Mirene Arsanios

Notes on Mother Tongues: Colonialism, class, and giving what you don’t have

Lebanese writer and editor Mirene Arsanios meditates on the relationships between mother tongues, motherhood, and colonialism. In this pamphlet, she investigates the historical and personal circumstances that led to the loss of her “native” language. Written as a fictional essay, Notes on Mother Tongues explores language as a field shaped by diasporic histories, class relations, and broken familial legacies. It strives to imagine mother tongues and motherhood beyond the labor of reproduction—languages that exist in troubled ecosystems where lack does not preclude repair.

“Arsanios sings knowledge into life out of languagelessness [...] Her praxis here embraces the “speculative,” the improvisatory, and the ghostly, ultimately bringing us closer to language’s truths.

—John Keene

“With all the luxurious love of the poets I take part in the sentences that Mirene Arsanios writes.

—Christopher Rey Pérez