

Article

Languaging the Borders of Europe

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Academic Editors: Joanna Swanger and Martin J. Bull

Received: 6 July 2015 / Accepted: 13 November 2015 / Published: 30 November 2015

Abstract: Emerging from a discomfort with the blind spots encountered within and across theorizations of language and space in the field of human geography, in this article, we argue for “making space” for conceptualizations that speak from and through the everyday territories of migrants in Europe today. Inspired by a range of writers thinking postcolonially and multi/trans-lingually, the authors draw on their own embodied migrant experience to argue for re-envisioning Europe’s borders through multiple *languaging* practices. “Languaging”, in this view, takes linguistic practices in a migrant context as an inherently prosthetic activity, whereby any dominant, national host language is inevitably subject to the subterranean rumblings of all the languages a migrant brings with her on her global journeys. Conceived as being saturated with prosthetic “absence(s)”, migrant languaging practices rework cultural geography’s bounded, inward-looking, and security-fixated understanding of the language/territory nexus, the better to open a vital space for re-envisioning language’s everyday territories as sites for translational solidarity and becoming.

Keywords: Europe; borders; languaging; prosthesis; absence; territories of the everyday; becoming

1. Introduction

“[L]angue et territoire n’ont pas à être enracinés dans une géographie spécifique: ils peuvent tout simplement *être là*, à disposition ou produits, pour des raisons dont les causes sont ailleurs.” ([1], p. 90, emphasis added).

“At one stage of my self-translation, it was important to me to go over my childhood experiences in English; now I could pick up the other part of the interrupted story and grow up in Polish. This, I think, is the source of the pleasure: That it is possible now to go back and forth with the knowledge that both languages that have constructed me exist within one structure; and to know that the structure is sturdy enough to allow for pliancy and openness—and, who knows, perhaps for new discoveries yet.” ([2], p. 54).

“I don’t know anymore how my tongue beats...altijd in beweging...ಇವಾಗ ಇಲ್ಲಿ ಆಮೇಲೆ ಎಲ್ಲೋ?...Qué mejor lenguaje que del cuerpo para experiencia las fronteras como vuelo y vuelo como las fronteras?” [3].

A European Blind Spot?

“When faced with an interview to justify my claim and identity as ‘eligible’ for asylum, I preferred to do this in English rather than the two choices given to me by the [Dutch] immigration department: that of either Amharic (my mother tongue) or Dutch. Even if my mother tongue is Amharic, in the context of my asylum interview this would mean that a translator would interpret and translate my story from Amharic to Dutch¹. And given that I did not at that time speak any Dutch, this meant that I would not have a direct understanding and control over my own story in its final narration to the immigration officer. However, I ended up having a very long and boring four hour long interview interpreted by an Amharic-Dutch translator. Not only was this frustrating as a process in itself, but the rejection of my asylum application further exacerbated the same. While ‘knowledge migrants’ to Netherlands are freely given the option to choose their language of migration application between English and Dutch, this was not the case for me. While Ethiopia has a strong history of resisting European colonial powers, the intertwined histories of education and technological exchanges between European empires and Ethiopian rulers is partly the reason for my own education in Ethiopia in English and my fluency in this language. This case is exemplary of the underlying assumptions behind the Immigration Department’s imaginaries of Europe’s territories of reference as ‘cut-off’ with territories of references being part of Europe’s outer/worldly relations still alive in diverse linguistic practices of asylum migrants coming to Europe and in Europe today, remaining a blind spot worthy of underlining” [5].

How are borders being transformed under heightened conditions of globalization today? As evinced by the above-mentioned narrative derived from the lived experience of one of the authors of this essay, we argue that borders, at least in Europe, are currently being reconfigured in significant ways through

¹ The Dutch immigration system, like some other countries in Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, is built around the notion of using “language analysis” to determine an asylum-seeker’s country or region of origin, which can dramatically influence the decision to grant (or deny) asylum to an individual [4].

the *linguaging* practices of migrants, exiles, and refugees inhabiting European space. Building on theorizations regarding language and space by the geographer Claude Raffestin, brought to the critical dialogue with postcolonial writers thinking bi/trans-lingually, we argue that *linguaging* is a process of *fully inhabiting a space that is constantly varying and modulating the acquired dominance of any one of the languages inhabiting (our) migrant-voices*². Modern European nation-states attempted over the centuries to create a unitary territory in which a one-to-one correspondence would be achieved between a language and a national territory. As handmaiden to the nation-building process, the disciplinary field of geography would go far in legitimating this view of the culture/language/territory nexus, whose echoes (as we shall see below), still resonate with us in today. Yet, we state that the historically constituted “imagined language community” of European member states and their associated borders are blind to the lived space of more and more people currently inhabiting European territory. This is so by virtue of the fact that as migrant-exile-refugee movement across global space to and in Europe has accelerated in recent years, European national territories and their unitary language cultures have become increasingly entangled with, and unsettled by, a myriad of “other” languages, memories, and imaginaries in a dynamic and recursive process producing spatio-linguistic territories that can no longer be shoehorned into any national or regional European tradition or culture. Importantly, and again as revealed in our opening story, such migrant linguaging territories are themselves the product of the intertwined histories and overlapping territories binding European colonial métropoles to those very worlds from which migrants set off today for Europe. Within the coordinates of this vaster, spatio-temporal frame, contemporary migrant linguaging practices are contributing *in situ* to a postcolonial reworking of European borders, with profound theoretical as well as political consequences.

To set the conceptual scene for our discussion of migrant-exile-refugee linguaging practices and their effects on contemporary European borders, we review work emerging from a continental geographical tradition, examining the nexus of European territory and language as exemplified in the writing of Swiss geographer Claude Raffestin. In particular, Raffestin’s elaboration of the “territory of the everyday” (*territoire du quotidien*) serves to reveal cultural geography’s ambivalent blind spots regarding the necessary conditions for languages and territories to remain dynamic spaces capable of development and becoming, beyond the imperative for “security”. In the breach of Raffestin’s theoretical contradictions, we place him in dialogue with a postcolonial literature, which has established the problematic relations of majoritarian/minoritarian languages as central to the recuperation of postcolonial sovereignty and dignity since at least the time of decolonization. Working along the grain of Frantz Fanon’s reflections on language in racially charged colonial settings, the notorious “debate” between Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s on the role of English for African writers and intellectuals, Jacques Derrida’s “monolingualism-of-the-Other”, Rey Chow’s recently formulated notion of “language as prosthesis”, as

² Here we use migrant not just to refer to the historically grounded as well as actually existing flows of migrant bodies, imaginaries in/through/across space, nations, and continents, but also as pointing to the experiential, epistemological, and existential condition of “being migrant”. This latter notion awakens thought to the perils and possibilities of “departure” in the broadest sense: leaving one’s “borders of comfort” to dive into yet-to-be-imagined horizons “beyond”; the dense and tense phenomenology of waiting as a norm of everyday life; the furtive habitation of the shadowy, interstitial spaces of nations, states, and borders, never “fully arriving” at one’s destination, one’s gaze never fully “here” or “there”; and converting that “not yet” into acts of intellectual-political creativity, possibility, solidarity, and hope.

well as the work of a range of bilingual writers exploring questions of identity and creativity, we proceed to craft a lens capable of illuminating a range of postcolonial languaging encounters and practices on European territory, drawing on our own experiences as extra-European migrants³ dwelling in Europe. We conclude by reflecting more generally on the transformed context our findings pose for the ongoing transformation of Europe's borders, viewed not from the high-point perspective of statecraft, but from that of the everyday creativity of migrant languaging practices.

2. Dwelling in Claude Raffestin's Language Territories

In charting a course for a renewed "cultural geography" in the mid-1990s, Claude Raffestin is one of the few geographers to have grappled with the precise nature of language and its relation to territory. Critical of geography's disciplinary proclivity for visual representation—vividly expressed through cartographic modeling—Raffestin lamented the extent to which "geographical thought [would become] devoured by its representation...(entailing) to a certain extent the revenge of visualization over conceptualization"⁴ ([1], p. 87)⁵. In asking whether a geography of cultural phenomena can be anything other than a mere visual representation of the locational distribution of languages, religions, arts, and literatures, Raffestin proposes another "territorial" and "relational" optic, one which takes into account that "[G]eography is the expression of the knowledge of [a] practice and knowledge that men have of a material reality, namely the earth as it is made available for action so as to satisfy human needs..."⁶ ([1], p. 89). For the Swiss geographer, all human cultural needs, including those of communication, have their foundation in the conceptual triad "production-exchange-consumption", the three finding their apt expression in both material as well as immaterial forms. The three elements of this triad are themselves "translated" by complex systems of relations, which in turn implicate "interiority, exteriority and alterity" ([1], pp. 89–90).

As complex systems extending through the trinomial relation of production-exchange-consumption, language and territory "do not need to be rooted in a specific geography" ([1], p. 90). They "may quite simply be there (*être la*), available or produced, for reasons whose causes are elsewhere (*dont les causes*

³ Huda Degu and Kolar Aparna are currently active with *Stichting GAST*, a migrant-rights organization located in Nijmegen at the Dutch/German borderland. In addition to working with *Stichting GAST*, Olivier Thomas Kramsch is a member of *Beth Hamifgash*, a civil society-based organization located across the same border in the city of Kleve, Germany (NRW), devoted to resurrecting the memory of Kleve's deported Jewish community, while working on behalf of the city's growing migrant-refugee population there. All three authors are members of the "Asylum University" initiative, a collective of students and faculty at Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen, dedicated to making the university a safe space for migrants, exiles, and refugees.

⁴ In what follows, all cited passages of Raffestin's are translated by the authors from the original French into English. Where applicable we provide both the original and translated versions.

⁵ "[l]'instrument cartographique, d'auxiliaire est devenu principal, reléguant à l'arrière-plan la pensée géographique qui est ainsi dévorée par sa représentation: c'est en quelque sorte la revanche de la visualisation sur la conceptualisation" ([1], p. 87).

⁶ "la géographie est l'explicitation de la connaissance de la pratique et de la connaissance que les hommes ont d'une réalité matérielle à savoir la terre telle qu'elle est offerte à l'action pour satisfaire les besoins humains qui constituent une partie des besoins du vivant" ([1], p. 89).

sont ailleurs)” ([1], p. 90)⁷. Given the inherent indeterminacy of historical circumstances, there is thus no *a priori* causal relation between language and territory: “any territory can receive any language and any language may be used anywhere”⁸ ([1], p. 90). Having said that, for Raffestin the link between language and territory is secured in the ultimate instance by “inhabitants who assure the guaranteed relation to the extent that they are producers of language and territory” ([1], p. 90). At this juncture, the imperative of habitation acquires its full material and symbolic weight in the constitution of both territory and language. “*Habiter*”, in Raffestin’s usage, is defined as “the ensemble of responses given by a human collectivity under the pressure of [its] needs”⁹ ([1], p. 91, drawing on Heidegger [6]). Recognizing the “dynamic” nature of such “needs” in time and space, Raffestin is nevertheless keen to show how the habitation of both territory and language is over-determined by the overarching need for *security*:

“Every representation is inhabited in the sense that it nourishes memory and in so doing a culture which always roots itself in past antecedents...Territory, materialized through its governance, contributes to ensuring the security of the lived being in the present since it assures the stability of places in relation to one another, protection against external menaces, liberation from fear and anxiety, the fixation of limits and the promotion of order, which in turn aims to make norms respected, assure security in recollecting the past hence in memory but also in the projection one may make into the future: one doesn’t inhabit the word territory but one inhabits the memory of territory through the words of a language.”¹⁰ ([1], p. 93, translated by authors).

As suggested in the preceding passage, for Raffestin, “limits” (“*[l]a limite*”) are “consubstantial to linguistic production and territorial production”¹¹ ([1], p. 93). As embodied both in the myth of the foundation of Rome, as well as in the Saussureian bar that cuts off the signifier from the signified, the limit’s primary function is to generate difference, and thus to oppose itself to chaos while satisfying the human need for security. In this view, the very origins of limits have biological as well as social foundations, expressed most saliently by the “natural” need for animals to delimit and mark their territory through signs and symbols. This, for Raffestin, signals the “biosocial” origin of all languages and territories ([1], p. 94).

⁷ For what follows, it is noteworthy that Raffestin signals the degree to which “Indo-European languages used in Africa, in Asia or America are, in the majority of cases, imported and have nothing to do with the original territories in which they are used” ([1], p. 90).

⁸ “N’importe quel territoire peut accueillir n’importe quelle langue et n’importe quelle langue peut être utilisée n’importe où: il n’y a pas de relation fonctionnelle obligée entre une langue et un territoire” ([1], p. 90).

⁹ “[L]’ensemble des réponses données par une collectivité humaine à la pression des besoins” ([1], p. 91).

¹⁰ “Toute représentation est habitée au sens où elle nourrit la mémoire et par là même la culture qui s’enracine toujours dans des antécédents...Le territoire, matérialisé par son aménagement, contribue à assurer la sécurité du vécu dans le présent puisqu’il assure la stabilité des lieux de relations, la protection contre les menaces extérieures, la libération de la peur et de l’anxiété, la fixation de limites et la promotion d’un ordre, que s’efforcent de faire respecter des normes, assurent la sécurité dans le souvenir donc dans la mémoire mais aussi dans la projection que l’on peut en faire dans le futur: on n’habite pas le mot territoire mais on habite la mémoire du territoire à travers les mots d’une langue.” ([1], p. 93).

¹¹ “[C]onsubstantielle de la production linguistique et de la production territoriale” ([1], p. 93).

To put analytical flesh on the bones of his explanatory framework, Raffestin proceeds to sketch a four-part typology of the language/territory nexus.

2.1. Territory of the Everyday

(*Territoire du quotidien*): that territory in which everyday life takes place (*se déroule la vie courante*), one which is “taken for granted” (“*ce qui va de soi*”, with an intellectual nod to Henri Lefebvre). A “pyramid of needs” constructs itself within this territory of the everyday: physiology, security, belonging, love, “*etc.*”¹² ([1], p. 96). Such a territory is characterized more by discontinuity than continuity; it can be characterized as an “archipelago of places immersed in time” (*archipel de lieux qui baignent dans du temps*) that one must “overcome in order to move from one to the other” (*qu’il faut vaincre pour passer de l’un a l’autre*). These places, isolated one from the other, are often terminals (*terminaux*) that render us blind to the interstitial spaces which we traverse but which we do not really inhabit (*nous traversons mais que nous n’habitons pas réellement*), spaces of mobility such as the metro, train, car, *etc.* To this territory of the everyday corresponds a language of the everyday, or a “vernacular language” (*langue vernaculaire*), whether in the form of a dialect or a language carved out of (*découpée a l’intérieur d’une*) a dominant language, such as English, French, German, Spanish, or Italian. Vernacular language, in this context, in addition to communication, serves the function of “communion”, by which is meant the tacit codes which lead the users of vernacular language beyond the mere functionality of communication to “conviviality” (*convivialité*) ([1], p. 97).

2.2. Territory of Exchange

(*Territoire des échanges*): such a territory articulates different levels within a scalar system that implies a region as well as a nation or the world. A territory that is open and fluid (*ouvert et fluide*), in constant flux and perpetual motion (*en remaniement constant, en mouvement perpétuelle*), whose intensity and scale varies in relation to the exchanges under consideration ([1], p. 98).

2.3. Territory of Reference

(*Territoire de référence*): a territory whose nature is utterly singular (*tout a fait singulière*), whose definition is hard to pin down to the extent that it emerges simultaneously from a material [base] as well as from an idea (*a la fois au matériel et a l’idée!* emphasis in the original) ([1], p. 98). A territory of reference “is precisely that of one’s historical background” (*est justement celui des antécédents*), a definition that does not come without “numerous problems of interpretation” due to the fact that a territory of reference may no longer exist materially but may exist in the reconstituted collective memory (*mémoire collective reconstituée*), as demonstrated by the history of African-Americans in America ([1], p. 98, citing Steiner, 1986). This territory has “more of a relation with culture and a way of thinking about space and time than with a territory embedded in historic temporality (*la durée historique*) and

¹² “Ce territoire qui va de soi est celui dans lequel se construit la pyramide des besoins: besoins physiologiques, de sécurité, d’appartenance, d’amour, *etc.*” ([1], p. 96).

certainly the density of historicity”¹³ ([1], p. 99). Raffestin locates the most ancient territories of reference for Western society (*société occidentale*) in Greece and Rome. In the modern period, he points out that Italy and Greece have served as a territory of reference for many Europeans from the 16th–20th centuries, as has France since the 18th century for central and eastern Europe, including Russia, and, for a large part of the world (*une grande partie du monde*), America. These territories of reference cannot be inhabited in the material sense, but may be so in an “ideal sense” (*au sens idéal*) in, along with, and through language, or languages (*la langue ou mieux les langues*). A key figure here for Raffestin is Heidegger, who “inhabited” ancient Greece throughout his life via the Greek language, and who is perceived to have suffered as a result of the time-lag and disjuncture between the territory of reference of ancient Greece and the “real” territory of actually-existing Greece ([1], p. 99).

2.4. Sacred Territory

(*Territoire sacré*): Sacred territories and sacred languages are intimately bound up in the foundational religious texts—the Koran, the Old and New Testaments—each of which attempts to found a sacred community (*communion*) on the basis of an “absolute” conjoining of language and space. Throughout history, nation-states around the world are observed to have “sacralized” territory, language, and many borders (*beaucoup de frontières*), the latter often being controlled and defended as were the sacred spaces of temples and cities in the past ([1], p. 101). Similarly, in France, since the French Revolution, language has been sacralized to the degree that, as the primary vehicle for the dissemination of the declaration of the “rights of man”, the French had to extirpate all rival language groups (*les patois*) so as to erect itself as sole language of *L’Hexagone*.

By way of this conceptual typology of territorial/linguistic practices, Raffestin proposes the disciplinary grounding for a renewed cultural geography, one which has the virtue of opening continental European geography to the “language question” as a dynamic process composed of both material as well as immaterial domains, in dialogue with the past and open to future-oriented action. In our view, Raffestin’s conceptualization of the language-territory nexus, while opening a vital beachhead for geography into the linguistic realm as well as for linguists into the geographic realm, nevertheless remains informed by an overarching and primordial “need” for security that traps it in an essentialist and organicist understanding of the communitarian underpinnings of both language and territory. Here, territories and (their) respective languages are best conceived as isolated, self-enclosed (dare we say, cantonal?¹⁴) units, steeped in a regionalist *longue-durée* that elides Europe’s long-standing practice of linguistic standardization as the foundation of nations and nationalisms, alongside imposing its metropolitan languages across vast swathes of the planet through overseas imperial rule. Raffestin’s theoretical landscape is therefore unable to acknowledge the intertwined linguistic histories and overlapping territories of tongues at work in the constitution of European linguistic space, precisely through the blurring of linguistic boundaries and intermeshed languaging practices [7–11].

¹³ “[P]lus en relation avec la culture et une manière de penser l’espace et le temps qu’avec un territoire engagé dans la durée historique et surtout l’épaisseur de l’historicité” ([1], p. 99).

¹⁴ Professor Raffestin is speaking from a Switzerland that follows an administrative system of “cantons” that also serve as political territories and are symbolic of regional identities.

In this respect, Raffestin's language/territory conceptual framework is historically as well as geographically distorted, if not disingenuous. Ironically, it also replicates the visual-cartographic blind spot he so strenuously condemns, arbitrarily cutting off Europe from the myriad of territorial as well as linguistic relations that have historically connected it to the rest of the world. An unfortunate consequence of this move, we believe, is that such a view holds fast to a notion of language and territory that remains fearful, defensive, and closed in on itself, unable to adapt to the worldly conditions of heightened mobility, migration, and extraterritorial flow affecting more and more people currently inhabiting European space. For us, an urgent question remains: how can linguistic territories inter-articulate with one another to produce language spaces that avoid closing in on each other (*renfermement sur lui*) and thereby bordering themselves from historical change, alterity, and difference? Other than reminding us that all "human culture" is composed of a triangle whose summits are delimited by the mediating elements "work, language and territory" (*le travail, la langue et le territoire*), the Swiss geographer closes his essay with precious few signposts.

Perhaps we can step in the breach of Raffestin's self-professed "lacunae" and "paradoxes" in order to re-orient his by now two decade-old cultural geographic research agenda in "another" direction, this time not from the safe, cantonal heartlands of the European continent¹⁵ but from its extraterritorial, mobile, often precarious and worldly margins [12,13]. We thus begin the task of what we might productively call a migrant refashioning of Raffestin's "Europeanist" territory/language framework. This we attempt through a process of conceptual *détournement*, drawing on the Swiss geographer's own doubts and "lacunae" so as to think in solidarity with them while pushing them in directions he may not have foreseen at the time of his writing. In setting the stage for such a detour, we propose to define the essence of postcolonial migrant languaging by re-articulating two of Raffestin's core ideas: (1) re-inhabiting language's "absence(s)" as postcolonial prosthetics and (2) re-envisioning the discontinuous, interstitial territories of the everyday as sites for border-crossing trans-lingual migrant solidarity.

3. Postcolonial Languaging

Reading and speaking from a different Europe more than two decades on since Raffestin crystallized his language territories, we urge for a thorough re-reading of the same via the multi-dimensional lens provided by the rich body of postcolonial writings on the language question by writers across different (border) positionalities (elaborated below). As is often the case through acts of careful reading, the seeds of auto-critique lie just under the topsoil of any narrative. A remarkable moment appears in Raffestin's thinking when he recognizes the limits of his own "limit" conceptualization in articulating the relation between language, territory, and borders. This moment-*limite* emerges at first "through a glass darkly", by attributing negative qualities to languages that do not adhere to the strict language-territory-limit model he has previously and so authoritatively established. Reading as we do "from the outside" of European geographical knowledge production—one that is located as such in and through migrant imaginaries of and in Europe—we may call this move Raffestin's "disciplinary unconscious", one which acknowledges gaps, holes, and fissures in his own (and his field's) explanatory edifice. Raffestin begins

¹⁵ Professor Raffestin teaches at the Université de Geneve, Switzerland.

his self-reflexive critique by noting a “flawed paradigm” (*paradigme lacunaire*) working at the interstices of language and territory. Although there is a “narrow relation” between linguistic production and the production of territory, the relation is not exhaustive: “it is precisely in the lacunae and gaps (between language and territory) that cultural differences are made visible” ([1], p. 95)¹⁶. In his view, cultures can best be identified (*repérer*) through the “differentiation of their lacunae” (“différenciation de leurs lacunes”) ([1], p. 95).

Though Raffestin attributes only deficient qualities of language use to describe such lacunae—“there are languages that produce nothing, a little or a lot on the basis of this or that physical or social element”¹⁷ ([1], p. 95)—we can recuperate this abject register (“abject” because lacunae is understood in a linear way of some languages being “more” or “less” in their capacities for socio-cultural production) in such a way as to formulate a first proposition of languaging: in a context of postcolonial movement, language *is by definition fissured with absence*. This is so because, as migrants, we are constantly caught in spatio-temporalities that deterritorialize a dominant language to which we find ourselves exposed. In our experience, such a hegemonic language could be the legal language of immigration in a host country that we happen to find ourselves in and perceive as “alien”. Or it could be a dominant mother tongue or official host language attached to one’s country or region of origin, positioned in an often fraught relation to the power geometries of “Other” national, European languages in a diversity of settings, but also, most importantly in relation to the dominant language(s) and tongue(s) we carry with us from our migrant trajectories. The negotiation, apprehension, and appropriation of a dominant, national host language, is a key part of our migrant-languaging journey(s). However, most importantly for us, rather than involving the eradication of any original mother tongue or any reclamation of a singular pure “original” tongue, languaging means fully inhabiting a space that is full of creative potential precisely because of navigating against the acquired dominance of any one of the languages inhabiting our migrant-voices. Viewed from our migrant-languaging perspective, Raffestin’s “lacunae”, rather than signaling a lack, gesture to a range of latent and hidden possibilities inhabiting postcolonial languaging. Indeed, they gesture to alternative geographies and geographical imaginations that rumble under the surface of any host or dominant language, producing productively de/re-territorializing effects, if not the very reinvention of territories.

Secondly, and starting from the body, space comes to be racialized fundamentally by “an encounter with language” [14] (elaborated below). Reflecting on such inter-subjective emotionalities we argue that rather than being a fixed “thing” to be acquired and mastered, postcolonial languaging—drawing on an ethos of survival (in the sense of Bourdieu’s “*habiter*” [15]), leads to the creative reinvention of everyday, lived space, emerging in turn from an actively adapting *habitus* that can only be grasped as futuristic becoming. This migrant creativity in the face of racialized domination can be seen as a response to “the lingering work of language in the form of skin tones and sound effects”; in the very act of “naming” the migrant, the foreigner, language operates a cut between “community” and “arrest, seizure and expulsion” ([16], pp. 2–3, 14). *Language thereby produces a border*, whereby racialized and

¹⁶ “C’est justement dans les lacunes et les manques que les différences de culture se donnent à voir” ([1], p. 95).

¹⁷ “Il est des langues qui produisent rien, peu ou beaucoup à propos de tel ou tel élément physique ou social” ([1], p. 95).

often nationalized relations of Us/Them are established, defined by deep asymmetries of power. The inherent violence of that linguistic bifurcation is well-captured by Chow:

“Fanon’s ‘dirty nigger’ and ‘negro’...place this force/violence at center stage, revealing ‘amputation’ to be the jagged edge in the racialized scene of interpellative contact. In Fanon’s reading, racialization demands to be grasped first and foremost as an experience of language, not least because lingual relations are themselves caught up in the aggressive procedures of setting apart that racialized naming and interpellation ineluctably intensify.” ([16], pp. 6–7).

The dangers stemming from the jagged border edges of racialized and nationalized language is ultimately recognized by Raffestin himself. Having earlier posed language and territory as a quasi-biosocial “limit”, he acknowledges the limits of his own “limit (or, b/order-thinking)”, to the degree that, pushed to its logical conclusion, the absolute conflation of language and territory would produce its own form of terror. He refers explicitly to this risk when mentioning a “curious paradox” of sacred territory:

“[T]he sacred, which proposes security, tends to become a factor of insecurity to the extent that it is pushed towards fundamentalism, invading the entirety of the social field and eliminating all that does not conform to it. It creates insecurity by a sort of closing in on itself, breaking off all bonds with an alterity which opposes it with difference: it wishes to be the absolute limit, in other words negating the existence of all that is not it. At this point it is the negation of communication and communion with the outside”¹⁸ ([1], p. 100).

How to escape the “prison-house” of this language-territory *limite*? With Rey Chow, we propose one form of “escape” is to see “the reality of languaging as a type of prostheticisation” ([16], p. 14). Here, we invoke the multiple languages rumbling under the power geometries of any colonially-imposed, hegemonic language, as well as the knowledge of the “impermanent, detachable, minoritarian and (ex)changeable” nature of any language ([16], p. 15). For Chow,

“In this extreme conceptual shift lies a chance of overturning the burden of negativity that tends to attach itself tenaciously to languaging as a postcolonial experience. The libidinal or figural logic that accompanies racialized language relations can then, perhaps, proceed beyond the familiar, subjective feelings of loss, insult, injury, and erasure that imbue so much of postcolonial thinking and writing. Rather than being signs of inferiority, for instance, aphasia and double disfigurement can be conceptualized anew as forms of (unveiling), as what exposes the untenability of ‘proper’ (and proprietary) speech as such.” ([16], p. 15).

As with any other prosthetic body part, recognition of the inherently prosthetic nature of tongues in postcolonial settings releases us at once from the great and still-unresolved drama of postcolonial languaging, encapsulated in the classic debate between Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe and, a generation

¹⁸ “[L]e sacré qui postule la sécurité tend à devenir un facteur d’insécurité lorsqu’il est poussé jusqu’à l’intégrisme en envahissant tout le champ social et en éliminant tout ce qui ne se rapporte pas à lui. Il crée l’insécurité par une sorte de renfermement sur lui en rompant tous les liens avec l’altérité qui lui oppose une différence: il veut être la limite absolue, autrement dit nier l’existence de ce qui n’est pas lui. A ce point, il est négation de la communication et de la communion avec l’extérieur” ([1], p. 100).

later, writer/activist Ngugi Th'iongo. In his well-known effort to define the relation of newly independent African writers and the English language, Achebe claimed:

“My answer to the question ‘Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?’ is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask: ‘Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker?’ I should say, I hope not.” ([17], pp. 91–103).

Parrying his mentor, and acutely aware of the alienating influence of the English language in the education of the African child, Thiongo responded a decade later by advocating the use of indigenous African languages, such as his local Gikuyu, rather than English:

“The language of an African child’s formal education was foreign. The language of the books he read was foreign. The language of his conceptualization was foreign. Thought, in him, took the visible form of a foreign language...The child was now being exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself. He was being made to stand outside himself to look at himself.” ([18], pp. 4–32).

For all its virtues, in our view the Achebe/Thiong’o *affaire* succeeded in presenting the postcolonial world with a false choice: *either* global, cosmopolitan English capable of reaching out to a world audience, *or* the consolations of one’s indigenous, local native language. In a curious parallel with Raffestin’s linguistic territories, the “recovery of self” after colonial rule would enforce a one-language-one-territory matrix, and would thus militate against the hybrid use of multilingual tongues on any given territory. Indeed it would largely be assumed that being bi- or trilingual constituted a tragic handicap, rendering the alienated speaker a “stranger to oneself”, a melancholy creature ultimately condemned to loss and silence. Such postcolonial diffidence towards multilingual subjectivity would be startlingly reinforced a decade later in Jacques Derrida’s seminal 1998 book-length essay, *Monolingualism of the other; or, the prosthesis of origin*. Reflecting on his fraught relationship to the French language, and contrary to what one might expect from someone who has grown up in a French colony (Algeria), Derrida does not claim adherence to a non-French mother tongue. Rather, he ceaselessly invokes speaking only one language:

“I am monolingual. My monolingualism dwells, and I call it my dwelling; it feels like one to me, and I remain in it and inhabit it. It inhabits me. The monolingualism in which I draw my very breath is, for me, my element. Not a natural element, not the transparency of the ether, but an absolute habitat. It is impassable, *indisputable*: I cannot challenge it except by testifying to its omnipresence in me. It would always have preceded me. It is me.” ([19], p. 30).

However, in what he himself terms a “performative contradiction” ([19], pp. 2–3), Derrida defines the conditions for inhabiting French (while being fully inhabited by it) in a way that foregrounds his utter lack of possession of the language:

“I only have one language: it is not mine...[I]t will never be mine, this language, the only one I am thus destined to speak, as long as speech is possible for me in life and in death; you see, never will this language be mine. And, truth to tell, it never was.” ([19], pp. 1–2).

While we appreciate Derrida’s lyrical attempt to resolve the postcolonial “language question” posed by Achebe and Thiong’o, and are sympathetic to his formulation of language-as-dwelling based on an

existential absence (of a mother tongue) attached to the same, we nevertheless remain slightly unsatisfied with his lack of possession. Such a stance, we believe, is ultimately disingenuous in that it avoids engaging with the racialized and nationalized scene of languaging as a tense and expectant field of power between majoritarian and minoritarian languages, and forecloses exploring the political possibilities, pains, and joys attached to inhabiting a multi-lingual subject position [2,20]. Here we would like to draw on a rich tradition of reflection by bi- and trilingual authors, for whom writing and speaking in multiple tongues cannot be shoehorned into a binary either/or, majoritarian/minoritarian language stance. For such authors, languaging across borders—caught as they often are between multiple “home” and “destination” countries—inevitably requires a complex, palimpsest-like form of habitation (“*habiter*”) emerging from the ceaseless shuttling back and forth between “absent” and “present” languages (depending upon the “accidental” geographies in which they have room to play). Languages *haunt one another across nation-state borders*, and in the process often produce original, de- and re-territorializing effects in multilingual migrant subjectivities.

Thus, reflecting on her position as “a woman, and French language novelist”, Algerian writer Assia Djébar deploys a Derridean register when she claims “my literary writing, in its original text, can only be in French” ([21], pp. 19–20). Yet, as an “Arabo-Berber woman...writing in French”, Djébar was early on aware of the French language as a veil: “a veil over my individual self, a veil over my woman’s body; I could almost say a veil over my own voice” ([21], p. 21). This veiling of the voice through the French language is double-sided; while it provides Djébar the capacity for “suggestion and ambiguity”, allowing her to “hide...somewhat”, it also produces a “voluntary muteness...[a] sudden aphasia”. By repossessing French “like a landlady”, not an “occupant with hereditary rights”, Djébar is able to make of the French language “a welcoming home, maybe even a permanent place where each day the ephemeral nature of dwelling is sensed” ([21], p. 21). Unlike Derrida’s ‘possessionless’ use of French, Djébar’s “repossession” produces:

“A woman’s space that willingly inscribes at the same time her inside and her outside, her intimacy and her unveiling, as much her anchor as its opposite, her navigation. Writing that could historically signify my extraterritoriality yet is becoming, gradually, my only true territory.” ([21], p. 22).

Such a re-territorializing of French, for Djébar, allows her to “cross the threshold [of the French language] freely, no longer submitting to a colonized situation” ([21], p. 21): “I, as author, *have found my space in this writing*” ([21], p. 22, emphasis added). From an alternatively re-rooted relation to the French language, speaking across (Anglophone) Canada and France, author Nancy Huston writes:

“A person who decides, voluntarily, as an adult, unconstrained by outside circumstances, to leave her native land and adopt a hitherto unfamiliar language and culture must face the fact that for the rest of her life she will be involved in *theatre, imitation, make-believe*.” ([22], p. 55, italics in original).

Huston’s positionality as opposed to Derrida acknowledges the existential condition of “being migrant”, in which the choice of inhabiting a monolingual space is often not an option. In Huston’s “theatre of exile”, imitation of the host language “depends on how good an actor you are”; some foreigners are able to ‘pass’—“a bit like the quadroons or octoroons...invented for those American

blacks who took bitter pride in ‘passing’ for white” ([22], p. 56). In France, “passers” are quickly sniffed out, and put in their place. However, for Huston, whereas for many there may be found a general prejudice against those who speak with an accent (Derrida himself confesses to this weakness ([19], p. 23)), “my own (equally irrational) prejudice is in their favor” ([22], p. 59). Foreign accents, for this Québécois, produce “interest and empathy”. “Ah”, she says to herself, “That person is split in two. She’s got a *story*” ([22], p. 59). Huston elaborates:

“Because if you know two languages, you also know two cultures—and the unsettling effects of going back and forth between them, and the relativization of each by the other. For this reason, it often seems to me that people with accents are more “civilized” (by which I mean subtler and less arrogant) than monolingual impatriates...In a sense, *foreignness is a metaphor for the respect every individual owes every other individual.*” ([22], p. 59).

For Huston, the inherently prosthetic nature of all languages is revealed in the fact that by acquiring a second tongue, the “naturalness” of the first language is destroyed; “from then on, nothing can be self-evident in any tongue; nothing belongs to you wholly and irrefutably; nothing will ever “go without saying” again” ([22], p. 62). Confronted by others to explain the reason why she so often code-switches between languages, even changing registers within any given language—from high to low French, Parisian to Québécois, Boston English to British English—Huston can only reply: “Probably because I *like* doing it...and because it’s easier for me, as a foreigner, than for them, as native speakers, to transgress literary norms and expectations.” ([22], p. 64). As a voluntary exile, Huston therefore derives joy and pleasure from shuttling between her many tongues, reveling in this “achievement”, one which militates against the traditionally modern, melancholy view of the exiled migrant [8].

At the same time, this joy of embracing the other is always contextual and hierarchically entangled with the question of who is involved in such confrontations and how such processes unfold in a situational space. The inter-subjective emotionalities of the racialization of space and bodies, for instance, emerge first and foremost in and through language. “Few people speak a language about race that is not their own. If more of us could actually speak from another point of view, like speaking another language, we could accelerate the flow of ideas.” (Deveare Smith, cited in [23]).

In *Black Skin, White Masks* [14]), there is a dizzying passage when Frantz Fanon describes the “moment his inferiority comes into being through the other” ([14], p. 291):

“Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.

“Look, a Negro!” It was true. It amused me.

“Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.

“Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.” ([14], p. 291).

On the occasion where Fanon is forced to “meet the white man’s eyes”, he feels an “unfamiliar weight” burdening him, whereby the “real world challenged [his] claims on reality” ([14], p. 291). The slowly accreted “composition of *myself* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world”, that phenomenological “structuring of the self and of the world-definitive”, is shattered. Through the

violence of the White man's gaze, Fanon's body is returned to him "sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day" ([14], p. 291). He is dispossessed, made homeless: "*Where shall I find shelter from now on?*" ([14], p. 292, emphasis added). It is precisely in these everyday territories—where the tensions, joys, and betrayals of cross-border languaging practices come to be embodied and experienced, where the "discontinuous" within language (the product of mobile, interstitial spaces) may now be *seen* for the first time, rather than passed over or ignored; not as uninhabited *Zwischenstationen* but as fully inhabited territories constitutive of those languages alive to dynamic change, power struggles, and historicity.

Prostheticisation of languaging then opens up political possibilities for powerful spaces of enunciation, confrontation, and articulation of the intertwined histories and overlapping territories of race, empire, and nation-states that play out in embodied inter-human inter-actions between people. Rather than being seen as pure absence or linear lacunae, this process allows for re-possession of stories of dispossession, re-territorialization of de-territorialized identities, re-routing "language origins and destinations", and deconstructing the inter-subjective emotionalities of racialized encounters, all the while aware of the impossibilities of "containing" language within binary imaginaries of majoritarian *versus* minoritarian, indigenous *versus* colonial, state *versus* regional/local, self *versus* other. Our postcolonial excursion repositions Raffestin's thinking within such a renewed space.

4. Emotionalities of Postcolonial Migrant Body-World Languaging¹⁹

Europe's borders are not where they used to be. Through the postcolonial languaging practices of extra-European migrants, they are being rerouted along lines of flight that can no longer be "fixed" to territories defined by the *longue durée* of historically sedimented communities whose reason for being is framed principally by the exclusionary need for security. "[O]ne doesn't inhabit the word territory", Claude Raffestin writes, "but one inhabits the memory of territory through the words of a language" ([1], p. 93). In what follows, we trace "a recent emotional encounter of languaging"²⁰ from our own life-worlds, attempting to further build on the postcolonial languaging lens that we propose to rethink Europe's borders. Juxtaposing three such encounters based on various emotionalities of joy, anger, (dis)possession of privilege, intimacy, and desires, we as migrants in and of European space ground the preceding theoretical discussion in autobiographical vignettes that explore our own lived confrontations and embodied emotionalities with language and space in the Netherlands.

¹⁹ Each of the authors speaks from geographical, linguistic, and professional trajectories that might serve to contextualize our positionalities. These are elaborated in the footnotes of each vignette that follows.

²⁰ The empirical vignettes in the paper were generated within the framework of the Asylum University initiative (see footnote 3) where the authors regularly met to share stories with each other around "languaging encounters" that were then chosen based on their relevance to the theoretical debates and discussions that we have been having within the framework of this initiative. Here an auto-ethnographic approach was applied within a collective process that allowed for "making space" for sharing and exchange as central to such an approach.

4.1. Vignette 1: The Joys of “Passing”²¹

“Near-fluent multilingualism has also provided me a great joy in life: the ability to ‘go native’ and melt into a variety of languages, cultures, atmospheres. To ‘pass’: as a ‘German’ child on the streets of Krefeld, Nord Rhein Westphalia; as a young ‘Frenchman’ in Paris or Tangier or Tijuana; as a ‘Chilean’ refugee in East Los Angeles; as a ‘Californian’ rustling through Barcelona archives; as an ‘American’ researcher in Nijmegen (the Netherlands); as a middle-aged ‘German’ man on the cobblestone streets of Kleve (Germany). Someone who, despite not understanding much of what goes on at Dutch-language staff meetings, is nevertheless so familiar with extraneous linguistic encounters that *even this, strangely, feels like home*. This *pass-partout* has given me a chameleon-like ability to ‘fit in’, to feel at home everywhere, and nowhere. There is an *aesthetics* to this feeling which is hard to describe, but is instantly recognizable whenever I encounter it in the random collision with otherness at an international airport lounge; on a train crossing a major European border, at that precise moment when a child’s high-pitched voice in French tips me off that we have crossed from Germany into France; at a dinner table where several languages are spoken fluidly, effortlessly, interchangeably. Some might call this the status of a privileged cosmopolitan, to be met with suspicion, ethical disdain and contempt (certainly among *bien-pensant* Marxist colleagues). *I prefer to call this a skill*, one that can be acquired, trained, and honed, enabling the user to see the world through multiple perspectives, angles, vistas, lenses, each relativizing the other so that none remains dominant, as in a fugue²². I go further: as with Huston, *I call this doubling and trebling of the human voice a power, as well as possible resource for a certain kind of empathy and happiness*. If English is my Djebarian ‘veil’, the language in which I express my ‘hidden’ self most clearly and persuasively, it nevertheless refracts the German and French languages of my childhood, raised as I was in the United States in a Franco-German household keen to hold fast to European ‘roots’. If English is indeed my ‘native language’, my long, circuitous sentences and literary style reverberate French and German, often producing puzzlement and irritation among my Anglo-Saxon colleagues. Compared to the forced migrant and refugee, my languaging position is undoubtedly one of privilege. This makes my encounters with languaging’s limits all the more startling and disturbing.”

²¹ Olivier Thomas Kramsch was born in Southern Germany but quickly left the Old World for the New (Boston), where he grew up in a tri—French, German, English—lingual family. He managed to escape the burden of this inheritance by moving into Spanish, which allowed him to take on different lives in Latin America (Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, S. California), then back across the colonial divide to Europe (Spain) via the same language, landing at a university in the Netherlands, from where he continues to re-think Europe’s borders from the perspective of their multiply constituted outsides (*i.e.*, Amazonia, North Africa). The great grandson of French colonial military statesmen and administrators (Indochina, Morocco), he currently takes responsibility for the family biography by doing everything in his power to post-colonize European attitudes/vistas/relations across both internal as well as external EU borders, in the service of a more “worldly”, less fearful, and hopeful form of border studies and activism.

²² My debts to Edward W. Said [8] for this idea.

4.2. ...and Encounters with a Dutch “Limite”

“The professor has requested a special session, alone in my office, along with another senior male colleague, accompanied by a female typographer. Shortly before this, I had taken part in a larger, more formalized group meeting with the accreditation committee, in which, among other things, we *docenten* had been asked to describe the courses we teach. I had done so, in English, although the entire meeting was conducted exclusively in Dutch (and despite one member of the committee being a German migrant capable of speaking also English and German). I remember trying to appear enthusiastic about the course I taught, and thought no more of it afterwards. Sitting across the desk in my small, cramped office, the professor began by voicing concern about two bachelor theses I had supervised, one of which dealt with the Netherlands’ (post)colonial relations with the Dutch-Indies and present-day Indonesia. The student had gotten his historical facts wrong, fumed the professor. Furthermore, his use of “theory” was perceived as confusing and nonsensical. As this student’s primary thesis supervisor, I was being “called on the mat” to explain the poor performance of my student, and indirectly my poor supervision. In framing his critique, the professor noted a curious behavioral kinship between me and the aforementioned student, whom the professor had experienced on a previous, student-led panel the previous day. According to The Professor, the student had apparently spoken willy-nilly, without much careful reflection or consideration. Similarly, in describing my course, I was seen to have spoken energetically, using my arms and hands—at this point the professor began to wave his arms and hands in the air in a wild, clownish way as if to mimic my gestures—thus suggesting, by my reading, that I am similarly ungrounded and prone to irrational or hysterical flights of fancy as my student.

I take the theatrics of this in, absorbing it slowly, but *not believing what I am hearing*. My reality is still so far removed from the professor’s that I can still view him as through an “inverted telescope”, from a safe, protective distance. The professor then asks me to account for myself, turning deadly serious. I try my best to explain the weak result, drawing on all my strength to retain my composure. The stenographer types silently, looking down into her laptop. The other male colleague observes me closely. Upon leaving, the latter turns to a thick volume on my desk featuring Alexander von Humboldt’s travels in the Americas, and departs saying to the professor: “He must have some quality, otherwise he wouldn’t have that book there”. I take the paternalist condescension like a blow to the gut, and remain silent. As with Fanon, through the professor’s gaze I am reduced from my “body-world” reality as competent North American scholar with an international reputation to a blubbing, low-rank *medewerker (co-worker)*, unable to adhere to nationally socialized, Dutch academic behavioral *normen en waarden (norms and values)*, defined by the ability to speak Dutch in low, measured tones, and under no condition rely on arms and hands for supportive body language. Under the burden of this lens my “reality” is equally shattered, and I am left to ponder the distance between *myself* and that of my Dutch colleagues, for whom these behavioral norms are often simply taken-for-granted. “Where”, indeed, “shall I find shelter from now on?” I think: ‘*I have lost my multi-lingual privilege*’.

4.3. *Vignette 2: Neighborly Desires*²³

“Elia is eight years old and she sometimes visits my house after her school. She is more than a neighbor to me. She is my favorite little friend. She is the only person I can have a broken conversation [with] in Dutch, given my limited Dutch vocabulary and grammar. As friends, we however do not speak ‘perfect Dutch’ but it is still the only common language linking us. Elia’s family migrated from Somalia, but being herself born in the Netherlands, she speaks both languages with equal ease. On the other hand, my native language is Amharic, which I use with my husband in the house and elsewhere in public spaces. I hardly know the Dutch language due to my linguistic frustrations around my immigration procedures. However, with Elia I always try to keep the conversations going with a few Dutch words and lots of common sense, trying to read her facial expressions and her body language, much in the same way as she does with me. Most of the time, we end up not understanding each other in a full sense in terms of the contents of such exchanges. However, this is not a problem for us, but instead, provides us with the small pleasures of laughter and confusions that break the mono-rhythms of the everyday. Elia, being her age, likes to shoot questions at me in Dutch despite being aware of my poor Dutch vocabulary. Sometimes my husband is a solution to us as he speaks Somalian, Dutch, and Amharic, and attempts at bridging our communications. However, these multi-lingual practices are what produce our neighborhood. Inhabiting these languaging practices of multiple tongues struggling against the dominance of a single tongue/monolingualism, nevertheless has a re-territorializing effect, one in which our neighborhood comes to be produced in these slippages of tongues and meanings. And yet, alongside these multi-languaging practices, inhabit also monolingual desires in relation to temporalities of such practices.

“Having learnt at least five languages due to his movements and living in the Netherlands for more than 10 years, my husband’s desire for dwelling in Amharic had begun to grow just before meeting me. Despite being acquainted with few friends from the Amharic speaking communities in the Netherlands, for political reasons, and for the purpose of integration into the Dutch Society, he always chose to speak Dutch. However, his longing for Amharic never disappeared even if he speaks Dutch everyday. Our very first meeting with each other can itself be attributed to such desires, given that we were drawn to each other in public space as familiar strangers speaking the same language. This chance language encounter in space has led to what has become our family today. Inhabiting our relationship in Amharic makes me and my husband feel ‘at home’. This monolingual desire with Amharic is however not in a Derridean sense of being unable to speak more than one language, but one that comfortably co-habits multi-languaging practices producing the larger neighborhood where we live.”

²³ Huda Degu is a refugee-activist in the Netherlands. She was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and grew up in a bilingual environment of English and Amharic. She has been active as a gender activist at her University in Alemaya, and worked for various NGOs in Ethiopia around advocacy and awareness-building for citizen voting rights, data collection for micro-credit organizations, and conducting qualitative fieldwork interviews with prostitutes, among others. She continues her resistance as a refugee in the Netherlands in various ways. She has led “women’s activities” in an asylum center in the Netherlands while she lived there, and continues to carry with her a resistant and critical-observant view on bureaucratic institutions and personalities who function “behind curtains” as part of her encounters as a refugee.

4.4. Vignette 3: Unveiling Anger²⁴

Recently I received an invitation to speak at a public debate organized at our University on the “hot” topic of Europe’s so-called asylum crisis and the bottom-up citizen initiatives in relation to the same. Seen as an academic active at local migrant support organizations, I was asked at the last minute to join the conversation that would be led by the session’s main guest speaker—a professor of migration law also active in the Green-Left political party in the Netherlands. While answering the initial clarifications of the organizer regarding my ideas on the topic, I declared my preference to have the debate in English or at least in a mixture of Dutch and English, sharing with him my lack of confidence to conduct such a debate fully in Dutch. Given that the main speaker was clearly a well-reputed, higher-ranking academic and politician speaking on the topic of migration I assumed turning the event into more than one language/bilingual (English and Dutch) would not be a major problem. However, the next day I received a call back with apologies that they found another speaker for the event since the main speaker and the organizers wished to conduct the event fully in Dutch. Rather than any disappointment of being un-invited for the event, the irony of this situation was something I could not ignore. Not only is an international university organizing a public debate in which any non-Dutch language is excluded, but more ironically the very topic of asylum migration, which calls for conducting debates that invite migrant languages, is being restricted within monolingual inward-looking perspectives meant for a pre-selective so-called majoritarian (legal) national language-speaking audience. I decided nevertheless to attend the event out of sheer curiosity. What followed was a discussion in a specific kind of Dutch, one that was hard for me to fully follow. Parts of what I understood were mostly the number-based discussions of “how many” refugees are headed to the Netherlands, “how many” can the Netherlands take and what this means for the country and so on and so forth. My anger at the absurdity reached an unbearable limit when a good friend of mine, also an “undocumented migrant”, was invited onto the stage and asked to respond in Dutch to highly paternalistic questions of “how did you make it to the Netherlands?” and “How do you feel being undocumented?” *etc.*, to which he could only respond in apologies for his inability to speak Dutch,

²⁴ Kolar Aparna was born and has lived for much of her childhood in Bengaluru (India) while her adult life has been across cities in Netherlands (Amsterdam, Groningen, Eindhoven, Nijmegen, DenBosch) and Mexico (Tijuana), straddling linguistic identities of Kannada, Tamil, English, Spanish, and Dutch. Her formal education in Bengaluru has been inevitably tied to the intertwined histories and overlapping territories of British and French colonial and missionary networks in India influencing her relationship with English, which is, however, changing in relation to her stay and education in the Netherlands. She is often told that her grandfather was a chemical scientist from Bengaluru who was “the first in the family to take the ship to London” in the late 1920s, to return with a PhD from a British university, later on taking up key advisory roles to “develop” Indian industries. Thinking postcolonially allows her to re-visit such familial narratives that continue to be seeped in the complex hierarchical, intertwined histories and identities that are part of colonial histories. As a professional dancer towards the turn of the millennium travelling across India and the USA, she became disillusioned with the “cultural trap” of post-independent, post-liberalization India where she experienced neo/self-orientalizing tendencies of cultural organizations to attract corporate and western funding. Moving to Amsterdam in search of ways to escape this trap she was, however, intimately confronted with Eurocentrism within the performing arts networks, which pushed her to “seek refuge” in border studies where she is now trying to “find her voice”.

making him appear as a dumb victim. By the time it came to the round of audience questions my anger was rising up to a level that seemed to turn my tongue inside out. Holding the mic, I exploded in a triple-linguaging exercise of mixing Dutch, English, and suddenly without my planning, also my mother-tongue Kannada, all the while arguing for a hospitality towards refugees that can see beyond the numbers and material dimension of throwing clothes, food, and shelter to welcome the refugee Other. In breaking out for a minute or more in Kannada my idea in hindsight was to confront the audience to the realities of asylum conditions in which listening and exchanging in tongues that are not always fully understood by each other is more common in practice than the utopian visions of monolingual exchanges of migrant support or hospitality. However, it was also an emotional outburst—one of anger—as a migrant academic activist embedded and implicated within Europe’s asylum conditions and debates. It was also a deeply empowering emotional experience of unveiling as a process of reclaiming my languages and my multilingual subject position in a way that did not hierarchically order my relationship with Dutch, English, and Kannada (between mother tongue as some original source of my identity *versus* English and Dutch as externally imposed) but rather reclaimed the same as an inherently intertwined reality. Through this process of unveiling, I was then able to powerfully transform the sense of rejection and absence that I might have felt otherwise at being excluded from a debate because of my inability to speak a dominant language, in this case Dutch.

4.5. ...And Intimate Translation of Handshaking

I cannot but help attribute this process of unveiling to my engagements with the local migrant support organizations in recent years. Despite not being bound by a single language, given the diversity of linguistic identities of people present in the weekly informal gatherings of the migrant support organization (for “undocumented migrants”) some of us volunteer in, it is in the multilingualism of everyday gestures such as handshakes, hugs, smiles, and eye-contact over which forms of citizenship regardless of legal status, but based on social relations and solidarity acts in relation to each other, come to be practiced. The intimacy and proximity of people coming together in a small café who nevertheless are here for reasons often not fully of one’s choice, pushes each one present to search for a common language, as opposed to cases such as embassies, asylum centers, visa offices, detention centers *etc.*, where it is quite clear who has the power to welcome or not and in which language. Additionally, the lack of a common verbal language pushes one to look for common gestures of body language. One such negotiated gesture is handshaking. Although I am unable to speak to many of them due to the verbal language barrier, we always shake hands with each other. This gesture even crosses the gender barrier as much as the linguistic barrier, communicating solidarity, familiarity, friendship, and sometimes even difference, which nevertheless needs to be acknowledged. The handshake sometimes leads to a conversation in which I end up listening to someone without fully understanding or speaking without being certain if I am fully understood. It is a space full of frustrations, misunderstandings, and disappointments as much as a space of communicating solidarity and friendship. However, the challenge of translation lies on both parties who are communicating, rather than on a single one, unlike integration exams and asylum procedures, in which both the choice of language and translator are determined by the state. The lack of a common verbal language also allows for each of us present there to be confronted very closely with all the paradoxes, contradictions, and pains as well as

joys of communicating across difference, leaving the process of translation to always be constantly negotiated. Interactions are driven by the need to build and forge shared spaces of intimacy and encounters based on emotional inhabitation. The handshaking is particularly powerful in serving as a way of “coming together” towards inter-articulating each other’s “emotional territories of embodiments”. For instance, when I extend my hand, it is reciprocated by the other by taking my hand into his/her palms, and then I put my other hand on top of theirs, each time feeling a different emotion and warmth, or tension, or coldness. For me, when extending my hand is responded to with a quick handshake that leads to a common shared action such as to sitting on the same table sharing sometimes a silence for a short time, or a story, or some “soup”. Linguaging then takes on a body-world process of unveiling in which a constant negotiation and intimate confrontation with the Other is inevitable.

5. Conclusions: Linguaging the Borders of Europe

Paraphrasing the venerable Swiss geographer, our preceding migrant-vignettes have attempted to chart personal, as well as collective habitations of memories of territories through the words of our multiple languages. Unlike those alluded to by Raffestin, however, our “memories” are, to use his lexicon once again, “quite simply...there, available or produced, for reasons whose causes are elsewhere (*dont les causes sont ailleurs*)” ([1], p. 90). It is precisely from the locational “*elsewhere*” of our memories of territories, by way of our varied and intersecting extra-European migrant linguaging practices, that we are re-shaping European borders along vectors that still remain to be fully accounted for by Continental European cultural geography.

For Olivier, to re-inhabit linguaging’s prosthetic absences in a migrant context—in this case *precisely* because it is a highly privileged one—means opening up to the struggles and journeys associated with *finding one’s voice* beyond the exilic realm of inauthentic “theater” and “make-believe” associated with linguistic “passing”, while confronting *the necessity of taking a stance in relation to language’s Other*. This “Other” could be defined in terms of a newly imposed majoritarian linguistic identity one must grapple with in order to make oneself understood, or that resulting from shifts in one’s own dominant tongues when in the process of migrating. Yet again it could be found in the relation towards the memories of Other body-linguaging practices that rumble under the surface of a shared global and “scientific” language, such as English. Rather than associating linguaging’s absences with an *a priori* relation between language and territory—understood as static and objective objects, in a worldly context of intensified cross-border flows and corresponding multilingualism, finding one’s voice becomes a practice of inhabiting the horizon of spaces yet-to-come. Such spaces cannot be pre-determined or pre-known because they form a biography of places that are themselves in ceaseless flux and transformation, despite the “limits” such mobile biographies inevitably encounter.

Huda and her family’s monolingual desire for Amharic in a Dutch context is an embodied experience that carries grounded memories of the past in the old country, but that also travels in and through her embodiments across space in ways that through such movements have no choice but to be open to Other languages. Rather than assume a unitary and stable backdrop where everyday life runs its course according to a *longue durée* leading to taken-for-granted community, the linguaging experiences of Huda and her family point to a dynamic refashioning of the same, whereby the multilingual slippages between Amharic, Somali, and Dutch creates a *new space*, thus reconfiguring the border

between so-called *autochtoon* (native) and so-called *allochtoon* (foreign) communities within a single Dutch neighborhood. Here then, place-making is actively constructed through migrant bordering practices in ways that, rather than being exclusionary to other languages, are inevitably intertwined. Here, along this radical edge of migrant languaging practices, memories of extra-European monolingual desire live in productive tension with dominant national European languages, producing “territories of the everyday” that are fully inhabited by a continuity of relations binding Europe and its former colonial territories. Not being heard at the IND interview is generative of such a place, where home is along that bleeding edge of denial alongside resistance and resilience.

Unveiling as a process of empowerment re-positions and breaks open for Kolar her multilingual subjectivity beyond the rigid colonial and postcolonial relational struggles of mother tongue *versus* other European languages of imposition, into more liberating emotional configurations. The “Babelic”, multilingual space of Kolar’s café brings her and her migrant colleagues to search for a common language rooted in the corporeal memories of handshakes, hugs, smiles, and eye-contact capable of bridging cultural and linguistic differences. In light of the contradictions, pains, and joys implicated in translating across such differences, handshakes play a unique role, providing the skin tones adequate for achieving new emotional territories of the everyday beyond those defined by the bounded need for geographical security. This is so because, offered within the heart of national space, they are given and received by subjects who themselves *lack all security*. Despite their condition of existential precarity, handshakes are nevertheless generative of solidarities and friendships that interlace with Olivier’s abject, “excitable” hands, Huda’s “tied” Amharic tongue, as well as the embodied languaging practices of so many of the café’s inhabitants who lack the formal right to be there (“*etre la*”). A handshake powerfully proclaims: “*I am here, with all I bring from there*”. Rather than being marked solely by the melancholy emotionalities associated with violence and loss, productive habitation (*habiter*) of the spaces of postcolonial languaging re-territorialize a voice in ways that joyfully reconfigure both “migrant” and “host” languages, keeping any “*limite*” open to outcomes that cannot be known *a priori*.

Acknowledgments

Our collective writing journey could not have taken place without the many conversations held over years with friends and comrades associated with the *Radboud Universiteit Postcolonial Reading Group (RUPRG)*, the *Asylum University* collective (Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen), *Stichting GAST* (Nijmegen), members of Beth-Hamifgash (Kleve), as well as the late *Terecht (Critical Space) Café* (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen). A heartfelt “*merci*” goes as well to Claire Kramsch for insightful and sympathetic remarks provided during the final stretch of writing.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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