the *Declaration* process.

PMcD: To return to the process: could you elaborate on the tensions, compromises and difficulties about wording in your deliberations. You've said that the biggest debate centred on the definition of the 'language community'. Were there any other key points of contention?

CT: Maybe the most important contribution of the *Declaration* is that it considers the collective and individual dimensions of linguistic rights inseparable. The principle is that language is collectively constituted within a community and it is within this community that we all make a personal use of it. The practice of individual linguistic rights, to be effective, asks for the collective rights of all communities to be respected by everyone. Well, we all knew that by acknowledging *collective* rights, the idea of the 'language community' as a rights-bearing entity, we were condemning the *Declaration*, ensuring it would not become a text adopted by UNESCO too soon. So this was a further, more strategic debate at the beginning: should we try to do all this based only on individual linguistic rights, which would be a completely different exercise because then we knew that this would find its way through the international institutions in its present shape?

PMcD: Because the alternative would inevitably put you on a collision course with state power?

CT: Of course. As soon as you define any kind of collective right, as soon as you define the right of, say, the Mapuche linguistic community, or the Maoris, to be educated in their language, the next step is land. Of course, and I understand this politically, but I still defend it as a real success to have put the concept of linguistic community, which is different from nation, at the heart of the *Declaration*. To me, this is crucial. So the first debate was also about individual vs. collective rights.

PMcD: The debates were in a sense knowingly utopian, then? You were fully aware of the fact that you were making a statement that was going to confront the realities of state power, and you felt that you couldn't concede on that point from the start.

CT: Yes, for me this was true from the very beginning. But this is also how I understand PEN today and even living! You need a utopia to be able to walk. And the text of the *Declaration*, if I may say, is so well reflected upon, so nuanced, that it really shapes this

utopian vision into what could be international law. The issue is not whether or not you reach a utopia. It is all about the process, the pilgrimage you are making toward articulating it. So in that sense, its true the *Declaration* has not caught on today—and I don't think it can do so even in the coming years, unless there is a big mental revolution. Nor has it been accepted by UNESCO because UNESCO is really just soft power and too bound up with the state. But this is not to say it has not had an effect. When the language laws of Paraguay were written in 2004, for instance, they used the concepts of the *Declaration*. The same goes for Colombia whose laws were written by one of the experts who was part of the network. And when there was a debate in Parliament in Mexico on how to promote the rights of the indigenous languages, they used the language of the *Declaration*. And when I visited Tibetan PEN in exile with Jennifer [Clement, President of PEN International] last year [2017], they presented a huge analysis about linguistic rights in Tibet which focuses on the process of replacing the Tibetan language with Chinese Mandarin in the schools. In the bilingual policy of the Chinese government, the main language of instruction is Chinese Mandarin, so even when they are teaching the Tibetan language, they use Mandarin. To children who have Tibetan as their mother tongue! This means they are learning their own language as if it were a foreign language. The whole preface of that 60-80 page report uses the concepts of the *Declaration*: the language community, the right to be member of a language community, the right to education in you own language and culture…. That meeting in the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Dharamsala was really very moving. So, in all these ways, the *Declaration* has become a point of reference and to me it is good that it is so utopian because it has not been corrupted. So it stays there and conceptually its strong. Of course, I hope someday, some other text will come out of it, enforceable by international institutions. This will be a major step, especially for all the linguistic communities that need it.

PMcD: No doubt this goes some way to explaining why the final text includes some very powerful endorsements by key public figures, including Nelson Mandela, Noam Chomsky, Peter Gabriel and Wislawa Szymborska, among others, and why Desmond Tutu, Josep Carreras, Octavio Paz and Ngugi wa Thiong'o all look forward to its official approval by the UN and UNESCO specifically—even the hope that it will become a legally binding *Convention*. As you mentioned, this has never happened but could you say a little more about the main stumbling blocks?

CT: At one level, it is unsurprising that some of these figures referred to UNESCO because we mentioned this in the letter we sent them. We asked for their support because we wanted to turn the *Declaration*—which had been approved at the level of NGOs with the support of UNESCO—into a text of international law, into a UNESCO *Convention* or a text that UNESCO would accept with the acknowledgement of the United Nations. In some cases, it was not only the letter that did this but the encouragement of particular individuals: the President of SA PEN at the time, Anthony Fleischer, for example, mentioned this when he approached Desmond Tutu. In fact, from the very beginning not only PEN South Africa, but the state of South Africa became

one of the main promoters of the *Declaration* with the support of Mandela, Buthelezi, and Tutu. This was very good for the prestige of the *Declaration* because every time we had a public event or panel in UNESCO, the South African Ambassador chaired it. I remember very well that at one of the first events we had in Paris, the South African Ambassador was chairing and the first speaker was the President of the Kurdish Institute in Paris. That was something: South Africa giving the floor to the Kurds! And then instead of talking about the Kurds, the Kurdish representative said, 'I want to talk about a language that is disappearing but which is a symbol of integration: Aramaic, the language of Jesus.' Half of his intervention was about the few (perhaps 10-20,000 people) still speaking Aramaic around Homs in Syria. Who knows what has happened to them now with the war? What remains of that linguistic community?

So, to me, we were quite successful at putting the defence of linguistic rights on the table, giving countries like South Africa, Bolivia, Paraguay, Colombia or even Lithuania guidelines for legislation. We also combined this with the realities of the communities who were more under attack, who were, from their point of view, in a position of real despair. This transnationality was achieved because from the very beginning the process was as important as the ultimate goal, which was, yes, to have a *UNESCO Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights*, as a text of international law and then to turn it into a *Convention*. This wasn't only PEN's idea or the idea of the different centres and NGOs that were part of our movement. It was also UNESCO's, and of Frederico Mayor Zaragoza, the General Secretary in particular. In fact, as a consequence of the conversation we were having with UNESCO, the Division of Languages was created, one of the purposes of which was to turn the *Declaration* into something that could become international law.

PMcD: So it did have an immediate impact on UNESCO?

CT: Yes, the *Declaration* was tabled at a meeting of the Executive Committee six months after it was proclaimed in Barcelona, so quite fast. But then we encountered some resistance. Indonesia and Nigeria were among the most vocal at that meeting. And we know there were others manoeuvring behind the scenes. The UNESCO ambassador for Spain, for instance, did not make its resistance public because there was a contradiction between the lack of support, to put it mildly, in UNESCO, and the fact that the *Declaration* had been unanimously accepted in full as a document to be promoted by the Commission for Culture of the Spanish Parliament. That shows that 1996 was another period of history like today!

More importantly, after six months, one year, two years… we realised that the road to UNESCO would be very difficult, if not impossible. But we did not stop. We had the *Declaration* translated in to 30 or more languages, including Japanese (it was used by an Institute of Linguistics in Tokyo), as well as the languages spoken alongside Spanish in Mexico, notably Nahuatl and Zapotec. In addition, as I mentioned earlier, experts who had been part of the process began assessing the linguistic laws in Paraguay first and

Colombia later. So the *Declaration* started to have a real impact on the ground in many different situations.

It also evolved even in UNESCO until about 2004. But even as we realised no more fruitful work could be done at that level we kept up the pressure. So, for instance, in December 2016 the *Donostia Protocol* was approved. This was another a long process—a year at least—involving Kontseilua, Basque PEN, PEN International, Linguapax, UNPO, the European Language Equality Network and other institutions. This is a *Protocol* to ensure language rights are introduced in several countries in Europe. Essentially it offers an analysis of each community and shows what practical steps need to be taken to achieve what the *Declaration* proclaims. And in the upcoming PEN Congress in India (in Pune in summer 2018), the leader of this process will share the Protocol with Indian linguistic rights organisations who will consider how it might be transformed to be useful in India.

PMcD: So that is another way forward, providing different route outside UNESCO, for individual groups, organisations, and language communities. As you were saying earlier, you need a utopia to point you in the right direction! There have been other initiatives too, predating the *Donostia Protocol*, notably PEN's own *Girona Manifesto* (2011), which essentially reduces the *Declaration* to ten pithy statements. Could you say a bit about its background and consequences?

CT: Once the UNESCO route appeared blocked, having such a heavyweight document as the *Declaration* did not help with the daily work of many groups committed to promoting linguistic rights. So PEN's Translation an Linguistic Rights committee decided to create a shorter version which would synthesise and summarize the *Declaration*, turning it into something for campaigning at the local level. This was drafted by Josep Maria Terricabras, a philosopher from Girona and now vice-chair of the Group of the Greens at the European Parliament, and John Ralston Saul, who was President of PEN at that time. This has proved very useful. It addresses linguistic rights in all spheres of life for communities and individuals and has the same global scope as the *Declaration*, but it is easy to understand and it has circulated everywhere.

PMcD: Given everything we have been discussing, I can't resist ending with some comments on the fact that we have of course conducted this interview in English, which, as the 2007 PEN report *To be translated or not to be* notes in a beguiling 'ecolinguistic' metaphor, has become not just the world's *lingua franca* but something of 'an invasive species' globally. Since this has hardly been a spontaneous process—the 'invasion' has, for one thing, often been driven by the state first in its colonial then in its post-colonial guise—how does the future look to you today?

CT: That's the ultimate paradox: the hegemony of English is such that any opposition to English as tsunami drowning other languages has to be formulated in English…! A big question with which to conclude so let me try to address it in three ways: first by saying a bit more about *To be translated or not to be,* then by talking about the struggle with the state, and finally by giving a paean for multilingualism!

1) The good thing about the ecolinguistic approach for PEN is that the 'victims' of 'invasive species' and its 'perpetrators' are all together. We are part of the same family and we share the same values. We of course also share the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* because PEN America, English PEN and the two PEN Centres in Australia supported it and were part of the process. The PEN International report *To be translated or not to be* was produced after American writers decided to campaign for more translations into English from other languages because that's the central issue in the complex market of translation. We know, for instance, that in some countries Germany, say, or France, up to 30% or 40% of books published are translations. For the smaller languages, like Danish, Catalan or Slovenian, the percentage is even higher because they need the foreign bloc. In the US, and many other English-language countries, however, the figure is 3%. In that context, American PEN launched the World Voices Festival in New York in 2005, the big international literature festival in the US devoted to translation. It was led by Salman Rushdie (then President of PEN America) and Esther Allen (then chair of the Translation Committee, which is a very important committee in PEN America) and its director at the time, Michael Roberts. *To be translated or not to be,* directed by Esther Allen, emerged out of this as a joint collaboration with PEN International's Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee, which I was chairing. This has had a wide and positive impact, raising awareness at all levels in the US from publishers to the National Endowment for the Arts. This also led to the creation of the extraordinary PEN/Heim Translation Grants Fund, promoting every year 12 translations from several languages. Is it a paradox that PEN defends equality also in the sense of promoting authors of all linguistic traditions to be translated into English?

2) As far as the struggle with the state is concerned, PEN as an international community with centres all around the world continues to promote of linguistic rights in a very pragmatic manner. In Africa, for instance, particularly in Kenya and Nigeria, where the issue of English as a matter of state policy is so pressing, we are thinking about associated projects that would address the issue of school textbooks in, say, Gikuyu or Hausa, where possible taking this this up to the level of state. In other ways too there are promising developments. We have new, multilingual centres emerging in Mali—in Bambara, Soninke, Tamasheq, Fula and French—and south India. The last is a centre for six south Indian languages: Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Konkani, Kannada and Marathi.

   PMcD: It's interesting that that's happening now because the idea of multilingual centres has in the past been a source of contention in PEN. I am thinking of the split between Madrid and Barcelona in the 1920s, which we discussed at the start, and the many divisions in PEN South Africa over the years.

   CT: As a Catalan, I have of course always felt it is necessary to promote language separately to be able to defend our linguistic rights and because the creation of a

literary community is essential for the promotion of the literature and the language. This feeling of community is essential to my tradition. So I am really surprised about these multilingual centres but I welcome them. When we were with PEN Mali, for instance, we saw how this works: first we heard a Tamasheq poet from the Azawad in the north reading his poetry, and then young urban rappers from Bamako rapping in Bambara and Soninke. At the same time, the publishers were being very positive about local African languages. So there is a diversity of situations and PEN can do a lot to support these new initiatives with the horizon of being inclusive of all linguistic communities.

3) Finally, on the question of multilingualism and English in more general terms. Here I think the issue is actually quite easy from a theoretical point of view, because promoting linguistic rights goes together with promoting translation and multilingualism. If the *lingua franca* is English, everyone needs to learn English plus the 'mother tongue' and possibly more. It is completely feasible to promote the idea of every child being at least trilingual. This is not crazy! It's something that needs to be implemented with optimism and enough resource. Every child can be—at the same time—educated in his or her 'mother tongue' plus English, plus another language of choice. I always tell a story about a friend of mine who does research in Barcelona with the immigrant children. He has a test for when the children arrive in the schools, which includes the question: 'Have you been surprised that we have two languages in this society?' Most of the Latin American children say 'yes, that's really hard'. But the African children say 'Yes, only two!'

   We need to take such realities where children are used to speaking two or more languages in their daily life as an example, while making sure that the linguistic rights of all communities are respected and promoted formally as well. Of course, it's a world of complexity but there is no other future. That's where we are heading. As an international community of writers, PEN is not only in a good position to help us all come to terms with the reality of multilingualism but to promote what is a positive experience for so many communities around the world.

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