1. Can "migrants" speak? Voices, narratives and performances

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Abstract This chapter analyzes the multiple voices of exiles, asylum seekers, adventurers, travelers, or migrants. To understand migration processes, it is necessary to understand that language practices are social practices that create and throw into play interactional and socio-political contexts. In opposition to a media, state and police conception of the speech (*parole*) of exiles, a plethora of academic and artistic productions related to migration issues have shaped a new approach to mobility and language practices in Europe. By *freeing the speech* of exiles themselves, through life narratives in particular, these works offer a different perspective on women and men whose discourse and language registers have been obscured or erased. By shifting gazes, I suggest instead starting out from countries affected by mobility in order to observe language practices as social practices, where they emerge locally through cinema, radio, songs, rap, performances, novels, etc.

Keywords migration | voices | narratives | performances | speech | semiotic | language practices

INTRODUCTION

In Nicola Mai's (2013) film *Samira*, the main character tells the anthropologist: "You know, it's suffering that gives you papers. Not happiness. Happiness is for friends, for people who understand" (15'07).

This statement from Samira, a transsexual from Algeria with whom Nicola Mai spent a good deal of time, emphasizes the need for asylum seekers to construct multiple narratives of the self, according to the context. On the one hand, narratives for administrations (specifically the OFPRA in France, or SPRAR in Italy) require the accumulation of a sufficient amount of suffering and the ability to express it clearly; on the other hand, the recounting of real life experiences is usually reserved for a private and intimate setting with trusted people.

If the aim of research is to understand migration processes, it is necessary to understand that language practices (*parole* or speech/voices/words[1]) are social practices (Canut et al., 2018) that create and throw into play interactional and socio-political contexts. Language is not a filter or the transparent tool of a supposedly fixed thought; it requires bodies, objects, imaginaries, and power relations related to a *total semiotic fact* (Nakassis, 2016). How, in this perspective, can we listen to, report and analyze the multiple voices of exiles, asylum seekers, adventurers, travelers, or migrants?

This essay examines three ways of analyzing migrants' speeches:

- Linguistic practices – through a positivist/structuralist approach to languages, particularly in the context of the institutional framework of demands for biographical narratives to obtain asylum rights.
- Narrative practices – as a means of understanding subjectivity and the so-called "identities" of exiles.
- Language and semiotic practices – drawn from long ethnographies, which give substance to a complex understanding of the singularity of speech as a social praxis.

Within each of these three epistemological dimensions of the accumulation of knowledge about migration, artistic mise en scène (in words, signs or images) has emerged as a preferred mode of dissemination in European academia. A plethora of works (books, texts, photographic exhibitions, plays, films, comic books, etc.) related to migration[2] issues have shaped a new approach to mobility and to *adventurers*, *harragas* or refugees[3] themselves.

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1 As *parole* has no single English equivalent, the words 'speech', 'voice' and 'words' have alternatively been used (we are referring here to the usual use of *parole* and not to the Saussure dichotomy langue/parole).

2 Here are some examples in France: *Eldorado* by Laurent Gaudé (J'ai Lu, 2009), *Ulysses from Bagdad* by Eric-Emmanuel Schmit (Albin Michel, 2008); *Dans la peau d'un migrant* by Arthur Frayer-Laleix (Fayard, 2015); *Tous migrants !* (Gallimard, 2017); *Brûle la mer* by Berchache and Nathalie Nambot (2014); *Les messagers* by Crouizillat Hélène and Tura Laetitia (2014); La traversée by Mathieu Pernot (Le point du jour, 2014); the exhibition *I AM WITH THEM: manifeste photographique pour les réfugiés*, by Anne A-R., (Gründ, 2016); Weiwei's gesture imitating the dead child Aylan Kurdi. For information on the compassionate rhetoric of images, see Susan Sontag *Devant la douleur des autres* (Christian Bourgeois, 2003), in particular the analysis of Sebastião Salgado's exhibition *Migrations : Humanity in Transition*. Concerning the power of images, see Maaza Mengiste *How not to photograph the Rohingya genocide in the making*.

3 The use of the terms "migrants" or "exiles" is not satisfactory, especially since those who they refer to use other terms ("*aventuriers*" 'adventurers' and "*voyageurs*" 'travelers' in French, but also many other terms stemming from local linguistic practices, see Canut & Ramos (2014) for West-Africa, for example). Therefore, we will be using several terms throughout this text in order not to settle on one or the other (see Canut, 2020).

Thus, *giving voice* to the people involved in migration practices by restoring subjectivities through the publication of life stories or documentary-making has allowed a new light to be shed on women and men whose speeches and language registers (see Agha, 1999) had long been obscured. However, one can question the objectives of researchers, writers and artists for whom one may wonder if the aestheticization of migration (and sometimes outright symbolic or economic instrumentalization) takes precedence over the issue of power relations, often even hiding those relations completely.[4] For whom are these works made? Who do the authors talk to? From which political perspective are the life stories presented? I hypothesize here that these approaches are often underpinned by a neocolonial or paternalistic vision which tends to commodify exiles.

In order to avoid that paternalistic underpinning found in many artistic projects[5] about objectified and subjugated exiles, researchers' gazes and selves should shift in order to consider novel assemblages stemming from the co-construction of knowledge (Canut et al., 2018). The proposal is to work *with* people involved in mobility or exile (including those who do not move but suffer the effects) and, above all, to observe and listen to their own discursive, aesthetic and artistic pro-

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4   Many research festivals address the theme of migration, such as: http://www.unicaen.fr/recherche/mrsh/fresh/3930, or exhibitions such as in EHESS: Photographier l'exil, https://www.ehess.fr/fr/exposition/%C2%AB-photographier-lexil-%C2%BB-exposition-con%C3%A7ue-et-r%C3%A9alis%C3%A9e-par-collectif-vost-en-partenariat. Researchers' films such as "Benvenuti" by Laure Auriole and Annalisa Lendaro (Paris, 2016); "Angie, une femme sur le fil(m)" film by Fabienne Le Houérou (IREMAM, Labexmed, CNRS, AMU, Cultura Mundi, Juillet 2014), etc. For an overview of this issue see Rigaux, Elsa (2012). For a discussion on the role of "participatory research", see: https://media-animation.be/Filmer-les-migrations-faire-avec-ou-sur-les-migrant-e-s.html. Another edifying example is the exhibition at the Orléans biennial by the PEROU (Pôle d'exploration des ressources urbaines) collective in 2018: for a very relevant critique, see Alexandra Galitzine-Loumpet (2018). The words of the exiles are systematically reinterpreted, and the subjects totally depoliticized in favour of an aesthetic approach: "The exiled subject appears only in silhouettes and traces, in the off-field of representations of constructions and narrations-and his few words immediately reinterpreted" (ibid., p. 120).

5   The movie by Nicolas Kotz and Elisabeth Perceval, *Héroïque lande (la frontière brûle)*, in 2017, or the following *Fugitifs où cours-tu ?* (2018) are two of many of very good examples. As Alexandra Galitzine-Loumpet (2018) writes: "He appears in a long documentary, *Héroïque lande (la frontière brûle)* by Nicolas Kotz and Elisabeth Perceval (2017) in which the associations and other caregivers are significantly absent. "The Jungle" Klotz writes elsewhere "is the descendant of all the forests of the world, chestnuts, runaway slaves, the Underground Railroad …". We sense the danger of this upside-down assignment, mixing places and subjects and leading to the desubjectification of the subject in favour of a subjectification of the place – or to put it another way, a subjectification that leads, in spite of itself, to another form of subjection" (p. 107, my translation).

ductions with the aim of understanding what they *say* and what they expect to do. It is therefore important to go to the countries impacted by mobility, in order to account for language practices as social practices as they emerge locally through cinema, songs, rap, performances, novels, and so on (Canut & Mazauric, 2014). More importantly, it is about analyzing the particular *indexicalities* (Silverstein, 2003), that is, the meanings given to these practices by people who participate in interactions.

To do so, I will focus on several musical, theatrical, filmic, poetic and vocal experiences in West Africa (Senegal, Mali, Cape Verde, and Niger), and examine them using a political sociolinguistic approach (Canut et al., 2018) that brings together linguistic anthropology – in particular metasemiotics – (Irvine & Gal, 2000; Silverstein, 1993) and French discourse analysis (Pêcheux & Fuchs, 1975).

Borrowing from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous essay *Can the Subaltern speak*?, I take a deconstructive, critical and political perspective (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Rosa, 2019). This perspective is aimed at questioning our practices as European researchers who too often capitalize on the affects of the exiles (most of whom come from the so-called "Global South" countries) while a (largely documented) European policy of abandoning migrants at the border and subjugating African countries economically is simultaneously unfolding before our eyes.

ERASING VOICES

Beyond the thorny question of their denomination (migrants, exiles, undocumented workers, refugees, immigrants, *clandestins*, *sans papiers*, etc.), the confiscation of the words (e.g., through the erasure of self-assigned designations) and, consequently, the silencing of the exiles upon arrival in Europe has long been a blind spot for researchers. It was not until the beginning of the 21st century that interest in the place and the voice of the migrants emerged.[6]

Our memories were nevertheless marked by the rising awareness against racism in the 1980s, and activism for migrants in the French suburbs, such as the *Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme* 'March for equality and against racism', also known as *Marche des Beurs* 'March of the Beurs' (Beur is French slang for Arab), in 1983

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6   Though in France, isolated work has been conducted rather early on from within the field of sociolinguistics of didactics of migratory paths (Vigouroux, 2003), it wasn't until the 2010s that the field of sociolinguistics of migration fully opened at the international level thanks to authors like Jacquemet (2005a, b), Pavlenko (2007), Miles (2009), Baynham et & de Fina (2005), Pennycook & Makoni (2007), Makoni (2012), García (2009), Creese & Blackledge (2010), Canagarajah (2013, 2017). For a more exhaustive review of literature, see Canut & Guellouz (2018).

opposing anti-Arab police brutality. For instance, in France, Yamina Benguigui's stunning documentary *Mémoires d'immigrés*[7] deals with firsthand testimonies of Algerian children, mothers and fathers. As Benguigui stated: "What I inherited was a very very long period of silence and unsaid things[8]" my translation). Although recent reports in the media have included many new facts about migration, there is little to no echo of this in the field of (socio-)linguistics.[9]

Linguists do not escape linguistic imaginaries: the *order of the language*[10] is highly prevalent. The injunction to learn French, which is supposed to be the *sole* vector of integration in France remains the number one goal for the vast majority of teachers. The regime of linguistic ideologies (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Blackledge, 2000; Canut, 2007, 2008, 2010; Certeau et al., 1974; Gal, 2006; Martin Rojo, 2010) that makes monolingualism and the standard language an identity factor and the key to integration hardly leads anyone to question linguistic plurality in its pragmatic dimension, particularly for illiterate people. The scope of these ideologies, although concerning all Western language policies, has been particularly coercive in Europe. In France, the imposition of one standard and one dominant language as a value in the economic language market (Bourdieu, 1982) has led to the erasure of all other practices. This translates into very strong linguistic prescriptivism for children at school, alongside the neglect of mother tongues outside it. Combined with spatial segregation and job discrimination, the consequences of these policies of exclusion have never been fully captured.[11]

The understanding of language as a value of symbolic domination aimed at legitimizing social hierarchy as opposed to language practices as tools for action and emancipation in society had been largely explained in Bourdieu's 1982 seminal work *Ce que parler veut dire*. Yet, surprisingly almost no sociolinguist drew from his innovative findings; conversely, structuralism persisted in its own direc-

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7   Benguigui Y., 1997, *Mémoire d'immigrés, l'héritage maghrébin,* Production Bandits/Elemiah, Canal +.

8   Interview of Benguigui Y. at TV France 2, INA Societé, 6 février 1998, on line: https:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xsanz3_-Zks.

9   Only A. Sayad's *La double absence* accounted for the sociological and psychological dimensions of exiles' lived experience.

10   The order of language is a concept that I develop in a book to be published in 2021 by Amsterdam (Paris) entitled *Provincialiser la langue, langage et colonialisme* (*Provincializing language, language and colonialism*). The aim is to show how the naturalization of language (la langue) has erased the dynamic of life of speech (parole) as linguistic praxis.

11   Some French discourse analysts (Barats, 2001; Bonnafous, 1991) study discourse about migrants, focusing notably on the rise of discourse by the extreme right party *Rassemblement National* 'Nationally Rally', formerly *Front National* 'National Front', in the media. But their goal was never to work on language practices in interaction.

tion, making languages or varieties of language objects to describe, sort, categorize, prioritize.

What are the consequences of this process of scientific *silencing* (Orlandi, 1996, p. 59), which one could call a *neocolonial ideological linguistic regime*?

One of the first effects of this regime lies in the slow impregnation of a strictly linguistic approach to language, which still dominates today in most French classes given to migrants by nonprofit organizations. Centered on a referential approach (which makes language an "instrument of communication" aimed at conveying messages), this perception/understanding of language as a sacred object sets the conditions of a quest for the Holy Grail of a so-called "French culture" and produces many misunderstandings. For individuals whose imaginaries about language are, on the contrary, constituted by an interactional and pragmatic approach, according to which speaking is *doing things* with words (by *doing* I refer as much to dreaming, playing, acting, working or behaving) with regards to others, the division of language into bounded "languages" assigned to cultural identities is not self-evident (Canut, 2007, 2020b).

For example, it is important to understand the position of a child who, from birth, has been speaking in four or five radically different ways (four or five "languages", according to the neocolonial ideological regime) depending on interlocutors, places, social constraints, or desires of the moment, etc. This child would never have needed to distinguish sounds, words, or sentences, because these "languages" are in no way related to a written entity, delimited, prescribed and objectified. Despite the culturalist logic that imposed French in West Africa, and led an elite to appropriate colonial metalinguistic categories (language, dialect/patois, grammar, lexicon, morphology, conjugation, etc.), *adventurers*, especially barely literate ones, have always been far removed from them and do not even need them.

According to the same ideological paradigm, most Europeans tend to apply to African countries the nationalist linguistic ideology in which a language corresponds to a nation, a territory, a community, an ethnic group, and most important to an identity and a culture (Canut, 2008). Far from being universal, this reduction of language practices to a language-as-cultural-object-of-learning has become dominant, especially through colonization when the European school system imposed itself as a model of education all over the world (Canut, 2020b).

In recent years, many scholars (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Canut, 2007, 2008, 2010) have documented the limitations of such associations between language, nation, community, and identity. They have shown that to solely associate migrant children to "their" supposed language and "their" culture of origin in order to promote otherness and the celebrated "diversity", as it is often done in French class-

rooms adopting an "intercultural" point of view, may have perverse effects. For many different reasons, children may resist such categorization processes, not to mention the fact that bringing them back to earlier periods of their lives may be psychologically disturbing. Jonathan Rosa (2019) goes even further by arguing that "the mantra of 'diversity and inclusion' can be understood as part of a normative project that seeks to present the superficial appearance of racial diversity while leaving white supremacist institutions and structures fundamentally unchanged" (p. 13).

HOMOGENIZATION OF VOICES

Another consequence of the homogenizing conception of language in migration studies is related to the interplay between indexicalities and the modalities of entextualization (translations and written transcriptions) of the words and voices of asylum seekers when they testify before the National Court of the Right of Asylum (CNDA). As Jacquemet (2009) demonstrates, the entextualization of public verbal performance according to specific discursive norms and moral terms acceptable to the linguistic ideology and textual routines of the dominant groups leads to many errors of interpretation (p. 524) or "distortion of the record" (p. 537).

Beyond editorial and argumentative skills, Jacquemet (2009) argues that most errors come from "cultural assumptions, which are rooted in dominant national values" (p. 527), and that the testimony does not allow alterity: "As such, the hearing becomes a written record of compatibility with the linguistic ideology and textual routines of the dominant classes" (p. 527).

From a linguistic point of view, the choice of interpreters is often complicated by the great diversity of languages represented in court (Noura, 2013, p. 130): due to the lack of interpreters in some varieties, some exiles are forced to tell their story in a language or a register that they do not know well. Conversely, the applicant may be assigned a territory-language of birth without taking into account the mobility[12] or the high level of family plurilingualism (Poudiougou, 2018). Linguistic expertise is regularly requested to account for this mobility. Ironically, linguistic divisions are usually based on linguistic cartographies elaborated by colonial administrators such as Delafosse, who used the logic of equating language, culture, and identity, with territory to assign speakers to only one supposedly "mother" language (Canut, 2008).

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12   Let us take, for example, the circulation of children among Malian families through practices of fostering, where children are left with a sister or aunt for their education, sometimes far from their biological parents' home.

As Jacquemet (2009) notes, if the asylum seeker does not speak the language of the place they claim to come from, or if they are unable to describe the flag or name cities, they are systematically suspected of lying.[13] Conversely, the translator does not always know the places and environments crossed by the asylum seeker, which can weaken the veracity of the statement.[14] Ultimately the results of the long asylum procedure are products of conflicting language conceptions: "the entextualization of asylum hearings is one of the most powerful structuring instruments used by nation states to grant noncitizens refuge and access to valuable resources" (Jacquemet, 2009, p. 540) Finally, the whole dimension of untranslatables and misunderstandings with dramatic consequences in asylum application situations, studied in particular by the very relevant Liminal project,[15] leads to *tinkering* (Bathaie et al., 2020).

RACIALIZATION OF VOICES

Exiles are also affected by the neoliberal logic of fluidity that derives from the mobility of individuals, which in turn contributes to the commodification of practices and skills within global competition (Lorente, 2017, p. 486; see also Heller, 2010; Heller & McElhinny, 2017).

Many studies examine the exploitation of migration (Duchêne et al., 2013; Lorente 2012) through labor that produces new inequalities (Codo & Garrigo, 2014; Del Percio, 2018) at all levels of society including education (Martin Rojo, 2010). Concomitantly, the fetishization of the native speaker (Muni Toke, 2010; Shohamy, 2006, p. 66) leads to a systematically prescriptive and negative assessment of migrants.[16]

It is assumed that they will never succeed in mastering the "language" of the country of residence (Rosa & Flores, 2017) even when they engage in a process of

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13   I was, myself, called by the Swiss Refugee Council only to confirm that it was possible for a person to live in the Kidal region in Mali for seven years without speaking either Songhay or Tamashek (but Pulaar, Arabic, French, and Bambara).

14   For more information specifically on discursive and narrative questions involving the play between moral norms and the notion of "truth", see Beneduce (2008, 2014, 2015); Blommaert (2001); Schuman & Bohmer (2010); Fassin & Kobelinsky (2012); Maryns (2006); d'Halluin (2006); Mekdjian (2016); Laacher (2018).

15   On this point, see the site: https://liminal.hypotheses.org/ and number 124 of *Plein Droit*: "Traduire l'Exil" (https://www.gisti.org/spip.php?article6318) led by ANR Liminal officials.

16   Wodak's (2015) recent work on (re)inventing nationalism argues that these nationalist narratives function as a counterpoint to the othering of transnational migrants (De Fina & Tseng, 2017, p. 389).

whitization – what some of them call "speaking like a white person" by manifesting increased attention to pronunciation and syntactic structures (Telep, 2017). The paradigm of linguistic deficiency (Rosa, 2019, p. 6), applied to migrants, is built on a moral opposition between normalized practices and deviant ones.

When migrants have internalized this paradigm, they know that they will never be considered speakers and citizens in their own right. The effects of the power of external discourses and the *raciolinguistic enregisterment* (Rosa, 2019, p. 7) that persistently exclude them – sometimes merely through the contemptuous smile of a "listening subject" (Inoue, 2003, p. 158) – contribute to the double bind to which they are subjected.

Compelled to avoid any linguistic hybridity, migrants are assigned the *order of the language* and speech as a criterion of integration. The multiplicity of language tests (made even more relentless by new neoliberal technologies, see Blackledge, 2000; May, 2014; Wodak, 2015) subjects the newcomer to an assimilating injunction. Despite its fantasmatic dimension, this mode of assimilation imposes the "ideal of language" (Houdebine, 2002) in various discourses, debates, courses in French as a foreign language, literary works, etc. From this comes the combined fantasy of the loss and lack of supposed languages of origin. It is in the literary field of exile that this link between the targets of language as object and language loss finds its most convincing expression (Tahar Ben Jelloun, Fatou Diome ...).

HANDING OUT VOICES

In opposition to a media, bureaucratic and police conception of the discourse of exiles, several academic and artistic productions related to migration issues have shaped a new approach to mobility and language practices.[17] Narratives (autobiographies, life narratives or texts describing the journey) collected in new contexts (protected sites, associations or NGO offices, private rooms, etc.) have emerged as the essential means to deal with migration issues in a different way, and to confront the bureaucratic approach (Saglio-Yatzimirsky, 2018, pp. 94-101; see also Beneduce, 2008, 2014; Poudiougou, 2018).

By *handing out speech* to exiles themselves, the aim is to restore their subjectivities through life narratives, texts, photographic exhibitions, plays, films, etc., thus offering a different perspective on women and men whose discourse and registers of language (Agha, 1999) have long been obscured or erased.

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17   I will only cover artistic productions in Europe here, whilst relying on the vast international literature theorizing narrative questions.

Anna De Fina (2003), one of the first to theorize the role of storytelling in the social sciences, discusses the strictly linguistic aspect of the question, and shows the different phases that helped sharpen narrative analysis and strengthen knowledge on migration. In a later publication with Tseng, they explain this point:

> This in turn highlighted storytelling's potential for providing a voice to minorities and other underrepresented/socially isolated communities to author their own versions of their experiences. In this, work on migrants has taken prominence precisely because a primary scholarly objective has been building knowledge about processes of displacement and relocation as lived by narrators and their stories' protagonists, thus offering a counterbalance to the often-negative views about marginalized social groups circulated through political discourse and the mainstream media. Thus, research using stories both as objects and as tools is fundamentally qualitative and often ethnographically oriented. (De Fina & Tseng, 2017, p. 382)

However, many questions regarding the status of these instances of speech (and voices) of migrants remain (Nossik, 2011): Who is speaking? To whom? Under what conditions? With what interests in mind? Within these new configurations, the positioning of exiles is not always very clear: whilst the goal of the authors is often to *better understand* the motivations of migrants in order to reinforce an *intercultural* perspective, a rather one-sided point of view persists. Exiles remain subjugated figures, objects of studies, thought and constructed by Europeans. The North-South relationship that reproduces postcolonial models still conditions most of these approaches.

As suggested by Rosa (2019) and Rosa & Flores (2017), it is interesting to change perspective and to focus first and foremost on those who speak about migrants. Using the concept of *listening subject* (from Inoue, 2003, taken up by Reyes, 2014), one could say that the issue is no longer the subject-objects of discourse but rather the ways in which these subject-objects have been constituted, through their being *enacted*:

> This speaker focus neglects a thorough conceptualization and interrogation of the listening subject: how change may not in fact begin with speaking subjects (migrants) but may be brought into being by listening subjects (those authorized to speak about migrants) and whatever anxieties and desires motivate the circulation of representations of speakers. (Reyes, 2014, p. 368)

It seems to me that what Rosa (2019) calls the *ideologies of Otherness* refers to diverse artistic and scientific practices in Europe, often considered generous and benevolent (considerate to the other), and yet reminiscent of paternalistic colonial practices.

Thus, since the early 2000s, books and films have been made to redraw itineraries that seem staggering to Europeans. Mainly produced by filmmakers, journalists, and sometimes social scientists, these documents provide good examples of the imaginaries of listening subjects. Let's take two symptomatic examples.

Bako, l'autre rive 'Bako, the other shore', a Franco-Senegalese film directed by French director Jacques Champreux (1979), is a precursor of the genre of film dealing with migration. This fictional story tells of the exhausting journey from Mali to Paris of an undocumented migrant who ends up dying of cold after having found his brother in a squat in Paris. For the first time, a French director reproduced on screen what would have been the journey of any *adventurer* (but named *immigrant* at the time) to reach Bako (the other shore – France). The knowledge of the context and the explicit political commitment displayed on screen (and supported by a quote from J. M. Jeanneney, Minister of Employment, in 1966 at the end of the film, at 1'48'50)[18] are not convincing. It provides a typical occidental gaze on the situation and shows migrants as passive, naive and a bit silly.

As Anne Doquet mentioned at the symposium organized by our Miprimo project[19] in 2014, it is quite symptomatic to see that while the film brought tears to French eyes, paradoxically it triggered laughter among the Malian audience. This difference says a lot about the contrasted modes of intelligibility and interpretation on both sides: the French approach the story with pathos when face with supposedly generic tragic situations, whilst the Malian apprehend the journey as contestants (which also becomes a ground for the self-denomination *adventurers)* and consider the hero a special case, very different from themselves.

It is just comical to Malian viewers that the main character dies of cold upon arrival, after overcoming all the obstacles and pitfalls of the journey. The important element is that behind this fluctuation of interpretations, very different ontologies about migration emerge. As I have shown in a recent work (Canut, 2018), the power to act and the willingness of the men and women who make these journeys

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18   "L'immigration clandestine elle-même n'est pas inutile, car si on s'en tenant à l'application stricte des règlements et accords internationaux, nous manquerions peut-être de main-d'œuvre" (J. M. Jeanneney, ministre du travail, 1966) at 1'48'50 (Orphan Productions, 1978).

19   Bringing together around 20 scholars from France, Africa and America, this project (under my coordination) was financed by the French National Agency for Research (ANR) between 2011–2015.

are totally incompatible with the victimized vision of supposedly passive, subjected, manipulated people who do not know the dangers of the journey they undertake. My ethnographic work shows the opposite: the African *adventurers* present themselves as conquerors ready to face the challenges of the road with determination, solid knowledge of travel practices and a relentless *quest for luck* (Canut 2020a; Gaibazzi, 2015). To understand this, one must take the time to listen to other words and narratives, such as the stories adventurers tell their friends, relatives or families, which function according to other discursive regimes.

Similarly, in books recounting the stories of adventurers, the processes resulting in their siting/sighting (Gal & Irvine, 2019, pp. 167–168; Silverstein, 1998) as subjects, and in giving them voice are blurred. The book, *Dem ak xabaar. Récit d'un clandestin africain, En route vers l'Europe* "Story of an African clandestine en route to Europe", noticeably the fruit of collective work based on a tangible encounter, nevertheless leaves out important ethical questions (Traoré & Le Dantec, 2012). Written collaboratively by Mahmoud Traoré and Bruno Le Dantec, and including the maps of Mahmoud's journey, the first page of the book describes a fairly clear division of labor: Mahmoud Traoré – Autobiographical account; Bruno Le Dantec – Translation and rewriting; Sonia Retamero Sanchez – Interview and documentation.

Beyond the fact that the name of Sanchez does not appear on the cover, one cannot help but wonder from the outset about Le Dantec's mediating role in his writing of the preface and post-face which frame the "narrative", aimed at informing us: we learn that 30 hours of recording of Mahmoud were made; that they went back to the sites of his trip in Morocco; it was reportedly "sometimes necessary to insist" to get more details because "his prudishness and taste for accuracy often encouraged him to confine himself to a purely factual narration, excluding any pathos" (Traoré & Le Dantec, 2012, p. 14).

On the other hand, no information about the rewriting or translation (e.g., from which language?) carried out by the journalist is provided. Yet, in the book, the reader can recognize the register of standard French that has nothing to do with that of lively oral stories, at the opposite of the linguistic heterogeneities that one usually hears from *adventurers*. It is difficult to know more about the motivations and specific modes of this entextualization which, as in the context of the narratives for asylum applications, results from the adaptation of a transidiomatic and oral discursive regime to a prescriptive and written standard even after listening to the authors discussing their work during a presentation.[20]

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20   Explanations can be found in a talk-show hosted at https://www.mixcloud.com/WEBRADIO_-ZYGOMAR_PERPIGNAN/recit-dun-clandestin-africain-en-route-vers-leurope/.

As soon as the terms *clandestine* and *European Eldorado* (Traoré & Le Dantec, 2012, p. 10) are used, one should already be wary of the ideological imprint of the anti-migrant discourse: while Mahmoud calls himself *adventurer* like all his companions of migration, the term *clandestine* projects him into the semantic field of lawlessness purported by the authorities. So, who speaks for whom in that kind of book? What status does Mahmoud's voice have after having been reconfigured according to socio-political issues specific to the European area?

Other works much less mindful for subjectivities are published as sensationalistic stories.[21] For example, the presentation of Bandelier's *Paroles de migrants* 'Words of migrants' clearly targets readers in search of thrills:

> Distressing stories that shed light on the dysfunctions and changes in the world, but also on unique individual paths and universal aspirations. Highly instructive, these modern odysseys, which will not stop any time soon, raise questions about our values and the world we want. These *brave, often painful, sometimes exceptional* human journeys reveal the richness and diversity of human experiences unaccounted for by political and media discourses that have, instead, depicted a *migration crisis* in recent years. Since the 1990s, immigration has become a major problem that urgently needs to be addressed.[22]

Here again, the Eurocentric discursive logic (the reference to the Odyssey being most often used) and the moralistic perspective attached to immigration as a "problem", "crisis" or "danger" are associated with heroism among migrants ("exceptional", "overwhelming"), at a moment when Europe stopped rescuing the inflatable boats drifting in the Mediterranean.

The commonality between all these stories lies in the generalization of the cases presented, as Le Dantec states in the preface: "The story of Mahmoud Traoré is that of thousands of young Africans who, succumbed to the songs of the sirens of the globalized world, embark on the roads of exile" (Traoré & Le Dantec, 2012, p. 9, my translation).

The display of individuals, legitimized by a desire to counter the political discursive regime, is, nonetheless, animated by moralizing discourses that raise issues

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21   We will not account for outrightly deceiving publications such as the one where a journalist "dresses up as an illegal" to "denounce smugglers", "hosts", and other "middlemen in human trafficking" because he is "in the skin of a migrant" (Arthur Frayer-Laleix*, 2017, Dans la peau d'un migrant: de Peshawar à Calais, enquête sur le "cinquième monde"»*, J'ai lu, 4ᵉ de couverture).

22   Presentation of the book on different websites like https://www.decitre.fr/livres/paroles-de-migrants-9782755641226.html (my emphasis).

about the authors' objectives. We systematically find this idea that migrants are deceived ("sirens of the globalized world") and victims of the distorted images of an Eldorado, despite the efforts of few "big brothers" in preventing a disaster.

The possibility of an alternative narrative[23] born out of different interlocutors and worldviews is not considered. Yet several works (Pavlenko, 2007; Relano Pastor, 2014) demonstrate how the construction of narratives depends, like any type of speech, on an enunciative, interlocutive and socio-political context and especially on permanent negotiations between dominant ideologies. Considered real semiotic practices (De Fina & Georgapoulou, 2008), narratives are the product of all the external conditions that make them emerge. Finally, when it comes to the "market" of narratives and their role in migrant survival strategies, Maitilasso (2014) and Mekdjian (2016) have shown how the conventional paradigms of poverty, insecurity or discrimination, according to the expected discursive norms in the Global North, are widely understood and taken up by *adventurers* themselves. They might well be as profitable/lucrative for Europeans as are the sums allocated to NGOs that take care of newcomers (Del Percio, 2018).

LISTENING TO AND HEARING MIGRANTS' VOICES

Narratives might be everywhere, but they are also often embedded in complex social and semiotic practices made of discourses, multiple voices, music, rituals, songs, cries, laughter, and so on. How can one account for *free speech* without subjugating it to postcolonial power relations, even if no researcher is immune to the previous discourses that shape their subconscious?

To answer this question, it is necessary to focus on the assemblages found in other types of productions that result from the co-construction of knowledge and of aesthetic and artistic productions. The idea is then to start from countries impacted by mobility in order to observe language practices as social practices, where they emerge locally through cinema, radio, songs, rap, performances, novels, etc.

As part of our research program (Miprimo), a group of scholars focused specifically on this issue in West Africa. By re-contextualizing the performative dimension of stories, texts, speeches, and songs at the heart of West African[24] artistic

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23　It is actually quite compelling that the discourse of migrants chosen for these types of productions are always well in tune with the moralist discourse of Europeans.

24　For more on this topic, see Bourlet (2014); Degorce (2014); Lafay & Mick (2014); Mazauric (2014); Moulard-Kouka (2014); Prothmann (2015); Seck & Ly (2015); Sow (2014).

spaces, the objective was to show how the entanglement of linguistic and migratory practices produce new forms of enunciation and imagination as well as subjective, social and political emancipation.[25] Migration processes – often conceived deterministically – take on a whole new meaning from the moment they are investigated through the wording, scenography, and even image production of the actors themselves before, during and after their journeys. The role of the scholar is to listen to existing stories rather than generating them, particularly in countries of departure. Certainly, this implies a long familiarity with the places, the social and language practices of the people with whom the researcher shares time and to whom they listen, whilst avoiding pre-categorization of their practices.

Multi-site ethnographies have led to interest in both the words of mobile people and in those of their relatives who remain, in addition to those of the institutional frameworks (state, school, media, nonprofit, etc.) that have agency over migrants' situations, positions and activities. Linguistic practices (interactional, stylistic, narrative) and metapragmatic discourses produced by people about their practices and those of others also require the analysis of new indexicalities at the local and transnational level.

Thus a patient reconstruction and understanding of artistic performances in various contexts has been developed by listening to, for example, the rap of *Y'en a marre* 'Fed up' in both Senegal and France (Moulard-Kouka, 2014), the songs of young girls between Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast (Degorce, 2014), by reading the poetry of *returners* (i.e., returning migrants) to Western Sahara (Boulay 2014), by observing the musical practices of the griots between Senegal and Italy (Pizzolato, 2014) and theater in Mali (notably Habib Dembélé's stand-up "Le Visa Kanute" (Sow, 2014), by observing the surge in women's *batuku* in Cape Verde (Canut & Furtado, 2014) or by reading novels in poulâr (Bourlet, 2014) and so on.

In some cases, returning migrants produce art, as in the play *Essinga*, performed in political forums by refugees from Central Africa stranded in Bamako (who created the nonprofit ARACEM) after being pushed back from Morocco. Written from within a plural experience of the word, the authors play with borders and boundaries (language, geographical, artistic) in order to obliterate the dominant discursive frameworks. The upsurge of theater through subversive comedy in the activists' landscape intended to confront and resist many preconceived ideas about migration by deploying an unprecedented type of symbolism of the experience of African migration. Far from victimhood and a miserabilist vision, the force of migratory strategies as it appears in this cathartic play cannot be detached from the

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25   Canut & Mazauric (2014); Canut & Ramos (2014); Canut & Sow (2014a); Seck, Canut & Ly (2015).

poetic forces that accompany it. Thus, it brings out new indexicalities around the notion of *traveler*, positively valued as a self-denomination (Canut & Sow, 2014b).

This political aim, contained in all performances, is also meaningfully exemplified in the beautiful documentary film *Koukan Kourcia ou le Cri de la Tourterelle* directed by the Nigerien filmmaker Elhadj Sani Magori, which Lafay and Mick (2014) examined. Son of an exile in Ivory Coast, the director decides to go find his father in Abidjan with the ambition to bring him home. To succeed, he relies on the Nigerien singer Zabaya, who was, herself, at the core of their departure when, twenty years earlier, her irresistible song had pushed men of the village to leave. Aged 75, she will use, once in front of them, the same insistent lament to bring them back.

Through the role of this woman, the reasons for leaving suddenly appear totally new, even irrational; the role of poetic singing and its pragmatic force that has sent men away, opens up new spaces of meaning. Beyond this poetic dimension, the narrative construction of the film based on a double *mise en abyme*, is conceived in such a way that it is not intended to represent but to become an instrument at the service of social change (Lafay & Mick, 2014, p. 502). Being at the same time an autobiographical film, an existential quest, a road movie and a collective adventure, *Koukan Kourcia* produces a performative effect that forces the actors into the author's trap since it defies them openly. The tour de force consists in the very power of his activist cinema to act on the real, since it is in this way that he will actually get his father to return. Through a complex polyphony and different narrative frames woven together, the emphasis is on the central role of women portrayed as engines of social transformation.

Since many films (e.g., *The Tears of Emigration* – Diago, 2010; *Hope Travel* – Zongo, 2011) and books are made by Africans who have gone through migration experiences, our role as scholars is to capture the discourses and narratives they produce in order to enter into their specific logics. Thus, focusing on indexicalities referring to local perceptions of questions of migration facilitates a singular reflection for each and every one. Because speech is complex and fragile, it does not affect everyone in the same way.

DEMYSTIFYING MIGRANTS' CHOICES

Questions of departures and returns stem from interactions between those who have lived mobility and those who remain but are familiar with departures: a game is very often played out within this singular relationship, constantly negotiated but always inscribed in the collective (Dardot, 2011). At stake in this negotiation is

speech itself as it inscribes mobility in this relation between people. However, mobility should not be reduced to a supposed mythification/allegory of loss, lack or nostalgia of those left behind. Many people go on an adventure for reasons that require ruptures, opportune reasons (e.g., break from the parents to avoid marriage, from a rowdy brother, from a rival in the village, from a forsaken lover). The journey – as we have described it several times with the example of Atta Koko (Canut, 2013) – may take the form of initiation: the achievement or accomplishment of a mission, regardless of the mythical or illusory dimension (Canut, 2020a).

These works, however, do not just explain or testify, they always have a clear performative function: they generate messages and incite social and political transformations in Africa. They inspire young men to leave, to find a brother, a father. They encourage young people to stay in the country, engage in a reflection on neocolonialism or social realities in general. They allow the audience to pay respect to an often despised group (e.g., the Soninke), anchor feminine solidarities, change the mentalities of men, establish a feminist thought process, and promote political action, etc. These objectives emphasize the pervasive interventionist dimension of these authors' works. Thus, the gaze beyond the screen that challenges the audience, like the actor who addresses the public in the *koteba*, establishes this perpetual tension between subjugation and emancipation.

The protest can be implemented through laughter and theatricalization. This is what Habib Dembélé, who shares his time between Mali and France, does in his stand-up comedy "The Kanute Visa", to the point of creating a crisis around the very value of migration (Sow, 2014). Far from inaugurating cosmopolitanism, Dembélé regards migration as the practice that blinds people by creating fantasies of modernity. Ridiculed by their pathological desire to go to Europe, the characters of "The Kanute Visa" are primarily presented as archetypes of postcolonial figures of contemporary Mali. In order to rectify this delusion, the author goes from a "praise of locality" (Sow, 2014, p. 25) to a tribute to the Soninke people – those who either leave but never forget their country or sacrifice themselves for it.

The function of the plays, books or films is therefore less one of representation than a pragmatic one: these works are primarily intended to encourage peers to participate, to contest, to reflect, to change, to protest and to act. Migration in this sense then contrasts with the recurrent European clichés as the place of a thought in action that never ceases to question and to raise debate in African societies. In my opinion, it is crucial and urgent to start any analysis of African migrations from this discursive activity, otherwise running the risk of losing what is most important for our understanding.

PAROLE COMMUNE. PRODUCTION OF AND ENGAGING IN COMMON SPEECH AND A COMMON VOICE

By carefully attending to and understanding the words of mobilities as a starting point, as explained above, an ethnography could lead to the co-construction/co-production of knowledge as in the case of Nicola Mai's ethnofictions, Zelimir Zilnik's documentary series, Nicolas Jaoul's militant struggles or the filmed improvisations or fictional documentaries that I myself initiated. These works are the products of a deep commitment (subjective and political) to people, hosts, friends and/or companions of struggle. The methodological challenge is to take the time to seize the chances and to look out for the unexpected.

Whereas co-construction is each and every time defined in a singular way depending on the contingencies of lived experiences (Canut, Danos, Him-Aquilli, & Panis, 2018), it is obvious that participants are animated by a common desire to bring forth an innovative collective speech and a collective voice. Thus, recalling and accounting *in one gesture* for different types of stories required for a refugee to obtain asylum in Europe has been a major focus of Nicola Mai's films and installations with transsexuals. Dealing with very different issues, Nicolas Jaoul participated for months in a movement of political struggle alongside migrants in the Stalingrad neighborhood in Paris, trying to produce sound and image with the *physical* strength that comes from a collective political movement despite differences of its members (languages, cultural and social practices, etc.). Finally, bringing to the screen the demands of the women of a small island lost in the Atlantic through the performance of *batuku* in a road movie also implies a will to transform social practices and to affect political subjectivation.

Let me now turn to the work of Nicola Mai, whose *ethno-autobiographical* method consists of protecting transsexual asylum seekers by not filming them directly, but by getting actors to play their roles. The idea behind this process ("participative creative and filmmaking-based methodology," 2016, p. 7) is to account for the power relations involved between different narrative registers. Samira, facing the institution, facing the medical world, facing her clients or facing the anthropologist, takes up different narratives for her story and, notably, "the contradictory requirements of being a transsexual" in France and a "man" in Algeria" (2016, p. 9). By splitting the screen in two, the director sets both characters face to face in interaction, trying to capture what he calls the "evolving directions of her mobile orientation" (Mai, 2016, p. 12), and to let voices and speech emerge in their complexity. Thus, the multiplicity of stories presented indicates that there is no single truth, but rather that truth varies "in relation to the biographical borders

and existential priorities at work in each situation and at different stages of her life" (Mai, 2016, p. 7).

In fact, Mai observes that "during these interviews, Karim described his life in terms of the Algerian transsexual biographical border: a teleological transnormative narrative originating from the global north that allowed him to frame his complex sexual and gender identification as "a woman trapped in the wrong body" (Mai, 2016 p. 10). Through the juxtaposition of "the self-representations that emerge in different situations, relationships and settings" that produces a "fragmented process of knowledge production" (Mai, 2016 p. 11), the director reconstructs the subjectivity of Karim-Samira, captured by ethnography and interviews. Through experimental cinema, Mai politically engages in a new scientific logic that aims to thicken language practices as they constantly re-contextualize situations and perform the *real*. In addition, by combining the various regimes of narration and speech, the author gives its full value to the body, which is so often forgotten in the analysis of migration: "To have their rights recognized and avoid deportation, migrants assemble their bodies and perform their subjectivity according to standardized humanitarian scripts of victimhood, vulnerability and gender/sex that act as 'biographical borders'" (Mai, 2014 p. 189). Moreover, he breaks with the idea of an assigned identity, to initiate a reflection on the heterogeneity of becoming, the movement of identifications, which can only be tested by and in language interactions: "A performative and relational understanding of subjectification is predicated on the recognition of the intrinsic, if not ontological, heterogeneity of subjectivity"(Mai, 2014).

This heterogeneity cannot be separated from the historicization of the temporal process of migration, which also changes according to subjugation techniques:

> Migrants' understanding of agency and vulnerability are embedded within existential priorities and needs that evolve alongside their migration trajectories and emerge from a dynamic evaluation of 'past experiences and a desire to achieve some improvement in the future' (Bastia & McGrath, 2011). Within this dynamic evaluation, what used to be a risk can sometimes become an opportunity and vice-versa as migrants decide, implicitly or explicitly, to endure different opportunities of protection, autonomy and control according to where they are in relation to their desired life trajectory. (Mai, 2014)

As a second example, I will briefly mention my work *Ilia di Mudjer,* focused on Cape Verde (Canut*,* 2016a). Similarly to the work of Mai, it aimed at bringing out assemblages and experiences of becoming as they are continually interactionally

constructed. In this film, co-construction involves the entanglement of several genres and several linguistic and semiotic hybridities that highlight "that agencing decisions mean very different things at different times" (Mai, 2016 p. 9). While *batukadera* women explicitly narrate their practice of *batuku* so as to extract all the functions that this performance fulfills in their daily life, this *free speech* is elaborated in interaction between them, especially through the role of the intermediary played by Ja, who leads the investigation in her own way "like a journalist" (Canut, 2018).

Added to this free speech, the film emphasizes the signs (multiple indexicalities) that the *batukaderas* produce with their bodies, in the unbridled repetition of percussion on the *chabeta,*[26] in dance as a trance in which some of them indulge and, finally, in the song that brings women together, mainly around feminist demands. The exhaustion and, at the same time, the energy provided by the rhythm, the joy of the cathartic effect of the songs, the power of the messages addressed to others, in particular to men, are the many innovative ways of addressing issues of migration: in this case issues of women who stay but protest against this abandonment. These *immobile* or *refrained* ones (*paradas*), as they call themselves, simultaneously construct their collective becoming (*devenir*). Organized as a self-help group (sometimes with tontines), they support each other while letting off steam and creating. As I have shown in detail elsewhere (Canut, 2016a, 2017, 2018), the ambition of the work is to listen to what happens, and from this reality to engage in a common work to extend the *free speech* and the struggle, to unfold them in several places of power depending on the needs and desires of the people affected.

The latest example of co-construction is *Bèriz (Paris), Le Temps des Campements* (Jaoul, forthcoming). Directed by filmmaker and anthropologist Nicolas Jaoul, *Bèriz* is the product of a collaborative commitment against the violent policy towards migrants in Paris. This project focuses on the residents of the Stalingrad neighborhood who demonstrated in 2016 to protest the treatment and living conditions of exiles. The first part of the film is dedicated to the filming of the demonstrations emphasizing the connections, the links, the negotiations, the misunderstandings, the moments of conciliation as well as the differences between "supporters" and "migrants". Filmed a year later, the second part gives voice to two of the protagonists involved in the struggle: Ismail, a Sudanese herder; and Fathi, a Syrian activist. In order to capture their sentiment, Jaoul takes the first character, Ismail, back to the site of the camp where the demonstrations took place to dialogue with Fathi, in a cramped room provided by the government to asylum seekers.

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26   The *chabeta* is a handmade percussion instrument made of cloths covered with a piece of plastic or leather.

Far from displaying pathos, the film follows an experimental progression of events on both sides of the camera. It does not adopt the narrative logic of a story reconstructed afterwards for the public (by editing – which producers often ask for) but instead a performative logic of relations in an order settled between the researcher and his fellow protesters over a long period. Without ever putting himself forward, the director (hidden behind his camera) succeeds in filming aesthetic (construction of the film, sequence shots with stark movements, selection of peculiar situations etc.) to reveal the crux of his questioning (although never expressed): beyond the so-called "languages" and the so-called "cultures," what connects us in the most essential way? Everything connects these men and women in the struggle (or the struggle connects these men and women) because what is essential lies in the interaction of bodies and socio-political practices, which implies sharing words and voices (despite having different languages) that convey freedom, respect and dignity. At the end of this raw political journey, the viewer has lived through what is perhaps the purest political experience. And perhaps what is called *the real*.

CONCLUSION

This short survey of the modes of engaging with speech and voices of exiles is not exhaustive, but aims at indicating how, in Europe, these practices reveal ambivalent relations towards the object of reflection and knowledge that is "migration". Adopting the words of the authorities (e.g., clandestine, illegal), applying a positivist and structural vision of language ("a" language as object) or speaking for others by erasing what constitutes their discursive singularity are all attitudes and practices that contribute to the making of what I have called a *neocolonial ideological linguistic regime*. On the contrary, taking into account the words and the aesthetic productions of migrants themselves, or of those who are differently involved with this experience, is imperative. This way, the understanding of migratory processes can be radically modified: the frameworks of knowledge production are primarily located in artistic creations or found in enduring debates (in the kitchens, during tea drinking in courtyards, in the media, within civil society, etc.) in countries of departure. The production of meaning implies novel and ever-changing indexicalities that introduce new ways of examining peoples' trajectories.

Far from the sensationalist representations found in the media, the victim-based approaches of NGOs or the political and electoral manipulation by European leaders, listening to and interpreting the words of *adventurers*, *travelers* and other refugees themselves presupposes that researchers consider each subject (speaking subject) in their singularity in order to capture the plurality of meanings given to

migratory itineraries. To attach oneself to the word and voices as a social practice is, consequently, the only way to bring out common action (*agir commun*) as defined by Dardot (2011):

> Common action thus determines an original collective subjectivation which does not belong to the *collection* or the *whole*, nor to the *collective being* or to an integrative whole producing a higher unity, but rather a collective of singularities: neither a collection of elements nor a superior individual, the unity realized by such a collective proceeds only from the common task imposed by the singularities, by the rules that they co-produce in accomplishing it for its accomplishment. (p. 257)

Constructing together *with* those who want to, or at least attempting this path of common action, seems to be – for me – the only valid solution for an ethical and committed research we could be proud of.

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