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Afterword: on communities, language, and everyday (academic) citizenship

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Articles included in this special issue bring together fascinating analyses of diverse country contexts in two continents. The contributions address practices of translation in activist and advocacy environments in Japan (Shindo, 2021), everyday citizenship in a multilingual suburb in Finland (Puumala and Maïche, 2021), and migrants' citizenship education in Sweden (Milani et al., 2021). Most articles draw on ethnographic data, combined with textual analysis of public policy or historical data as in the context of the border region between India and Bangladesh (Chowdhory and Poyil, 2021). Combined, the articles draw out a multifaceted conception of (everyday) citizenship as a status and as a habitus to be learnt; of possibilities of becoming a recognized, legitimate member of a community despite disparities between how one perceives oneself and how one is perceived by others; and of acts of citizenship not only as steps towards visibility, but towards audibility. From a different disciplinary angle, Määttä, Suomalainen, and Tuomarla (2021) explore the micropractices of language use in online discussion boards and their significance in negating legitimate presence. In their article, language use in the form of hate speech, emerges as a way to reduce the 'other' to complete inaudibility.

In addition to the contributions that theorize from different empirical contexts, Peled's article (Peled, 2021) discusses the boundary problem in democratic theory and connects this with critical disability studies by drawing attention to sign language(s). This optic adds yet another layer for thinking of audibility and visibility in the context of exploring and re-imagining community and everyday citizenship: sign language(s) bring along different dimensions of accessibility, translation, and corporeal communication that remains an underexplored perspective in otherwise stimulating field of critical citizenship studies.

Reading the papers compiled in this special issue initiated many thinking processes about its key themes. As with the stated aims of this special issue, the purpose of this commentary is not to arrive at a fully fledged conclusion on these matters either, but to bring a modest contribution to the discussion the issue seeks to generate. With this in mind, for this commentary, I will first reflect upon the special issue themes drawing on insights gained during my years of multi-sited ethnographic research on mobilities and solidarity practices around the Mediterranean, and more recently in Chile and the broader South American context. Moreover, I will add insights from multilingual activist

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and advocacy groups I have worked with(in) – not just as a researcher, but rather as a practitioner, albeit having my paid employment in the academia and researching and teaching themes related to this praxis.

My experiences and positionality provide insights into the difficulties one faces when operating across languages, be it different languages altogether or specialized languages utilized in given professional or activist contexts and often overlapping communities. They resonate with insights brought forth especially in the ethnographically tuned articles in this issue by Milani et al., Puumala and Maïche, and Shindo. Ultimately, operating and trying to move somewhere (forward? or perhaps in circles?) in such contexts requires some form of acceptance that communication is – more often than not – bound to fail, as Shindo in her article proposes.

While the question of 'community' occupies a less prominent role in my own academic work when thinking of the broader composition of societies, it has been necessarily present as regards the engagements with particular groups in different societies, whether diverse migrant groups, transnational activist groups, or migrant-to-migrant solidarity activist groups. Multiple languages and questions of understanding and misunderstanding are omnipresent especially when working in contexts one cannot claim as their own. As many of the articles in this issue illustrate (Milani et al.; Puumala and Maïche; Shindo), this is pertinent when working with people on the move or identified as foreigners by others either from the perspective of the state or within casual encounters. In many of these encounters, the use of different languages or dialects that necessitate coming forward with the quest for mutual understanding and the praxis of translation, are central dimensions of being together. This is despite the fact that these practices often form a mundane part of interaction and are not problematized, let alone theorized. Furthermore, everyday citizenship can be discerned both in terms of people's multiple ways of becoming and being present and visible, but especially through their diverse practices of claiming a place in contexts where their presence has not been perceived as legitimate.

In the final part of this commentary, I want to think a little more on research contexts that are not English-speaking or heavily inclined to use English as the first foreign language. Reading the special issue made me think of how its key themes – community, language, and citizenship – might be discussed and theorized based on research done in other academic contexts I am familiar with, especially French- and Spanish-speaking environments. Would something change when changing the language of theorization, not only in data collection and production? Furthermore, what could be done to facilitate multilingual forms of collective reflection and knowledge production? This connects with possibilities of enacting academic citizenship in a global context where the academic language is prominently English. Being based in a relatively well-resourced higher education institution in a non-English-speaking country located in the Global North, where academic working language, nothwithstanding, has been English for a quite some time already, language is discussed often in terms of resources allocated to language revision of academic publications. This is not the case in many research institutes in less well-resourced non-English speaking academic environments and, I argue, this state of affairs merits further reflection on something that I call here *everyday academic citizenship*.

On speaking, being heard, and navigating multilingual environments

Feminist and postcolonial scholars have worked on the questions of access to voice and audibility for a long time. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) famously asked whether the subaltern can speak, addressing in her essay both practices of global knowledge production and (linguistic) agency. Similar issues have been raised by indigenous scholars (e.g. Smith 2012), as indigenous peoples have struggled for legitimate membership in state-defined communities, and against structural, epistemic, and direct forms of violence, across the globe. Indigenous struggles for recognition and, indeed, audibility, are yielding results too: one of the very latest examples is Mapuche feminist Elisa Loncon Antileo being elected as the president of the recently composed constitutive committee in Chile in early July 2021. These struggles are far from being over, and indigenous languages are yet to be recognized as commonly accepted means of expressing and educating oneself in most countries.

Translational practices take place in manifold everyday negotiations when the newly arrived do not speak the dominant language, such as Haitians in Chile as compared with Venezuelans, for example. Evidently, these negotiations rarely concern language only but they are also, or one might argue even foremost, a matter of corporeal interpretation (in this issue see also Milani et al; Puumala and Maïche): they are deeply entwined with the perceived or actual socio-economic status of the person or the group, and in the case of Haitians, race (on the processes of racialization in the migration history in Chile, see Tijoux Merino and Palominos Mandiola 2015). As the first visible Black Caribbean population to arrive in large numbers in Chile in 2010s, their presence was quickly associated with debates on economic insecurity and the subsequent turn towards restrictive migration controls following the lead spearheaded by Australia, European Union, and the United States. The fact that most Haitians arriving to Chile did not speak Spanish, and only those who had completed higher education were likely to master French either, language became an increasing concern and a way of othering the newly arrived, combined with racialization. Migrant solidarity groups were quick to pick up this challenge, however, and they began sharing information in Creole in order to reach non-Spanish speaking audiences amongst the migrant population. While these practices cannot do away with racialization in everyday encounters, they are necessary for the newly arrived to access information and to enable them to better claim a legitimate space in the society.

In Morocco, migrant-to-migrant solidarity work since 2005 is organized along linguistic divide between the French- and English-speaking communities, with the eldest of migrant civil society organisations, Conseil de Migrants Subsahariens au Maroc (CMSM), representing the French-speaking communities and its sister organisation, Collective of Sub-Saharan Migrants, the English-speaking ones (see, e.g. Üstübici 2016). This division reflects the colonial histories across West and Central African countries. Furthermore, it adds to the multilingual composition of Morocco. It is an Arabic-speaking environment where the version of Arabic predominantly in use in the daily interactions is not the Modern Standard variant but the Moroccan dialect, Darija. In addition, the state has fairly recently recognized the indigenous language Amazigh as a formally legitimate means of communication. Due to Morocco's colonial history, the first foreign language has traditionally been French,

although this has begun to change with English gaining ground among younger generations of Moroccans. These linguistic divisions pertain to the concerns of every-day life within multilingual societies, and they transpire to activist efforts where creating shared understandings of claims is a constant concern (also Shindo, this issue). Language is not only something that conveys meanings, but it is embedded in histories and worldviews that translate less easily than simple words. In this issue, one example of this kind of a wider role of language in society is discussed in Peled's article.

According to my experience with different multilingual activist and advocacy environments, translation is not only a matter of being a professional or not. The interpreter needs to understand also, on the one hand, the particular context, including specific legal terminology, and on the other, the continuities and contesta-tions within the given domain of debate. Professional translators/interpreters are not necessarily more aware of the nuances of claims than amateur interpreters who are familiar with the context and concerns at stake. One example of this can be connected with the notion of intersectionality that has moved from US-based activist and academic debates to Europe and elsewhere, first to English-speaking audiences and then, from feminist groups via the convergence of struggles to broader societal debates in other linguistic spheres such as French and Spanish. This mainstreaming of the concept, that remains accidentally or purposefully misunderstood at times, has not always been smooth. Coupled with a difficult relationship to the colonial past and its present-day continuities, the response to intersectionality has been at times violent, as the recent attacks by the state authorities against academics in France testify (see, e.g. Colak and Toguslu 2021). Even in friendly environments, profes-sional interpreters have confused intersectionality with the notion of intersexuality and translated it as such. While both notions are connected with gender and gender studies, they relate to somewhat different sets of rights and ensuing advocacy efforts.

Translation is key to facilitating communication across linguistic boundaries, but multilingual communication can be comprehended as inherently more prone to be failed at the outset. For example, Shindo (in this issue) also talks about possibilities of failed communication and its implication to the idea of community, drawing on the experiences of interpreters working as advocates for migrant workers. Beyond aca-demic and advocacy efforts, however, failed communication can result in literally fatal consequences. Here one may think of the risky journeys across the Mediterranean and the ways in which activist groups have mobilized to minimize the casualties and have fewer people die at sea. One way of trying to address the issue is to mobilize peers to translate not only language-wise but with a nuanced understanding of dialects and, most importantly, the contexts in which decisions to embark on such maritime journeys are undertaken. A successful example of this is Watch The Med -network, established in 2012, that has mobilized a dense network of people in different countries around the Mediterranean and in Europe, to run a 24-hour green line for those in distress at sea to seek help (Heller, Pezzani, and Stierl 2017). In Morocco, for example, the network has convinced people on the move to join and play an integral part in distributing the word and mediating between different entities: people on the boats and activists responding to the phone calls.

Language learning as a factor of inclusion and exclusion

Building on the discussion of failed communication, I will next turn to think about language and its exclusionary and inclusive potentialities. In November 2006 I was invited to speak at a training organized by the Finnish Refugee Council, my former employer, in Vaasa, a medium size city located on the West coast of Finland. The city of Vaasa is bi-lingual, and it is surrounded by a region where many municipalities are mainly Swedish-speaking, as much of the coastal areas of the country more broadly. Participants at that training were mostly social work and health professionals working with asylum seekers and migrants. Over the years, the region has hosted reception centres for asylum-seekers, and there are also municipalities such as Närpes/Närpiö nearby that have successfully integrated migrants in the labour market, especially in the agricultural sector and care work. The participants to the training flagged out the recruitment needs in the region. They pointed out especially the shortage of Swedish-speaking professionals in the health care sector they were facing already at the time. Fifteen years later, during the campaign for the municipal elections in Finland in 2021, I was listening to the speech of Ann-Maj Henriksson, the chairperson of the Swedish People's Party's, the liberal party mainly identified with the Swedish-speaking electorate. In her address, Henriksson still highlighted these needs, this time connected to Jakobstad/Pietarsaari, her hometown that has struggled with finding bilingual health professionals and making them stay.

The above example illustrates concrete issues at stake when the newly arrived begin to integrate, formally as well as informally, in a multilingual country and claim a legitimate presence therein. Those arriving as asylum-seekers are dispersed in reception centres across the country, and often moved from one location to another, perhaps to a locality where the main language differs from the previous one. Hence, they may start their (informal) integration process in one language, in the case of Vaasa and its surrounding region in Swedish, only to be relocated to another centre, for example in Eastern Finland where Swedish is not spoken. Not only does this cause disruption and a loss of social networks but can result in an inability to communicate with the local people. A further layer is added by the fact that many migrants are told to get a training in the care sector and hence, people who have first arrived to the West coast and other Swedish-speaking localities, could be perceived as a prime population to be employed in the sector.

Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish, and a more debated relation with main historical minority languages, Roma and Sami. For people arriving from abroad, there are specialized integration courses that should nowadays be available for all migrants as a part of the integration plan during the first three years of residence, regardless the reason of moving to Finland. This plan is done on a voluntary basis, but for refugees and other migrants entitled to receive welfare benefits attendance to integration programs is obligatory. On paper this sounds fair, and the approach has ameliorated from the first version of the integration law in 1999 that restricted public integration measures, such as language instruction, for welfare recipients only. However, research has identified numerous gaps in the ways in which these measures actually work in terms of belonging to the broader society, access to labour market, access to formal citizenship, and possibilities of participating actively in social and political life in Finland. In addition

to that, the maximum of 3 years of residence tends to exclude persons who have moved to Finland earlier, have worked but possibly become unemployed and find it difficult to access new employment without fluency in Finnish or Swedish.

In Finland, civil servants need to prove that they master, at least on paper, both official languages. This is due to the requirement, enshrined in the Constitution (§17), of providing service in one's own language, whether Finnish or Swedish. In practice, this does not function quite as smoothly as the practical use of Swedish in municipalities in the Central, Eastern and Northern parts of the country is very limited, if extant at all. Due to this linguistic division, many civil servants do not actually need the command of both languages outside the West coast and capital region. Hence, a general requirement to master both is exclusionary and leads to a situation where only people educated fully in the Finnish system tend to meet the requirement – which is again discriminatory if looked through the prism of equal treatment. What often follows from this requirement is the exclusion from civil service of those people who have acquired Finnish citizenship later in their life, not at birth. To obtain Finnish citizenship, it is obligatory to master one official language, that is either Finnish or Swedish, and to pass a notoriously complicated integration test. Hence, the situation is different from Sweden, as discussed by Milani et al. (in this issue). At the same time, as the above example from Vaasa and the West coast suggests, employment opportunities for those migrants who learnt Swedish could indeed be better than those who learnt Finnish. This is due the fact that Swedish is closer to many other languages, which is why it is often easier to learn and master as a foreign language than Finnish. The example illustrates that the question of language intertwines in a complex way with practices of both inclusion and exclusion. It can be used to draw boundaries between people and limit their possibilities in a given society even in cases where linguistic rights are thought to be secured. An even more unfortunate example of the exclusionary potential of language use is discussed in this issue by Määttä, Suomalainen and Tuomarla, where language becomes a tool for not just excluding those perceived as 'others', but completely dehumanizing them.

Language and everyday academic citizenship

Aside formal encounters with exclusionary state policies and everyday encounters in multilingual societies, language is also central to academic community building. In the academia, it bears upon the results of which perspectives can come to the fore in scholarly debates. The predomination of the English language in many of these communities excludes those academics who do not master this language well enough to use it for research communication. The effect is easily multiplied as the same academics may lack the resources and access to professionals who could help in refining their scholarly contributions in this foreign language. This pushes further divisions between those who had the possibility to study and work abroad, and those who could not afford it, often related to the socio-economic background of one's family. This is indeed a question of access to everyday academic citizenship. Here I use the notion of academic citizenship to think about academics' potential roles in the global circuits, not in its common understanding as relating to societal interaction and impact, namely academics' potential contributions to the societies where they live (e.g. Macfarlane 2007; Nørgård and Bengtsen 2016) even if these are not completely separate either.

One aspect that contributes to, and indeed, hinders access to everyday academic citizenship in the sense outlined above is the language of academic production. As an example, from a context most familiar to me, most academic authors located in North African higher education institutions work and publish in French and/or Arabic, even if in the latter only more recently and to a narrower extent. It would not be far-fetched to claim the situation has contributed to a communication gap between different academic audiences. There is an on-going push in the Maghreb countries to incite and transform the language of higher education increasingly into English (e.g. Lefèvre 2015; Jacob 2020), in order to equip faculty and students with better skills to cooperate and compete in the academic environments and labour markets globally. According to Jacob (2020), in that context English can also be perceived as a decolonial language as the language of the colonizer was French: language that does not, in that context, call exclusionary and violent past into being. However, this linguistic transition may create new divisions and exclusionary practices as with changing criteria on evaluating academic excellence elsewhere. One of these divisions concerns different generations of academics, with younger generations more prone to use English alongside French.

All in all, the issue of academic language(s) becomes visible when one moves into other global linguistic spheres. Besides the possibilities of failed communication when operating with languages one cannot claim as one's own, sometimes a person's academic language may be their third or fourth language. Furthermore, the question of academic language arises with citational practices and their change across linguistic boundaries: other theorists than the ones frequently cited in one sphere may appear as meaningful in another linguistic, societal and political context. Both aspects, especially when combined, beg the question on how we, as academics, can understand each other and learn from one another: how should we act towards decolonizing knowledge production, constitute a global (academic) community and, indeed, be able to perform everyday academic citizenship at the fullest?

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

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