

Issue 13, July 2026

THE MOUTH

Critical Studies on Language, Culture and Society

Poetics of Resonance

Published with the generous support of



Imprint

13th issue of
The Mouth Journal

Editors:
The Mouth

Technical support of the online edition:
Andrea Hollington

Layout and design:
Andrea Hollington

ISSN: 2513-101X



CONTENTS

01 Introduction	7
02 Jeremiad chants of bellyache Dannabang Kuwabong	13
03 Praise poetry in Zimbabwe: Forms, contexts and ritual communication in chiShona and isiNdebele Andrea Hollington	25
04 The symbolic universe of Arabic letters: An anthropological-linguistic study of Alif, Waw, and Nun Emine Selcen Altındal	53
05 Convivial creativity in everyday life: Cultural resources in encounters and ruptures Ronja Kampschulte	69
06 Shifting gender-role attitudes among the Sukuma in Tanzania: A comparative study of oral poetic forms and societal perspectives Esther J. Masele & Lily B. Makalanga	99
07 From silence to power: Women's voices and social transformation in a rural dairy co-operative in Tanzania Beatrice J. Kimaro & Rehema G. Kilonzo	115
08 Multilingualism and GBMSM (gay, bisexual, and men-who-have-sex-with-men) group sex Alexander Andrason	137
09 Voices of Resistance - Queere Stimmen, die Cyborgs und Hybridität als Widerstand: Eine Voice Performance Yuri Walter	171

10 Warten und Gastfreundschaft Johanna Pütz	199
---	-----

11 Warten nervt Lilian Richter	205
--	-----

12 Wandeln, warten, verwandeln Anne Storch	209
--	-----

01

Introduction

01

Introduction

Fortunately, linguistics is no longer limited to theories grounded in Platonic thought, description based on Eurocentric gazes on typologies, or other ‘mainstream topics’. Instead, everyday moments, encounters, reflections, and voices and outputs that are less frequently heard are receiving more and more attention from interested and progressive colleagues, who are broadening the definition of language studies in general, as well as of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and pragmatics, among other fields. Since its first issue in 2017, *The Mouth* has consistently paved the way for courageous and innovative perspectives, a path that the journal continues with the present issue.

This collection brings together contributions that explore the relationships between

language, the body, perception, and social experience. The authors examine how people engage with the world through aesthetic, linguistic and embodied practices, considering topics such as poetic forms of expression, everyday moments of waiting, religious symbolism, sexual and desire-related practices, and acts of resistance and self-positioning.

More courageous and innovative perspectives are also found in the ways ideas and resonances are presented as we strive for epistemic diversity also through a plurality of forms and modes of constructing and transmitting knowledge.

The contributions are united by a shared interest in moments when language transcends mere communication. Here, language emerges as resonance, embodied practice, aesthetic form,

social action, and a medium through which belonging and difference are expressed. The authors explore how people construct meaning, create community, negotiate power relations and performatively produce identity – often precisely where language, the body and emotion are inextricably intertwined. These poetic voices that are gathered here have in common that they display individuals’ ways of resonating with the world, which is often not very hospitable, or is exclusive, or allows only for very selective stories and experience narratives. The poetic voices also show ways in which communities emerge and resonate with the world through embodied actions and reactions that connect rather than separate. The poetics of resonance re-centers language and communicative acts in the worldview of an individual and seeks for a reconnection and community, and as a process highlights the role of “language as a life-seeking and hospitable gift that creates resonances and inclusive entanglements” (Storch & Faraclas 2025: 10) – always in danger of being hijacked, instrumentalized, mainstreamed or subsumed under dominant hegemonies, where individuals’ experiences no longer matter, or are muted. Focusing on resonance and on the poetics of resonance means allowing for an affective, transformative experience where literature, art, or poetry, but also daily experience, strikes a deep, kinaesthetic, or emotional chord, connecting an individual to the world, their environment, and to their own being. Resonance in terms of poetics also means a “reformulation” (in the narrow sense) of utterances, perspectives, hegemonies, and allows for a broader and more complex web in the reconnection of a speaker with the world and in mutual human relationships, too, as has been outlined in the sociology of resonance (Rosa 2016). “Resonance” happens here not only between authors

and the events in their lifeworlds but also between readers (of the contributions), listeners (of audio formats) and spectators of the images and the authors.

This issue of *The Mouth* begins with Danabang Kuwabong’s Jeremiad Chants of Bellyache, poems that reflect on the ways in which we live and travel in a world in which our ancestors are forgotten: “What mariner stories shall we share as sojourners? / In these lands shared by our ancestors that we deny / Among these people betrayed by our ancestors / Whose names are written on our history walls? / Whose names and gains we enjoy without regret / Or feel any commitment / to their right to reparation.” Poetry as an alternative way to chronicle the present and to look at the histories from which it emerges here helps us to turn the gaze not only to the powerful contribution of the poetics of resonance, but also to the deep meaning offered by texts in other genres than academic papers. Andrea Hollington’s essay on praise poetry in Zimbabwe, in which she also focuses on ritual communication, subsequently shows how this genre is used to convey perspectives on history and society. The many layers of meaning and the complexity of praise poems in terms of their aesthetics, structure and performance alike demand dedication and respect by scholars. The latter is also highlighted by Emine Altındal in her contribution of the deep symbolism and complex semiotics of the Arabic letters alif, waw and nun. Sacred writing, sound, art, practices of reading and reciting are some of the aspects of the rich semiotics of Arabic letters she explores. In Ronja Kampschulte’s artistic piece on conviviality and creativity in everyday spaces, it is the simple bench in the public space, the environment of the railway station and the city center, in which the depths of conversation and hospitality unfold

and help us understand that resonance can be experienced anywhere.

A second group of contributions offers insights into layers upon layers of embodied experiences that are part of language and communicative practices which challenge the current systems of domination. First, Esther J. Masele and Lily B. Makalanga offer a study of the poetic aspects of shifting gender in Sukuma society. Then, Beatrice J. Kimaro and Rehema Kilonzo's work on women's voices and social transformation in Tanzania sheds light on the powerful communicative strategies rural women have found in order to be heard. Alexander Andrason in his multivocal, inspiring piece on multilingual practices in group sex reminds us of the means of linguistics itself to empower people, for example by creating paradigms in which formerly marginalized ways of communicating can be appreciated and taken seriously. The fourth contribution in this section is not an essay or a paper, but a libretto. It is a spoken sonic performance by Yuri Walter on resistance, cyborgs and hybridity, alongside its transcript (in the pdf issue). "Technologies influence myths, and myths influence technologies. Dominant, hierarchical narratives – about gender, nature, or the body, for example – are embedded in technologies. At the same time, there is emancipatory potential: by developing new myths and repurposing technologies, we can break down these embedded orders. (*water gurgling*)", they write. The performance itself is available in the online issue on the website of *The Mouth*.

A third group of contributions highlights situations in which order may fall apart, something may happen, or change is at least conceivable: waiting not as an enforced passive state, but as a creative way of resonating and engaging with the world, as there is no other option

anyway, while one waits. Johanna Pütz's work shows how waiting entails hospitality, which, if we only give ourselves the permission to accept the invitations of others, takes us into the most amazing situations. Lilian Richter's paper draws our gaze at the raindrops on the window of a train that refuses to move, the sounds in spaces in which waiting takes place, and the thoughts that emerge from the annoyance of waiting – until waiting unfolds as a possibility, as a future. Anne Storch offers a few glimpses of waiting as precarity, play and rejection in a contribution that was inspired by Pütz' and Richter's work as well as discussions with students in Cologne.

We are delighted that Issue 13 of *The Mouth* became such a rich collection of contributions that represent a relatively large variety of genres. Ranging from academic papers to poems, anecdotal texts, essays on autobiographic and personal reflection, calligraphy, watercolour paintings, sound performance, bricolage and much more, the contributions brought together here help to demonstrate that the different ways of creating and transmitting knowledge themselves can resonate. There is no need to exclude whatever transcends the limitations of the 'traditional academic article', and we can thrive enjoying the enriching interactions of diverse genres, enabling us to take part in multisensory and profound resonance.

We remain deeply grateful to the wonderful authors and creators present in this issue of *The Mouth*, who, hailing from various countries and being at different stages in their (academic) careers, all contributed to a deeper understanding of how language is interwoven within the aesthetic, social, and material fabrics of life, and how its study can transcend conventional disciplinary boundaries by viewing language as an integral

part of their relationship, and our relationship, with the world.

References

Rosa, Hartmut. 2016. *Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Storch, Anne & Nicholas G. Faraclas. 2025. Introduction. In: Faraclas, Nicholas G., Anne Storch & Viveka Vellupilai (eds.), *Hospitable Linguistics: Alternative, Indigenous and Critical Approaches to Language Research and Language Encounters*, 1–27. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.



02

Jeremiad chants of bellyache

02

Jeremiad chants of bellyache

Dannabang Kuwabong

Cataract Visions

For we
who desire only the emptiness of fun
For we
who take these pleasure rides
Over these terraces of congealed blood
Between arterial streets of infinite struggle
Our illusions
of abundance conceal our collusions
Our erasable
consciences are sites of unfeeling
And their histories have no holds on our heartbeats
Pounding in the drugged ventricles of dreams
Unwilling to pause in compassion for the dead
Our hearing
lost in these silenced chambers of pain
Unhearing

Hang trembling
As bounty hunters
Sought manhood
Hoisted between
Sanctified by priestly blessing,
Scripted
Proclaimed

the shrieks of the dying that circulate
still in these dank and still airless cells
from our nations fox-trotted and balled
initiation through Black virgin hymens
trap doors or chained to cannon balls
legalized by royal laws
in peninsulas of Iberia or Netherlands
in peninsulas of Albion or Denmark

We who
inherit similar visions of their rites to dominate
Seek
forget deleted memories of our journeys

Locked
in chains of enslavement around necks and wrists

Fear of recognition
Of those black bodies

Whose escaping souls

Yet

if only we could see beyond

We may perceive determined faces

Seeking pittance of freedom and voice

Yet only we, who wrap ourselves in mosquito nets of panic

we are

who banks own and malls buy,

we see these vendors

daring the sun

we see these trekkers as exotic primates

captured in computerized camcorders as tales

to be shared around chuletas de cerdo and bacardís con lechón

is our appetizer for a denial
still bleeding in these dungeons
become the winds of change that prosper us

our looking glasses beyond our noses
behind shielded limo windows

But when we have seen all this
sans perceiving
And when we have consumed all
sans tasting
When we have heard it all
sans listening

And the dust trails of our excursions die down
What mariner stories shall we share as sojourners?
In these lands shared by our ancestors that we deny

i sit
by this rain drenched window of a leaking *trotro*,
Gaze through the mist at all which glide before my vision, wondering:
“ . . . How have we come to become mere mirrors to annihilation?”

in my
head cacophony: lamentations and woe. You too can hear them:
lonely
are the children in this land without the vision of elders!
scattered
are the people who lick honey from dead vultures!
lonely
the baobab waving leafless branches at treeless horizons!
lonely
the crowd circling around monuments of false gods
making
leftover offerings of the desires at the shrines of shadows,
our
countenance of delusions graphitized against our hopes,
become
building bricks for new tabernacles of nightmares,
where
in many tongues noon-time howlers hawk salvation:

“ . . . For whom do we aspire to reflect our people’s death?”

i am
stranded by the burden performed at Nkrumah Circle at night,
Among
ruinous heaps from foreign spheres sprawl,
we
scramble for our souls,
and
like confused mambas wriggle up and down the walk-overs,
at
these bend-down boutiques we seek nothing but these unwanted wastes,
we
are translated into scavengers and devotees of destroyers’ dreams,
with
no *cuestionamientos* from the children, no *contestaciones* from elders,

we
 build the alter for the plastic god on the soul of the soil and waterways,
 choke
 their gifts of fertilities in open sewers and create a beggar's land:
 "... For whose entertainment shall we sing our agony?"
 i have
 no answers, only a retreat to the valley of drunken-knowledge,
 i yearn
 to learn to over-stand the burden of mountain visions developed,
 by people
 in *favelas* that surround the glass cages of *xeroxed* development.
 how
 we make supplications to a desert god squirming in opulence,
 sprinkling
 mortuary stinks as benedictions for a future abundance,
 from
 McCarthy Hill to Aburi Gardens where unruly concrete rises,
 in these
 reclaimed swamps and mangroves for a Bush highway to dying,
 against
 the conduct of nature that monitored the flow of floods,
 and by
 the new speedways, desolation cloaks the rot with rising smoke:
 "... How have we come to become mere mirrors to annihilation?"
 i see
 the squint eye *sankofa* bird rise lazily from its loft at Sodom,
 and ride
 the wind of many smells to Gomorrah across Korle lagoon,
 It circles over strangers' gated communities in the cities' centers,
 from where
 they minister unto the children of lost homesteads,
 beside
 the highways, range sentries of broken cars and fridges, line after line.
 beside
 the sidewalks, lean skeletons of bicycles and motor cycles, line upon line.
 beside
 gas stations, squat discharged engines and mountains of retired tires,
 pawned
 nightmares of rich nations unable to digest their consumption,
 so we scramble for honorary membership at their table of hunger:

“ . . . For whom do we aspire to reflect our people’s death?”

cry:
from Woe to Boe, Mpalaba to Gambaga, Dambai to Bamboi, cry:
see
somewhere in the central forests and northern savannahs, see,
far from official probity yet supported under the table annuity,
see
trees razed and the rivers dragged and drained and are no more.
galamsayists and gunslingers
pan for gold, burn mercury for pittance.
cry!
future minds transfigure into nutters roaming the city squares. cry.
cry!
where millet grew, no more pito.
cry!
We pawn sorghum land for *jathropa*, Europe’s desires.
cry!
Do not create new scarecrows of our children on these lands.
scream!

“ . . . For whom do we aspire to reflect our people’s death?”

but how do I scream, I, who have also joined the band of exodus
who so soon may un-remember the Monsanto deception in Walewale
who
so soon may dis-remember the debacles of dependence on gold
who
so soon may un-remember feeding on what I cannot digest
i seek
for an answer to the way reciprocity without forgetting

“How have we come to become mere mirrors to annihilation?”

“For whom do we aspire to reflect our people’s death?”

“For whose entertainment shall we sing our agony?”

we
only pour libations of tears to cleanse our eyes for seeing!

By the banks of Wadi Gaza

Our confused ghosts
Float without direction
Pry fingerless among minced
Blow over shredded flesh
Seeking a place cell memory
Among the undead and unalive
Swirling in these muddy waters
Looking for any rakish spaces
Along these banks of Wadi Gaza

The reddish water of our cut lives
Gush into the Blue Mediterranean
The flow cut Gaza in two
We cannot breath consolation
In this our strip of desolation
As roaring stars screech over Gaza
Blasting away sanctuaries of life
Where Sulaymān ibn Dāwūd rested
Where Issah reached out to heal all
But now, we walk like shadows

Here our spirits disperse listening
Unhearing my mother's call at evening time
Yearning for a father's welcome embrace
Seeking morning light over Zoroub Hill
Our vacant stares lost in artillery flares
And we sigh in guttural whispers:

The hooting bombs boom over Gaza
Rupture our weakened eardrum
And we whimper by Wadi Gaza
Aisha to Inusah in Khan Yunis calls
Zoya to Nabila in Abasan-al-Kabira calls

Only rubble dust rise out of empty spaces
Only thunderous flashes silent our screams
And we cower along these banks of Wadi Gaza

The laughter of Gibril and Nadia breaks
The joys of Issah and Jamila wilts and disperse
Censored, muffled in darkest despair

“Oh our voiceless land,
Oh our crumpled hopes”

Only stuttering echoes of brokenness
Whistle from hollows of shattered bones
Terminates beneath sallow rubble
Hiss like phantoms from jaheem
They stretch their hands to jannāt
Asking why zabaniya suck their breaths
But no Mikā'il, no Jibrīl, no mal'akhs
And befuddled Allah or Elohim cringe
In the shadows of another rebellion
By humans not by hordes of gehenom
In search of images to return to shiamim
They wring creative hands in shame
Gaze wearily over sudden human mounds
In the shadow of Bani Suheila
Wadi Gaza twists painfully eastwards
As we perch by the bank of Wadi Gaza
Fatima beckons to Hamza
Yasmin gestures to Habib
To look toward Jabaliyah
Perchance to descry an irenic spot
Even as the flares of ammo
Torpedo through sanitariums
And they conduct hasty burials
Amidst clouds of smoke and dust
And the living and buildings are no more,

And yet, and yet the world waits in joy
And Wadi Gaza
Continues to leak
Into the Mediterranean
We pondered in our puny minds:
"What then really happened
To the sons of Ibrahim?
On Haram al-Sharif aka Moriah?
Was Ishmail the ram in lieu of Ishāq
Not reincarnated Hābīl's ram caught by the horns?

We pondered in our puny minds:
What has happened
To the daughters of Miriam?"

See how Salma and Maha
See how Amira and Amina
Cup their bursting breasts and wail
They wail to a deaf world no avail
Observe how they clutch the remains
Of the limp and shredded remains
These guiltless souls
Gifts of their bleeding wombs
For in the news from Rafa
There is no consolation
For those who hide there too
It is Omar and Ali
They claw through shattered concrete
Their tiny hands search for missing mothers
Who in a flash of light and sound
Disappeared in crumbling steel and bricks
And yet, and yet the world cheers on
Saying: Wadi Gazans you may weep salty tears
Perchance to water new deserts of war

Rayan cries to Imran
Inayah wails to Farah
Rabiah cries to Zainab
Lailah wails to Farida
Abdallah shrieks to Abdul
And we cluster under a fig tree
That no longer provides shade
Its leaves stripped to cover the decaying
Thinking whether to flee to Beit-Lahiya
Or hotfoot to Beit-Hanoun
But we can only dream of Khan Unis
For Egypt has sealed her borders
For Egypt has sealed her tunnels
And yet Wadi Gaza slouches
Carrying the salt waters of her children
Zigzagging among the treacherous terrain
Carving invisible hieroglyphics of history
And Khadijah, like Rachel

Run around weeping for her children
And they will not be comforted
For the children hear her not

Amal like La Llorona
Cries for her children
By the Wadi Gaza
She will not be comforted
For the Dead Sea has swallowed them
For the Wadi Gaza
Has sacrificed them to Mediterranean

And we wait
at sunset
For the guns
of Wadi Gaza
to lie silent
In vain we wait
For the world ar-el-Salaam
That peddle the beatitudes of 'Īsā al-Masih
To descend with olive branches
And lead us to Al-Quds
Their silence stirs at us in disdain
And yet
We wait

03

Praise poetry in Zimbabwe:
Forms, contexts and ritual communication in
chiShona and isiNdebele

03

Praise poetry in Zimbabwe: Forms, contexts and ritual communication in chiShona and isiNdebele

Andrea Hollington

1 Introduction¹

Praise poetry is a well-known and culturally significant form of oral literature in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa and beyond.

In fact, as Ruth Finnegan states, praise poetry, also known as panegyric, is one of the most common and elaborate poetic genres on the African continent (Finnegan 2012: 111). She especially highlights its prominence in

¹ The poems, performances and linguistic practices discussed in this paper are based on research in Zimbabwe in July 2018 as well as on published sources and literature on praise poetry in Zimbabwe. The former includes interviews, group conversations and discussions as well as ethnographic methods, in particular participant observation (especially with the performance group *Zim Totems* founded by Chiremba Hwesa Masango). I want to express my deepest gratitude to the speakers of chiShona and isiNdebele who have shared their knowledge on praise poetry, totems, ancestors and related cultural practices with me and commented on various preliminary thoughts, in particular Mapfumo B. Tinago, Venna Tinago, Chiremba Hwesa Masango, Shiloh P. Mafukidze, Helen Kauma and Bryan Kauma. I thank the Global South Studies Center, University of Cologne for sponsoring and supporting my research. I am indebted to Axel Fanego Palat, Anne Storch and Janine Traber for their helpful comments and to Mary Chambers for proofreading the text.

Southern Bantu/Sintu² language practices and states that praise poems constitute a specialized and complex form of verbal art in Southern Africa (ibid.: 121).

ChiShona and isiNdebele, the two main African languages spoken in Zimbabwe, exhibit rich forms and performative practices of praise poetry that will be discussed in this contribution. ChiShona is the most widespread Sintu language (or language cluster) in Zimbabwe and serves, alongside the colonial language English, as a *lingua franca* in the country.³ It is comprised of several regional varieties (often referred to as 'dialects'), including chiZezuru, chiKorekore, chiManyika, chiNdau and chiKaranga. However the term 'Shona' as an umbrella term for the dynamic varieties spoken in Zimbabwe is not unproblematic and is rejected by several linguists and speakers.⁴ Zimbabwean isiNdebele (often referred to as 'Northern isiNdebele') is another Sintu language spoken in the country. It is part of the Nguni group and closely related to isiZulu, from which it branched off as King Mzilikazi migrated with his followers in the early 19th century. This article deals with Zimbabwean isiNdebele, which is related to, but distinct from South African isiNdebele varieties.⁵

The reciting of praise poetry fulfills various functions and is used as a form of ritual

communication in a number of culturally significant domains such as giving thanks, greetings, courting and love, respecting in-laws, engagement and marriage negotiations, and funerals, among others. Moreover, it is also a form of recounting history and local or regional histories and can be regarded as a mnemonic technique. Praise poetry is deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual beliefs; it praises clans and ancestors by evoking the *mitupo* ('totems', chiShona) and *izibongo* ('clan names', isiNdebele). These cultural practices are also connected to taboos: for example, members of the same clan who share the same totem are not allowed to marry. While the underlying concepts are different in Shona and Ndebele culture, the practices exhibit significant parallels and also influence each other through cultural and linguistic contacts.

This paper tries to disentangle some of these complexities and to shed light on the practices in context. While there are a number of popular publications on totems and praise poetry in Zimbabwe, there are just a few academic publications available, mostly on chiShona praise poetry. This paper seeks to contribute to the study of praise poetry by describing the cultural genre from an anthropological perspective and through the lens of ritual communication. In describing the practice and its

² The term *Bantu* is commonly used by many linguists, but has a problematic history in parts of Southern Africa, especially South Africa. While the term is widely used in large parts of (Eastern and Southern) Africa with its original linguistic meaning 'people', it acquired negative and racist connotations during the colonial apartheid regime with its dehumanizing policies and ideologies of categorizing and segregating people. Many South African linguists prefer the term *Sintu* for the large group of languages spoken in eastern and southern Africa, which is also adopted in this paper.

³ The number of speakers is estimated at about 10 million, but this figure depends on which varieties are included in the count.

⁴ For a critical discussion of the term and its establishment in the context of colonial and missionary linguistics see Makoni, Brutt-Griffler and Mashiri (2007).

⁵ While Zimbabwean isiNdebele is often referred to as 'Northern isiNdebele' and is also characterized by internal variation, the picture becomes more complex when including South African isiNdebele, which comprises three main varieties: the Ndzundza variety, on which the official South African Standard isiNdebele is based, spoken in the western parts of the Mpumalanga province and in and around Pretoria/Tshwane, the closely related Manala variety and the Sindebele variety spoken in the Limpopo province. The latter is characterized by language contact with Sotho-Tswana varieties (Axel Fanego Palat, personal communication).

uses and contexts, the paper compares chiShona and isiNdebele and therefore also contributes to an understanding of oral literature and ritual communication in a typological perspective. Furthermore, while popular accounts such as newspaper articles (e.g. Sekai 2014) bemoan the loss of this cultural practice, there are also new and continually developing usages and contexts in which totems/clans and their praises play significant roles. This will also be discussed in this contribution.

Basso and Senft's (2009) account of ritual communication offers an anthropological-linguistic framework for the study of Zimbabwean praise poetry, that looks at the linguistic practice as multimodal performance, as embedded in and simultaneously creating cultural knowledge, and as characterized as artful, formulaic, repetitive and following local aesthetics (Basso and Senft 2009: 1).⁶ This approach seems to fit perfectly to address praise poetry in Zimbabwe as it brings together many relevant components of the phenomenon under study and places them in a frame of cultural context, pragmatics and communication.

The main objective of this paper is to describe praise poetry in chiShona and isiNdebele as forms of ritual communication. This will shed light on the performative linguistic practice and the language of praise poetry as well as on its role within cultural communication in a changing society, and as ritual activities which "instantiate, represent and memorialize" (Tavárez, 2022: 197). The paper will also reflect on differences and commonalities between chiShona and isiNdebele forms of praise poetry.

The next section will introduce chiShona and isiNdebele praise poetry in more detail and reflect on its various contexts of use. This will also include pragmatic issues such as personalized forms of praise and will shed light on the underlying ethnohistoric and cultural concepts. Section three will focus on the language of praise poetry and look at two examples of praise poems: one in chiShona and one in isiNdebele. The section will shed light on linguistic features and rhetorical/literary devices in the verbal art. Praise poetry as ritual communication is the theme of section 4. As an approach to praise poetry, ritual communication offers an excellent perspective to discuss various functions of the practice in its cultural context, looking at aspects such as anticipation, indexicality, recontextualization and change.

2 ChiShona and isiNdebele praise poetry in Zimbabwe in its cultural context

Praise poetry in Zimbabwe is a performative practice that is closely connected to the social structure of the cultural groups involved, in particular clans and families. Clans as a social structure are common among Suntu-speaking communities of eastern and southern Africa. They serve a number of purposes with regard to social organization, cultural memory and ritual communication. However, it should be highlighted that clans and family structures are not static entities but characterized through social mobility, migration and other dynamics.

In chiShona, *madetembedzo* is the name for what is called praise poetry in English, while it is referred to as *izibongo* in isiNdebele.⁷ In some

⁶ In this regard, ritual communication refers to diverse forms of communicative practices that are ritualized in various contexts including special occasions as well as daily life. Basso and Senft's (2009) book presents anthropological-linguistic perspectives at forms of ritualized communication that examine language practices in their cultural contexts.

⁷ Due to the imbalances in academic works which feature chiShona praise poetry more prominently than isiNdebele (or other Zimbabwean languages), the elaboration of chiShona practices takes up more space in this section.

instances, in dictionaries and other publications, praise poetry is also referred to as 'praise songs'. Praise poetry is a complex cultural practice that includes a number of aspects such as names for genres, totems, clans and specific practices, and expressing respect and praise through a number of linguistic and non-linguistic communicative acts that often follow ritualized patterns of interaction (including the reactions they anticipate) and are part of the shared cultural knowledge of the group. In this regard, the power of names and proper nouns often have distinct referential properties in ritual speech practices, especially in terms of the historical narratives, social orders and social differences as well as identities they refer to and represent (Tavárez 2022: 201).

Among the maShona and the amaNdebele, as elaborated in their praise poetry as well, the history of the clan in its natural and social environment plays an important role with regard to the (perceived and prescribed) shared clan identity and the cultural knowledge shared by the members, which is based on the (accepted version of the) history of the ancestors, including migration, settlement, wars and overcoming other obstacles. The clan history often features in the elaborate versions of the clan praise poetry, especially in isiNdebele praise poetry, which strongly focuses on the leaders and founders of clans or on kings. This is quite common in (African) praise poetry, as Finnegan (2012: 111) argues: "It seems to go with a particular ethos, a stress on royal or aristocratic power, and an admiration for military achievement". In this sense, Southern African praise poems usually contain a narrative element that evokes the shared history of a clan. Pongweni

(1996: 27) elucidates: "There is a sense in which such glorification can be viewed as a celebration of the clan's survival in what was obviously a bare-knuckled fight against all the insurmountable problems that a hostile environment presented". In this regard, there is also a connection between ritual and authority, whereas praise poetry enacts and celebrates authority in social relations rooted in cultural history by calling on ancestors and clans, producing and reifying authoritative ontological models about the cosmos (see Tavárez 2022).

In chiShona, there are different types of *madetembedzo* which have different names, contexts and purposes. Fortune and Hodza (1974: 65) identify the clan/totem praise poetry, called *nhetembo dzorudzi* ('praises of the clan') as the most renowned form. Musiyiwa (2003) refers to this type of clan praise as *madetembedzo edzinza/rudzi* ('clan praise poetry'). Other types of chiShona praise poetry include personal praise (*madetembedzo okurumbidza munhu*) and boasts (*madetembedzo kuzvirumbidza*) as well as various sub types (Musiyiwa 2003).⁸ Another important genre of praise poetry is the domain of love, marriage and sexuality. While totem praise poetry can be used in that domain, there are other love poems which are recited in such contexts. The oral performance poetry for love and courtship includes *madetembedzo okupfimbana* ('courtship praises') and *zvirevereve zvomugudza* (men) and *madanha omugudza* (women) which are regarded as 'praises for love-making' and which praise the partner for sexual performance (Chimhundu 1995: 148; Hodza and Fortune 1979: 289-338). The great variety and repertoire of poems in this domain illustrates the important link between sexuality, marriage

⁸ For a more detailed typology of praise poetry of the maShona, see Musiyiwa (2003), Fortune and Hodza (1974, 1979).

and ancestors/totems which is fundamental in chiShona philosophy and culture (Chimhundu 1995: 149).

Clan praise performance poetry focuses on praising the *mitupo* ('totems', SG.: *mutupo*), which stand for the clan and address all clan members, the ancestors as well as the living. The maShona are historically comprised of various groups that settled in certain areas and their clans play a vital role in kinship, political and social relations. Every clan is represented by a *mutupo*, a 'totem'. Nyamutswa (2018: 1) states that the totemic system (*zvomitupo*) in chiShona cultures consists of the totem (*mutupo*), the principal praise name (*chidawo*), the totemic animal (*mhuka inoerwa*), and the totemic praise poem (*nhetembo yomutupo*, cf. alternate names above). In chiShona, totems are usually animals such as a lion, monkey, mouse or eland, as well as human or animal body parts such as the heart or the leg. Mugovera (2017) highlights the reciprocal relationship between the clan and its totem, as the clan possesses characteristics of the totem and the totem "contributes to the survival of the clan". This implies that members of the clan are not allowed to eat the totemic animal related to their clan, but rather protect it, which is also seen as a contribution to "preserving the balance of the ecosystem" (ibid.). This turned out to be a relevant point in my research, as my interview partners also highlighted the respect for the totem and the balance of nature expressed through the totemic system. The totems also serve to construct and stabilize in-group solidarity within the clan, as they provide characteristics that stand for the whole clan, play a vital role in

processes of socialization within the clan and determine forms of addressing, naming and ritual communication. They tie the group of the living to their ancestors and shared history and hence provide a strong sense of belonging. Moreover, to address someone by his/her totem or totemic praise name is an expression of utmost respect. Nyamutswa (2018: 1) elucidates:

The totemic system strings together people of the same genetic identity and provides a spiritual connection between an individual, family, clansmen and the ancestors. When someone is praised using the totemic system, the praise reverberates through that chain. Addressing someone by their totem, praise name or totemic symbol is the utmost show of respect among Zimbabweans. The person being addressed feels respected, inspired, encouraged and motivated. One feels that they are a great ancestor reincarnate. Ancestors are held in high esteem. An address by the totem is more respected than any other honorifics that one may think of such as the British term Sir, an address by name or surname.

In isiNdebele, the shared history and ancestry of the group is of particular importance and features prominently in the clan praise poetry. The breaking off of King Mzilikazi and his followers of the Khumalo clan from the Zulu kingdom under King Shaka in the early 19th century, the wars and battles with various groups, their migration and subsequent settlement in present-day Zimbabwe is well documented in the oral history of the amaNdebele, and their praise poetry consti-

tutes an important part of that history (see for instance Khumalo 2003).⁹ In fact, the praise poetry *izibongo* usually focuses on the kings and leaders (and not on totems) who stand out in the history of the amaNdebele. Their praise poetry is therefore also referred to as ‘royal poetry’ (see Musiyiwa 2003) and the poems that praise outstanding leaders such as King Mzilikazi or King Lobengula are often recited by a special person, the poet or praise singer called *imbongi* (Matshakayile-Ndlovu 2003). Highlighting important aspects of shared history through praise poetry can be regarded as selective deployment of metasemiosis which produces epistemological framing that foregrounds certain processes. In *izibongo* we can see that the ritual behavior produces chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981) which frame the ontological authoritative order in their historical context as well as their social and convivial ways of living (see Tavárez 2022).

While chiShona and isiNdebele share several aspects of this cultural practice, there are also significant differences. For instance, while the *mitupo* (chiShona) relate clans mostly to totems, such as animals and body parts, creating strong cultural ties on the level of cultural conceptualizations and metaphorical extensions of the beings and their respective clans, in isiNdebele it is the clan names themselves, *izibongo*, that are praised. Mugovera (2017) elucidates:

While the Shona people use mitupo based on animals and nature, in Ndebele izangelo/izibongo

were derived from names of the ancestors, from power, looks and deeds. For example, ‘abakoKhumalo ngondlangamandla’ (those of the Khumalo totem live by the sword) illustrates how they settled in present day Zimbabwe and established their kingdom.

Mangena and Ndlovu (2016: 254), on the other hand, explain that the totems in isiNdebele also serve as surnames, while in chiShona the surnames (family names) are usually different from the totems and their praise names (although there are several exceptions, such as *moyo* ‘heart’ which is not only a totem but also a common surname).¹⁰ Musiyiwa (2003) explains that while chiShona praise poetry centers on totems and their general characteristics, isiNdebele praise poetry focuses on outstanding leaders in the clan history and their individual features and achievements. This is shared among the Nguni cultures, whose praise poetry is more formalized and is also recited at specific public events (in opposition to chiShona praise poetry, which is more informally recited in daily contexts, Musiyiwa 2003).

Despite these differences, animal imagery is commonly used among the amaNdebele and maShona with regard to clans/totems in in other domains: “In both Shona and Ndebele cultures, images of the relationship between human beings and animals do take a variety of forms” (Mangena and Ndlovu 2016: 251). Various domestic and wild animals feature in rhetorical devices in Zimbabwe and al-

⁹ It should be pointed out that the amaNdebele of Zimbabwe and the amaNdebele of South Africa should not be confused with each other. Although their paths have crossed at various points and their roots and routes in Southern Africa are certainly entangled, the two groups invoke different migration, clan and settlement histories and their languages also differ significantly (see Skhosana 2009, who studied variation in isiNdebele with a focus on the South African scenario).

¹⁰ This is likely to go back to the time when surnames (a Western tradition) were introduced in the area and clan names were taken as surnames.

lude to perceived similarities between humans and animals. The role of animal symbolism is deeply rooted in Zimbabwean culture and can be traced back to medieval times, where it is evident in the architecture, designs and structures of the ruins of ancient Zimbabwe such as Great Zimbabwe (see Huffman 1996).

The human behaviors that are usually compared to those of animals include sexuality, eating, diligence, socialization, movement, and communication (Mangena and Ndlovu 2016). The authors state that animal imagery is used to express positive as well as negative human characteristics and behavior. Examples of negative connotations include the comparison of humans who seem to have lost their sense of humanity to wild animals or the use of ritual insults among school children, while positive analogies refer to aspects such as good character, faithfulness, beauty and intelligence (ibid.: 252ff). The complex relationship between animals and clans with regard to totemic systems among the maShona and amaNdebele is regarded as a special area of animalization and can be seen as constructions of group identity, belonging and descent (ibid.: 254). The association with animals through totems usually highlights positive characteristics of the animal, which symbolically stands for the clan as well as for the individual addressed in the praise poem. For instance, the strength of the lion, the greatness of the elephant or the beauty of the zebra are common features highlighted in praise poetry. Interestingly, negative attributes also feature in the performances and oral recitations, and the members of the clan/totem take pride in them as well. The praise poem for the *soko* ('monkey') totem, for example, contains the lines "those who survive on stealing", "those who bathe once a year" and "those who always

scratch their skins" (ibid.: 255). Mangena and Ndlovu (ibid.) explain this aspect as follows:

These are less virtuous traits, yet in the totem world, people embrace these for the simple reason that they are attributes of their totem animal. This is quite revealing: in African culture, all qualities have their special places, be they positive or negative. [...] This speaks to the centrality of harmony and balance in African cultural thought and philosophy.

In this regard, praise poetry can "reveal connections and hidden faces in society that would not otherwise be accessible" as part of the making of social relations (Barber 1991: 2). Similar to *oriki* in Yoruba society, praise poetry in Zimbabwe can be "used to swell up the reputation of the person they are addressed to and to lay claim to membership of certain social groups", but, beyond that, they also "represent social action [...] in a mediated and refracted discourse. Whether implicitly or explicitly, they offer a commentary on it: a commentary which is made up of heterogeneous and sometimes competing views" (ibid.: 3).

Moreover, and this is also illustrated in Mangena and Ndlovu's (2016) contribution, there are one-to-one analogies of phrases of praise poetry relating to totemic animals in chiShona and isiNdebele. The authors show this for poems praising the zebra (chiShona: *mbizi*, isiNdebele: *dube*), the elephant (chiShona: *zhou*, isiNdebele: *ndlovu*), the lion (chiShona: *shumba*, isiNdebele: *sibanda*), the monkey (chiShona: *shoko* [*soko*], isiNdebele: *ncube*) and the baboon (chiShona: *mukanya*, isiNdebele: *mfene*) by citing lines of their poems in both languages (ibid.: 255). While this seems to contradict the above-mentioned contexts and

histories of isiNdebele praise poetry being based on clans and their outstanding founders and leaders and not on totems/animals, these analogies of totemic animals and their praise in both languages, which have also been attested and produced by a number of chiShona and isiNdebele speakers, may be a result of cultural and language contact. Inter marriages (which are common in Zimbabwe, especially due to exogamic marriage practices), migration and numerous contexts of contact have led to many convergence phenomena in chiShona and isiNdebele that have only partly been studied from a linguistic perspective (see for instance Khumalo 2004). Furthermore, while some authors stated that isiNdebele praise poetry refers to surnames/clan names rather than totems (see above), it is also a fact that animal names are common surnames among the amaNdebele (such as *ncube* 'monkey', *ndlovu* 'elephant', *nkomo* 'cow', *dube* 'zebra', among others).

In order to illustrate the cultural concepts of the complex chiShona and isiNdebele terminology concerning praise poetry that have been mentioned in this section, table 1 summarizes various terms in the semantic field of praise poetry in both languages.¹¹

It is interesting to note, in this regard, that although some of the concepts in this table seem to be very similar in chiShona and isiNdebele, they are treated differently grammatically. This becomes evident in particular when taking a closer look at the noun classes. For instance, as table 1 shows, the general term for

praise poetry in chiShona, *madetembedzo*, is in class 6, a plural class which in chiShona (as well as in numerous other Suntu languages) is mostly associated with fruits, body parts (that come in pairs), liquids, animals, loan words (e.g. from English), plural nouns and, as in this case, terms that denote abstract concepts (see Brauner 1993). The class is also associated with big things and can serve as an augmentative. The isiNdebele term for praise poetry, *izibongo*, is a plural form in class 8, whose singular form *isibongo* (class 7) refers to a clan name. The class 7/8 in isiNdebele encompasses varied lexemes denoting inanimate objects as well as people and some abstract concepts (see Bower and Lotridge 2002). Since systems of nominal classification can be manifestations of cultural conceptualizations (for instance with regard to the formation of culturally influenced categories), the assignment of these terms to different noun classes in chiShona and isiNdebele may reflect their particular underlying cultural cognition (for a broader discussion of the semantics of Suntu noun classes and cultural conceptualizations see Dingemanse 2006, Maho 1999).

The introduction to praise poetry in this section makes clear that this genre of verbal art fulfills a number of functions and occurs in various contexts. Praise poetry is performed in special situations which all involve the expression of gratitude and/or praising another person, the most common and everyday occasion being the expression of thanks to another person. Praise poetry is performed in a rhythmic style with a voice, facial expression and other gestures that

¹¹ It should be pointed out that the interlinearizations in Table 1 and in the entire paper are in some instances rather detailed/explicit and deviate from common practice in Suntu linguistics, where some features (such as the marking of indicative mood through the final vowel -a) are not always made explicit in interlinearizations. Since this paper seeks to discuss linguistic forms in their cultural context and looks at two language practices in comparison, the present author believes that the detailed interlinearization is justified as a means to provide as much background information on grammatical elements as possible due to their (potential) significance in these cultural and regional contexts.

Table 1: Semantic field “praise poetry”¹²

(partly adapted from Hannan 1974, Fortune and Hodza 1974, Pelling 1971, and Matshakayile-Ndlovu 2003)

chiShona	isiNdebele
<i>madetembedzo</i> CL6.praise.CAUS.NMLZ ‘praise, praise poetry’ ‘praise names peculiar to a clan or sub-clan’	<i>isibongo</i> CL7.praise.NMLZ <i>isibongo</i> (SG) ‘clan name’ <i>izibongo</i> (PL) ‘praise songs’
<i>-tetemba</i> praise.IND ‘praise in rhythmical fashion’ ‘greet ceremoniously (using praise names and phrases)’	<i>-bonga</i> thank.IND 1. ‘appreciate, thank, give thanks’ 2. ‘praise, worship’ <i>imbongi</i> CL9.thank.NAG ‘poet, praise singer’
<i>nhetembo</i> CL10.praise.NMLZ (alternate form: <i>nhetembedzo</i>) ‘Litany. Series of praise greetings or sayings in praise of a person’	

¹² Please note that the respective chiShona and isiNdebele forms that are listed in the same line as pairs are not necessarily analogies of each other. The list presented here provides an insight into the semantic field. This list is not considered to be complete.

<i>nhetembo</i> CL10.praise.NMLZ ‘clan praise poetry’	<i>dzorudzi</i> CON10.clan 	<i>izibongo</i> CL7.praise.NMLZ ‘praises of the kings’	<i>zamakhosi</i> CON.CL6.king
<i>madetembedzo</i> CL6.praise.CAUS.NMLZ ‘clan praise poetry’	<i>rudzi</i> clan 		
<i>mutupo</i> CL3.totem/clan ‘totem, clan name’		<i>isangelo</i> CL7.clan-name ‘clan name’	
		<i>isitemo</i> CL7.ancestor-name ‘a name associated with ancestors (used as clan name)’ <i>-tema</i> cheer.IND ‘cheer, greet, etc. (using person’s isitemo)’ <i>-temeleza</i> cheer.CAUS.IND ‘praise extravagantly’	
<i>chidawo (chidao)</i> CL7.praise-name ‘praise name’ Hannan translates the terms as ‘sub-clan name (e.g. the clan with the <i>mutupo soko</i> has a sub-clan with <i>chidao: murehva</i>). The <i>chidao</i> name is most frequently used when greeting a person.’			

underline the solemn, usually respectful character of praising and thanking.

In chiShona, this reciting style exhibits a characteristic final cadence and is referred to as *kutetemba* ('to praise in rhythmical fashion', Fortune and Hodza 1974). In isiNdebele, the practice is referred to as *ugubonga* ('to thank, praise, worship'). A common context for a spontaneous recitation of a praise poem, which has been brought up as an example by a number of my interlocutors, is when a woman wants to thank her husband for something that she has received from him (meat from hunting, groceries from the supermarket, clothes or any other gift). She thanks the man by performing a praise poem for his totem/clan. This context seems to be so typical of the recitation of totemic praise poetry that a bride who fails to recite her husband's clan's praise poem can be sent home to her family for re-education (Pongweni 1996: 16). It is common in these contexts and beyond to address the other person by his/her praise name or *chidawo*, which not only identifies the clan/totem, but also the subgroup within the clan. Other contexts in which praise poems are recited include marriage and dowry negotiations (chiShona: *roora*, isiNdebele *lobola*), where the male relatives of the groom come to the prospective bride's home and express their utmost respect to the bride's family by invoking the family's totem. Moreover, praise poems can be recited to chiefs and leaders at a variety of official and social gatherings. At funerals, the clan/totem of the deceased should be called upon and worshipped to facilitate the transition into the world of the ancestors. This also highlights the close link between the totemic group and the ancestors (Pongweni 1996: 6). On the social level, praise poetry fulfills a number of functions, including "flattering those in power"

(such as chiefs, kings and leaders), "preserving accepted versions of history" as shared clan history, and "serving as an encouragement to emulation or achievement" (Finnegan 2012: 120). Furthermore, the recitation of a praise poem in the right context may encourage the praised to perform future actions and may serve as an act of triggering anticipated behavior through focusing on clan history and totem characteristics. Pongweni also adds to the functions of clan praise poetry that it serves to manifest a social system which regulates or prescribes social behavior, which also relates to Tavárez reasoning on ritual and authority where patterned and calibrated actions such as ritual speech manifest authoritative ontological models of social order (Tavárez 2022).

For instance, the exogamic marriage rules of the amaNdebele and maShona do not permit their members to marry someone from the same clan (who shares the same clan praise name). Breaking this taboo can be socially sanctioned or may have negative consequences for the entire family or clan. Pongweni summarizes the functions of totems in chiShona, which are also basically valid for clan praise poetry among the amaNdebele: 1. they regulate exogamy; 2. they serve as ceremonial forms of address with prescribed responses (praise poem as "social lubricant"); 3. they serve as social ties between members of the same clan; 4. people can swear on their clan name or totem; 5. totemic animals are charged with taboo: people are not allowed to eat their totemic animal (Pongweni 1996: 8ff). The author also stresses that members of a clan share "substance" through common descent and (and this includes members married into a clan) through the consumption of food grown on the land of the clan (ibid.: 11).

3 The language of praise poetry

While there are conceptions of praise poetry as a fixed and formulaic form, there is great variety with regard to the recited versions. This can be observed in the publications that have compiled praise poems for the same clans/totems. Today, only a few people can recite a large praise poetry repertoire for their totem. However, numerous Zimbabweans have claimed the ability to recite shorter versions and new creations. In other words, in the actual practice of praising someone in a particular situation, there is room for freestyle, and shorter, individual poems are commonly performed on various everyday occasions.

Example 1 provides a chiShona praise poem for the *mhofu* ('eland') totem. It addresses the *shava museyamwa*, whereof *shava* is the principal praise name (*chidawo*) for the *mhofu* ('eland') totem, while *museyamwa* designates a subgroup of the totem/clan (thus the title of the poem, *shava museyamwa*, refers to a specific clan that can be associated with a particular geographic location and clan history). This example illustrates a longer and rather formulaic version of the praise poem. Only a few people (nowadays) know such long praise poems by heart. The transmission of some of the ancient clan praise poems is fragmentary and incomplete (see Hodza and Fortune 1979).

There are several slightly different, longer or shorter versions of this praise poem in published written sources (see for instance Masango 2014: 42), and likewise, variation can be observed with regard to the other praise poems in the written sources. Of course, this reflects the nature of praise poetry as a form of oral literature. Variation can be observed with regard to length, the number and order of stanzas or lines, and the

culmination of various versions or poems into one (cf. Finnegan 2012: 127). Despite this variation, however, the poems show clearly their formulaic and at times repetitive character, which is typical of ritual communication. The most characteristic and outstanding feature of chiShona, and in fact most Southern African praise poetry, is the use of praise names and epithets that appear as complex nominal constructions, which can be substantival constructions, verbal constructions or ideophonic constructions (Hodza and Fortune 1979: 72). Many of these forms are deverbal epithets (with a prefix combined with either the verb stem, a verb phrase or an entire clause, *ibid.*), also referred to as "eulogues" (praises), which appear in the form of these complex constructions, as we shall see below (Pongweni 1996, 2012; Hodza and Fortune 1979). Pongweni states (actually with reference to the praise poem of the *shumba murambwi* 'Lion, the rejected one', but his statement is valid for all clan praise poetry): "The poem is awash with deverbal epithets which load the beneficiary of praise with eulogues that derive from actions performed by or on his ancestors" (Pongweni 1996: 35). This link with the ancestors and the clan's history and totem is at the core of the praises and is the basis for all of the creative linguistic derivations and metaphorical expressions. These linguistic and rhetoric devices underline the authoritative ontologies inscribed in the oral clan histories while they reflect "dominant epistemological stances and perceptions about language" (Tavárez 2022: 198).

(1) Praise poem of the *Shava Museyamwa*
(adapted from Musiyiwa 2003)

Shava - Museyamwa

*Maita Shava,
Mhofu yomukono, Ziwewera
Hekani Mutekedza*

*Vakatekedzana paJanga
Vakapiwa vakadzi munyika yavaNjanja*

Hekani Mutekedza, vari uHera Mukonde

Zvaitwa Mhukahuru, vemiswe inochenga miviri

Ziendanetyaka, mutunhu une mago

*Vanovangira vashura vhu, kutsivira mutumbi
Chidavarume, vanovhimwa navanonyanga*

*Vasakamonera vakadzi dzenhema
Vanomonera vakadzi dzamangondi
Vanochemera wavatanga
Vane misodzi inodonha pasi*

Kuti yadonha yoda nhevedzo yeromunhu ropa

*Tinotenda vari Matenhere
Vari pazvikomo zveMbwenya
Maita veTsambochena, Mhofu yomukono*

Kuyambuka rwizi mvura yakwira makomo

Totenda voMuchimbare, veGuruuswa

Vane nzangachena kunge mwedzi wejenachena

Eland – One who can be leant on

Thank you Shava
The Great Eland Bull, The Runaway
Thank you very much The-one-who-carries-
heavy-loads

Those who challenged each other at Janga
Those who were given wives in the country of
the Njanja people

Thank you my dear Mutekedza, those in uHera
Mukonde

It has been done, Great Animal, those with tails
that are intimate with their bodies

One with sounding feet, one who comb of
wasps

Those who chase those who portend death, as
compensation for a corpse

One-who-likes-men, hunted only by those who
do so with caution

Those who do not wrap women with lies

Those who embrace and bend women

Those who yearn for the original one

Those with tears that are too sacred to fall to
the ground

But if they fall, they must be accompanied with
human blood

We are so thankful those in Matenhere

Those who lie in the hills of Mbwenya

Thank you those of White Bangles, Great Eland
Bull

Crossing the river after the waters have
ascended the mountains

We are so thankful those in Muchimbare, those
of Guruuswa

Those with white settlements that resemble the
whiteness of the full moon

<i>Kuziva zvenyu VaShava Mukonde, vari Gombe</i>	It is your custom to be kind, Shava Mukonde, those in Gombe
<i>Zvaonekwa vahombarume, zvaitwa Mbiru</i>	Your kindness has been seen great hunter, it has been done Mbiru
<i>Aiwa, zvaonekwa Sarirambi, zvaitwa Nyashanu</i>	Indeed, your kindness has been seen, Sarirambi, it has been done Nyashanu

In chiShona totemic praise poetry, the person who recites the praise usually starts with thanking the totemic animal by using its praise names: in example 1 *shava* constitutes the principal *chidawo* ('praise name') of the *mhofu* ('eland') totem, while the complex deverbal nominal construction *museyamwa* (lit.: 'one who can be leant on', from the verb *-seyama* 'to lean on a support') serves as a name for the sub-clan and at the same time expresses a characteristic of the animal that is praised as a virtuous attribute of the totem. There are more praise names (many of them deverbal with a verb as the base) that appear as complex nominal constructions and express characteristics of the totemic animal while serving as clan praise, such as *ziwewera* ('the runaway', from the verb *wewera* 'run away' (for big animals)), *mute-kedza* ('the one who carries heavy loads', from the verb *-teka* 'carry heavy burden in arms' + causative), *mhukahuru* ('great animal' or 'fierce beast' as a substantival construction with a noun phrase comprised of *mhuka* 'wild animal' + *huku* (also *hukuru*) 'big, great' (see Hodza and Fortune 1979: 82)), and *ziendanetyaka* ('one with sounding feet', lit. 'walk with cracking sound of joints', based on the verb *-enda* 'go'), among others. These characteristics, which are usually praised even if they don't seem to express a positive or virtuous trait, serve as metaphors that link the animal with the clan and its members. In chiShona totem praise

poetry, these creative and metaphoric epithets can be allegories for the clan and its individual members. The creative combination of praise names, characteristics and historic elements forms a colorful and complex piece of art. Furthermore, the metaphoric language of the totemic praise also contains references to love and sexual relationships, as in *Vasakamonera vakadzi dzenhema* ('those who do not wrap women with lies') and *Vanomonera vakadzi dzamangondi* ('those who embrace and bend women'), which, as mentioned above, are at the core of chiShona totem culture (Nyamutsa 2018).

The praised characteristics and names are combined with various terms that express thankfulness: above all, *maita* is a word that features prominently in chiShona praise poetry, and often initiates the poem. It is also frequently used when expressing other forms of thanks and praise in ritualized or formulaic ways, for instance when thanking family members, chiefs or elders (e.g. *maita basa* 'thanks [for the] work', when thanking someone for a favor). In chiShona culture, expressing thanks is often accompanied by a culturally significant and gendered gesture, namely the clapping of hands, which is referred to as *kuwuchira*. Men clap with the fingertips and heels of the hand touching while women clap with their hands at an angle, with the right hand over the left hand (as when forming a ball). Both keep their hands

cupped so that the clapping produces a hollow sound. Hand clapping accompanies (or even replaces the verbal expression of) greetings, thanking and praising. It can be short (often two claps when greeting someone) or long (for instance to accompany a praise poem praise, where it also provides a rhythmic backing)¹³. Moreover, the accompanying clapping gesture also testifies to the multimodal nature of ritual labor which includes multiple communicative modes and actors, such as a variety of speech genres, iconography and metaphor, human and non-human (e.g. totemic animals) actors (see Tavárez 2022: 198).

Another word to express gratitude which features frequently in chiShona praise poetry, and in example (1), is the verb *-tenda* ‘thank’, which can appear in various inflected forms depending on the (grammatical) context, such as in (1a) and (1b), extractions from example (1).

- (1a) *Ti-no-tenda* *va-ri* *Matenhere*
 1PL-PRES-thank.IND 3PL-be place name
 ‘We are so thankful (to) those in Matenhere’

- (1b) *To-tenda* *vo-Muchimbare* *ve-Guruuswa*
 1PL.PRES-thank.IND CON2-place name CON2-place name
 ‘We are so thankful (to) those in Muchimbare, those in Guruuswa’

- (1c) *Hekani* *Mu-tekedza*
 thank you CL1-carry heavy burden
 ‘Thank you, one who carries heavy loads’

A third expression of thanks includes the use of the word *hekani*, which is otherwise rarely used in daily communication. The phrase in (1c) occurs twice in the poem *Shava Museyamwa*.

The expressions for ‘thanks’ also fulfill an important structural function, namely marking and front-linking stanzas (which are quite flexible units in chiShona praise poetry; see Hodza and Fortune 1979: 112).

In addition (and relation) to praising the totemic animal and its traits, chiShona praise poetry also contains references to clan history and praises of the achievements of clans and individuals (leaders). This usually includes mentioning of significant places where members of the clan have settled, fought wars or defended their territory, among other praiseworthy activities. In the poem in example (1), a number of place names are mentioned, either with ex-

¹³ The clapping is a very characteristic non-verbal form of communication in chiShona culture, and distinguishes it from isiNdebele. There are male and female hand gestures and maShona will clap on various occasions. Most prominently and commonly, greetings and expressing thanks are accompanied by a few claps. Clapping is usually a rhythmic backing to praise poetry and other oral performances. The hollow sound that is achieved by holding the hands in a cupped position is characteristic and is different from applause in the western sense. Clapping also expresses respect and plays a significant role in in-law communication, starting with the clapping by male members of the family of the future groom when they pay a first visit to the family of the future bride in order to negotiate a marriage. The men (usually brothers, uncles) will clap outside the gate of the prospective in-laws to announce their presence and express respect until the father of the household acknowledges their coming and lets them in.

plicit words about what happened there, or in combination with the expression of thanks (to the people from that place), including *Janga*, the country of the *Njanja* people¹⁴, *uHera Mukonde*, *Metenhere*, *Mbwenya*, *Tsambochena*, *Muchimbare*, *Guruuswa*, *Gombe*. These place names are often fragmentary pieces of fossilized clan history, which are sometimes hard to reconstruct or understand for uninitiated people (especially nowadays, see Pongweni 1996: 35). This is why praise poetry can be regarded as insider-poetry which can be understood only by those who can make sense of the allusions to places, people and acts that characterize the history of the clan (ibid.. 13).

Moreover, the poem contains several lines with metaphorical expressions, a feature that is characteristic of Southern African panegyric (Finnegan 2012) and that brings together the different strands of reference on a figurative

level: the expression of praising/thanking, the reference to the clan and its people and leaders, the person/clan member who is thanked by the performance of the poem, as well as the totemic animal and its characteristics that, again, relate to the clan, as in the extracts (1d) and (1e), taken from example (1) above.

The poetic language of this praise of the *Shava* totem brings together qualities of the person, the animal and the clan on a figurative level. This is partly enabled because of the linguistic forms chosen: the frequent use of CL2-forms, which also constitute the honorific form (*va-* etc., see example (1) and forms in the extracts (1a), (1b), (1d) and (1e)) make a general reading ('they', 'those') as well as a respectful address possible. Therefore, they can reference the past and present members of the clan (ancestors and the living) as well as the totemic animal as a personalized character who stands

- (1d) *Va-no-vang-ira* *va-shura* *vhu*,
 3PL-PRES-run-APPL 3PL-bring bad omen IDEO.come into sight
- ku-tsiv-ira* *mu-tumbi*
 INF-repay-APPL CL3-corpse
 'Those who chase those who portend death, as compensation for a corpse'
- (1e) *Vane* *mi-sodzi* *i-no-donha* *pasi*
 3PL-have CL4-tear CL4-PRES-fall CL5.ground
- kuti* *ya-donha* *yo-da* *nhevedzo*
 that CL4.PAST-fall CL4.PRES-need CL9.sequence of events
- ye-ro-munhu* *ropa*
 CON9-CON5-person CL5.blood
 'Those with tears that are too sacred to fall to the ground
 But if they fall, they must be accompanied with human blood'

¹⁴ This could possibly refer to the chiChewa/chiNyanja-speaking people of present-day Malawi.

for the clan (e.g. the eland) and can thus be regarded as poly-pragmatic. The linguistic form (including the use of plural forms instead of singular, even when praising an individual¹⁵) is thus all-encompassing and provides a frame for a collective identity that is embraced and expressed by the clan members through praise poetry. In this sense, the performances of praise poems “are display events in which the values of a society are embodied and enacted in an intensified way” (Basso and Senft 2009: 10). The language of chiShona praise poetry thus enables the enacting of identity constructions, of cultural memory and of social values and relations through the use of linguistic forms that can reference on multiple levels and create inclusiveness beyond the circle of persons present at the performance. It is particularly the use of figurative speech and metaphor that sets the tone and mood of the poem and characterizes the cultural ways of praising (cf. Finnegan 2012). Moreover, the expression of gratitude, respect and appreciation through the use of various forms of ‘thank’, and of indirect and hence respectful forms in the plural instead of direct forms of address (‘they’ and ‘those’ instead of ‘you’), is at the core of chiShona culture, in which respect and politeness play a significant role (Nyamutswa 2018). To be sure, such forms of respect and politeness (using plural forms and honorifics, expressing thanks) are also common in other societies, cultural groups and forms of praise poetry. However, all my interlocutors highlighted the importance of these aspects in chiShona cultural practices, which is why I consider it a significant observation. ChiShona praise poems usually end on a similar vein, by stating that the totems (and the

clan’s/individual’s) kindness have been seen and that ‘a service’ has been done (see Hodza and Fortune 1979). In many poems, the passive verb forms *zvaonekwa* and *zvaitwa* are used in the final verse (as in 1f and 1g taken from example 1).

- (1f) *zva-onekwa*
8.PAST-see.APPL.PASS
‘it has been seen’
- (1g) *zva-itwa*
8.PAST-do.PASS
‘it has been done’

These ritualized forms to end a praise poem recur in most totem praises and, although they exhibit some kind of variation, mark a known and anticipated end of the praise verses. They constitute a final expression of gratitude and assurance that the deeds and services (of the heroic ancestors and praised clan members) have been acknowledged.

In isiNdebele praise poetry, as stated above, the focus is not so much on the totemic animals as on the clan history and the praising of the outstanding leaders (kings) of the group. Example (2) shows the praise poem for King Lobengula, the son of the above-mentioned King Mzilikazi.

In this poem we observe, in contrast to the chiShona praise poems, a more direct focus on the praised individual, which linguistically manifests itself in the use of more singular forms (as opposed to the frequent plural forms in the totem praise poems of the maShona clans).

¹⁵ The use of plural forms is also common in respectful and honorific language/ways of addressing elders.

(2) Praise poem of King Lobengula¹⁶

Izibongo zika Lobengula kaMzilikazi kaMatshobana

*Ngwalongwalo kaMatshobana!
Watshonaphi, Mzac'omnyama
Otshay'izinkomo lamadoda.
Nkub'enkulu yamahlathi,
Eth'ezinye zitshiy'umzila,
Yona ingatshiyi lasonjwana.
Silwane samahlathi!
Ezinye ziyathungatheka,
Kanti lesi sakwaKhumalo
Sadabula singatshiyi mkhondo.
Amadoda wonke amangele,
Kwaze kwamangala lezinja ezimhlophe
Ukuthi watshonaphi, Khumalo.
Ngangelizwe uyindab'enkulu!
Wal'ukuthunjwa yizizwe
Wakheth'ukuf'ukhulekile
Ithuna lakho liyakwaziwa ngokhokho kuphela,
ngangeze!*

Matshakayile-Ndlovu 2003¹⁷

Praises of Lobengula son of Mzilikazi son of Matshobana

The owner of many books, son of Matshobana
Where did you disappear to, Black Rod
That beats cattle and men?
You the big elephant of the forests,
Whereas other elephants leave a trail,
You do not leave even the smallest trail.
You the lion of the forests!
Whereas other lions can be tracked,
But this one of the Khumalo
Moved across without leaving a scent
All men are surprised
And even the 'white dogs' are surprised
About where you disappeared to, Khumalo
You who is as big as the earth you are big news.
You refused to be captured by foreigners
You chose to die a free man
Your grave shall be known by your ancestors
only, you who is as big as the earth!

Like in the chiShona poem, we also observe the use of praise names and praises in the form of complex constructions. In the first line the praise name translated as 'owner of many books' is created by reduplication of the plural form derived from *ugwalo* 'book' (CL11/CL10), while the second part constitutes an ellipsis ('of Matshobana').

Other forms in the poem are phrasal constructions such as those illustrated in (2a) and (2b). It is interesting to note that while the classical chiShona praise poetry centers on one (totemic) animal and its qualities, this praise poem for Lobengula makes references to two different animals, namely the elephant and the lion. Both animals are used here metaphorically

¹⁶ This poem is characterized by the use of archaic and poetic language forms that do not occur in the same style in today's conventional discourse (the same is true for the chiShona poem discussed above). The isiNdebele poem for Lobengula is full of abbreviated and contracted forms, which is typical in poetry. However, certain forms are quite difficult to fathom with regard to the translation provided. For example, *Wakheth'ukuf'ukhulekile* is translated as 'you chose to die a free man'. While this translation makes sense in terms of the contextual meaning, one would expect the form *Wakheth'ukuf'ukhululekile* (*ukhululekile* meaning 'to be free' while *ukhulekile* could be read as 'to pray').

¹⁷ Available online at: <https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-opinion-sc-columnist-byo-65994.html> (accessed January 2026)

to distinguish Lobengula from others of his kind, as someone outstanding who surprises others as he does not leave a trail and cannot be tracked. This poem is rife with rhetorical devices that provide the structure and impact on the style of the verses.¹⁸ For example, the lines repeated in (2c) and (2d), concerning the animals discussed above, show the use of parallelism.

(2a) *Wa-tshonaphi*
2SG-spend.where
'where did you disappear to'

(2b) *Ngange-lizwe* *u-yi-ndab-enkulu!*
as big as-CL5.country 2SG-COP-CL9.story-CL9.big
'You who is as big as the earth you are big news'

(2c) *Nkub'enkulu yamahlathi,* 'You the big elephant of the forests,
Eth'ezinye zitshiy'umzila[...] Whereas other elephants leave a trail [...]

(2d) *Silwane samahlathi!* 'You the lion of the forests!
Ezinye ziyathungatheka [...] Whereas other lions can be tracked [...]

(2e) *Amadoda wonke amangele,* 'All men are surprised,
Kwaze kwamangala lezinja ezimhlophe And even the white dogs are surprised'

Another rhetorical device used in this poem is the cross-linking between lines, by repeating an element from one line to the next (but not in a parallel style), as in (2e), where a form of the verb 'surprise' is repeated.

The poem is full of comparisons, metaphorical as well as through the use of a direct linguistic marker of comparison, namely *nganga/ngange*, which appears twice in the short

The parallelism is basically constructed through the names of the animals, *nkub'enkulu* ('big elephant') and *silwane* ('lion'), which appear at the beginning of the verse in combination with the word *mahlathi* ('forests') preceded by the connective prefix. The third parallel element is the word *ezinye* ('others'), which appears in the second line of the verse.

poem. All of the comparisons serve the purpose of praising King Lobengula and his clan, the Khumalo, which is also mentioned twice in the verses. A very interesting observation that can be made with regard to the praise poem for King Lobengula is with regard to variation: while the chiShona totemic praise poems are also characterized by variation (see above),

¹⁸ Of course, other praise poems in chiShona, isiNdebele and isiZulu exhibit numerous stylistic devices as well (for chiShona see Hodza and Fortune 1979, while isiNdebele praise poetry is not found much in the literature, there are many publications on closely-related praise poetry in isiZulu, see for example Vilakazi 2021). In this version of the praise poem for Lobengula, however, the rhetorical devices are evident in compact and demonstrative forms, which is why they are examined in this section.

there is another praise poem for Lobengula which is strikingly different from the one cited above.¹⁹ There are just a few parallels between the two versions. While the poem discussed here praises Lobengula in a positive fashion, outlining his skills, outstanding characteristics and achievements, the other version of the poem, presented on africanpoems.net, exhibits metaphors that have a negative reading and reveals – though in figurative manner – the criticism that Lobengula’s reign is associated with. The critical meanings are particularly visible in comparison to the praises of Lobengula’s father, King Mzilikazi, who is praised as a great warrior and leader while his son is conceptualized as a weaker ruler (who roars like a calf instead of a bull) and criticized due to his controversial strategies and behavior (especially with regard to his deals and contracts with the British South Africa Company, which invaded and subsequently colonized Matabeleland under the rule of King Lobengula). This is in line with Pongweni’s (1996: 15) view that praise poetry is not just to praise, but also “to admonish, to warn and to criticise”, and with Barber’s observation that commentary in praise poetry can comprise heterogeneous and competing perspectives (Barber 1991: 3).

This section has presented two different praise poems in chiShona and isiNdebele and has discussed some of the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the two art forms. To summarize the shared cultural-linguistic features and functions, we can underline that praise poetry usually follows ritualized patterns and that in performing poetic praises speakers make use of specific ways of speaking/praising with words. We have seen in examples (1) and

(2) that certain metaphors and figurative language recur. Finnegan summarizes the creative use of language in praise poetry:

Most praise poetry, above all the official type, seems to adopt a more or less obscure and allusive style. The language may be archaic and lofty, there are often references to historical events or people which may need interpretation even to local listeners, and figurative forms of expression are common. Especially frequent are comparisons of the person praised to an animal or series of animals. His strength may be conveyed by referring to him as a lion, a rhinoceros, or an elephant, and, particularly in Southern African praise poetry, the actions and qualities of the hero may be almost completely conveyed in metaphorical terms, only the animals to which the hero is implicitly compared being depicted in action. [...] Praise of a person [...] is not something to be expressed in bald or straightforward language. (Finnegan 2012: 117)

Figurative and metaphorical language and rhetorical devices, together with the rhythmic performance of the poem are the major poetic features that distinguish it from other linguistic genres, not so much rhyme and meter like in western poetry (Finnegan 2012). In Zimbabwean praise poetry, structural devices that shape the poems include front-linking (forming “a verse out of a number of successive lines by the repetition of some common initial element or combination of elements”, Hodza and Fortune 1979: 92), parallelism (of consecutive or non-consecutive lines), cross-linking (e.g. repeating an element such as an

¹⁹ The other version of Lobengula’s praise poem can be found online: <http://africanpoems.net/praise/praises-of-lobengula/> (accessed January 2026)

affix from the end of a line to the beginning of a new line), chiasmus (as a more complex form of cross-linking, resulting in cross-parallel lines), apposition (placing together two lines which express the same semantic content or underlying conceptualization), and expansion of praise names (Hodza and Fortune 1979). These devices, in combination with the rhythmic recitation style, endow the praise poetry with its typical formulaic style which is the basis for the discussion of ritual communication in the next section.

4 Praise poetry as ritual communication

Ritual forms of communication can take many different shapes and occur in various contexts. Basso and Senft, in their seminal contribution to the field from an anthropological-linguistic perspective, define ritual communication as “artful, performed semiosis, predominantly but not only involving speech, that is formulaic and repetitive and therefore anticipated within particular contexts of social interaction” (Basso and Senft 2009: 1). The previous sections have established the linguistic nature and cultural background of chiShona and isiNdebele praise poetry. We have seen that, while there are various degrees of variation with regard to performance poetry, there are linguistic, rhythmical and figurative features that make the poems formulaic and facilitate

memory and recitation. These very features, the sound of the verses, the style of the performer and the cultural rootedness of the metaphors, trigger certain reactions among the listeners which can be anticipated. For example, during one field session in Harare in July 2018, we were sitting in a courtyard of a small house in Budiriro, a high density suburb (commonly referred to as “ghetto”) of Harare, with a small group of people: a married couple, two common male friends and me. During our interview, the wife recited the beginning of the praise poem for her husband’s totem, *Soko Vhudzijena* (see (3)). While she only recited some fragments of the praise poem, we can observe a few practices that are significant. The context provided by her husband (for the sake of the interview) was that he came home and brought something for her. She received the gift and started to recite the poem rhythmically with a falling intonation at the end of each line (or rather, at the end of each praise name or phrase, since lines are only created in writing), while clapping her hands (*kuwuchira*, see above). This is a ritualized practice that is expected in certain social situations as explained above. When she recited the phrase *Vanodya zvekuba* ‘those who survive on stealing’, she (and this could be heard in her voice) and the others present smiled or started laughing. When I asked about the translation of that phrase later in the interview, everybody

(3) Extracts from the praise poem for *Soko Vhudzijena* performed by Venna Tinago

Maita soko
Mukanya
Vhudzijena
Vanodya zvekuba
 [...]

Thank you monkey
 Sociable One
 White Hair
 Those who survive on stealing
 [...]

laughed. This is part of the anticipated reaction of certain characteristics associated with the totem and, hence, the clan members, be they virtuous or not. This practice and context also illustrates that a short allusion is sufficient to evoke not only a reaction but also a shared understanding of the cultural background and social relations (the clan). In performing praise poetry, it is not necessary to be direct and elaborate: it is through figurative speech, through allusions and through indexing places, characteristics and people that meaning is created as representations of constructed social relations and identities. Mietzner and Storch (2018), who look at totally different communicative practices in Eastern Africa, also state that ritual communication often works through being indirect. They state, based on the thoughts of Ochieng'-Odhiambo, that through ritual and symbolic communication we express "our entanglements with others and with the entire world" (ibid.: 222)

Basso and Senft (2009: 2) depict ritual communication as a "special mode of semi-otic behavior" which perfectly describes the praise poetry presented: the poems are performed with a special intonation and rhythm and accompanying gestures, in appropriate situations, and they make meaning on a multilayered level (addressing the individual, the ancestors, and the clan/totem) through contextualized metaphors and other forms of figurative language. In this sense, the praise poems are a very special form of communication, although they find their place in daily communicative practices, which (as Basso and Senft also suggest) transcends the assumed opposition between ritual and everyday. Another aspect that the authors regard as significant with regard to ritual communication is indexical

linking (ibid.: 9). All the praise verses presented in this paper are full of indexical links, for instance names and complex constructions such as metaphors, that situate the praise in its cultural context and connect the praised person to his/her ancestors, the clan and the totemic or other animal, as well as to significant events, places and activities in the clan history. In fact, it is the indexical links that the praise poem contains that connect past and present, ancestors and living, human and animal. In that regard, even though the poem is only recited by one person, there is a "play of voices in interpersonal relations" (ibid.: 13) in which (a) the narratives of the ancestors merge with the narratives of the living through a construction of shared clan identity, evoked and enacted through the performance of praise poetry, and (b) in which social relations and social roles are transmitted and recalled through playful performance.

Moreover, I want to argue in this section that ritual communication can be more than the reciting of specific formulaic language forms. It can also be the underlying cultural conceptualizations that are ritualized and find new linguistic expressions in new forms of performance, new contexts and new interpretative frames. Looking at contemporary practices in Zimbabwe, we can observe that features from the praise poetry are recontextualized and appropriated in different ways. In Zimbabwe (and elsewhere), ritual communication is thus dynamic and continually transformed, as certain practices can live on in new contexts. While praise poetry is not so commonly used anymore in all contexts and at full length, it is often recited in shorter forms and with new creations. Several speakers have stated that praise poetry can also be a freestyle, where certain known phrases and praise names are combined

with new praises that particularly relate to the praised individual, that tell new stories and reference characteristics or deeds of the present addressee of the poem.

Moreover, it seems that the imagery and metaphors employed constitute representations of moralities and gender roles as their performance ascribes social status and prescribes social behavior. The social relations constructed through the imagery and metaphors of praise poetry can also be used in more recent domains of performative practices such as popular music:

Selected examples drawn from three sub-genres of love poetry and from Afropop recordings are used to show that, in many cases, traditional praises and modern lyrics are

quite similar in terms of imagery and symbolism, as well as in terms of socialization for contemporary role-relationships. This, of course, has wider implications outside the family and in effect this situation tends to support the status quo in gender politics at the national level. [...] Like the oral poets before them, the Afropop composers of today use aesthetically pleasing, sensuous language for social comment, moral persuasion and sentimental expression (Chimhundu 1995: 147).

In a more conservative vein, the poet Chiremba Hwesa Masango, who refers to himself as a herbalist, environmentalist and traditionalist, wrote not only a book about totems and totem praise poetry, he also founded a musical group called Zimtotems, who perform praise poetry

Figure 1: Chiremba Hwesa Masango and the Zimtotems (photograph by the author)



as songs accompanied by Zimbabwean instruments such as the mbira, the marimba and percussive instruments, as well as by dancing practices. Their objective is to maintain the Zimbabwean cultural heritage and they use the music group to educate the people about totems and praise poetry.

Apart from practices of commemorating praise poetry, there are also new verses being created: based on the images and characteristics of animals that are widely known and common in Zimbabwean society (see Mangena and Ndlovu 2016), people also construct new poems that may have meanings in political, social, religious or personal contexts. The short poem presented in (4) is a poem in isiNdebele created and performed *ad hoc* by Helen Kauma, based on the culturally scripted conceptualizations of the crocodile, which is of particular currency with regard to the political domain (ibid.: 252).

(4)	<i>Ingwenya! Ingwenya!</i> <i>Inyamazana enkalakatha</i> <i>Inyamazana edla ezinye inyamazana</i> <i>Amehlo akho makhulu</i> <i>njengenkanyezi</i> <i>Nyamazana eyesatshwa ngezinye izilwane</i>	Crocodile! Crocodile! A huge animal An animal that eats other animals Your eyes are as large as the moon Animal that is feared by other animals
-----	---	--

Such practices can be regarded as “the reconfiguration of meaning and new contextualization of older practices as well as the creation of new forms of ritual communication from historically older forms” (Basso and Senft 2009: 15). In this sense, praise poetry as a form of ritual communication changes and adapts over the course of time. This illustrates the dynamicity and flexibility of seemingly fixed transmitted language practices. The interesting point here is that praise poetry is, on the

one hand (especially in its elaborated form), a very specialized and formulaic linguistic form characterized by archaic and poetic language whose understanding and interpretation often requires expert knowledge. On the other hand, it is also part of daily communicative behavior and anticipated social rituals while is room for individual creativity and situational flexibility.

5 Conclusion

This paper presented a broad introduction to praise poetry in chiShona and isiNdebele by looking at the cultural concepts related to the linguistic practices, the broader contexts and the implications for use. A special section has been dedicated to the linguistics of praise poetry, where poems in chiShona and isiNdebele have been analyzed with regard to language and stylistic devices. The discussion has focused on similarities and differences

between chiShona and isiNdebele, which are based on different underlying cultural conceptualizations, different clan histories and different social functions of the praise poems. All these aspects lead to the final section, which places praise poetry in the frame of ritual communication, an approach that takes an all-encompassing perspective on major relevant aspects of this form of verbal art: its formulaic yet flexible structure, its anticipated performance, its indexical links and its ever-

changing fluidity that transcends genres, styles and contexts. The main objective was to describe praise poetry practices in their cultural contexts, with a particular focus on a comparison between the well documented chiShona *madetembedzo* and the isiNdebele *izibongo*, and to discuss praise poetry as ritual communication. There is very little work available on isiNdebele praise poetry and it would be a rewarding task to investigate this culturally and socially relevant genre that combines oral history, cultural imagery and linguistic art in more detail, also with regard to its ties to other language practices within the Nguni group. Moreover, further studies could concentrate on performative aspects that were only briefly discussed in this paper, as well as on language contact.

References

- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. (Edited by Michael Holquist). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Barber, Karin. 1991. *I could speak until tomorrow. Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Basso, Ellen B. and Gunter Senft. 2009. Introduction. In Gunter Senft and Ellen B. Basso (eds.), *Ritual Communication*, pp. 1-19. Oxford/New York: Berg.
- Bowern, Claire and Victoria Lottridge (eds.). *Ndebele*. Lincom Europa.
- Brauner, Siegmund. 1993. *Einführung ins Shona*. Köln: Köppe.
- Chimhundu, Herbert. 1995. Sexuality and socialization in Shona praises and lyrics. In Graham Furniss and Liz Gunner (eds.), *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature*, pp. 147-161. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dingemanse, Mark. 2006. *The Semantics of Bantu Noun Classification*. MA Essay, Leiden University.
- Finnegan, Ruth. 2012 [1970]. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Fortune, George and A. C. Hodza. 1974. Shona praise-poetry. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London 37,1: 65-75
- Hannan, Michael. 1974. *Standard Shona Dictionary*. Second Edition. Salisbury (Harare): Rhodesia Literature Bureau.
- Hodza, Aaron C. and George Fortune. 1979. *Shona Praise Poetry*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Huffman, Thomas N. 1996. *Snakes and Crocodiles. Power and Symbolism in Ancient Zimbabwe*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Khumalo, Langa. 2003. *A General Introduction to Ndebele Grammar*. Cape Town: The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society.
- Khumalo, Langa. 2004. Language Contact and Lexical Change: A Lexicographical Ter-

- minographical Interface in Zimbabwean Ndebele. *Lexikos* 14: 105-117.
- Maho, Jouni. 1999. *A comparative Study of Bantu Noun Classes*. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis
- Makoni, Sinfrey, Janina Brutt-Griffler and Pedzisai Mashiri. 2007. The use of “indigenous” and urban vernaculars in Zimbabwe. *Language in Society* 36: 25-49.
- Mangena, Tendai and Sambulo Ndlovu. 2016. Figurative and symbolic function of animal imagery in packaging human behavior in Ndebele and Shona cultures. *South African Journal of African Languages* 36,2: 251-256.
- Masango, Chiremba Hwesa. 2014. *Mitupo Yedzimbahwe*. Harare: Studio Design.
- Matshakayile-Ndlovu, Tommy, 2015. The praise of Mzilikazi and Lobengula. *Bulawayo24 News*. Available online at: <https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-opinion-sc-columnist-byo-65994.html> (accessed January 2026)
- Mietzner, Angelika and Anne Storch. 2018. Everyday rituals: On describing language and on being indirect in Nilotic. In Helga Schröder and Prisca Jerono (eds.), *Nillo-Saharan Issues and Perspectives*, pp. 211-224. Köln: Köppe.
- Mugovera, Gracious. 2017. Totems: our cultural heritage. *The Patriot* (issue 20. April 2017). Available online at: https://www.thepatriot.co.zw/old_posts/totems-our-cultural-heritage/ (accessed January 2026)
- Musiyiwa, Mickias T. 2003. Shona praise poetry. *Poetry International Web*. Available online at: <https://poetryinternationalweb.org/pi/site/poet/item/5751/25/Shona-Praise-Poetry> (accessed January 2026)
- Nyamutswa, Cosmas. 2018. *Our Totems, our Sexuality*. Self-published in Zimbabwe.
- Pelling, James N. 19712. *A Practical Ndebele Dictionary* (Second Edition). Harare: Longman Zimbabwe.
- Pongweni, Alec J.C. 1996. *Shona Praise Poetry as Role Negotiation: the Battles of the Clans and the Sexes*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Pongweni, Alec J.C. 2012. *The Oral Traditions of the Shona Peoples of Zimbabwe. Studies of Their Folktales, Songs, Praise Poetry, and Naming Practices*. Cape Town: CASAS.
- Sekai, Nzenza. 2014. Praise poetry – the lost language of love. *The Herald* (issue 28 May 2014). Available online at: <https://www.herald.co.zw/praise-poetry-the-lost-language-of-love/> (accessed January 2026)
- Skhosana, Philemon Buti. 2009. *The Linguistic Relationship Between Southern and Northern Ndebele*. PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, South Africa.
- Tavárez, David. 2022. On ritual speech: Epistemologies, history, and the social order. In Svenja Völkel and Nico Nassenstein

(eds.), *Approaches to Language and Culture*,
pp.197-215. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Vilakazi, Benedict W. 2021 [1945]. *Amal'ezulu*.
Witwatersrand: Wits University Press.

Abbreviations

APPL	applicative
CAUS	causative
CL	class (noun class)
CON	connective
COP	copula
IND	indicative
INF	infinitive
NAG	nomen agentis
NMLZ	nominalization
PASS	passive
PL	plural
PRES	present

04

The symbolic universe of Arabic letters: An anthropological-linguistic study of Alif, Waw, and Nun

04

The symbolic universe of Arabic letters: An anthropological-linguistic study of Alif, Waw, and Nun

Emine Selcen Altındal

1 Introduction

The Arabic alphabet has long been more than a tool for sound representation; it has functioned as a system of symbols deeply embedded in the religious, artistic, and intellectual traditions of Islamic cultures. As Annemarie Schimmel (1984) notes, in Islamic civilization, “letters were never regarded as arbitrary signs, but as

bearers of a sacred power” (Mystical Dimensions of Islam, p. 388). This perspective reflects a broader anthropological insight: writing systems are not merely technical instruments but cultural artifacts that encode worldviews (Goody 1986).

In particular, the symbolic role of letters has been emphasized in mystical traditions such as Hurūfism, where each letter is treated as a key to the hidden structure of the universe.

According to Şinasi Gündüz (1998), Hurūfī thinkers saw the alphabet as a “cosmological map” in which divine truths were concealed and revealed. Within this framework, Arabic letters become “condensed symbols” in Victor Turner’s sense (Turner 1967), embodying multiple layers of meaning – phonetic, numerical, metaphysical, and aesthetic – simultaneously.

The sacralization of the Arabic script is closely tied to the Qur’an. As Jack Goody (2000) argues, literacy in religious contexts often elevates the written word to a sacred status, and in Islam, the Qur’an is considered not only a divine message but also a linguistic miracle (i‘jāz al-Qur’ān). This elevation extends to the individual letters themselves, particularly those that appear as the mysterious *hurūf al-muqatta‘āt* at the beginnings of certain Qur’anic chapters, such as Alif-Lam-Mim or Nun. The ambiguity of these isolated letters has inspired generations of exegetes and mystics to ascribe symbolic meanings to them, treating them as fragments of divine speech that resist ordinary interpretation (Khalidi 2006).

This paper focuses on three such letters – Alif (ا), Waw (و), Nun (ن) – each of which carries profound symbolic significance in Islamic intellectual and artistic traditions. Alif is often seen as the sign of divine unity and uprightness; Waw as a symbol of creation and humility; Nun as an emblem of mystery and destiny. These associations are not arbitrary but emerge from a long history of theological reflection, mystical speculation, and artistic innovation, particularly in calligraphy.

The guiding question of this study is therefore: How do these three Arabic letters function as symbols that transcend their

phonetic value, and what cultural, religious, and artistic meanings have they acquired? By adopting an approach grounded in symbolic anthropology (Geertz 1973) and anthropological linguistics, this research seeks to demonstrate how Arabic letters, as cultural symbols, participate in meaning-making processes that shape collective identity, spiritual imagination, and aesthetic expression.

2 Theoretical Framework: Anthropological Linguistics, Semiotics, and Sacred Writing

This study aims to explore the symbolic meanings of Arabic letters – specifically Alif, Waw, and Nun – based on the assumption that language is not merely a tool of communication, but also a cultural and meaning-making system. Therefore, the theoretical foundation of the research is shaped by anthropological linguistics, which examines the relationship between language and culture, and semiotics, which analyses signs and processes of signification. Furthermore, within the Islamic cultural sphere, the metaphysical status attributed to writing and letters situates the analysis within the context of sacred writing.

2.1 Anthropological Linguistics: The Relationship between Language and Culture

Anthropological linguistics approaches language as organically intertwined with the cultural structure, belief system, and worldview of the society that produces and uses it. This approach moves beyond vocabulary and grammar to investigate how language categorizes, shapes, and transmits cultural reality. Edward Sapir defined language as “a

symbolic system which guides social reality in an extraordinarily complex way” (Sapir 1931: 578). From this perspective, language is not a passive instrument but an active force in the construction of the social world.

The Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, developed by Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf (commonly referred to as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis), provides one of the most influential frameworks for understanding this relationship. The hypothesis posits that the structure and conceptual categories of a language shape how its speakers perceive and experience the world. Whorf argued, “Every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationships and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness” (Whorf 1956: 252–253). In the context of this study, this suggests that the Arabic writing system – and particularly the symbolic meanings ascribed to its letters – functions as a *guide* in how Muslim communities interpret their religious and cultural worlds. The fact that letters signify not only phonetic sounds but also profound theological and philosophical concepts (such as unity, connection, and wisdom) demonstrates how the conceptual map of language is interwoven with cultural codes. It is important to note that these symbolic interpretations of letters developed primarily in the post-Islamic context, as the spirituality introduced by religion directly shaped processes of meaning-making and the production of cultural memory.

This approach enables us to analyse letter symbolism not in isolation, but as part of the worldview of the culture that produced it. The interpretation of a letter through its form, sound, and numerical value exemplifies how linguistic signs acquire function and meaning within cultural systems—making letter symbolism a quintessential subject of anthropological linguistic inquiry.

2.2 Semiotics: Interpreting the Letters

Semiotics, or the science of signs, is the study of signs and their functioning in communication. When letters are considered as linguistic signs, the analytical tools of semiotics become indispensable for understanding their symbolic dimension. In this study, the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce are especially relevant.

Saussure defined the sign as an arbitrary relationship between a *signifier* (the sound-image or written form) and a *signified* (the concept, Saussure 1959: 67). For example, the physical shape of the letter Alif (ا) is the signifier, while the concept of “oneness” or the idea of “transcendence” it evokes in the mind is the signified. Yet in the case of Arabic letter symbolism, this relationship is not entirely arbitrary. A strong connection is established between the visual form (signifier) of the letter and its metaphysical meaning (signified). For instance, the vertical line of Alif and its association with “unity” (tawhīd) and “exaltation” suggest an **iconic** relationship grounded in resemblance rather than convention.

At this point, Charles Sanders Peirce’s more comprehensive typology of signs provides a useful framework. Peirce divided signs into

three categories: **icon** (based on resemblance), **index** (based on causality or physical connection), and **symbol** (based on convention) (Peirce, 1931–58, §§2.247–2.249).

- **Icon:** The upright form of Alif in relation to “uprightness” and “rectitude” is iconic. Similarly, the bowl-shaped form of Nun resembles an inkwell, evoking the idea of a vessel in which knowledge or wisdom is contained.
- **Index:** The grammatical function of Waw as the conjunction “and” has an indexical relationship with its symbolism of connection and linkage (*rabita*). Here, the symbolic meaning is causally related to the letter’s linguistic function.
- **Symbol:** The *abjad* numerical values of letters, such as Alif = 1 and Waw = 6, represent theological concepts (1 = divine unity, 6 = divine omnipresence) purely through cultural convention. Without shared agreement, these associations would not exist.

This tripartite framework enables us to analyse how Arabic letters construct multilayered systems of meaning. A single letter may simultaneously display **iconic** (through its form), **indexical** (through its grammatical function), and **symbolic** (through its numerical or conventional value) properties.

2.3 Sacred Writing and the Ground of Metaphysical Meaning

While the tools of anthropological linguistics and semiotics help us analyse the cultural meanings of letters, to fully grasp the symbolism of letters in the Islamic context, it is

necessary to consider the **metaphysical status of writing and language**. Within the tradition of revelation, the sacred text is not merely a message but also the physical manifestation of divine speech. This invests its constitutive elements – letters and words – with a sacred character.

The Qur’an’s *muqaṭṭa‘āt* (disjoined letters such as *Nun*, *Alif-Lām-Mīm*, etc.) are among the most striking examples of this phenomenon. In the exegetical tradition, numerous speculations have been offered regarding their meaning: some commentators regarded them as secret codes between God and the Prophet, others as keys to the divine names, or as symbols pointing to the mysteries of creation (Gündüzöz 2011: 47–49). Such interpretations demonstrate that writing, in this context, transcends its communicative function and acquires an ontological dimension.

The thought of Ibn al-‘Arabī provides the theoretical foundation for this metaphysical ground. According to his doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being), everything is a manifestation (*tajallī*) of the Absolute Being (God). In this sense, letters themselves are forms through which the divine names and attributes manifest. Ibn al-‘Arabī states, “Letters, too, are a world like us... among them are prophets, and each has names appropriate to it” (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, I:58; cited in Demirli 2008: 228), thereby positioning letters as an independent ontological category. For him, the articulation of letters through human breath parallels the creative act of God through the “Breath of the All-Merciful” (*al-nafas al-raḥmānī*), which brings the cosmos into being (Demirli 2008: 229–231). This analogy renders letters a microcosm of the creative process and

grounds their symbolic interpretations in a metaphysical framework.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework of this study rests on three pillars: anthropological linguistics enables us to understand letter symbolism as part of a cultural system; semiotics allows us to analyse the mechanisms of signification (icon, index, symbol); and the context of sacred writing – particularly the metaphysical background of Islamic thought – explains why this symbolism occupies such a profound and central role. Taken together, this interdisciplinary approach demonstrates how the letters Alif, Waw, and Nun function not merely as graphic signs but as powerful cultural and spiritual indicators.

3 Case Studies: Symbolic Interpretations of Selected Letters

Building on the theoretical framework outlined in Section 2, this section examines the symbolic dimensions of Alif (ا), Waw (و), and Nun (ن). Each letter is explored through three interrelated perspectives: its role in cultural memory and literature (anthropological linguistics), its function as a sign (semiotics), and its theological or mystical resonances (sacred writing). This layered approach demonstrates how Arabic letters operate as cultural and metaphysical archetypes, simultaneously embedded in poetry, art, and spiritual discourse.

3.1 Alif (ا): The Pillar of Unity and Transcendence

As the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, Alif holds an unparalleled position in the symbolic universe of Islamic culture. Its simplicity of

form – a single vertical line – and its *abjad* value of 1, representing absolute unity, have made it one of the most profound symbols in mystical and theological traditions.

In Sufi terminology, Alif is often described as “the extension of the point” (Ceylan 2001: 145). While the point (*nuqṭa*) symbolizes the hidden and absolute essence of Being (*al-Dhāt*), Alif emerges through its movement and extension. In this sense, Alif is the first manifestation of divine reality, the archetype from which all other letters derive (Ceylan 2001: 146). This metaphor closely parallels the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence). Ibn al-ʿArabī deepens this vision: “It is both the center of the circle and its circumference; both the composition of the worlds and their resolution” (Kanık 1996: 129).

The most fundamental meaning of Alif lies in its representation of unity (*tawḥīd*). Its numerical value of 1 makes it the purest

Figure 1: Konya Mevlevi Lodge.
Source: Architect Elif Merve Gürer



symbol of God's indivisible essence (*aḥadiyya*) (Uludağ 1995: 167; cited in Ceylan 2001: 146). Ibn al-ʿArabī explains: "As the number One pervades all numbers, Alif pervades all letters. Everything depends on it, but it depends on nothing" (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, I:65; cited in Demirli 2008: 234). The fact that Alif does not connect to subsequent letters and has no dot further symbolizes purity and transcendence from multiplicity (Ceylan, 2001, p. 146).

Alif's symbolism extends to cosmology and anthropology. The term *alifbā* itself signifies the beginning of knowledge and being. In Sufi ethics, the *murshid al-kāmil* is described as "straight as Alif in his words, deeds, and states" (Zâtî Süleyman, cited in Ceylan 2001: 146). Moreover, the association of Alif with the number one thousand (*alf*), which visually resembles it, connects it to the thousand divine names (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*) (Uludağ 1995: 167).

In Divan poetry, Alif takes on worldly connotations. The beloved's stature, the lover's sigh, and even physical attributes such as nose, finger, sword, or spear are described in terms of Alif (Çelebioğlu 1986; cited in Ceylan 2001: 145). These literary uses show the adaptability of Alif, from a metaphysical emblem of divine unity to an aesthetic metaphor of beauty and desire.

Alif, with its archetypal position, represents the transcendent oneness of God and the uprightness of perfected humanity. Its simultaneous presence in mystical metaphysics and secular poetics illustrates the polyvalence of letters as cultural and theological signs.

3.2 Waw (و): The Symbol of Unity, Humility, and Aesthetic Form

Divan poetry and Islamic art employ Waw not only as a phonetic unit but also as a cultural and mystical symbol. Its grammatical versatility, symbolic richness, and graceful form granted it a privileged position in both literary and visual traditions.

As the 26th letter of the Arabic alphabet, Waw functions as a conjunction ("and"), a long vowel marker, and an oath particle (*waw al-qasam*). In Qur'anic usage, it often introduces oaths, such as *wa-sh-shams* ("By the sun"),

Figure 2. Image. Source: Architect Elif Merve Gürer



invoking divine testimony (Özkafa 2015: 2578). In Ottoman Turkish, it enabled the adaptation of Persian compounds into poetic diction, as in *‘ilm ü ‘irfān* (“knowledge and wisdom”) or *qadā vü qadar* (“fate and destiny”).

Symbolic and Mystical Meanings

- **Unity:** The *abjad* value of Waw is 6. Mystics noted that the divine name *Allāh* has an *abjad* value of 66, equal to the combined values of Adam and Eve. This correlation placed Waw at the center of reflections on divine-human unity (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) (Özkafa 2015: 2581). Two Waws written together (66) directly symbolize God.
- **Humility and Humanity:** The curved form of Waw has been likened to the human figure in bowing (*rukū‘*) or prostration (*sujūd*), as well as to a fetus (Baltacıoğlu, 1971, p. 116). These associations highlight humility and dependence before the Creator.
- **Poetic Uses:** Expressions such as “the Waw of immersion” (*vav-ı istiğrāq*) to describe mystical ecstasy, or “the Waw of covenant” (*vav-ı ‘ahd*) for binding promises, reveal its semantic richness. Conversely, “saint

without Waw” (*vavsız evliyā*) mocked superficial religiosity.

Figure 4. “Motifs of paired Waw letters”. Source: Architect Elif Merve Gürer



Waw’s form made it central in calligraphy. Monumental Waws written in *celī sülūs* were often filled with Qur’anic verses or the declaration of faith. Notable examples include Bursa’s Great Mosque (Ulu Cami V2), where such inscriptions became known as the “Ship of Faith” (*Āmentü Gemisi*) and the “Bazaar of Waws” (*Vavlar Çarşısı*) (Özkafa 2015: 2585–2586).

Waw thus transcends its grammatical role, embodying divine unity, humility, and spiritual depth. As Özkafa (2015) summarizes, Waw is “a symbolic mirror of the human condition, linking creation, submission, and divine unity” (p. 2577).

Figure 3. Yeşyurt Quba Masjidi. Source: Architect Elif Merve Gürer



3.3 Nun (ن): The Seal of Hiddenness and the Vessel of Wisdom

Nun, the 25th letter of the Arabic alphabet, occupies a particularly rich symbolic place due to its distinctive form – a semicircle resembling a bowl or inkwell – and its role as a *ḥarf muqattaʿ* at the opening of Sūrat al-Qalam (Q 68: 1).

Nun has been associated with objects such

Figure 5. "Kalem Suresi" başlığı ve içerik.
Source: Rahmet Gemisi (2017)



as the sword's edge, a fish (*al-ḥūt*), or an inkwell (*al-dawāt*) (Gündüzöz 2011: 48). In Divan poetry, its bowl-like form inspired comparisons to cups, while its curve resembled the beloved's eyebrow or the crescent moon (Ceylan 2001: 150).

Classical exegetes interpreted Nun in *Nun. By the Pen...* as fish or inkwell (Gündüzöz 2011: 50). A report from Ibn ʿAbbās relates: "The first thing God created was the Pen. Then He created Nun – the inkwell – and commanded the Pen: 'Write,' and it inscribed all decrees until the Day of Judgment" (Ibn Qutayba, 1978; cited in Gündüzöz 2011: 51). Others imagined Nun as the cosmic fish carrying the earths (Ibn Kathīr). The connection to Jonah (*Dhū al-Nūn*) reinforced its symbolism as both prison and salvation (Elmalılı, cited in Gündüzöz 2011: 52). Comparative thinkers linked it to Hindu and Christian fish symbolism (Guénon, 1980).

In Sufi thought, Nun is associated with condensed knowledge (*ʿilm al-ijmāl*), the hidden essence of truth (Uludağ 1995; Ceylan 2001: 151). Its link with *nūr* (light) inspired the notion of *nūn al-nūr* ("the Nun of light") (Fakīh 2002). Ibn al-ʿArabī offers a deeper view:

"It's Nun of existence! Its essential point indicates its Worshipped One. Its being proceeds from His generosity, and all exalted existences proceed from His bounty... Know, that Friend, that Nun belongs to the realm of Mulk and Jabarūt... Its numerical value is fifty in the major abjad system and five in the minor. Its element is earth; its nature cold and dry... It is pure yet deficient, awe-inspiring and fearsome. The Essence belongs to it."

(Kanık 1996: 143–144).

This description situates Nun within both the cosmological and mystical hierarchies of creation.

As Gündüzöz (2011: 53–54) emphasizes, Nun's symbolic meanings align with the psychoacoustic qualities of /n/, which in Arabic roots often conveys emergence, bursting forth,

or lamentation. Thus Nun embodies paradox: revelation and concealment, manifestation and enclosure.

Nun exemplifies how a single sign can condense diverse theological, mystical, and cultural layers. It has been conceived as inkwell, fish, prison, vessel of light, and cosmic archetype – simultaneously poetic metaphor and metaphysical foundation.

4 Analysis and Discussion: Layers of Meaning through Three Letters

As the theoretical framework of this study has shown, Arabic letters function not only through their phonetic values but also as cultural signs imbued with symbolic depth. The analysis of Alif, Waw, and Nun reveals the extraordinary richness and interconnectedness of this symbolic universe. This section offers a comparative analysis of the three letters, highlighting their layered meanings and discussing their significance from an anthropological-linguistic perspective.

4.1 A Hierarchy of Meaning and a Network of Relations: The Alif–Waw–Nun Triad

Although Alif, Waw, and Nun each present a coherent symbolic world when considered separately, together they form a triadic system that can be read as a cosmological cycle or a hierarchy of existence.

- **Alif (ا): The Symbol of Oneness and the Absolute**
Alif, associated with beginnings, unity, and absoluteness, occupies the apex of this hierarchy. Its simple form, lack of a dot, and refusal to connect to other letters make it, in

Saussurean terms, a “pure” signifier, whose signified is the idea of unity (*tawhīd*). Ibn al-ʿArabī observed: “As the number One pervades all numbers, Alif pervades all letters” (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, I:65; cited in Demirli 2008: 234). In Peircean terms, its iconic quality (vertical form = uprightness) and symbolic dimension (*abjad* value = 1) both reinforce its role as the archetype of unity. From an anthropological-linguistic perspective, Alif embodies the core value of Islamic culture – *tawhīd* – serving as the cornerstone of its worldview.

- **Waw (و): The Symbol of Mediation and Descent**

Waw acts as a bridge between Alif’s absolute unity and Nun’s multiplicity. Its grammatical role as “and” cements its function as a connector within language, representing a clear indexical relationship between form and meaning. In Sufi cosmology, Waw symbolizes the *insān al-kāmil* (Perfect Human), who mediates between God and creation. Its form, resembling a bowing or prostrating figure, provides an **iconic** support for this interpretation (Ceylan 2001: 151). Thus Waw marks the stage of descent, where the abstract principle (Alif) moves toward the manifest (Nun).

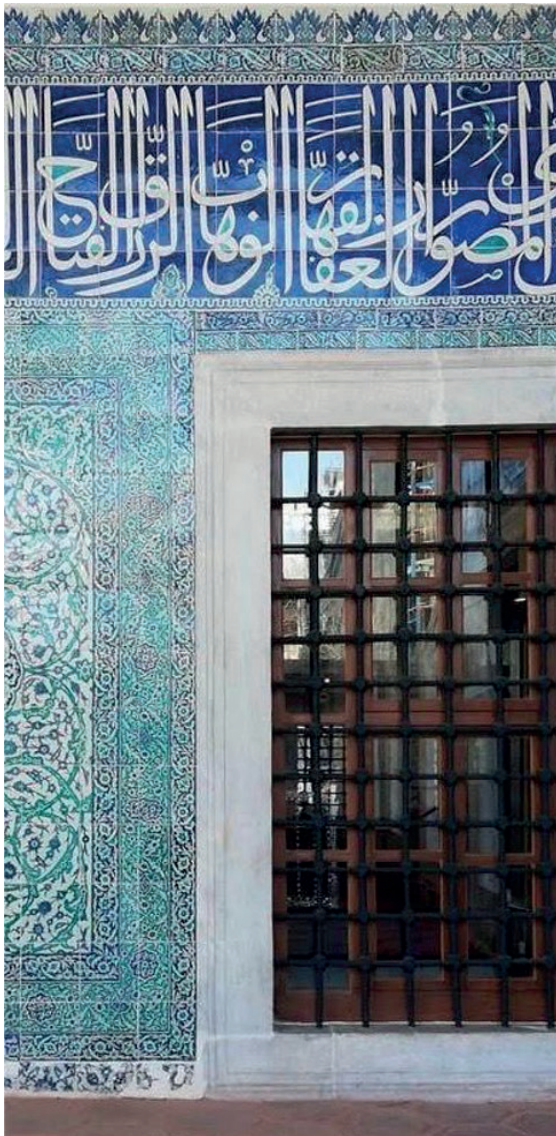
- **Nun (ن): The Symbol of Manifestation and Hidden Wisdom**

Nun corresponds to the world of multiplicity and manifestation. Its inkwell form links it to knowledge, writing, and revelation; its association with the cosmic fish symbolizes both cosmic support and the tension of captivity and rebirth (as in

Jonah's story) (Gündüzöz 2011: 50–52). In semiotic terms, Nun is **iconic** in its bowl-like form, **indexical** through its link to divine creation in *Nun. By the Pen...*, and **symbolic** in its connection to abstract notions like light (*nūr*). It represents the proliferation of forms that derive from Alif's primordial unity.

Taken together, the triad reflects a metaphysical process: from unity (Alif), to mediation (Waw), to manifestation (Nun). This schema was not only theoretical but also materialized in Islamic art and literature, from calligraphy to poetry.

Figure 6. "The Dance of Alif", Hatice Turhan Valide Sultan Mausoleum, Eminönü



4.2 Polysemy as a Semiotic Phenomenon

Our analysis shows that none of the letters carry a fixed meaning; rather, their significance shifts according to context, exhibiting what semiotics calls **polysemy**. This illustrates how Saussure's principle of the arbitrariness of the sign, when embedded in cultural systems, generates stable yet multi-layered fields of meaning.

- **Alif:** The same sign (ا) may signify "the Divine Essence," "uprightness," "the spiritual guide," or "the beloved's stature," but all converge around themes of singularity, nobility, and transcendence.
- **Waw:** Its meanings – "conjunction," "Perfect Human," "oath," "bowing figure," "pair of eyes" – revolve around mediation and connection.
- **Nun:** Associated with "inkwell," "fish," "light," "knowledge," and "Jonah's whale," Nun's meanings intersect around themes of containment, hiddenness, manifestation, and service to a higher purpose.

This polysemy explains the cultural resilience of letter symbolism. As Whorf argued, linguistic symbols shape the way communities perceive and interpret reality. Letters thus offered Muslim societies not just phonetic tools but cultural frameworks for meaning-making.

4.3 The Functions of Symbolism as an Anthropological Process

From an anthropological perspective, letter symbolism performs two essential functions:

- **Concretization of the Sacred**

Abstract and transcendent truths—unity, creation, divine knowledge—are made tangible through letters encountered daily in writing, recitation, and art. A calligraphic panel depicting Nun is not merely an aesthetic object; it invites the viewer to contemplate divine wisdom. In this way, sacred meanings are integrated into everyday practices.

- **Cultural Continuity**

Letters serve as cultural codes transmitted across generations. A Divan poet comparing his beloved to Alif, and a Sufi master pointing to Alif as the symbol of the Divine Essence, both participate in a shared symbolic repertoire (Ceylan, 2001: 145–146). As Gündüzöz (2011: 54) notes, even if such interpretations are historically contingent and subjective, they gain permanence through their role in collective memory, becoming carriers of cultural identity.

The symbolic universe of Alif, Waw, and Nun demonstrates the power of Arabic letters as **laboratories of meaning**. No longer arbitrary linguistic signs, they became polysemous cultural symbols, layered with iconic, indexical, and symbolic associations. Their interrelation—unity (Alif), mediation (Waw), and manifestation (Nun)—forms a coherent system that reflects the Islamic worldview. By concretizing the sacred and ensuring cultural continuity, letter symbolism functions as both a theological language and an anthropological



Figure 7: "Ya Deyyan". Source: Architect Elif Merve Gürer

process, embedding metaphysical truths in cultural memory and lived practice.

5 Conclusion

This study has examined three foundational letters of the Arabic script—Alif (ا), Waw (و), and Nun (ن)—through the combined lenses of anthropological linguistics and semiotics, demonstrating that these letters extend far beyond their phonetic functions to embody a dense universe of symbolic and cultural meanings. Consistent with the central argument introduced at the outset, the findings confirm that in Islamic civilization, and in the cultures influenced by it, these letters are not merely graphic symbols but powerful anthropological signs with central roles in religious, mystical, and cultural practices.

The theoretical framework—comprising anthropological linguistics, semiotics, and the study of sacred writing—has provided complementary tools for unpacking this symbolism. Anthropological linguistics empha-

sized the necessity of contextualizing letters within the cultural and religious worldview that produced them. As the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests, such symbols mediate how Muslim societies perceive and interpret reality. Semiotics, particularly Peirce's tripartite distinction between icon, index, and symbol, enabled a systematic analysis of the letters' layers of meaning: Alif's verticality (icon) and *abjad* value (symbol) aligned with *tawhīd*; Waw's grammatical role as conjunction (index) reflected its function as mediator; Nun's inkwell form (icon) and numerical associations (symbol) tied it to divine wisdom. Finally, the sacred writing perspective, especially the Qur'anic *muqatta'āt* and Ibn al-ʿArabī's doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, illuminated the metaphysical grounding of these symbols, explaining why such profound ontological significance has been attributed to letters.

The comparative analysis of Alif, Waw, and Nun also revealed the relational network that binds them together. The triad symbolizes a cosmic and epistemological process: **Unity (Alif) → Mediation (Waw) → Multiplicity and Manifestation (Nun)**. Alif represents the absolute and unconditional Oneness; Waw, as mediator and as the symbol of the Perfect Human, embodies the transition between unity and plurality; Nun represents the realm of concrete manifestations, filled with wisdom yet marked by hiddenness. This triadic structure situates letter symbolism not as a scattered collection of interpretations but as part of a coherent and systematic worldview.

Another key finding of this study is the **polysemous capacity** of these letters. The fact that the same sign can point to both the Divine Essence and the beloved's stature (Alif), or to both an inkwell and a cosmic fish (Nun),

highlights the flexibility and potency of letters as cultural signs. This polysemy allowed letters to operate across registers - from intellectual Sufi treatises to lyrical Divan poetry - thus functioning as dynamic mediators between different cultural layers.

From an anthropological perspective, this symbolic system performs two principal functions:

1. **Concretization of Abstract Beliefs:** Highly abstract and metaphysical concepts such as divine unity, creation, and knowledge are made tangible through letters experienced in daily writing, recitation, and artistic forms. A calligraphic panel depicting Nun, for instance, becomes not only an aesthetic object but also an invitation to contemplate the divine wisdom it symbolizes.
2. **Cultural Continuity and Identity Formation:** By transmitting shared symbolic codes across generations, letters ensured cultural continuity. The fact that both a Divan poet likening the beloved to Alif and a Sufi mystic pointing to Alif as the Divine Essence draw upon the same symbolic repertoire testifies to a collective identity and shared aesthetic sensibility (Ceylan 2001: 145–146).

In conclusion, Alif, Waw, and Nun are not inert signs but foundational elements of a vibrant symbolic system, saturated with religious, philosophical, and aesthetic meanings. This study has shown that the study of writing systems must take into account not only their phonetic but also their visual and symbolic dimensions. Letters can serve as powerful indicators of how a culture interprets the world and experiences the sacred. Future research

may extend this inquiry by examining the artistic manifestations of these letters (calligraphy, illumination, marbling) across different geographies and historical contexts, or by analyzing other letters (such as Bāʾ or Mīm) within a similar framework. Ultimately, this research has sought to reveal how the “silent world” of letters carries a profound and multidimensional cultural discourse.

References

- Baltacıoğlu, İsmail Hakkı. 1971. *Resim ve yazı*. İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi.
- Bewley, Aisha. 2003. *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī. The General Judgments of the Qurʾan and Clarification of what it contains of the Sunnah and Āyahs of Discrimination Vol. 1: Juzʾ 1: Al-Fātiḥah & Sūrat al-Baqarah 1-141*. Bradford: Diwan Press.
- Ceylan, Ömür. 2001. *Tasavvufî Şiir Şerhleri ve Sembolik Dil*. İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları.
- Çelebioğlu, Âmil. 1986. [Study on Divan poetry metaphors of letters]. (As cited in Ceylan, 2001).
- Demirli, Ekrem. 2008. *İbnü'l-Arabî: Varlık ve Mertebeleri*. İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları.
- Elmalılı, Muhammed Hamdi Yazır. n.d.. *Hak Dini Kurʾan Dili*. İstanbul: Eser Neşriyat. (As cited in Gündüzöz, 2011).
- Fakîh, M. 2002. [Work discussing “nûn al-nûr”]. (As cited in Ceylan, 2001).
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goody, Jack. 1986. *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goody, Jack. 2000. *The Power of the Written Tradition*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Gündüz, Şinasi. 1998. *Hurûfîlik: İnanç Esasları ve Tarihi Gelişimi*. Ankara: Vadi Yayınları.
- Gündüzöz, Soner. 2011. Nun harfinin Kurʾan ve İslam kültüründeki yeri. *İslâmî İlimler Dergisi*, 6,2: 45–55.
- Guénon, René. 1980. *Symbols of Sacred Science*. (Trans. H. D. Fohr). Hillsdale, NY: Sophia.
- Ibn Kathîr, Imam. (n.d.). *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Azīm*. [Various editions].
- Ibn Qutayba, Abdullah Muhammed. 1978. *Kitāb taʾwīl mushkil al-Qurʾān*. Cairo: Dār al-Turāth.
- Kanık, Mahmut. 1996. *Hurûfîlik ve İbnü'l-Arabî Düşüncesi*. İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları.
- Khalidi, Tarif. 2006. *The Qurʾan: A New Translation*. London: Penguin.
- Özkafa, Ekrem. 2015. “Vav harfinin İslâm sanat ve düşüncesinde sembolik anlamları.” *Turkish Studies*, 10(8), 2575–2588.
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. 1931–1958. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (8 vols.).

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rahmet Gemisi. 2017. "Kalem Suresi başlığı ve içeriği" [Blog post/visual project].

Sapir, Edward. 1931. "Communication." In *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (Vol. 4, pp. 78–80). New York: Macmillan.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1959. *Course in General Linguistics* (Trans. W. Baskin). New York: Philosophical Library.

Schimmel, Annemarie. 1984. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Turner, Victor. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Uludağ, Süleyman. 1995. *Tasavvuf Terimleri Sözlüğü*. İstanbul: Marifet Yayınları.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. 1956. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Zâtî Süleyman. n.d.. [Poetic references to the "straightness" of Alif]. (As cited in Ceylan, 2001).

An aerial photograph of a sandy beach with several footprints leading towards the ocean. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The large number '05' is centered in the upper half of the image.

05

Convivial Creativity in Everyday
Life: Cultural Resources in
Encounters and Ruptures

05

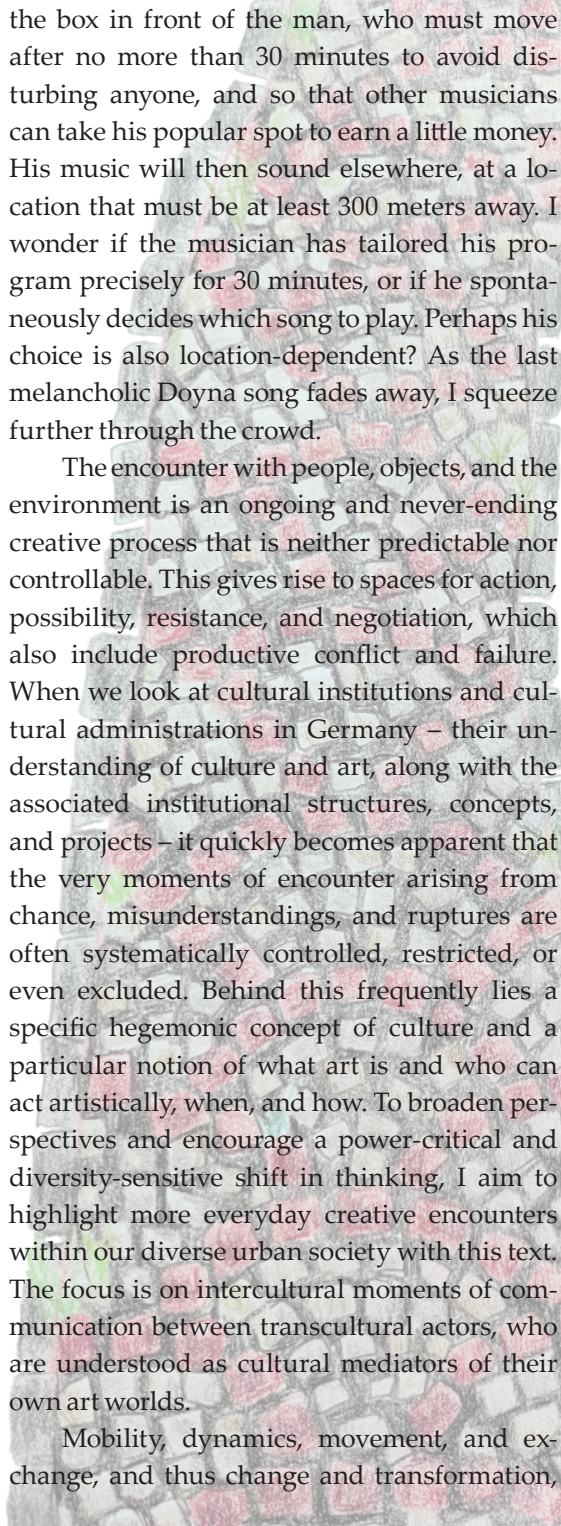
Convivial Creativity in Everyday Life: Cultural Resources in Encounters and Ruptures

Ronja Kampschulte

I'm strolling towards the Rhine, the sun is shining, and the city centre of Cologne is bustling with activity. It's one of the first spring days in April 2025. I had actually intended to avoid the crowds and get to the riverside promenade as quickly as possible, to see the calming, flowing, and simultaneously powerful river that, coming from the Swiss Alps, still has a long journey ahead of it before it flows into a large delta in the North Sea south

of Rotterdam, merging with the sea and no longer recognizable as the Rhine.

But as I hear a clarinet playing Klezmer songs, my steps lead me past the Cologne Cathedral, right into the hustle and bustle. I remember that I had actually wanted to look for concert tickets for Giora Feidman while listening to the man who has positioned himself on a stool near the Ludwig Museum. Time and again, someone hurries by, tossing a coin into



the box in front of the man, who must move after no more than 30 minutes to avoid disturbing anyone, and so that other musicians can take his popular spot to earn a little money. His music will then sound elsewhere, at a location that must be at least 300 meters away. I wonder if the musician has tailored his program precisely for 30 minutes, or if he spontaneously decides which song to play. Perhaps his choice is also location-dependent? As the last melancholic Doyna song fades away, I squeeze further through the crowd.

The encounter with people, objects, and the environment is an ongoing and never-ending creative process that is neither predictable nor controllable. This gives rise to spaces for action, possibility, resistance, and negotiation, which also include productive conflict and failure. When we look at cultural institutions and cultural administrations in Germany – their understanding of culture and art, along with the associated institutional structures, concepts, and projects – it quickly becomes apparent that the very moments of encounter arising from chance, misunderstandings, and ruptures are often systematically controlled, restricted, or even excluded. Behind this frequently lies a specific hegemonic concept of culture and a particular notion of what art is and who can act artistically, when, and how. To broaden perspectives and encourage a power-critical and diversity-sensitive shift in thinking, I aim to highlight more everyday creative encounters within our diverse urban society with this text. The focus is on intercultural moments of communication between transcultural actors, who are understood as cultural mediators of their own art worlds.

Mobility, dynamics, movement, and exchange, and thus change and transformation,

have been, are, and will always be (Greenblatt 2010: 3-5; Mecheril 2010: 8; Pries 2001: 5; Storch 2020: 10-11, 15-17). Through open intercultural contact, all parties can learn from the “other” and incorporate what is suitable for them into their own life plans. The self is fundamentally dependent on the designated other due to its own positioning (Göttsche 2013: 231; Sternagel 2015: 10). In relation to migration processes, it is assumed that cultures are dynamic mixtures in an interactive process (Pannewick 2010: 217, 249), both on the population, goods, and information levels, as well as in terms of everyday and artistic practices (Welsch 2010: 1-5). Welsch (2010) speaks in this context of “Transculturalization” (p. 5). Identity must be understood as a constantly changing and negotiable dynamic process, or as a practice and procedure (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2015: 225; cf. Middleton & Njogu 2009: xix-xv). It is inconsistent, contradictory, and unstable (Moser 2011: 50). Édouard Glissant (1997 [1990]) also emphasized that human “identity” is defined by the diversity of relationships with all their sensory aspects (p. 11). Modern research on multilingualism and societies outside the hegemonic orders of the global West repeatedly shows that extensive repertoires, open societies, and incompleteness can be considered the norm and that “Western” ideas of society and linguistic practices and concepts, such as the idea of the correlation between language and ethnicity, are rather exceptions (Evans 2009: xviii-xix, 209-210; Kopytoff 1987; Lüpke & Storch 2013: 347-348; Graeber & Wengrow 2022: 610-623, 649-651; Nyjamnoh 2017: 253-254, 2024: 121-122).

I sit down on a wall with a good view of the Heinrich-Böll-Platz between the Cathedral, the Hohenzollern Bridge, the Museum Ludwig, and the Cologne Philharmonic. I am

waiting, as my train will not arrive at the main station for a while. To my right, I see and hear the red DB trains passing by. Behind me lies the Rhine. The ground of the square is paved with red bricks. It is considered a “Gesamtkunstwerk” (total work of art) by the Israeli land art artist Dani Karavan, whose over 10-meter-high tower “Ma’alot” (Hebrew: Exit Song or Steps) is often interpreted as a Holocaust memorial. Integrated into the ground is a disc, which serves as the lid for the half-underground Philharmonic Hall built into the slope beneath it. The roof is built on swinging supports. The hall and the square were opened in 1986. However, due to the noise created by footsteps, skateboards, or rolling suitcases on the square, which reverberates in the concert hall because of the poor sound insulation of the roof, the square has been regularly closed off since 1999. On average, it is blocked off three times a day when rehearsals, recordings, or concerts take place. Costs of 300,000€ were planned for necessary security personnel in 2024 alone. Retrofitting the inadequate sound insulation was deemed too expensive by the city of Cologne at the end of the 1990s. Due to the nature of the Gesamtkunstwerk, the use of barrier tape is not allowed. Signs with instructions only in German have been put up, even though many tourists and people from all over the world are always passing through here (Schellen, 2024). The text on the laminated signs in DIN A4 format reads:

Unter diesem Platz liegt die KÖLNER PHILHARMONIE. Bitte betreten oder befahren Sie nicht die innere Platzfläche! [rote Schrift]. Tritt- und Rollgeräusche werden leider in den Saal übertragen, so dass Konzerte und Proben gestört werden. Wir danken für Ihr Verständnis! Karten und Informationen: koelner-phil-

harmonie.de. Die Stadt Köln und die Kölner Philharmonie.

I'm still trying to translate it:

Under this square lies the COLOGNE PHILHARMONIC. Please do not enter or drive on the inner square area! [red text]. Footsteps and rolling noises are unfortunately transmitted into the hall, disturbing concerts and rehearsals. We thank you for your understanding! Tickets and information: koelner-philharmonie.de. The City of Cologne and the Cologne Philharmonic.

A slightly yellowed image of the empty hall with a view of the seating is displayed to the right of the text. Neither the audience nor the musicians are shown in the photograph. As empty as the square is, the hall seems just as empty according to the visual representation. “Who would one actually disturb there?” I ask myself. The architectural conditions, as well as the requirements (silence, seating), considered necessary for the Philharmonic's concerts, stand in contrast to the everyday movement in the city, the mobility, and the noises and soundscapes of the urban environment. The square visualizes the absence of concerts through the presence of passersby; conversely expressed: The security personnel ensure that the square remains empty so that the concert hall can be filled.

Culture is considered in Germany as a good that creates ideal values, so public cultural funding, alongside the preservation of cultural heritage by public cultural institutions, the promotion of new and innovative art forms, such as scholarships for young artists, and the support of cultural education through institu-



tions like adult education centres or youth art schools, also promotes the quality of life and location in cities and municipalities through the support of cultural institutions with prestige power. Although cultural funding is a voluntary state task, Germany is one of the countries with the highest public spending on culture (Mandel 2002: 24-27). In 2024, the federal budget included expenditures of 2.3 billion euros for the cultural budget (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024). Although Hilmar Hoffmann's guiding principle "Culture for all" promoted more democratic and active participation of local societies in the so-called New Cultural Policy in the 1970s in Germany, and since then many outreach and cultural education programs have been initiated by cultural institutions, the

latter are still often not places of actual cultural participation (Annoff n.d.; Gram et al. 2024: 60-61). The underlying concept of culture in cultural institutions is often shaped in a euro-centric way, which is not accessible to everyone in society and does not make clear what this concept of culture entails. Museums, theatres, operas, literature, art, and cultural houses are still frequently anchored in the bourgeois educational elite, and the often subconscious dichotomy between high culture and sub- or pop culture is reproduced. Diversification processes in terms of equal opportunities for participation require a critical perspective on power structures, which also includes for example adequate financial compensation for people from communities whose knowledge is "needed"

(Görmar et al. 2023: 114-116). Mark Terkessidis (2010) points out that culture in the narrower sense (literature, art, music, film, drama) traditionally negotiates the self-understanding of a society. Culture plays an important role in the awareness of the self, which can be seen in Germany through the financial support of so-called high culture. These sums also make the cultural sector an important field for intercultural openness, as one must ask whether state funds are distributed in a way that benefits the entire population. However, this is not the case; a privileging of a group with certain (educational) prerequisites prevails in Germany (2010: 172-173). Thomas Renz (2016) reports that only 10 percent of the German population belong to the core audience of publicly funded cultural offerings, while 40 percent are categorized as so-called occasional visitors. A full 50 percent of the population would never enter cultural institutions (p. 65-66). In summary, only a minority of people in Germany belong to the regular audience of public cultural institutions. Even fewer people experience real participation or representation from these institutions (Kulturmanagement.net, n.d.).

There are government efforts, for example through programs in cultural education or funding, to change that. From 2018 to 2025, the Cultural Foundation of the Federal Government supported a total of 39 cultural institutions with 17.3 million euros as part of the program "360°- Fund for the Cultures of the New Urban Society." So-called agents have developed measures over a period of up to four years on how these institutions can diversify and contribute to creating a confident, open society towards immigrants, ensuring that the urban society benefits from them and that the existing diversity is also reflected within the

institutions. This is because neither in decision-making positions nor in the audience does the proportion of people with a migration background correspond to their share of the population (Kulturstiftung des Bundes, n.d.). The need for greater cultural participation has long been a topic in cultural policy. On the one hand, cultural institutions are trying to reach new visitors through creative methods and formats, increasing their appeal to new target groups. The English term for this is "Audience Development." The goal is to break up the current social homogeneity of a predominantly highly educated social milieu of visitors to the classical cultural offerings of publicly funded cultural life, so that a sense of community can be fostered (Mandel, 2016, p. 9). However, a generalized, deficit-based image of non-audiences or the recipients of cultural education must not be created. Instead, structural exclusions must also be considered (Henschel 2016: 150-151; Haselbach & Klein 2012: 112-113). Terkessidis (2010) also emphasizes that there are no "normal users." Therefore, spaces should be designed in such a way that all people, despite their undeniable differences, can find themselves within them (pp. 113-114). Patrick S. Föhl and Gernot Wolfram (2016) criticize the often strong focus on the audience (p. 272). The justification of Audience Development from an "economically well-situated, educationally bourgeois, white perspective of the majority society" (p. 121) must also be critically examined (Moser 2019: 119-122).

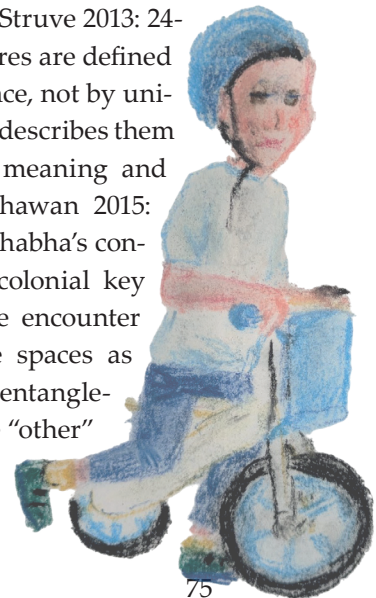
Overall, the question must be asked to what extent cultural institutions, perceived as high culture, can function as places of participation without top-down concepts through Audience Development approaches. Power relations and social practices regarding represen-

tations of migration must be taken into account (Bayer 2015: 212-220).



An older man sits down next to me, heavily loaded with bags. As he settles, he exhales audibly: "I need a break now," he says, almost to himself. I reply that I've been sitting here for a while, observing the busy activity at this heavily frequented spot along with its paradoxical barriers. For a moment, we both sit quietly, watching as tourists stare at their phones and consult Google Maps to find the best nearby brewery, as groups of teenagers with H&M and New Yorker bags walk by and as couples stroll towards the Rhine to have an Aperol or watch the passing ships. Even the Romans used the Rhine for trade and to this day the river, which is over 1,200 km long, remains an important transportation route. A child on a balance bike falls directly in front of us and screams. The older man tries to help, but in doing so, he knocks over his shopping bag, spilling the contents of it. The mother and I both bend down at the same time to help and end up getting in each other's way as we both reach for the same items. The man calls out: "Calm down, it's enough for everyone." We laugh. Self-efficacy experiences and self-empowerments occur through unpre-

dictable shocks and the associated creative acts, such as through the appropriation of space. As a result, shared moments of experienced community, i.e. "communitas" can emerge (Fischer-Lichte 2009: xxii). In this described encounter moment of transcultural actors, which is triggered by a coincidence or a rupture that shakes the actual actions and allows for a new role positioning of the involved actors, a liminal space is opened. I would like to refer to this space, following Homi K. Bhabha, as the third space. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the third space can be made fruitful for approaches in (intercultural or transcultural) art and cultural education (Mittelhammer 2018: 33-34). The world today is structured by transitions, various forms and patterns of difference and identity, the intertwining of the past and the present, as well as inclusions and exclusions. The central thesis is that cultural differences are constantly expressed in processes that open up intermediate spaces, which hold innovative places for societal development (pp. 1-2). An important role in his theory is played by alterity, as Bhabha assumes that identities, both on a collective and individual level, are always in relation to the "other" (Bhabha 2000: 23; Castro Varela & Dhawan 2015: 225; Struve 2013: 24-25). For Bhabha (2000), cultures are defined by difference and ambivalence, not by uniformity or closure (p. 54). He describes them as places of struggle over meaning and power (Castro Varela & Dhawan 2015: 257; Struve 2013: 41-44, 81). Bhabha's concept of hybridity is a postcolonial key concept that focuses on the encounter of cultures in intermediate spaces as places of negotiation and entanglement. Identification with the "other" is based on ambivalence, fra-

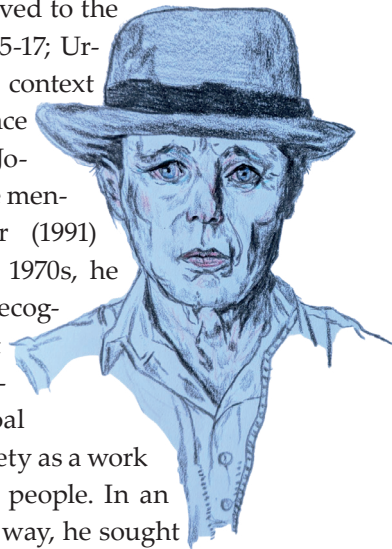


gility, and strangeness. He advocates understanding cultural differences as contested and conflictual, so that culture can be recognized as a meaning-producing, dynamic, and diverse process (Bronfen 2000: XI, XIII-XIV; Castro Varela & Dhawan 2015: 250-251, 257; Eremjan, 2016: 51-54; Huber 2014: 115-116; Moser 2011: 43; Struve 2013: 63-64). Hybridity, according to him, results (performatively) from opposites, but these opposites are overcome through the acknowledgment of the mixed. The processual nature and the creative reconstruction of identities are the focus, negotiated in the so-called third space (Struve 2013: 97). The productive intermediate space is opened up by moments of disruption and uncertainty in intercultural contact due to cultural differences (Ruf 2007: 76; Struve 2013: 50-51). Strategies of dynamic translation, which involve both understanding and misunderstanding, would be applied. Bhabha conceives the space of hybridity as a space of negotiation, resistance, and possibilities (Struve 2013: 109-112, 132-133; Moser 2011: 121-122).

Through and with art and the creative actions of transcultural actors in intercultural encounters within urban society, reality is created. The category of action and performance art must be emphasized particularly in terms of its performativity. It can be counted among the so-called second avant-gardes and spread increasingly since the late 1960s, starting in the United States (Bauman & Briggs 1990: 61; Helmstetter 2022: 9, 43-44). Performance art deals, among other things, with different and changing identity patterns and forms (Feige 2014: 217-220, 226-231). Anita Moser (2011) explains that the concept of art within the framework of action and performance art has been expanded, and the significance of the perfor-

mance situation as a dynamic process has been focused on. The direct communication and interaction between senders (artists), medium (material), and receivers (audience), as well as improvisation, have moved to the centre of interest (pp. 15-17; Ursprung 2010: 91). In the context of action and performance art, the German artist Joseph Beuys must also be mentioned. Christa Weber (1991) explains that since the 1970s, he has gained worldwide recognition as one of the most controversial contemporary artists. His goal was to create a new society as a work of art together with all people. In an open and experimental way, he sought to realize his idea of the so-called "social sculpture", which emphasizes the societal context of artistic action. Beuys reinterpreted the concept of art in such a way that any situation in which a person interacts creatively with the (social) world should be considered art (pp. 6-9). Especially Beuys' statement "everyone is an artist," which interprets creativity as a principle of life, attracted attention (ibid.: 19-20).

The man, the mother, the child and I are, for the moment, a mutually coordinated ensemble. The contrast between walking/moving (the mother and the child) and sitting (the man and I) creates an unexpected encounter situation. Waiting, according to Anne Storch (2020), is often perceived as a waste of time, but it is exactly here that liminal spaces could be opened. Paradoxical forms of waiting, which are inherent in practices of initiation and immigration, serve both the progression of time and



the powerful enhancement of hope, as this is where ideas of the subversive and reflection could grow. Waiting without distractions, which are often offered to us (waiting loops on the phone with background music, shopping opportunities in train stations and airports, etc.), could stimulate creativity and communication, thus contributing to new, even resistant thoughts (pp. 28-31). According to Walter Benjamin (1982), time can be perceived and shaped in different ways:

Man muß sich nicht die Zeit vertreiben - muß die Zeit zu sich einladen. Sich die Zeit vertreiben (sich die Zeit austreiben, abschlagen): der Spieler. Zeit spritzt ihm aus allen Poren. - Zeit laden, wie eine Batterie Kraft lädt: der Flaneur. Endlich der Dritte: er lädt die Zeit und gibt in veränderter Gestalt - in jener der Erwartung - wieder ab: der Wartende [D 3,4] (p. 164).

One doesn't need to pass the time – one must invite time to oneself. To pass the time (to chase away time, to strike it off): the player. Time sprays from his pores. – To invite time, like a battery charges with power: the flâneur. Finally, the third: he invites time and returns it in a changed form – in that of expectation: the one who waits [D 3,4] (p. 164).

Social administration and management lead people to struggle increasingly with waiting (ibid.: 178). Instead, however, “boredom” must be considered as something that can stimulate creative actions:

Langeweile haben wir, wenn wir nicht wissen, worauf wir warten. Und daß wir es wissen, oder zu wissen glauben, das ist fast immer nichts als der Ausdruck unserer Seichtheit

oder Zerfahrenheit. Die Langeweile ist die Schwelle zu großen Taten. (ibid.: 1024).

We are bored when we do not know what we are waiting for. And the fact that we know, or believe we know, is almost always nothing more than a sign of our shallowness or distraction. Boredom is the threshold to great deeds. (ibid.: 1024).

Waiting is part of many societal activities (Tsing 2015: 82). An example that waiting should not simply be seen as idleness or a waste of time comes from anthropologist Adeline Masquelier (2019). She examines the so-called “Fadas” in Niger. These are self-determined spaces where young, unemployed Nigerian men gather in urban neighbourhoods. It is shown that here, uncertainties and poor job prospects in a globalized world are confronted through the shared experience of being together. The economic marginalization of these young men is embodied through the act of sitting. The gatherings, which structure their daily lives, vary in nature. The Fadas, which particularly come alive in the early evening, can range from informal conversations to relatively structured organizations. The excluded individuals from the labor market develop new forms of sociability and spaces of belonging at these sites. Instead of focusing on the often critical or even crisis-like transition from youth to adulthood, which is frequently equated with boredom and an inability to progress, Masquelier highlights the collective benefit of these meetings (pp. 2-5). In this context, waiting or “doing nothing” is a way of resisting social marginalization and creating spaces for personal and collective growth. It becomes a tool for building solidarity and creating a sense

of belonging, even in the face of societal challenges. The described scene at the Heinrich-Böll-Platz in Cologne illustrates that practices such as sitting adjacently, observing the public environment, and waiting for public transport, alongside the contingency of accidental encounters, can serve as mechanisms through which social bonds and a sense of community are generated.

Finally, I rise to head towards the train. The man asks if he can accompany me, as he's headed in the same direction. He tells me that he lives near Keupstraße in Cologne Mülheim and that his son owns a Turkish snack bar there. As we pass the security staff – five people in neon yellow jackets – I ask him if he has ever been to the Cologne Philharmonic and he shakes his

head. He im-



mediately

adds that he is very knowledgeable about music and that his son plays many of his songs from their old Turkish homeland in his shop. As we enter the large train station hall, the man says that he finds Cologne's main train station interesting but not aesthetically, he prefers the one in Istanbul.

Our shared walk can be seen as a form of Walking Method. As we move, we perceive and gain insights. It is assumed that walking can bring people closer together and challenge un-

democratic institutions, as it is a free means of movement that makes one's own physicality tangible. Walking can be viewed as a kind of "in-between time" that connects activities which might otherwise be considered economically productive. In motion, we can become aware of our complex entanglements with materials, as well as social and cultural processes. Walking, as well as interdisciplinary talking, writing, and reading about it, can open new perspectives and create spaces away from destructive social forms like individualism, privatization and hyperspecialization (Stenning & Marland 2020: 1-4). In this way, walking becomes not just a means of transportation but also a reflective, relational practice. It engages with the environment and other people in ways that can foster solidarity, deepen understanding, and challenge societal norms. When thinking about walking, the following questions arise, among others: Why do we walk? When do we walk? What do we perceive? What influences us? How do we interact in movement with one another, with other living beings and with the environment? Artistic approaches in particular can reveal the ambiguity of walking and the various connections between the walkers and the (surrounding) world (Loose 2020: 13-14; Stenning & Marland 2020: 4-5). Walking and speaking are fundamental aspects of human existence. They are inseparable. Life itself can be interpreted as a long walk or conversation, framed by beginnings and endings, which relate to what has preceded them and simultaneously point to the future. Walking sets the whole body in motion. Like speaking, it is a fundamental social activity. Rhythm, timing, turning points etc., are always responses to the presence and actions of others. We walk because we are social be-

ings, and we are social beings because we walk. Walking is not just something the body does, but something that constitutes the body. This is why walking must be given more attention from a (social) scientific perspective (Ingold & Vergunst 2008: 1-3; Legat 2008: 35; Tuck-Po 2008: 25-26). Paths and routes unfold in the moment someone walks along them, just as a story unfolds when someone listens. This is why Katrín Lund (2008: 97) views walking as a narrative process that connects time (past and future) and places. Nico Nassenstein (2018) applies the method he calls “promenade linguistique” to examine the multifaceted tourist locations of Mallorca from the perspective of a personal linguistic biography. His work clearly shows how narratives, walking, and various places interplay and how insights can be gained from this. The different atmospheres seem to lead to the thematization of different contents and to the highlighting of various related experiences and emotions of the conversation partner in a multilingual context. According to Nassenstein, the method is characterized by rapidly changing dialogues, informal comments, sudden visual and auditory impressions, and unexpected encounters, which occur in a wide range of stylistic forms (pp. 81-84, 87-93). Action and performance art often consciously work with atmospheres, staging in public spaces, where fiction and reality merge, and where the attendees are thrown back on themselves through disruptions, prompting reflection. The contrast between movement and rest, walking and waiting, noise and silence, and thus the pause and absence as a whole, can have a performative effect. The perception of temporality and rhythm is significant in this context. Openness to situations that arise spontaneously and unplanned in the urban space, as well as a po-

tential “responsive availability,” as described by Hartmut Rosa (2020: 60-66), are prerequisites for enabling the experience of synchronization and resonance. In unexpected encounters closely tied to mobility, the significance of incompleteness for individuals, as well as for societies and global coexistence, as articulated by Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2017), becomes palpable. Incompleteness is normal. “Conviviality”, Njamnoh writes, invites us to preserve and celebrate it. The encounter with the incompleteness of the “other” must be seen as an opportunity to shape oneself. Through conviviality and boundary-crossing, alternative forms of togetherness would become visible, contrasting with the prevailing modes of violence and control (pp. 253-254). Exactly these performative moments of unexpected encounters, initiated by breaks, misunderstandings, and coincidences in the mobile, diverse urban society, which can open liminal negotiation spaces where something new in common can emerge, are often systematically avoided in cultural institutions. Yuriko Saito (2010) explains that the human desire for control over the uncontrollable continually manifests itself (e.g., through the elimination of dirt, disorder, etc., or in relation to aging). Often, ambivalent and contradictory actions accompany this (p. 7). According to her paradigm Western art is characterized by the fact that its properties seem to be determined by conventionalized ideas and the control of the artist over the material. Despite the many controversies about what constitutes artistic work and what does not, an art object is generally something with specific boundaries. This leads to the fact that the absence of an equivalent conventional understanding makes non-art objects appear “frameless” (ibid.: 18-19). Saito underlines that everyday aesthetics

have impacts on moral, social, political, and environmental levels (ibid.: 2, 51-53, 55). They can trigger unreflected actions. For this reason, she speaks of the action-oriented dimension of everyday aesthetics, in contrast to the viewing orientation of “art-centered” aesthetics (ibid.: 2-10). The fear of (too) little control (over nature or natural phenomena) or the loss of control is, for example, also the basis of many (linguistic) taboos (Allan & BurrIDGE 2006: 123-124).

Bayo Akomolafe emphasizes that modern civilization is based on the idea of separateness. He criticizes our categorizing mindset, which sees us as uniquely independent and disconnected from the animal and plant world, as well as from inanimate things like mountains and fluidity. He speaks of a shared agency, arguing that humans are not superior to the Earth. We have never truly been in control, and he calls for the building of new alliances and solidarities in the present – with a world we believed we had left behind. This would also include the spiritual. He is concerned with the processual nature and relationality of the world. He draws on West African Yoruba thinkers, believing that agency materializes through the body. For him, agency is a territory, widely distributed. It should be understood as an assemblage that uses bodies for its materialization. Thinking would not only reside in human life. He speaks of a cosmology of movement and animism (SRF Kultur Sternstunde Philosophie 2024, 1:42-4:20, 5:30-7:41). Akomolafe speaks of “white modernity.” By whiteness, he refers to a civilizational, planetary, and earth-shaping practice. He defines it as a socio-economic, racializing power arrangement that organizes bodies according to pre-established definitions of power and access in specific ways. This is based on a historically grown legacy, particularly in light of

colonialism. This interpretation would help break open rigid categories (ibid. 13:20–15:05). If we humans were to recognize that the world also acts and that we are all interconnected, it would become clear that we need a new ethical sensitivity – especially in the context of climate change (ibid. 16:20–18:10). His focus is primarily on integrating other cosmologies into our worldviews in order to learn from one another and allow new forms of knowledge, including the magical (ibid. 22:20–27:02). The Nigerian philosopher and psychologist believes that place-based knowledge from all over the world can be shared through conversation and experimentation. He sees particular value in the richness of African storytelling, which can offer important insights and be helpful in the face of the unraveling of modernity. Ideas of impermanence and the belief that we are not alone are, in his view, essential (ibid. 33:10–34:10). We would often regard language as a boundary that separates us from the world, rather than seeing it as part of the world. Language would not represent the world; it would not be nuanced enough to capture every molecular flow. Within a specific human framework and context, language may shape our perception of the world. But beyond these human-centered constraints, it would not represent the world outside of language. Instead, we need, Akomolafe argues, to reflect on the practices that constitute the world – language being just one aspect of these material practices, and thus never fully capable of depicting reality. He gives the example that language would not know how to deal with the scattering of cells through movement. He advocates for a playful engagement with uselessness against the backdrop of a processual and relational world – something that lies beyond the instrumental and the functional (36:43–39:24,

41:50-42:11). He believes that politics must position itself within the cracks of integrity and the dissolution of the Western concept of a stable individual. Politics, he argues, should be approached as a form of art, an experiment to create something. He critiques the notion that politics are clearly separated from philosophy and art, calling this a highly compartmentalized form of analysis. What we are facing, he says, is a paralyzing mass event that affects us all, yet we struggle with it because we have no ready answers to recent and current ruptures (climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other global disruptions). While attempts to give nature a voice in politics are important, he sees them as insufficient. Instead, he envisions solutions emerging through underground, transnational forms of politics – for example, through a possible explosion of carnival events. Such movements would reveal that power is not as fixed and stable as we often assume. It would not lie solely with nation-states, nor even exclusively within the capitalist system. Rather, power, in his opinion, is more widely distributed. He believes that a playful approach to power could function alongside the dominant system. It is about touching the ecology and the world – and being touched in return.

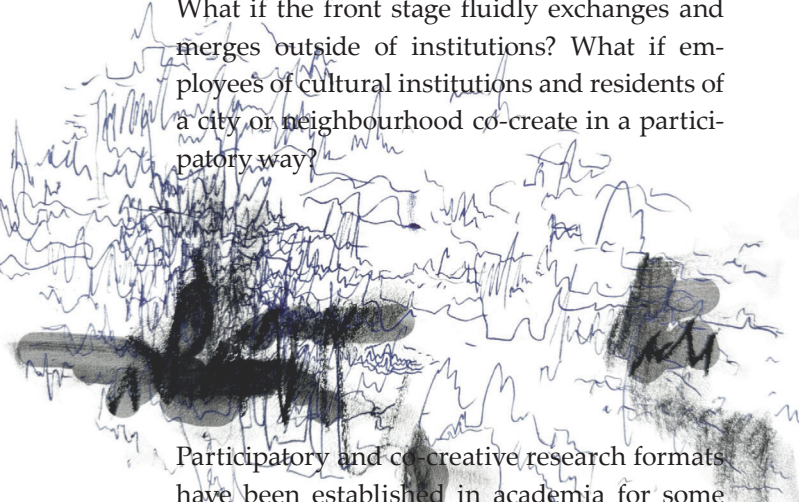
He underlines that we do not need to change the entire world, because that is the logic of capitalism. Instead, it would be about making small gestures and thinking within the cracks (43:05–48:10). I deliberately included this extended passage in my text to emphasize that the arts and cultural sectors can – and must – benefit from perspectives and ways of thinking that lie outside the dominant Western paradigms and traditional definitions of knowledge. Perceiving the world as active, fluid, relational, and processual opens new doors for



shaping collective interaction and should also influence the work of cultural institutions.

Erving Goffman (2003) conceives of the world as a social stage, where actors perform various roles, or in other words, he views life as a performance. In addition to the front and back stage, he introduces a third area that he refers to as the “outside.” This encompasses all places other than the two previously mentioned stages. He uses social institutions as an example: while most buildings contain rooms that are occasionally used as both front and back regions, the world outside the building should be understood as the “outside.” Generally, the control of the front region is significant because in everyday life, it is often important to

play different roles in front of different people and to keep certain audiences apart in order to maintain the intended impression of the performance (pp. 123–126). Goffman concludes that in social institutions, the impression created is often manipulated. A cooperative ensemble of performers strives to present a given situation before an audience. The interaction is based on behaviour rules (such as politeness). While roles are prepared in the background, which only the performers have access to, the actual performance takes place in the front region (pp. 217–218). But what if the front stage also would take place outside of institutions so that the “outside” includes the front and back stages? What if the front stage fluidly exchanges and merges outside of institutions? What if employees of cultural institutions and residents of a city or neighbourhood co-create in a participatory way?



Participatory and co-creative research formats have been established in academia for some time. Scientific and non-scientific actors work collaboratively together (Fücker 2024: 32–33). Participatory Action Research (PAR) has become a widely used approach in the social sciences.

The fundamental belief is that “knowers, and that which is known, and unknown, are entangled in relationship with one another, in localized and material ways, informed by diverse, multiple ways of knowing” (Gayá 2021: 171). People are recognized as situationally

reflective analysts of the world, who have particular expertise in relation to researching their own lives and, using this knowledge, are able to take action to change their lives for the better. However, Kesby et al. (2025) warn that the more PAR becomes systematized as a set of “tools” or “methods” promising innovation and impact, the more the organic and context-specific focus that challenges power inequalities may be co-opted by the economics of institutional reproduction. They emphasize:

PAR approaches have often in past decades come to resemble technocratic ‘fixes’ to address short-term problems that can be marketed at the end of a project funding cycle. Therefore, from our perspective, too much of what now purports to be PAR – participatory research, co-produced or co-designed research, within academic settings – lacks criticality. [...]. There is no gold standard of PAR praxis [...], as its use and its ability to effect meaningful change for people, places or policies are highly variable, contested, and unpredictable [...]. Nonetheless [...] this polyvalent research approach can and should be underpinned by the political commitments that are manifested in certain strands of critical theory and practice [...] (pp. 1–3).

PAR is a constantly evolving relational project that requires ongoing work. The authors describe PAR as a “series of ongoing, unfinished improvisations,” which strengthen situated, relational, and embedded innovations, including unresolved contradictions, difficulties, and experienced emotions (ibid.: 3; Askins 2025: 134). Privileges, power structures, and perspectives of embodied lived experiences and relationalities must constantly

be reflected upon (Kesby et al. 2023: 23). When walking and resting together outside the buildings of cultural institutions is considered art, it automatically becomes arts-based research for all participants in the walking process. In this case, space is performatively designed on the urban stage, and messiness and fluidity in and through encounters play an important role. Arts-based PAR can be a way to mobilize stories and share various forms of knowledge in practice (Woodrow 2025: 111-113). The involvement of performance artists who consciously play with mutable parameters (rhythm, tempo, route choices, modes of movement), sharpen awareness of certain factors (terrain, weather, sounds), and blur the boundary between fiction and reality can support the destabilization of boundaries within the group (Smitheram et al. 2024: 727-728). Here, space is understood as a social or individual thinking and action space, a fleeting construct that feeds on social conventions. The perceiving subject constructs the space (Moser 2011: 117-120). At the same time, the subject is performative and shapes the happening (Schellmann 2016: 16). The engagement with space and its staging is, in summary, part of performative practices and discourses (Gronau 2010: 83-84). In this context, it must be considered that every (social) space is hegemonically constructed, as segregations are made based on gender, social class, or other factors. It is linked to symbolic principles of spatial representation, such as signs, maps or codes (Moser 2011: 119-120). Wiebke Sievers (2024) emphasizes that arts-based methods stimulate the world-building capacities of research participants by presenting their perspectives and stories, encouraging dialogical exchange, and thereby introducing different

futures to a wider audience (p. 14). Mutual learning through the transformative power of cultural productions should be encouraged, and places of collective participation should be designed, allowing plural and diverse forms of conviviality to emerge in creative processes. Flexible structures that also allow criticism should be established. Regular reflection on categorizations, positionalities, inclusions and exclusions, and the critical examination of self-reproducing stereotypes in German society should be planned to ensure both aesthetic value and political significance (Moralli & Musarò 2024: 233-234).

The sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2020) argues that the way of life we call "modern" is defined by "the idea, the desire, and the longing to make the world available." However, "vitality, touch, and real experience arise," Rosa claims, "from encountering the unavailable. A world that is fully known, planned, and controlled would be a dead world" (p. 8, *emph. in orig.*). This is perceptible in everyday life. One moves between what is available and what is unavailable, the latter of which can still affect us. It is a dynamic play along a boundary line, which, for example, is constitutive of games in general, but also relevant for falling asleep or love. The more one aims for the latter two, the less they can be forced. Therefore, unavailability constitutes human life (*ibid.*: 8-9). He formulates the following thesis:

Indem wir Spätmodernen auf allen [...] Ebenen - individuell, kulturell, institutionell und strukturell - auf die Verfügbarmachung von Welt zielen, begegnet uns die Welt stets als 'Aggressionspunkt' oder als Serie von Aggressionspunkten, das heißt von Objekten, die es zu wissen, zu erreichen, zu erobern, zu

beherrschen oder zu nutzen gilt und genau dadurch scheint sich uns das 'Leben', das, was die Erfahrung von Lebendigkeit und von Begegnung ausmacht – das, was Resonanz ermöglicht –, zu entziehen, was wiederum zu Angst, Frust, Wut, ja Verzweiflung führt, die sich dann unter anderem in ohnmächtigem politischem Aggressionsverhalten niederschlagen (ibid.: 1).

In aiming to make the world available on all levels – individually, culturally, insti-

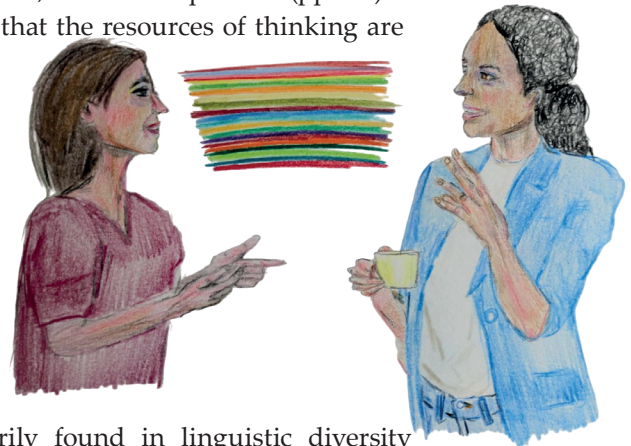
tutionally, and structurally – we encounter the world as an 'aggression point' or a series of aggression points, that is, as objects to be known, reached, conquered, controlled, or used. And it is precisely through this that 'life,' the experience of vitality and encounter – what enables resonance – seems to elude us, which in turn leads to fear, frustration, anger, and even despair, which then manifest, among other things, in powerless political aggression (ibid., p. 1).



Rosa believes that human (practical and cognitive) relationships to the world are dependent on the social and cultural conditions into which one is socialized. Our relationship to the world in the 21st century is shaped by technological advances, digitalization, financial market capitalism, constant competition and political-economic pressures for growth and optimization. This is evident in the ongoing drive to “improve” one’s body or in the long daily to-do lists. The sociologist assumes that this “aggressive” relationship to the world has developed over three centuries and structurally builds on the principle of dynamic stabilization, while culturally it is based on the idea of never-ending expansion. However, it is not the desire for “more” that is decisive, but rather the fear of loss, of having less, in a highly dynamic environment that is constantly in competition with us. Moreover, the promise of global expansion is a driving force and the dominant decision-making credo in all areas of life in late modernity. In summary, we are structurally (from the outside) and culturally (from the inside) encouraged to make the world an aggression point, i.e., to make it available and controllable (ibid.: 12-20). The social scientist and educator describes that in bureaucratic work, the focus is primarily on goal orientation in a time-efficient and manageable process, as well as on the exclusion of arbitrariness through legal regulations to maintain the principle of justice. The criteria of transparency and controllability in the working world often leave too little time for the actual work. However, in practice, it is precisely the unavailable aspects that allow for innovations and the development of competencies. Furthermore, unavailability can never be excluded or avoided. Therefore, it is

important to respond appropriately to it, as the creation of resonance spaces is fundamental to social coexistence (ibid.: 103-107). It becomes clear that flexibility and the avoidance or relinquishment of control, where possible, are considered significant by Rosa when it comes to the experience of vitality in the context of social life.

But how can cultural institutions recognize these productive moments of waiting, incompleteness, rupture, chance and misunderstandings in order to appreciate the diversity of urban society and make use of the cultural resources available to all, as François Jullien (2017) suggests? Jullien proposes a conceptual shift by speaking not of isolating “differences” between cultures, but of “distances” that productively juxtapose cultures and maintain a tension that brings out a “common” ground. He rejects the term “identity” due to its rigid connotations of self and instead uses the terms “fertility” and “resources.” Cultural resources, which cannot be owned and are therefore available to all, must be “exploited” (pp. 7-8). He believes that the resources of thinking are



primarily found in linguistic diversity and its productive deviations, which is why the fruitful process of translation (the back-and-forth, the “between”) must be preserved (ibid.: 53-60, 90-91). However, if cultural institutions

continue to try to unidirectionally transmit predefined knowledge, they are avoiding exactly this “in-between.” I suggest that cultural institutions revisit the approach of “culture by, for, with everyone,” expanding upon Hilmar Hoffman’s concept of “culture for all” (Pähler 2021: 71-72). This expansion involves broadening the perspective towards the creativity of encounters, the sharing of stories, an openness to sensual and physical experiences, the consideration of atmospheres and the acknowledgment of aesthetics in everyday life. Wolf-Dietrich Bukow and Karin Cudak (2016) highlight that society plays out in a temporally and socially condensed social space that productively frames everyday routines (p. 2-3). Social space can be defined as a “constantly (re)produced fabric of social practices” (Kessl & Reutlinger 2022: 3). Either the existing is confirmed, or it is questioned and transformed (ibid.: 7-9). Every action, every step and all encounters are meaningful because they create and shape spaces. The concept of space appropriation refers to an active engagement with space, where the space only emerges in the process. At the same time, societal norms and values are either repeatedly reinforced (inclusion in societal power relations) or newly negotiated (a constant process of becoming) (Landolt 2022: 194-197). Let us remember the scene I described: In relation to the space in front of the Philharmonic, state intervention in the public space becomes visible. But although there are no benches at Heinrich-Böll-Platz, the elderly man and I choose a wall to sit on. Furthermore, one could ask many different questions observing the place: Who moves through the urban space between the Cathedral, the Museum and the Cologne Philharmonic? Why do people choose this path, and how did they get there? What goal are they

pursuing? Who wears what clothing and carries what objects and belongings? What distinguishes the Klezmer player from the musicians performing in the concert hall of the Philharmonic? Who is being addressed and which audience is present? And very importantly: Who is absent? Yamamura (2005) highlights that adopting a spatial perspective bridges the gap between the concepts of “intersecting” and “intersectional spaces” by highlighting structural inequalities in urban environments. She demonstrates how spatial dimensions – such as class, temporal, and functional factors – shape migration-related diversity in intersectional spaces. By focusing on urban superdiversity and spatial inequalities, she reveals how stratification, discrimination and privilege are contested (pp. 10, 13, 16).

If cultural institutions perceive themselves as curious seekers of existing cultural resources in the society with the goal of being friendly hosts, but also being able to take on the role of the grateful guest in the neighbourhoods, working together with the city’s residents – who act as cultural mediators of their own life and art worlds – there is an opportunity to jointly develop new perspectives through creative action. If spaces can be shaped through shared experiences and encounters and creative actions are stimulated by chance, coincidences and ruptures, cultural institutions should try to experiment with these spaces. The independent scene often moves much more naturally within the urban space, allowing for fluid connections to be explored. Bold collaborations and the acceptance of a certain lack of control, which opens up new paths and shared stories should be promoted. It must be noted, however, that power hierarchies do not dissolve in these processes. Ann Laura Stoler (2008) argues that the nega-

tive consequences of colonialism and imperialism, both physically and psychologically, are still present in people's lives (pp. 191-198, 202, 211). Institutional discrimination reveals itself through its enduring and systematic nature, which leads to relative disadvantages between members of different social groups. It is based on legal and political frameworks, meaning organizational structures, norms, rules, routines and shared knowledge used as justifications for decisions (Gomolla 2016: 74-77). Structural discrimination, on the other hand, refers to the historically and socially structured discrimination that can no longer be directly attributed to specific institutions and is negotiated through representations and discourses (ibid.: 79). If cultural educators or facilitators of institutions see themselves as translators they could make unexpected exchanges and diverse knowledge visible, so that an open space could emerge that envisions polyphonic futures considering our interconnectedness with the world, according to Akomolafe (see above).

As the man and I walk, we adjust our steps. I walk slower than usual, being careful to choose a path without high curbs because I think the man may not be walking as well anymore. Eventually, I stroll beside him, engrossed in conversation, stopping occasionally to avoid getting too fast. I notice that the man also keeps stopping, though he doesn't appear exhausted. While I focus on him during the short breaks, he looks around and points at the steps in front of the cathedral: "I used to jump up those backwards," he says. At some point, I'm no longer sure who actually started stopping. Was it really me? In the end, the man decides our pace and uses the standing pauses to share his knowledge with me. He determines when we start walking again. A mimetic alignment takes

place as we adapt our behaviour to each other. Mimesis can be defined as:

"A becoming akin to the other, as a way of making oneself similar and standing in for the other, which does not necessarily align with representation in the pictorial sense. [...] [As] an aesthetic practice exposed to historical transformations [...], which is not only everyday and physical, world-bound and community-building, but also constantly problematizes the relationship between the self and the other" (Otto, 2013/2012).

Mimesis is described on the one hand as a sensual, physical process and on the other hand, it is connected to representation, action, performance, and power in the sense of appropriation. Michelle Puetz (2022) explains that mimesis creates a world of illusions, appearances, aesthetics and images in which existing worlds are appropriated, changed, and reinterpreted. In everyday intercultural encounters, mimetic processes occur that can destabilize boundaries. Although the man appears to be in the weaker physical position, he is ultimately the one who directs our progress.

William and Raine (2025) advocate for understanding the rhythmic fluidity of life as an opportunity for change. Affective encounters with the (surrounding) world would push the subject into the background and bring the continuous reconfiguration of subjectivity into focus. Actions and thoughts, they underline, are simultaneously shaped, with neither preceding the other (p. 13). DiPiero (2022) highlights that improvisation is deeply embedded in our everyday experiences. He suggests that a politics of the everyday is a politics of impro-

visation. He aims to trace the seemingly extraordinary potential of improvised artistic practices back to the ordinary moments that constitute improvisation itself: “the messy in-between that structure/agency binaries confuse for inconsequential or invisible” (p. 195). No action could necessarily create a break in the sensual merely through the attempt, but it would be only through this attempt and the cultivation of tendencies that prepare us to act – small repetitions in daily life – that a moment is activated. He reminds us that we cannot listen (or “attend”) without simultaneously responding with our bodies. Listening, he argues, is a practice that directs our attention to how we are already connected to the external world, influencing and being influenced. Our contingent encounters with the world – how we respond and how we are already responding – are the necessary fact of our being. Critical reflection through improvisation, DiPiero suggests, can help bring this fact to the forefront, continuously orienting us toward what is relevant in the moment (pp. 195-197). He emphasizes in his work that improvisation is not something extraordinary. Contingent encounters highlight the embodied fact of our everyday improvisations. Contingency structures our lives and brings improvisation into being as an everyday given. Improvisation exists everywhere because existence itself is contingent. Contingency, he argues, is the fundamental core of what it means to improvise. He proposes the following theses:

1. Contra the notion of improvisation as a creative capacity developed by subjects, improvisation can be productively understood as co-extensive with a contingent encounter between subjects, objects, and multiple environments,

where environments encompasses everything that has an effect, from physical spaces to the discourses governing how things are perceived or known. In this formation it is the subject’s role that has historically overdetermined theorizations of improvisation.

2. Given the radical contingency of every improvisation, each is incommensurate with every other instance, even within the same genre or medium – that is, improvisation is always a singularity.

3. If improvisation is always a singularity, then its ontology must be understood through contingency, and contingency alone, as this remains the only constant from improvisation to improvisation. In spite of every irreducible, irreplicable difference, it is always true that improvisation is contingent, and equally so.

4. The singularity of improvisation tightly links it, on a formal level, with practices in everyday life. This link is so tight, I suggest, that it is not so much that improvisation in music and in social life are identical, but more that all musical and social actions (and the musical and social spaces they create) are inherently improvisatory. That is, we do not act but through improvisation (*ibid.*, pp. 6-8).

This implies that improvisation cannot necessarily be understood as an open or spontaneous process. Rather, certain social investments lead to improvisation being perceived as an expression of freedom. Contingency indicates that every improvisation is simply dependent (*ibid.*). DiPiero further explores walking as a contingent and improvised phenomenon and compares it with musical improvisation. Both are forms of improvisation, but they differ in context and thus lead to different results. Everyday prac-

tices like walking and musical improvisation, involve a subject interacting with contingent circumstances. Both activities, DiPiero writes, occur within constraints, are unique and rely on repetitive learning and expression shaped by broader sociopolitical factors. Despite differences in context, both walking and improvising music share the same structural process of engaging with contingencies. While the difficulty of each may differ, improvisation in both cases operates similarly, responding to what is available. He writes that the distinction between musical performance and everyday life lies in context, not in the process of improvisation itself. Whether simple or complex, improvisation would remain the same mode of engagement (*ibid.*: 136-137, *emph. in orig.*).

Encounters create and transform differences, as it is the generative and relational coming together of affective actions, speech acts and becoming, which brings the unpredictable, surprising, and disturbing into focus. Learning is thus understood as something that is affective, spatial, continuous, non-linear and largely immeasurable (William and Raine 2025: 5). In this context, adopting a phenomenological perspective is meaningful, viewing learning as a lived act, as a practice embedded in situations, and as a process. The various forms of knowledge present (and also implicit) in the world can thus be perceived physically. Reflection, awareness of situations, non-rational processes and emotional abilities are prerequisites for learning. From the phenomenological perspective, learning is understood as a dynamic and decentered, inter-relational state of being and becoming, which is not limited to cognitive processes. Physical, emotional, and intuitive knowledge, as well as non-discursive and aesthetic forms of learning, are

considered (Kueppers & Desmond 2018: 6, 14). Walking as a physical engagement can be a form of “embodied research” or an “embodied method.” This is because the body functions as an archive and through the perception of the environment, processes of memory, sensibility, affect, relational connection and learning are stimulated, which in the normal course of academic work would typically not be activated in this way (Collier 2020: 63-64; Legat 2008: 39; Shepherd et al. 2018: 4, 12). Learning from each other could be facilitated through walking, which perceives improvisation as a contingent phenomenon and acknowledges the creativity and situated knowledge of transcultural actors. The significance of performativity in intercultural encounters, mobility, misunderstandings, breaks, and unplanned experiences could be brought to the forefront in the form of participatory action-based research, where participants (including staff from cultural institutions) view themselves as cultural mediators of their own art worlds, as researchers and as experimenters who resonate with each other. Since the analysis of art and cultural experiences is closely linked to one’s own bodily sensory perception, attention must be given to the performative power of the senses, physical experiences and the emotions associated with them (Banes & Lepecki 2007: 1-2). The unexpected and the encounter of differences can lead to the opening of third spaces, where something new can emerge, leading to new, more diverse perspectives on the work of cultural institutions and destabilizing boundaries in the late capitalist, neoliberal and postcolonial world. Essential to this is the ongoing reflection on one’s own roles and involvement in (institutional) and historically grown structures and power hierarchies, as these situations always influence the out-

comes (Diebäcker 2022: 171-172; Foroutan & İköz 2016: 143; Fricker 2007: 10-14; Klein & Göbel 2017: 11-13). The opening up of cultural institutions to the city's residents through collective action and the sharing of stories could contribute to greater social cohesion and the development of new ideas for the collaborative design of cultural institutions (Fonseca et al. 2018). Central to this is the recognition of actors as sovereign artistic and cultural practitioners and relational translators, who also engage in resistant practices (Butler 2005; Castro Varela 2018). The man and I say our goodbyes with a Kölsch 'Mach et joot,' a simple phrase that fades almost instantly into the familiar noise of the station - footsteps, loudspeakers, and the steady rhythm of trains coming and going.

Note: All figures are the author's own illustrations

The paintings and drawings embedded in the text serve to visualize personal experiences as well as to illustrate the theories and concepts discussed. All graphical representations were created by the author. The figures are not labeled in order to not disrupt the flow of reading.

References

- Allan, Keith & Kate Burridge. 2006. *Forbidden Words. Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Annoff, Michael. n.d. Im Hinterhof der Neuen Kulturpolitik. Hilmar Hoffmanns Schlüsselwerk "Kultur für alle" aus diskriminierungskritischer Perspektive. *Diversity Arts Culture*. <https://diversity-arts-culture.berlin/im-hinterhof-der-neuen-kulturpolitik> (last accessed 07 April 2025).
- Askins, Kye. 2025. "You think Too Much!". Emotional Geographies of Participatory Action Research. In Mike Kesby, Sara Kindon und Rachel Pain (eds.), *Critically Engaging Participatory Action Research*, pp. 125-136. London, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis.
- Banes, Sally & André Lepecki. 2007. *The Senses in Performance*. New York: Routledge.
- Bauman, Richard & Charles L. Briggs. 1990. Poetics and performance as critical perspectives on language in social life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 59-88.
- Bayer, Natalie. 2015. Migration und die museale Wissenskammer. Von Evidenzen, blinden Flecken und Verhältnissetzungen. In Erol Yıldız & Marc Hill (eds.), *Nach der Migration. Postmigrantische Perspektiven jenseits der Parallelgesellschaft*, pp. 207-224. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1982. *Das Passagen-Werk*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 2000. *Die Verortung der Kultur*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

- Bronfen, Elisabeth. 2000. Vorwort. In: Homi K. Bhabha: *Die Verortung der Kultur*, pp. IX–XIV. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- Bukow, Wolf-Dietrich & Karin Cudak. 2016. Auf dem Weg zur Inclusive City. In Melanie Behrens, Wolf-Dietrich Bukow, Karin Cudak & Christoph Strünck (eds.), *Inclusive City. Überlegungen zum gegenwärtigen Verhältnis von Mobilität und Diversität in der Stadtgesellschaft*, pp. 1–20. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Butler, Judith. 2005. *Gefährdetes Leben. Politische Essays*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Castro Varela, María do Mar & Nikita Dhawan. 2015. *Postkoloniale Theorie. Eine kritische Einführung*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Castro Varela, María do Mar. 2018. Grenzen dekonstruieren. Mobilität imaginieren. In Marcel Bleuler und Anita Moser (eds.), *ent/grenzen. Künstlerische und kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf Grenzräume, Migration und Ungleichheit*, pp. 23–33. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Collier, Mike. 2020. Ghosts of the Restless Shore. A personal pilgrimage. In Dave Borthwick, Anna Stenning & Pippa Marland (eds.), *Walking, Landscape and Environment*, pp. 51–66. London, New York NY: Routledge.
- Deutscher Bundestag. Haushalt 2024: 2,3 Milliarden Euro im Kulturretat. 31 January 2024. <https://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/kurzmeldungen-988360> (last accessed 09 April 2025).
- Diebäcker, Marc. 2022. Öffentlicher Raum. Kontrolle. In Fabian Kessl & Christian Reutlinger (eds.), *Sozialraum. Eine elementare Einführung*, pp. 169–180. Wiesbaden, Heidelberg: Springer VS.
- DiPiero, Dan. 2022. *Contingent Encounters. Improvisation in Music and Everyday Life*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Eremjan, Inga. 2016. *Transkulturelle Kunstvermittlung. Zum Bildungsgehalt ästhetisch-künstlerischer Praxen*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Evans, Nicholas. 2010. *Dying Words. Endangered Languages and What They Have to Tell us*. United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Feige, Daniel Martin. 2014. Wandel in der Kunst. Überlegungen zum Verhältnis der Künste. In Stefan Deines, Daniel Martin Feige und Martin Seel (eds.), *Formen kulturellen Wandels*, pp. 197–220. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 2009. Einleitung: Zur Aktualität von Turners Studien zum Übergang vom Ritual zum Theater. In Victor Turner (eds.), *Vom Ritual zum Theater. Der Ernst des menschlichen Spiels*, pp. i–xxii. Frankfurt: Campus-Verlag.
- Fonseca, Xavier, Lukosch, Stephan & Frances Brazier. 2018. Social cohesion revisited: a new definition and how to characterize it. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 32, 2: 231–253.

- Föhl, Patrick S. & Gernot Wolfram. 2016. Partizipative Kulturentwicklungsplanung als Wegbereiter für neue Formen der kulturellen Teilhabe und des Community Building. In Birgit Mandel (ed.), *Teilhaberorientierte Kulturvermittlung. Diskurse und Konzepte für eine Neuausrichtung des öffentlich geförderten Kulturlebens*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 265–279.
- Foroutan, Naika & Dilek İköz (2016): Migrationsgesellschaft. In Paul Mecheril (ed.), *Handbuch Migrationspädagogik*, pp. 138–151. Weinheim, Basel: Beltz.
- Fücker, Sonja. 2024. Wissen, “was die Welt [...] zusammenhält”. Verständigungen über nützliches Wissen. In Sonja Fücker, Holger Backhaus-Maul, Martina Grimmig, Viktoria Kamuf, Jessica Nuske & Matthias Quent (eds.), *Forschungsbasierter Wissenstransfer und gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt. Theorie, Empirie, Konzepte und Instrumente*, pp. 32–61. Campus Verlag (Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt).
- Glissant, Édouard. 1997 [1990]. *Poetics of Relation*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Görmar, Farina, Anna Lampert & Antony Patthau. 2023. Common Grounds. Wie gelingt zeitgemäße Kulturarbeit? In Jens Schneider, Jochen Oltmer & Antonie Schmiz (eds.), *Kulturproduktion in der Migrationsgesellschaft. Herausforderungen für Kulturinstitutionen und Kulturpolitik.*, pp. 113–140. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Götttsche, Dirk. 2013. *Remembering Africa. The Rediscovery of Colonialism in Contemporary German Literature*. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer.
- Goffman, Erving. 2003. *Wir alle spielen Theater. Die Selbstdarstellung im Alltag*. München, Berlin, Zürich: Piper.
- Gomolla, Mechthild. 2016. Diskriminierung. In Paul Mecheril (ed.), *Handbuch Migrationspädagogik*, pp. 73–89. Weinheim, Basel: Beltz.
- Graeber, David & David Wengrow. 2022. *Anfänge. Eine neue Geschichte der Menschheit*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Gram, Rikke, Lars Bädeker & Antonie Schmiz. 2024. Doing reflexive migration research in cultural institutions. Some thoughts on critical knowledge production. In Wiebke Sievers (ed.), *Cultural Change in Post-Migrant Societies. Re-Imagining Communities Through Arts and Cultural Activities*, pp. 59–75. Cham: Springer International Publishing; Imprint Springer.
- Greenblatt, Stephen (eds.). 2010. *Cultural Mobility. A Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gronau, Barbara & Alice Lagaay. 2015. “...die Einladung, Widersprüchliches zu ertragen...”. Schlaglichter auf den performative turn in Philosophie und Theater/wissenschaft. In Jörg Sternagel (ed.), *Kraft der Alterität. Ethische und ästhetische*

- Dimensionen des Performativen*, pp. 23–34. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Haselbach, Dieter & Armin Klein et al. 2012. *Der Kulturinfarkt: Von allem zu viel und überall das Gleiche. Eine Polemik über Kulturpolitik, Kulturstaat, Kultursubvention*. München: Knaus.
- Helmstetter, Randolph. 2022. *Unerlaubte Kunst. Der öffentliche Raum als künstlerische Arena*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Henschel, Alexander. 2016. Die Brücke als Riss. Reproductive und transformative Momente von Kunstvermittlung. In Birgit Mandel (ed.), *Teilhabeorientierte Kulturvermittlung. Diskurse und Konzepte für eine Neuausrichtung des öffentlich geförderten Kulturlebens*, pp. 141–153. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Huber, Thomas R. 2014. *Ästhetik der Begegnung. Kunst als Erfahrungsraum der Anderen*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Ingold, Tim & Jo Lee Vergunst (eds.). 2008. *Ways of walking. Ethnography and practice on foot*. Abingdon, Oxon, New York, NY: Routledge.
- Jullien, François. 2017. *Es gibt keine kulturelle Identität*. Unter Mitarbeit von Erwin Landrichter. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Kesby, Mike, Sara Kinson & Rachel Pain (eds.). 2025. *Critically Engaging Participatory Action Research*. London, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis.
- Kessl, Fabian & Christian Reutlinger (eds.). 2022. *Sozialraum. Eine elementare Einführung*. Wiesbaden, Heidelberg: Springer VS.
- Klein, Gabriele & Hanna Katharina Göbel. 2017. Performance und Praxis. Ein Dialog. In Gabriele Klein & Hanna Katharina Göbel (eds.), *Performance und Praxis. Praxeologische Erkundungen in Tanz, Theater, Sport und Alltag*, pp. 7–42. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Kopytoff, Igor. 1987. *The African Frontier. The Reproduction of Traditional African Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Küpers, Wendelin & Desmond Wee. 2018. Tourist cities as embodied places of learning. walking in the ‚fields‘ of Shanghai and Lisbon. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*. Online version: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-12-2017-0076> (last accessed 08 April 2025).
- Kulturmanagement.net. Rückblick Jahrestagung des Fachverbands Kulturmanagement 2023. Kulturbesuch ist nicht gleich kulturelle Teilhabe. <https://www.kulturmanagement.net/Themen/Rueckblick-Jahrestagung-des-Fachverbands-Kulturmanagement-2023-Kulturbesuch-ist-nicht-gleich-kulturelle-Teilhabe,4640> (last accessed 09 April 2025).
- Kulturstiftung des Bundes. „360°. Fonds für Kulturen der neuen Stadtgesellschaft. https://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/de/projekte/transformation_und_zukunft/detail/360_fonds_fuer_kul-

- turen_der_neuen_stadtgesellschaft.html (last accessed 10 April 2025).
- Landolt, Sara. 2022. Öffentlicher Raum. Aneignung und Eigensinn. In Fabian Kessl & Christian Reutlinger (eds.), *Sozialraum. Eine elementare Einführung*, pp. 193–206. Wiesbaden, Heidelberg: Springer VS.
- Legat, Allice. 2008. Walking stories. Leaving footprints. In Tim Ingold & Jo Lee Vergunst (eds.), *Ways of Walking. Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, pp. 35–49. Abingdon, Oxon, New York, NY: Routledge.
- Loose, Gerry. 2020. Walking in. (900 questions concerning walking). In Dave Borthwick, Anna Stenning & Pippa Marland (eds.), *Walking, Landscape and Environment*, pp. 13–14. London, New York NY: Routledge.
- Lund, Katrín. 2008. Listen to the Sound of Time. Walking with Saints in an Andalusian Village. In Tim Ingold und Jo Lee Vergunst (eds.), *Ways of Walking. Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, pp. 93–103. Abingdon, Oxon, New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lüpke, Friederike & Anne Storch. 2013. *Repertoires and Choices in African Languages*. Boston Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Mandel, Birgit. 2002. *Lust auf Kultur. Karrierewege in das Berufsfeld Kulturvermittlung*. Nürnberg: Bildung und Wissen.
- Mandel, Birgit. 2016. Audience Development, kulturelle Bildung, Kulturentwicklungsplanung, Community Building. Konzepte zur Reduzierung der sozialen Selektivität des öffentlich geförderten Kulturangebots. In Birgit Mandel (ed.), *Teilhabeorientierte Kulturvermittlung. Diskurse und Konzepte für eine Neuausrichtung des öffentlich geförderten Kulturlebens*, pp. 19–49. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Marland, Pippa & Anna Stenning. 2020. Black Men Walking: an interview with Dawn Walton and Testament. In Dave Borthwick, Anna Stenning & Pippa Marland (eds.), *Walking, Landscape and Environment*, pp. 100–112. London, New York: Routledge.
- Mecheril, Paul (eds.). 2016. *Handbuch Migrationspädagogik*. Weinheim, Basel: Beltz.
- Middleton, John & Kimani Njogu (eds.). 2009. *Media and Identity in Africa*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute (International African seminars, new ser. 7).
- Mittelhammer, Florian. 2018. Kultur als Übersetzungsprozess. Annäherungen an einen Begriff. In Christiane Dätsch (eds.), *Kulturelle Übersetzer*, pp. 21–36. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Moralli, Melissa; Musarò, Pierluigi (2024): Culture as deconstruction and participation? Reflections from a field...in transition. In Wiebke Sievers (ed.), *Cultural Change in Post-Migrant Societies. Re-Imagining Communities Through Arts and Cultural Activities*, pp. 219–236. Cham: Springer International Publishing; Imprint Springer.

- Moser, Anita. 2011. Die Kunst der Grenzüberschreitung. Postkoloniale Kritik im Spannungsfeld von Ästhetik und Politik. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Moser, Anita. 2019. Kulturarbeit in der ‚Migrationsgesellschaft‘: Ungleichheiten im Kulturbetrieb und Ansatzpunkte für eine kritische Neuausrichtung. In Elke Zobl, Elisabeth Klaus, Siglinde Lang, Anita Moser & Persson Perry Baumgartinger (eds.), *Kultur produzieren. Künstlerische Praxen und kritische kulturelle Produktion*, pp. 117–133. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Nassenstein, Nico. 2018. "I swear they said this ...". Kritische Gedanken zu afrikanischen Jugendsprachen und ihren Beschreibungspraktiken. *The Mouth* 3: 29–63.
- Nyamnjoh, B. Francis. 2017. Incompleteness. Frontier Africa and the currency of conviviality. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52, 3: 253–270.
- Otto, Ulf. 2013/2012. Mimesis. Kulturelle Bildung Online. Online version: <https://www.kubi-online.de/artikel/mimesis> (last accessed 08 April 2025).
- Pannekock, Friederike. 2010. Performativity and mobility: Middle Eastern traditions on the move. In Stephen Greenblatt (eds.), *Cultural Mobility. A Manifesto*, pp. 215–249. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pähler, Alexander. 2021. *Kulturpolitik für eine pluralistische Gesellschaft. Überlegungen zu kulturellen Grenzen und Zwischenräumen*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Pries, Ludger. 2001. *Internationale Migration*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Puetz, Michelle. 2022. Theories of Media, Keywords Glossary: Mimesis. The University of Chicago. Online verfügbar unter: <https://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/mimesis.htm> (last accessed 09 April 2025).
- Renz, Thomas. 2016. Nicht-Besucher im Kulturbetrieb. Ein Überblick des aktuellen Forschungsstands und ein Ausblick auf praktische Konsequenzen der Publikumsforschung in Deutschland. In Birgit Mandel (ed.), *Teilhabeorientierte Kulturvermittlung. Diskurse und Konzepte für eine Neuausrichtung des öffentlich geförderten Kulturlebens*, pp. 61–78. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Rosa, Hartmut. 2020. *Unverfügbarkeit*. Wien, Salzburg: Suhrkamp.
- Ruf, Frederick J. 2007. *Bewildered Travel: The Sacred Quest for Confusion*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Saito, Yuriko. 2010. *Everyday Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schellen, Petra. Ein Konzertsaaldach zum Skaten. 24 January 2024. In *taz*. <https://taz.de/Koelns-Philharmonie-als-Problemzone!/5983770/> (last accessed 09 April 2025).

- Schellmann, Nikola. 2016. *Ich sehe was, was du nicht hörst. Zur Produktivität des Abwesenden im (Theater)Raum*. Marburg: Tectum Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Shepherd, Nick, Christian Ersten & Dirk Jan Visser. 2018. Embodied research in emergent Anthropocene landscapes. *The Walking Seminar*: 3–4.
- Sievers, Wiebke (eds.). 2024. *Cultural Change in Post-Migrant Societies. Re-Imagining Communities Through Arts and Cultural Activities*. Cham: Springer International Publishing; Imprint Springer.
- Smitheram, Jan, Akardi Nakai Kidd, Ged Finch & Ewan MacMaster. 2024. A tale of one city through three stories of ludic mobility. *Mobilities* 19, 4: 721–735.
- SRF Kultur Sternstunde Philosophie. Spiritualität: Ein Ausweg aus der Krisenspirale? 11 March 2024. In Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GGdhIiMEyA> (last accessed 30 April 2025).
- Sternagel, Jörg (eds.). 2015. *Kraft der Alterität. Ethische und ästhetische Dimensionen des Performativen*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. 2008. Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination. *Cultural Anthropology* 23, 2: 191–219.
- Storch, Anne. 2020. Zeichen, Weg, Garten. In Axel Fleisch, Angelika Mietzner, Nico Nassenstein & Anne Storch (eds.), *Worte, Stimmen, Räume: Eine Einladung*. Mit einem Beitrag von Ingo H. Warnke. *The Mouth* special issue 4: 27–72.
- Struve, Karen. 2013. *Zur Aktualität von Homi K. Bhabha. Einleitung in sein Werk*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Terkessidis, Mark. 2010. *Interkultur*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, New Jersey, Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Tuck-Po, Lye. 2008. Before a step too far. Walking with Batek hunter-gatherers in the forests of Pahang, Malaysia. In Tim Ingold & Jo Lee Vergunst (eds.), *Ways of Walking. Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, pp. 21–34. Abingdon, Oxon, New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ursprung, Philip. 2010. “Experimentelle Kunst ist niemals tragisch”: Kunst und Leben seit den 1960er Jahren. In Erika Fischer-Lichte, Kristiane Hasselmann, Markus Rautzenberg & Katrin Wächter (eds.), *Ausweitung der Kunstzone. Interart Studies - neue Perspektiven der Kunstwissenschaften*, pp. 91–109. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Weber, Christa. 1991. Vom “erweiterten Kunstbegriff” zum “erweiterten Pädagogikbegriff”. *Versuch einer Standortbestimmung von Joseph Beuys*. Frankfurt/M.: Verl. für Interkulturelle Kommunikation.

- William, Smolander & Aiava Raine. 2025. Shifting shores. Transformative learning with the city. *Journal of Social Science Education* 24, 1: 1–20.
- Woodrow, Nina. 2025. Using participatory action research for performing stories and imagining inclusive communities. In Mike Kesby, Sara Kindon & Rachel Pain (eds.), *Critically Engaging Participatory Action Research*, pp. 105–124. London, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis.
- Yamamura, Sakura. 2025. Celebrating complexity and superdiversity: honouring Steven Vertovec's contributions to migration studies. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 0,0: 1–5.

06

Shifting gender-role attitudes
among the Sukuma in Tanzania:
A comparative study of oral poetic
forms and societal perspectives

06

Shifting gender-role attitudes among the Sukuma in Tanzania: A comparative study of oral poetic forms and societal perspectives

Esther J. Masele & Lily B. Makalanga

Introduction

Gender roles across various communities (Hofmeyr 1992, Womack & Marti 1993, Silberschmidt 1999, Kopytoff 2005, Njogu & Orchardson-Mazrui 2006) have been a major area of research, where the division of labor, particularly within patriarchal structures, and how it affects people's behaviors, lives, and attitudes in different ways have been examined. These

gendered roles, as Womack & Marti (1993) explain, reinforce inequality, particularly in the distribution of responsibilities and benefits between men and women, a pattern that manifests in several spheres, including the family, the labor market, and cultural-ideological productions. These ideologies, as discussed by Wollstonecraft (2024) and De Beauvoir (1993), have shaped members of society across historical and cultural contexts to believe that

women and men are not equal, not only biologically but also in the positions they occupy within their societies.

However, debates surrounding gender equality in Africa are often framed within a tension between cultural authenticity and Western influence. Some critics regard gender equality as a Western ideology that infiltrated African societies under the guise of feminism. This view is strongly supported by Oyěwùmí (1997), who argues that the rigid and hierarchical gender system often assumed to be traditional in Africa was, in significant ways, consolidated and institutionalized under British colonial rule. She contends that African women experienced “double colonization”: they were subordinated both as Africans under European domination and as women within colonial structures that privileged male authority. Oyěwùmí further demonstrates that the colonial state introduced a centralized, autocratic model of governance rooted in European political traditions, where access to power was explicitly gendered, and politics was largely defined as men’s work. Through the system of indirect rule, the British recognized and empowered male chiefs while ignoring the existence and authority of female political figures. Judicial powers that had previously been exercised at the community level were transferred to male-dominated councils, thereby excluding women from arenas in which they had previously participated. According to her analysis of Yoruba society, pre-British political and social organization was not fundamentally gender-determined. Thus, the marginalization of women from formal political structures was not an inherent feature of Yoruba society but rather intensified through colonial intervention. From this standpoint, unequal gender roles in many

African contexts cannot simply be attributed to timeless indigenous traditions. Rather, they must be understood in relation to the historical imposition of European state systems and patriarchal norms that redefined political authority, public participation, and social organization. Against this historical backdrop, the current paper presents findings on shifts in gender role attitudes among the Sukuma, situating contemporary perspectives within both precolonial legacies and colonial transformations.

Theoretical framework

This paper employs Social Role Theory to examine shifting gender role attitudes among the Sukuma of Tanzania. The theory provides a framework for understanding how societal expectations and institutional structures shape gender differences in behavior, making it ideal for analyzing the Sukuma’s patriarchal traditions. The Social Role Theory posits that gender roles arise from the societal assignment of distinct responsibilities to men and women and are reinforced through socialization and institutional structures such as the family, informal education, and the media (Eagly & Wood 2012, Eagly 2013). Structurally, men are often cast as providers and leaders, while women are portrayed as caregivers and supporters of the family members. These roles are deeply embedded in Sukuma culture, where men typically manage economic tasks and women oversee domestic responsibilities (Masele & Venkatachalam 2021). Cognitively, these roles foster gender stereotypes, widely held beliefs about the traits of men and women, which influence both self-perception and societal expectations (Eagly et al. 2000). The Social Role Theory is particularly relevant for this paper

because it analyzes how Sukuma songs either reinforce and maintain or challenge traditional gender roles, thereby enhancing our understanding of the factors driving attitudinal shifts within the community.

Methodology

This study was conducted in two Sukuma land regions: Mwanza and Shinyanga. The Sukuma are Tanzania's largest ethnic group, primarily living in the northwestern Regions of Mwanza, Shinyanga, Geita, and Simiyu, where patriarchal cultural practices are primarily reinforced through oral traditions such as poetic songs, shaping deeply ingrained gender roles that this study seeks to explore. The Regions of Mwanza and Shinyanga were purposefully selected due to their large Sukuma populations and renowned traditional singers, ensuring access to culturally relevant data.

We examined shifts in gender role attitudes within Sukuma society by integrating textual analysis of oral poetic forms with ethnographic methods. Four focus group discussions, each comprising four mixed-sex participants, complemented the interviews by capturing community-level perspectives. Two focus group discussions were conducted in Mwanza and the remaining two in Shinyanga. Eight of the participants had primary education, seven had secondary education, and five held a bachelor's degree. Among them, four were famous singers of traditional Sukuma dances, who agreed to give their expertise in Sukuma poetic forms and to provide both songs and interview responses. The singers provided songs needed to answer research question one: "How do Sukuma songs and societal views reflect perceptions of gender roles?" Interlocutors with

secondary and bachelor's education were purposefully selected to address the second research question: "What changes are occurring in gender role attitudes within the Sukuma community?"

Songs were selected based on their relevance to gender roles context, as recommended by both singers and community members. The study adhered to ethical research considerations where approval was obtained from the study region, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Confidentiality was ensured through anonymized data, sensitive topics were approached with respect, and participants were given the option to withdraw at any time.

Sukuma songs and societal perceptions on traditional gender roles

The findings in this study reveal a growing awareness of the unequal gender roles embedded in Sukuma cultural traditions. When asked whether men and women are pleased with the roles assigned to them, participants expressed varied perspectives. Women, in particular, highlighted dissatisfaction with entrenched patriarchal expectations. One female interlocutor explained that many Sukuma women now recognize that traditional customs disproportionately favors men by granting them greater authority and power, a realization that has encouraged behavioral change and strengthened their resolve to advocate for a better life. This perception is echoed in the song *Naliluha na milimo* (Text 1), in which the female voice laments the burden of domestic labor from girlhood through marriage, expressing frustration with the unequal responsibilities placed upon her.

<i>Naliluha na milimo</i>	I am exhausted with the household chores
<i>Nene naluha no bhichane kubyalwa nkima bhung'wene a hakaya.</i>	I have suffered a lot as the only girl in the family.
<i>Milimo pye yali yane u mkaya Kulwinzi, kwilima, kung'nhwi.</i>	I am responsible for all the household chores, fetching water and firewood for domestic use, and working on the farm.
<i>Kwisuya yaya buligwa izuga Diyu, limi na mhindi.</i>	I had no time to rest, as I was responsible for preparing meals in the morning, afternoon, and evening.
<i>Hangi nilemba ahabhutolwa nagwisuya bhone hamo.</i>	I thought I would get some rest after the marriage.
<i>Ka yaya bhadugu I milimo yiliniyanja, naje hali nakisuye?</i>	I am fed up with these everyday activities, where can I go to find rest?
Text 1 <i>Naliluha na milimo</i>	

The lyrics vividly catalogue gendered tasks: fetching water, collecting firewood, farming, and preparing meals throughout the day, presenting them not as occasional duties but as an uninterrupted life pattern. From the perspective of Social Role Theory (Eagly 2013), such responsibilities reflect the culturally structured division of labor in which women are assigned communal and domestic roles, while men occupy agentic and authority-oriented positions. This means that, women are traditionally assigned household chores while men perform outdoors activities. The singer's exhaustion exposes how these roles, though socially constructed, are internalized and normalized as natural obligations for women.

Importantly, the line "I thought I would get some rest after the marriage" reveals how marriage does not transform women's roles

but rather intensifies them. Social Role Theory posits that gender roles are sustained through socialization and reinforced by societal expectations. In this case, the transition from daughter to wife does not alter the structural expectations attached to femininity; instead, it reproduces them across life stages. The song therefore, does more than narrate personal suffering; it implicitly critiques the social system that distributes labor along rigid gender lines. The women's dissatisfaction, as articulated in both interviews and song, may therefore indicate an emerging renegotiation of gender expectations within Sukuma society, and it is similar to what one of the male interlocutors suggested: "Most people who had observed a change in women's behavior believed that it had shifted toward emancipation and independence". Others remarked that women "want

more of their own way.” These changes occur naturally after many of them realize that traditional gender roles are not in their favor. “Now, you can see that they no longer accept everything silently and they try to stand up for themselves.”

The remark that women “want more of their own way” signals tension created when individuals begin to resist traditionally prescribed roles. This transformation of social attitudes, as revealed in the songs and interviews, indicates growing awareness among the Sukuma and aligns with social role theory, which posits that changes in societal attitudes occur through shifts in individuals’ social positions (Walter 2018).

Unlike women’s voices, men’s perspectives are also shaped and reinforced through cultural expression. A recurring theme in men’s songs highlights the expectation that women conform to established domestic roles. The song *Bhukagi* (Text 2), performed by Magodi Ze Doni, exemplifies this dynamic. The repeated call for women and girls to wake at dawn to begin “mothers’ work” reflects what Social Role Theory describes as prescriptive gender norms, socially enforced expectations about appropriate female behavior. By metaphorically referring to himself as the rooster crowing at home, the singer symbolically positions the male figure as authoritative and central. The metaphor naturalizes male dominance and fe-

<i>Bhukagi</i>	Wake up
<i>Jikuhilaga I ngoko mmakingo ka bhukagi bha yayu.</i>	The roosters are crowing in their coops, wake up, women.
<i>Jikuhilaga I ngoko ka wela wa milimo bhukagi bha yayu.</i>	The roosters are crowing, it is dawn, time for mothers' work
<i>Pelegi sana a bashike wela, tubhadebhe a bhakamu na bholo.</i>	Hurry, girls, it is dawn, let us distinguish the lazy from the hardworking.
<i>Bhukagi a bashike u Ngwana-lemi napelanile.</i>	Wake up, girls, Ngwana-lemi is angry.
<i>Degelekagi sana a bhashike Wela tubhadebhe a bhakamu na bholo.</i>	Listen well, girls, it is dawn, let us distinguish the lazy from the hardworking.
<i>Nani uyo akumokaga dilu, Ngwana-lemi udakaga.</i>	Who else is crowing at home than Ngwana-lemi?
<i>Izugilijagi a bha shike u Ngwana-lemi u shigaga.</i>	Prepare breakfast, a man has arrived.
Text 2 <i>Bhukagi</i>	

male domesticity, presenting them as part of the ordinary rhythm of daily life.

Similarly, in *Ilange* (Text 3), Masunga Ikome instructs his wife to cook when told and to respect her mother-in-law, reinforcing hierarchical gender relations within marriage. The threat of sending a wife back to her parents if she fails to comply illustrates the regulatory function of social norms. Social Role Theory explains that gender stereotypes are maintained through approval and sanction: women who perform communal, submissive roles are validated, while those who deviate risk social punishment. Ikome's song functions as a cultural mechanism that reproduces these expectations by defining the "good wife" as one who unquestioningly fulfills domestic duties.

During the interview, the singer explained that men marry in order to build a family, but that a wife must be capable of managing all domestic responsibilities. He argued that a woman who cannot handle these duties cannot satisfy her husband or her in-laws. From his perspective, it is evident that Ikome's song rein-

forces traditional gender roles, in which women are expected to adhere strictly to their assigned responsibilities.

The division of labor between the sexes, as articulated in Social Role, is historically linked to biological distinctions but sustained primarily through socialization and cultural reinforcement. In Sukuma society, girls are prepared to become housewives, caregivers, and child bearers, while boys are groomed to assume productive and leadership roles. Such differentiated training embeds gender expectations from early childhood, fostering the belief that these divisions are natural and inevitable. The songs analysed here both reflect and reproduce these structures: women's songs reveal the strain of internalized communal expectations, while men's songs reinforce agentic dominance and domestic prescription.

This pattern is evident among the Sukuma, where girls are prepared to become housewives, child bearers, and caregivers, while boys are groomed to be producers and future leaders. Such training, conducted separately

<i>Ilange</i>	Obedience
<i>Shitawelwa mayu zugaga, kulwaki mayu ulilihya u nmomo.</i>	If you are told to cook, you should do it, why do you misbehave
<i>U bhebhe uli nki wane widebhe nu mayu wane</i>	You are my wife, so you should respect my mother.
<i>Shokagi kung'wing'we mayu hamo huko mtatunagwa hiiiyee!</i>	Go back to your home, perhaps no one there will ask you to cook.
<i>Shibhi mayu iiii i shinisho bhigwagi mayu abhagoshi bingwe.</i>	Lady, it is not good to behave in such a way.
Text 3 <i>Ilange</i>	

for each sex, instills these roles deeply in their minds from an early age. As a result, they grow up with the ingrained belief that gendered divisions of labor in a family level are natural and inevitable, as taught by their parents. This practice strengthens society's adherence to gender roles, with each person believing they were born to fulfill a specific set of tasks.

Shift of gender role attitudes among the Sukuma

Societal perspectives indicate that the division of labor among the Sukuma has undergone gradual but noticeable transformation. The once rigid compartmentalization of men's and women's tasks is increasingly being renegotiated, particularly regarding women's participation in economic and public life. While men occasionally assume roles traditionally assigned to women, such shifts remain less common, reflecting the persistence of patriarchal norms that continue to privilege male authority. For women, however, engagement beyond domestic spaces is often perceived as an opportunity rather than a transgression. These evolving attitudes are not only expressed in interviews but also reflected in Sukuma musical discourse. Text 4, *Tumishagi* 'Let us wake up', composed and performed by Grace Mazoya, captures this transformation. The song urges women to work hard, earn income alongside their husbands, and avoid total economic dependence. Lines such as: "Today's life does not allow women to stay at home waiting for their husbands to work" underscore the perception that contemporary economic realities require women's active contribution. The song further challenges widow inheritance and encourages women to prepare

for self-reliance, linking dignity and security to economic participation. Rather than presenting empowerment as automatic, the song frames it as a deliberate effort rooted in labor, determination, and awareness. This cultural expression encapsulates the broader shift in gender role attitudes identified in this study. The transformation of these attitudes emerges from interconnected structural, cultural, economic, and ideological forces, discussed below.

Agro-pastoral migration as drivers of changing gender role attitudes among the Sukuma

Our analysis indicates that agro-pastoral migration has been a significant driver in the transformation of gender-role attitudes among the Sukuma. Brockington (2001) notes that Sukuma migration facilitates cultural exchange and interaction with other ethnic groups, which influences social norms and practices. Of the key participants interviewed, six men and four women explicitly framed migration as a decisive factor in these shifts. The Sukuma's pastoral lifestyle drives them to migrate across Tanzania, from Sukumaland to regions such as Mbeya, Zanzibar, Lindi, Mtwara, Mpanda, Ifakara, Kilosa, and others (Brandström 1985, Brockington 2001, Mwambene et al. 2014), thereby exposing them to diverse cultural norms. This mobility is essential for finding adequate grazing land and water resources, especially during dry seasons when local pastures become scarce (Mwambene et al. 2014). This agro-pastoral migration influences cultural adaptation in the regions where they reside. For example, Sukuma women in Kilosa, Morogoro, have adopted semi-matrilineal practices from the

Sagara and Kagulu, where women freely engage in income-generating activities. A 35-year-old female respondent who migrated to Kilosa and later returned to Sukumaland explained:

Living with the Sagala has greatly broadened my understanding. For them, a woman is not someone who depends on a man for everything. In the morning, they get up early and go to their businesses. This has freed them from the burden of being goalkeepers and has increased their value in their marriages.

This woman takes pride in being an entrepreneur and also feels that business has made her independent. She believes that her contribution to the family has increased her value to her husband. That is, the exposure Sukuma women attain enables them to challenge

gender norms. When Sukuma people return to their original residence, they often introduce egalitarian gender norms, which community members gradually adopt. Today, many Sukuma women engage in small businesses to supplement the family income as suggested by Grace Mazoya in Text 4.

Grace Mazoya, who is also known by her nickname as Grace Ng'wana Nzoka, is a Sukuma singer or musical artist, particularly known in Tanzanian traditional music. Some of her music videos are available on YouTube, including songs like *Ng'wana wa Nzoka* and *Ngoshi Wane*. In Text 4, she inspires women to work hard and achieve full emancipation. She urges women to rise, earn their own income, and stop depending entirely on their husbands. She also calls on women to recognize their potential, commit seriously to productive work, and avoid unproductive pursuits such as gossiping.

<i>Tumishagi</i>	Let us wake up
<i>Bhakima bhichane bhukagi dugachole na bhagoshi bhise.</i>	My fellow women, let us work hard and earn money together with our husbands.
<i>Bhabehi iwelelo ya lelo ilemile u nkima ugulindana hakaya</i>	Today's life does not allow women to stay at home waiting for their husbands to work.
<i>Bhakima dudugije nulu kuzenga kanumba bhing'wene.</i>	We are even capable of building houses.
<i>Ibhujage ulushigu ogayaga u ngoshoko igubhiza ginehe?</i>	What will happen if your husband dies?
<i>Nulu wingilwe? Welelo ya kwingelwa yashilile.</i>	Will you be ready to be inherited by your husband's relatives? Nowadays the practice of inheriting widows no longer exists.
Text 4 <i>Tumishagi</i>	

Her message conveys that gender equality and empowerment will not occur by chance, but through sustained effort and hard work. The song incorporates the popular Tanzanian slogan *wanawake tunaweza* 'women, we are capable', rendered in Sukuma as *bhakima dudugije*. It reflects the singer's knowledge of gender equality and her intent to raise awareness of women's empowerment among her audience. The song's discourse underscores the belief that women can gain authority in their families and communities only by engaging in income-generating activities and acquiring property. This aligns with Remy's (1975) findings in Nigeria, who argues that women's independence depends on their participation in economic enterprises that provide regular and controllable income, thereby enabling them to overcome structural barriers to opportunity. The message conveyed in the song, together with broader societal views on the need for women to participate in the public sphere, is reflected in the increasing proportion of women in education, employment, politics, and other public institutions. This shift has made it increasingly difficult to sustain traditional attitudes regarding women's roles in society.

Conversely, men express mixed views. As a 38-year-old male respondent remarked, "It's good for women to earn, but they must still respect their duties at home", reflecting the persistence of patriarchal attitudes as suggested in *Ilange* (text 3) when the singer says: "Why do you misbehave when you are told to prepare food? Go back to your home, perhaps no one there will ask you to cook." In addition to the Sukuma who have migrated to other areas in search of pasture, the study reveals that many migrants have also moved into Sukuma communities, fostering cultural interaction. Over

time, the Sukuma have gradually embraced these changes and begun to adopt aspects of the lifestyles and cultures of these outsiders. For instance, one cultural practice they have adopted from the Chaga of Kilimanjaro region is the acceptance that both young men and women consider it appropriate for husbands and wives to work outside the home and contribute to the family's income.

Influence of education and interethnic marriages on gender role attitudes

The findings of this study indicate that highly educated Sukuma people, especially those residing in urban areas, are more likely to engage in interethnic marriages. Six respondents (three men and three women in interethnic unions) identified such marriages as a significant factor influencing shifts from traditional Sukuma gender roles. Marriages between the Sukuma and other ethnic groups, such as the Chaga, Gogo, or Luguru, expose spouses to differing cultural norms and practices, particularly regarding the division of household responsibilities. Over time, this exposure contributes to the transformation of gender role perceptions within marriage. During the discussions, a 40 years old Sukuma woman married to a Chaga man explained, "my husband encourages me to work on non-traditional tasks which are outside the home, unlike Sukuma traditions. I now run a small shop, which has changed how I see my role". Such experiences demonstrate how interethnic marriages foster more egalitarian attitudes, especially among women, challenging the traditional notion that they should be confined to domestic roles. Also, the exposure to alternative cultural models of gender relations

encourages greater acceptance of women's participation in the public sphere. As a result, more women are becoming active in business, employment, politics, and other public institutions. Men's perspectives also evolve as they adopt their spouses' cultural views. This was also observed by Takyi et al. (2003) and Kyei (2022), who suggested that education is one of the key factors enhancing change in gender role attitudes resulting from interethnic marriages. As Takyi et al. (2003) note, higher educational attainment increases individuals' autonomy in choosing a spouse. Tertiary institutions, in particular, provide diverse social environments and networks that expose young people to potential partners from various ethnic backgrounds. Overall, higher levels of education are positively associated with a greater likelihood of interethnic unions. This is consistent with Mumporeze (2020), who conducted a quantitative analysis of factors influencing attitudes toward women's employment and gender roles in Rwanda. The study suggests that education level plays a significant role in shaping Rwandans' views on gender roles. Specifically, individuals with higher levels of education tend to hold more non-traditional views, whereas those with lower levels of education tend to maintain more traditional gender role attitudes.

Mass media and technology as catalysts of changing gender role attitudes

Our study revealed that socialization processes mediated through mass media and technology have profoundly influenced the Sukuma in adopting cultural practices from other societies. Eight respondents (five men and three women aged 20-30) identified smartphones

and televisions as key drivers of this transformation. A 28-year-old male respondent with a bachelor's degree said, "Watching TV shows about modern families made me think husbands and wives can share responsibilities." This argument suggests that access to films and television dramas through mass media has exposed the Sukuma traditional societies to alternative gender relations, promoting the imitation of practices such as shared household responsibilities. Such exposure has particularly affected younger individuals across diverse educational backgrounds, fostering greater acceptance of men's participation in domestic work and women's engagement in economic activities. The influence appears most pronounced in urban areas and among the youth, whereas individuals aged 35 and above remain more strongly anchored to traditional norms, as indicated in Text 2. Moreover, the cultural exchange facilitated by technological devices has inspired some Sukuma singers to openly critique traditional gender roles in their compositions, reflecting an emerging shift in attitudes. Text 4, titled *tumishagi* exemplifies this trend. The role of mass media and technological devices in enhancing cultural sharing was also noted by Mumporeze (2020), who argued that these technologies, such as radio, television, smartphones, and the internet, play a significant role in the modern world by facilitating the rapid dissemination of information.

Economic demands and shifting gender roles

Economic demands were also reported to encourage women's entry into income-generating activities, a message reinforced in *tumishagi* (text 4) sung by Grace Mazoya, which

calls on women to work for economic independence. However, acceptance was often partial. Some male respondents maintained that certain occupations, such as mining, *boda boda* (motorcycle taxi driving), or construction, remain male domains. Despite receiving formal education, both men and women participants expressed divergent understandings of gender equality in the division of labor: (1) Women and men should perform the same work regardless of gender. (2) Each person should adhere to traditional roles. (3) Everyone should have the right to engage in any job regardless of gender. These responses were drawn from interviews conducted during four focus group discussions. Even within the first and third groups, where participants appeared to agree that women can perform the same roles as men, contradictions emerged. Some men still excluded women from male-dominated occupations. Men who supported equality in the distribution of responsibilities often restricted it to office work or small-scale trade, while rejecting women's involvement in heavy labor or transport services. In mining, women were deemed suitable only for ancillary roles, such as *mama ntilie* (food vending), as other tasks were perceived as undermining a husband's social standing and implying his inability to provide for the family. Educated women in the study attributed such restrictions to entrenched patriarchal norms, noting that even financially constrained men often preferred their wives to remain in domestic roles. These women linked economic dependence to subordination, a theme reflected in Sukuma songs that critique traditional divisions of labor. *Tumishagi* (text 4), in particular, frames economic indepen-

dence as essential to resisting humiliation and achieving gender equality.

Egalitarianism principles as drivers of the shifting of gender roles

In our study, we also identified knowledge of egalitarian principles as a primary driver of the shift in gender-role attitudes among the Sukuma. Gender egalitarianism, according to Kaufman et al. (2017), extends beyond its basic definition as beliefs and attitudes about equality between men and women, encompassing multiple dimensions and meanings. Respondents with secondary and higher education tended to express more egalitarian views. As one 32-year-old female teacher noted: "Learning about gender equality in school made me realize I can do any job, not just housework." Consistent with previous research, including Cassidy & Warren (1996), Loo & Thorpe (1998) and Islam (2010), the current study found that people with high egalitarian knowledge are negatively associated with traditional gender roles.

Interconnected drivers of changing gender role attitudes among the Sukuma

Although agro-pastoral migration, education, interethnic marriages, mass media, economic pressures, and egalitarian knowledge are presented separately for analytical clarity, the findings indicate that these factors operate in an interconnected and mutually reinforcing manner rather than as isolated drivers. However, these processes do not unfold in a historical vacuum. As argued in *The Invention of Women*, Oyěwùmí (1997) demonstrates that the imposition of the European colonial state

system institutionalized a gendered public/private divide across many African societies. Through legal codes, bureaucratic structures, and formal education, colonial governance consolidated male dominance within the public sphere while circumscribing women's authority. The contemporary transformations observed among the Sukuma therefore occur within a postcolonial state framework already shaped by this colonial legacy.

In this context, agro-pastoral migration functions as a structural entry point for exposure to alternative gender arrangements. As Sukuma households relocate to regions such as Kilosa, Mbeya, or Zanzibar (Brockington 2001), they encounter communities in which women's participation in income-generating activities is normalized. Yet migration alone does not automatically transform attitudes. Its transformative potential depends on the interpretive capacity provided by formal education, an institution itself introduced through colonial state machinery but now serving new purposes. Education equips individuals with cognitive tools to critically interrogate inherited norms, enabling them to reinterpret egalitarian practices not as foreign impositions but as pragmatic responses to contemporary social realities. In this way, an institution historically implicated in gender stratification becomes a mechanism for its reassessment.

Education also increases the likelihood of interethnic marriages (Takyi et al. 2003), which internalize exposure to plural gender norms within the domestic sphere. Such unions destabilize rigid, ethnicised constructions of gender roles that were historically reinforced through both customary authority and colonial administrative codification. Within these households, negotiation replaces prescription, and shared

domestic and economic responsibilities become lived experiences rather than abstract ideals.

Mass media and oral poetry further amplify this renegotiation. Modern compositions by artists such as Grace Mazoya alongside televised representations of shared domestic responsibilities, provide symbolic validation for shifting practices. Scholars of Tanzanian media note that when digital socialization and cultural representation mirror classroom discourses of equality, abstract principles acquire visible, imitable form. This cultural validation is critical because it offers what respondents implicitly described as 'permission', the social legitimacy necessary to enact change without appearing to betray tradition. In this sense, media does not merely transmit Western norms; it participates in a localized reinterpretation of gender within a postcolonial public sphere.

Economic pressures complete this interconnected chain. As traditional livestock returns decline and household survival increasingly depends on diversified income sources, the colonial breadwinner-homemaker model becomes materially untenable. Women's economic participation thus shifts from optional supplement to structural necessity. Importantly, when economic urgency intersects with migration exposure, educational reinterpretation, interethnic negotiation, and media validation, what might otherwise remain a temporary survival strategy crystallizes into a durable transformation of gender role attitudes.

Viewed through Oyěwùmí's lens, these findings suggest that contemporary changes among the Sukuma do not represent a simple importation of Western egalitarianism. Rather, they reflect a layered reconfiguration

of gender relations within a state system historically shaped by European political traditions. If colonial modernity institutionalized gender hierarchy through bureaucratic and educational mechanisms, the present interconnected drivers demonstrate how those same arenas, mobility, schooling, media, and economic restructuring, now facilitate the gradual renegotiation of that legacy. Gender role transformation thus emerges not from a single catalyst but from the cumulative interaction of structural exposure, cognitive reinterpretation, domestic negotiation, cultural validation, and material necessity.

References

- Brandström, Per. 1985. *The agro-pastoral dilemma: Underutilization or overexploitation of land among the Sukuma of Tanzania*. Uppsala: African Studies Programme, Department of Cultural Anthropology, University of Uppsala.
- Brockington, Daniel. 2001. Communal property and degradation narratives: Debating the Sukuma immigration into Rukwa Region, Tanzania. *Cahiers d'Afrique* 20: 1–22.
- Cassidy, Margaret L. & Barbara O. Warren. 1996. Family employment status and gender role attitudes: A comparison of women and men college graduates. *Gender & Society* 10.3: 312–329.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. 1993. *The Second Sex*. London: David Campbell.
- Eagly, Alice H. 2013. *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-Role Interpretation*. London: Psychology Press & Routledge.
- Eagly, Alice H. & Wendy Wood. 2012. Social role theory. In Paul A. M. Van Lange, Arie W. Kruglanski & E. Tory Higgins (eds.), *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, 458–476. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Eagly, Alice H., Wendy Wood & Amanda B. Diekmann. 2000. Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: A current appraisal. In Thomas Eckes & Hanns M. Trautner (eds.), *The Developmental Social Psychology of Gender*, 123–174. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hofmeyr, Isobel. 1992. Gender, patterns of story-telling and forced removals: A Transvaal perspective. In *Collected Seminar Papers, Institute of Commonwealth Studies* 44: 39–53.
- Islam, Md Kamrul. 2010. Differential attitude towards traditional gender role among adolescents: A sociological study. *Khulna University Studies*: 309–320.
- Kaufman, Gayle, Eva Bernhardt & Frances Goldscheider. 2017. Enduring egalitarianism? Family transitions and attitudes toward gender equality in Sweden. *Journal of Family Issues* 38.13: 1878–1898.
- Kopytoff, Igor. 2005. Women's roles and existential identity. In Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (ed.), *African Gender Studies: A Reader*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Kyei, Pearl. 2022. Patterns of interethnic marriage in Ghana: 2000–2010. *Ghana Journal of Geography* 14.1: 122–137.
- Loo, Robert & Karran Thorpe. 1998. Attitudes toward women's roles in society: A replication after 20 years. *Sex Roles* 39.11–12: 903–912.
- Masele, Esther Julius, & Venkatachalam Lakshmana. 2021. Manifestations of power and marginality in marriage practices: A qualitative analysis of Sukuma songs in Tanzania. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 22.1: 386–400.
- Mumporeze, Nadine. 2020. "When a mother is employed, her children suffer": A quantitative analysis of factors influencing attitudes towards women's employment and gender roles in Rwanda. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 21.1: 47–67.
- Mwambene, Pius L., Reginald P. Mbwire, Frank U. Hoeggel, Eliakunda C. Kimbi, J. Materu, A. Mwaiganju, and Seif Madoffe. 2014. Assessing dynamics of forced livestock movements, livelihoods and future development options for pastoralists/agro-pastoralists in Ruvuma and Lindi Regions, in southern Tanzania. *Livestock Research for Rural Development* 26, 1. Article 4.
- Njogu, Kimati & Elizabeth Orchardson-Mazrui. 2006. *Gender Inequality and Women's Rights in the Great Lakes: Can Culture Contribute to Women's Empowerment?* New York: UNICEF.
- Oyěwùmí, Oyèrónké. 1997. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Remy, Dorothy. 1975. Underdevelopment and the experience of women: A Nigerian case study. In Rosalie R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, 358–371. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Silberschmidt, Margrethe. 1999. *Women Forget that Men are Masters: Gender Antagonism and Socio-Economic Change in Kisii District, Kenya*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.
- Takyi, Baffour K., Nancy B. Miller, Gay C. Kitson, and Yaw Oheneba-Sakyi. 2003. Marital choice in sub-Saharan Africa: Comparing structural and cultural influences in contemporary Ghana. *Comparative Sociology* 2.2: 375–391.
- Walter, Jessica G. 2018. *Measures of Gender Role Attitudes Over Time*. PhD dissertation. Mannheim: University of Mannheim.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. 2024. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. In *Ideals and Ideologies*, pp. 411–416. London: Routledge.
- Womack, Margaret & Judith Marti. 1993. *The Other Fifty Percent: Multicultural Perspectives on Gender Relations*. Long Grove: Waveland Press.

07

From silence to power:
Women's voices and social
transformation in a rural dairy
co-operative in Tanzania

07

From silence to power: Women's voices and social transformation in a rural dairy co-operative in Tanzania

Beatrice J. Kimaro & Rehema G. Kilonzo

1 Introduction

Women's exclusion from formal economic and political decision-making remains a persistent challenge across much of the Global South, despite their central roles in sustaining household welfare (Bank 2012, Quisumbing & Doss 2021). Household welfare here refers to the well-being of household members in

terms of income security, food availability, health, and children's education, as well as women's contributions to agricultural production and community resilience (Quisumbing & Doss 2021). This marginalisation is particularly visible in rural contexts where deeply embedded patriarchal norms continue to shape access to resources and authority. Patriarchal norms often manifest through male

control over land, dominance in household decision-making, and limited acceptance of women in leadership positions (Pelzer et al. 2017). As a result, women often face constraints in accessing productive assets, financial services, and institutional leadership opportunities (Pelzer et al. 2017, Quisumbing & Doss 2021).

Within such contexts, co-operatives, member-owned and democratically governed enterprises formed to meet shared economic and social needs, have increasingly been promoted as institutional spaces through which smallholders can engage in collective enterprise, improve market access, and strengthen bargaining power (Münkner 2015). However, the effectiveness of co-operatives is uneven (Rwekaza & Anania 2020). Governance challenges, unequal participation, and elite capture may limit their transformative potential, while alternative organisational arrangements such as producer groups, private enterprises, or contract farming may also shape rural economic opportunities (Birchall 2017). Beyond their economic functions, co-operatives have attracted growing scholarly and policy interest for their potential to serve as sites of empowerment, solidarity, and collective voice, particularly among marginalised groups and small-scale producers (Coop 2016, World Bank 2020).

In Tanzania, where women constitute a substantial proportion of the agricultural workforce, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions and land ownership structures (URT 2019). In response, the government has increasingly promoted co-operatives as mechanisms for rural transformation and inclusive economic participation. National policy frameworks like the Co-operative Development Policy and the Agricultural Sector

Development Programme Phase II (URT 2016), Identify farmer organisations and co-operatives as key vehicles for strengthening smallholder market participation and improving rural livelihoods (URT 2017).

The Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative in the Kilimanjaro region provides an important case for examining these dynamics (FAO 2011). The dairy sector in many rural African contexts exhibits gendered divisions of labour, where women frequently undertake daily livestock management activities such as feeding, milking, and animal care, while men retain greater control over productive assets and marketing decisions (FAO 2023, Njuki et al. 2011). Women-led co-operatives, therefore, represent potentially significant institutional spaces through which they may reorganise production systems, enhance bargaining power, and gain greater public visibility within local economies (Quisumbing & Doss 2021, Agarwal 2010). However, key questions remain: To what extent do such co-operative spaces challenge entrenched gender norms, and how far do they expand women's voices beyond economic participation?

A women's co-operative can be understood as a member-owned and democratically governed enterprise in which women make up the majority of members and leadership, collectively pursuing shared economic and social goals. Existing literature provides valuable but incomplete insights into the outcomes of such organisations. Earlier studies highlight the role of co-operatives in improving women's access to financial resources, agricultural inputs, and markets (Iyer 2020). Nevertheless, some scholars warn that economic inclusion does not necessarily lead to greater decision-making power or social recognition, especially where patriar-

chal norms continue to influence daily social relations (Kyazze et al. 2017, Osmani 1993). Without intentional institutional reforms that encourage meaningful participation and leadership opportunities, co-operatives may inadvertently reinforce gender hierarchies, positioning women in supportive or symbolic roles rather than positions of influence (Boudet et al. 2018).

Recent feminist scholarship has called for a deeper examination of co-operatives as social and political institutions where gendered power relations may be contested and renegotiated (Agarwal 2010, Cornforth 2014). Empirical evidence from several African contexts suggests that women's participation in cooperative organisations can strengthen collective identity, expand economic opportunities, and enhance participation in community decision-making (ILO 2015, Majurin 2012). Nevertheless, empowerment outcomes remain uneven and context-dependent. While cooperative membership may improve market access and income opportunities, shifts in intra-household decision-making, community perceptions of women's leadership, and women's ability to exercise public voice often occur gradually and remain insufficiently documented (Doss 2013, Quisumbing & Doss 2021).

Consequently, empirical research examining how women-led co-operatives function as arenas for negotiating gender norms, leadership, and social influence remains relatively limited, particularly in rural Sub-Saharan Africa. Understanding whether and how such organisations contribute to transformations in household power relations and community governance, therefore, remains an important area of inquiry.

This study addresses this gap by examining the lived experiences of members of the Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative. It explores how participation in the co-operative shapes women's ability to speak, lead, and negotiate their social standing within both household and community contexts. The analysis is grounded in Empowerment Theory (Kabeer 1999), which conceptualises empowerment as the expansion of strategic life choices through the interconnected dimensions of resources, agency, and achievements. Feminist Co-operative Theory (Craig & Pencavel 1992) further provides a lens for analysing how collective organisation and democratic governance structures may create opportunities for women to challenge institutionalised inequalities and build collective agency.

At the same time, recent critical scholarship argues that empowerment initiatives focusing solely on women may have limited transformative effects if broader gender relations remain unchanged (Mwiine et al. 2026). Drawing on the concept of hegemonic masculinity developed by Raewyn Connell, this perspective highlights that meaningful gender transformation often requires engaging men, renegotiating dominant gender norms, and strengthening women's agency. Empowerment, therefore, emerges not only as an individual process but also as a relational one shaped by interactions between women, men, and community institutions.

Together, these theoretical perspectives allow empowerment to be analysed not merely as an economic outcome but as an evolving social, political, and organisational process. Rather than focusing exclusively on productivity or income indicators, this study examines how cooperative membership reshapes

women's everyday experiences. In particular, it explores changes in women's confidence to speak in public forums, their participation in leadership and collective decision-making, and their ability to negotiate roles and authority within households and community institutions. By foregrounding these relational dimensions, the study examines whether women-led co-operatives can serve as spaces for voice, negotiation, and gradual social transformation in rural Tanzania.

2 Conceptualisation of women's empowerment

The conceptual framework that underpins this study is presented in Figure 1. The model conceptualises women's empowerment as a dynamic and multi-stage process through which cooperative participation enables women to move from historical marginalisation ("Silence") to active engagement and expression ("Voice"), strengthened agency and influence ("Power"), and ultimately broader community-level impact ("Social Transformation"). This transformative pathway draws on Empowerment Theory, which conceptualises empowerment as the expansion of resources, agency, and achievements (Kabeer 1999), as well as scholarship on cooperative and collective enterprises, which emphasises the role of participatory organisations in shaping economic participation, decision-making, and institutional power (Craig & Pencavel 1992, Birchall 2013). Together, these perspectives highlight the relational, organisational, and structural mechanisms through which women's empowerment may unfold within cooperative institutions.

1. Silence: This stage represents women's initial condition of marginalisation, shaped by patriarchal norms, restrictive cultural expectations, limited confidence, and exclusion from cooperative governance structures. Silence reflects not only the absence of voice but the presence of structural barriers that constrain women's participation in decision-making.

2. Voice: At this stage, women begin to articulate their opinions, participate in meetings, and engage with cooperative processes. Voice signifies enhanced confidence, increased visibility, and a shift from passive membership to active participation. It also marks the early emergence of agency as women recognise their right to speak and be heard.

3. Power: This stage captures women's ability to influence decisions, assume leadership roles, command respect, and secure access to material and social resources. Power encompasses both individual agencies, such as confidence and assertiveness, and collective power arising from solidarity, shared identity, and collective action within the cooperative.

4. Social transformation: The final stage reflects broader shifts beyond the cooperative as empowered women begin to influence gender norms, lead community initiatives, and inspire younger generations. Social transformation includes increased community respect for women, improved intra-household negotiation power, and expanded contributions to local economic development and cooperative governance.

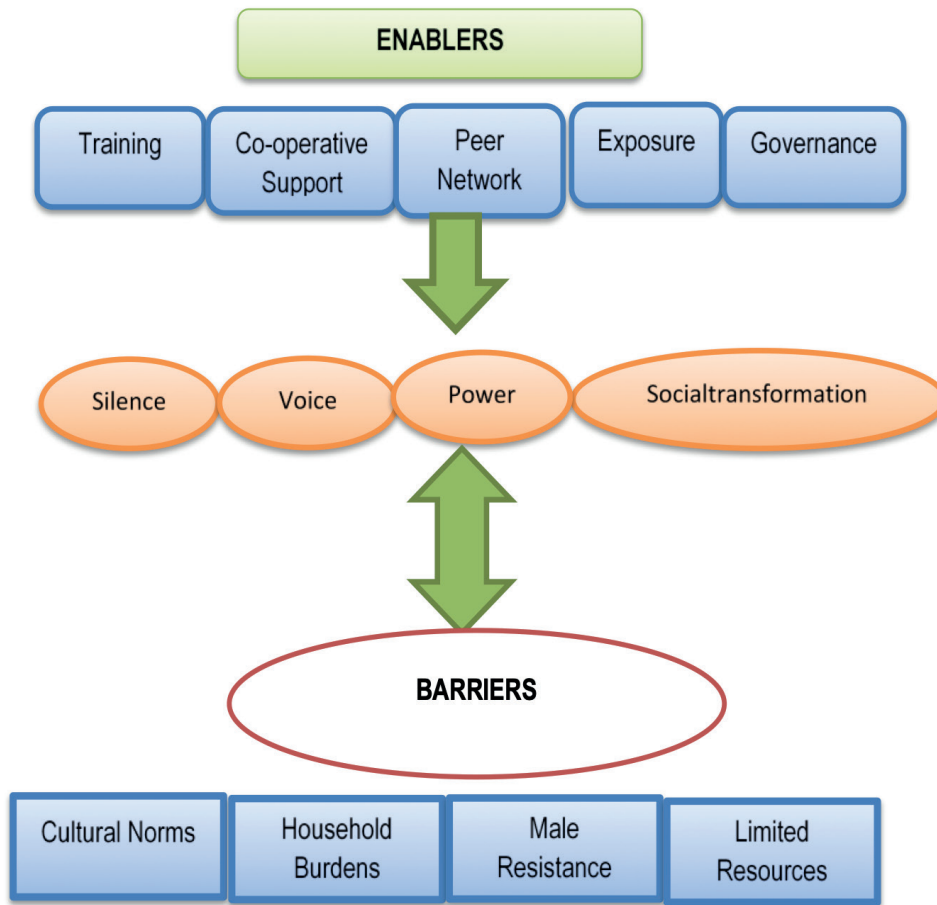


Figure 1 Conceptual model of women's transformation in co-operatives

Together, these four interconnected stages frame empowerment not as a singular economic outcome but as a holistic, multi-level process that evolves through cooperative participation and collective organisation. The framework, therefore, provides a lens for analysing how women navigate and negotiate voice, power, and social change within and beyond the Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative.

The model assumes that co-operative participation, training, peer support, and institutional inclusion act as enablers

moving women along this transformation pathway, while cultural norms, time burdens, and male resistance act as barriers.

3 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative case study research design to enable an in-depth examination of women's participation within the Kalali Women Dairy Cooperative. The designs are particularly appropriate when the researcher seeks to explore complex social

phenomena within their real-life context and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Levitt et al. 2018). Qualitative approaches are well-suited for investigating participants' experiences, meanings, and social interactions within specific institutional settings, allowing researchers to capture the depth and nuance of lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). By focusing on the Kalali Women Dairy Cooperative, the study provides a detailed exploration of how women interpret their participation in the cooperative and how such participation shapes their voice, agency, and pathways toward social transformation within the local community.

Empowerment, voice, and social transformation are complex social constructs that are difficult to quantify and are more effectively understood through narrative accounts, meaning-making processes, and subjective interpretation (Creswell & Poth 2018). The qualitative case study design, therefore, offers methodological flexibility to foreground women's perspectives, recognise contextual influences, and situate the findings within the socio-cultural realities of rural Tanzania.

3.1 Study area and case selection

The study was conducted at Nanenane ground during the Agricultural Exhibition in Dodoma. However, the home area for the Kalali dairy women's group is in Kalali Village, situated in the Kilimanjaro Region of northern Tanzania. The area is characterised by smallholder farming, where dairy farming significantly contributes to local livelihoods. The Kilimanjaro region has a longstanding tradition of cooperative organisation and mobile agri-

culture, particularly in coffee and dairy value chains. Many farmer associations and dairy cooperatives operate throughout the wider area, supporting milk collection, access to inputs, and collective marketing arrangements.

Despite this cooperative presence, gender inequalities are still evident in many rural producer organisations. Women often contribute significant labour to dairy production and livestock management, but frequently have limited control over productive assets such as land and cattle, and limited representation in cooperative leadership and decision-making structures. The Kalali Women Dairy Cooperative was deliberately chosen for this study because it is a women-led cooperative operating within this broader institutional environment. Unlike most mixed-gender cooperatives in the region, the Kalali cooperative mainly consists of women members engaged in collective dairy production and marketing. This organisational structure provides a relevant institutional setting to explore how women's collective organisation can create opportunities to enhance voice, leadership, and participation both within households and in the community.

The cooperative operates within a socio-cultural setting where men have historically held decision-making power within households, community institutions, and agricultural organisations. Although women significantly contribute to agricultural production in northern Tanzania, their involvement in public decision-making forums and leadership positions has traditionally been limited. In this context, the Kalali Women Dairy Cooperative offers a valuable example of how collective organisation can support women's participation in public roles, influence economic decisions,

and gradually challenge established gender norms.

Participation in the cooperative may expand women's economic engagement through collective milk marketing and income generation, while also contributing to broader social changes, including increased confidence in public speaking, greater involvement in cooperative leadership, enhanced participation in household financial decisions, and improved recognition of women's contributions within the community. Although the cooperative has gained recognition for boosting women's economic participation, its potential to bring about broader social and relational changes remains insufficiently documented.

3.2 Participant selection and sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals with rich experiential knowledge relevant to the study's objectives (Patton 2015). The inclusion criteria required participants to be active members of the Kalali Women Dairy Cooperative, to have at least five years of membership, and to demonstrate sustained involvement in cooperative activities or leadership roles. Participants were also expected to reflect on changes in women's roles, agency, and social status within the cooperative context. A total of seven key informants participated in the study, including five cooperative members (three of whom held leadership positions), one District Cooperative Officer, and one Regional Cooperative Officer. The inclusion of both internal cooperative members and external cooperative officers enabled triangulation of perspectives on cooperative governance, gender dynamics, and empowerment processes.

3.3 Data collection methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to elicit narratives regarding women's participation, leadership experiences, voices in decision-making, and perceived processes of social transformation. Interviews were conducted during the Nanenane Agricultural Exhibition in Dodoma, which provided a neutral and accessible environment for participants. All interviews were conducted in Kiswahili, the participants' preferred language, and were audio-recorded with informed consent. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim and translated into English for analysis. Field notes and reflective memos were also maintained throughout the data collection process to capture contextual observations, non-verbal cues, and the researcher's reflexive insights. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw, were strictly observed throughout the research process.

3.4 Data analysis

The collected data were analysed thematically following the six-phase analytical procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis began with repeated reading of the interview transcripts to develop familiarity with the data and identify preliminary patterns. Initial codes were generated through open coding, combining inductive insights emerging from participants' narratives with deductive codes informed by the interview guide and the study's conceptual framework, including constructs such as silence, voice, power, and social transformation. The coded

data were subsequently organised into broader categories through axial coding, identifying relationships and patterns across data segments.

These categories were refined into coherent sub-themes, including decision-making participation, confidence development, household dynamics, leadership experiences, and structural barriers. The sub-themes were further synthesised into higher-order analytical themes aligned with the study's conceptual model, namely Silence, Voice, Power, and So-

cial Transformation, which capture the multi-level empowerment processes experienced by women within the cooperative context. The resulting themes were reviewed and refined to ensure conceptual clarity, internal coherence, and alignment with the theoretical framework. A comprehensive codebook was developed to guide interpretation and maintain analytical transparency.

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Background	Identity and roles	Participant's background and co-operative role
	Motivation	Reasons for joining the co-operative
	Expectations	Initial hopes and fears
Women's Voice	Decision-making	Participation in leadership and decisions
	Recognition	Seriousness given to women's ideas
	Confidence	Growth in voice and assertiveness
Empowerment	Economic change	Improved income and financial independence
	Household dynamics	Power shifts at home
	Personal freedom	Confidence and autonomy
	Community perception	Changed social attitudes
	Community initiatives	Women-led non-dairy actions

Challenges	Cultural barriers	Norms restricting women
	Family pressures	Domestic constraints
	Co-operative barriers	Internal structural obstacles
	Silencing	Incidents of discouragement
Strengthening Voice	Training	Capacity-building needs
	Leadership	Leadership advancement strategies
	Male engagement	Role of men in empowerment
Vision	Co-operative growth	Future aspirations for the co-operative
	Women's Role	Future women's contributions
	Messages	Advice to other co-operatives
Final Reflections	Personal Stories	Any additional insights

Table 1 Coding Framework from the KII

Code name	Code description
Background & entry	Describes participants' identities, roles within the cooperative, motivations for joining, and their initial expectations or fears upon entry.
Voice & participation	Captures women's involvement in decision-making processes, the extent to which their opinions are valued, and their growth in confidence and public expression within cooperative spaces.
Empowerment & personal change	Reflects economic empowerment, increased control over household decisions, personal confidence, and expanded autonomy resulting from cooperative membership.

Community-level transformation	Represents broader social changes, including increased respect for women, greater visibility in community events (e.g., Nanenane), shifting gender norms, and women-led community initiatives.
Barriers & constraints	Covers cultural, social, familial, and institutional challenges that limit women's participation or attempt to silence their voices.
Strategies for strengthening women's voice	Highlights proposed actions, such as training, leadership development, cooperative education, and male engagement, to enhance women's voices and influence.
Future vision & aspirations	Encompasses women's hopes for cooperative growth, expanded roles for women, improved infrastructure, and messages of encouragement for other women's cooperatives.

Table 2 Coding framework

3.5 Trustworthiness of the study and coding framework overview

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed, including member checking, peer debriefing, informant triangulation, and maintaining an audit trail documenting coding decisions and reflexive analytical notes throughout the analysis.

4 Findings and discussion

The findings demonstrate a progressive empowerment journey through which members of the Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative navigate processes of voice, agency, and social transformation. Supported by Empowerment Theory (Kabeer 1999), women's empowerment develops through the interconnected dimensions of resources, agency, and achievements, with each phase reflecting a shift from limited choices to enhanced capa-

bility and influence. The cooperative functions not only as an economic institution but also as a transformative social space that enables women to renegotiate power relations at individual, household, and community levels.

4.1 Historical marginalisation and structural constraints

Women's narratives indicate that prior to joining the co-operative, their participation in dairy production was shaped by entrenched patriarchal norms, limited access to productive resources, and restricted involvement in household and community decision-making. Although women played a central role in sustaining dairy farming activities, their economic contributions were rarely accompanied by control over assets or income.

Participants described undertaking most of the daily labour associated with dairy production. Their responsibilities included

herding cattle to grazing areas, collecting fodder, feeding and watering animals, cleaning cattle sheds, milking cows, and transporting milk to local buyers or collection points. Women were also involved in preparing supplementary feed, caring for calves, maintaining hygiene around cowsheds, and occasionally processing milk into fermented dairy products for household consumption. Despite this extensive involvement in the production process, ownership of key productive resources, such as cattle, land, and dairy equipment, was typically held by husbands or other male household members.

This imbalance extended beyond labour and into household decision-making. Women explained that men commonly determined when milk would be sold, how the income from milk sales would be used, and whether new livestock or farm inputs would be purchased. As a result, women's participation in economic decision-making remained limited even though they contributed substantially to the labour required to sustain dairy production. As one participant summarised: "We did most of the work, but men decided everything."

Cultural norms also constrained women's participation in public and community decision-making spaces. Several participants noted that speaking during village meetings, farmer groups, or local gatherings was often discouraged. Women explained that challenging men's opinions in public could be perceived as disrespectful, discouraging many from expressing their views even when they had practical knowledge of dairy production. As one respondent described:

Cultural norms discouraged women from speaking publicly. Even if you had an idea, you

kept quiet because people would say women should not challenge men.

These experiences reflect what Kabeer (1999) conceptualises as disempowerment, where individuals' capacity to make meaningful choices is constrained by structural and cultural norms. In the case of these women, such constraints manifested as unequal asset ownership, limited control over income, and restricted participation in decision-making at both the household and community levels. Consequently, women's contributions to dairy production were often treated as invisible labour, reinforcing their economic dependence despite their central role in sustaining household livelihoods. Similar patterns have been documented across rural Sub-Saharan Africa, where gender hierarchies shape both the division of labour and women's perceptions of their economic rights and entitlements (Cornwall & Rivas 2015).

Against this backdrop of structural marginalisation, participation in the Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative emerged as an important institutional space through which women began to renegotiate these constraints. While broader gender norms within households and communities remain influential, the co-operative provided opportunities for women to engage in training, collective marketing, and organisational leadership. Importantly, involvement in the co-operative did not replace women's responsibilities within family dairy enterprises. Instead, participants explained that cooperative engagement operates alongside their household farming activities, providing an additional platform for accessing knowledge, strengthening bargaining power, and participating in collective decision-making.

The Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative is predominantly women-led, with only a small number of male members participating in supportive roles. Women therefore occupy most leadership and decision-making positions within the organisation, including committee membership, financial management, and operational planning. Participants emphasised that this female-dominated structure created an environment in which they felt more comfortable speaking in meetings, sharing ideas, and contributing to decisions regarding milk marketing, savings schemes, and training programmes. One participant described this transformation as follows:

Through joining the cooperative, I am no longer silent. The cooperative provides education, training, and capacity-building programs. My own income now empowers me, but before it was not.

These experiences suggest that while structural inequalities have not disappeared entirely, the co-operative has created new opportunities for women to exercise voice, build confidence, and participate more actively in economic decision-making. For the women in Kalali, co-operative membership therefore represents an important step in the empowerment process, enabling them to gradually challenge the social norms that previously limited their participation in household and community governance.

4.2 Participation, confidence building, and emerging agency

Women's participation in the co-operative marked an important shift from silence

to voice, particularly within the organisational space created by the co-operative itself. Through regular meetings, training sessions, and collective activities, women began participating more actively in discussions, sharing ideas, and raising concerns with increasing confidence. Participants described initial discomfort with public speaking, shaped by long-standing social norms that discouraged women from expressing opinions in community forums. Over time, however, repeated participation in co-operative meetings, encouragement from peers, and supportive leadership helped many women gradually build the confidence to speak. One participant reflected:

At first, I could not speak in front of people, but through the co-operative I learned to express myself." Another added: "Now, when we meet, I know my voice matters.

Importantly, these changes did not necessarily imply that broader community norms had fundamentally shifted. Several participants indicated that outside the co-operative setting, women's growing independence was sometimes viewed critically by others in the community. As a result, empowerment was often described not as the elimination of social constraints but as the development of confidence and collective support that enabled women to pursue their economic activities despite such expectations. In this sense, co-operative participation created a protected space where women could exercise voice and leadership, even while broader gender norms continued to require ongoing negotiation in their daily lives.

These experiences reflect the emergence of agency, as described in Empowerment Theory, where women develop the capacity to articu-

late preferences, make strategic choices, and participate meaningfully in collective decision-making processes (Kabeer 1999 & 2001). Within the cooperative, women were provided with a structured and inclusive environment in which they were not only encouraged but also expected to speak, vote, and assume responsibilities in organisational activities. Such institutional openness resonates with feminist institutional perspectives, which emphasise that participatory organisational arrangements can challenge entrenched gender power relations by creating spaces where women develop legitimacy, belonging, and collective confidence in decision-making processes (Acker 1990, Kabeer 1999). In this context, voice serves as both a symbolic and a practical entry point to empowerment, enabling women to transition from passive observers to active contributors and decision-makers within cooperative institutions.

Importantly, this newfound voice extended beyond the co-operative. Participants explained that the confidence gained through co-operative engagement enabled them to participate more assertively in community meetings and public events. One woman proudly shared her experience at the Nanenane agricultural exhibition, noting, “Now I am here at Nanenane selling and marketing our products,” emphasising how cooperative participation opened avenues for public visibility, entrepreneurship, and market engagement. This expanded presence aligns with Kabeer’s (1999) and Velthouse’s (1990) arguments that empowerment is relational and cumulative, whereby small acts of agency create ripple effects across multiple social domains.



Figure 2. Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative members showcasing their dairy products during the NaneNane Agricultural Exhibition in Dodoma. The exhibition provided a platform for women to market their products, demonstrate their entrepreneurial skills, and enhance their cooperative's visibility within the broader agricultural community.

Collectively, these findings show that voice, cultivated through participation, learning, and solidarity, served as a gateway to broader empowerment. It allowed women to challenge previous norms of silence, assert their perspectives, and position themselves as credible actors within both the cooperative and their wider community.

4.3 Leadership, influence, and control over resources

As women's voices strengthened within the co-operative, several members gradually moved into positions of visible and recognised leadership. This emerging authority was reflected not only in formal leadership roles but also in women's growing influence over organisational decisions and control over income generated through dairy activities. Participants occupying leadership positions described taking responsibility for coordinating co-operative meetings, managing milk collection schedules, overseeing financial records, and representing the co-operative in negotiations with buyers, extension officers, and local government representatives.

For example, some women explained that they now chair meetings in which members discuss milk pricing, the distribution of training opportunities, and savings contributions. Others described their involvement in negotiating milk sales with traders or collection centres to ensure that members receive fair prices for their produce. One committee member noted that her role included maintaining financial records, monitoring cooperative savings, and reporting on income from milk sales at monthly meetings.

Leadership also translated into greater control over dairy-related income at the household level. Several women reported that earnings from milk marketed through the cooperative were deposited into their own savings accounts or managed through the cooperative's savings schemes. This allowed them to contribute directly to household expenses, such as school fees and food purchases, or to reinvest in livestock. As one participant explained, managing

dairy income through the cooperative enabled her to make financial decisions that previously would have been handled exclusively by male household members.

These experiences reflect what Kabeer (1999) describes as the achievement dimension of empowerment, where expanded agency leads to tangible changes in power relations and outcomes. In this case, women's participation in leadership roles, their involvement in negotiating milk sales, and their increased control over cooperative income illustrate how collective organisation can translate into concrete shifts in authority and economic decision-making.

Economic empowerment also played a central role in expanding women's influence. Members consistently emphasised that earning and managing dairy income enhanced their bargaining power at home. One woman explained, "Now I can decide how to use the income. It has changed how my husband listens to me." Another noted the broader social recognition she gained: "People now come to me for guidance, even men." These narratives highlight how control over resources not only improves economic well-being but also elevates women's symbolic and relational power in both household and public arenas.

The co-operative itself provides an enabling institutional environment that normalises women's leadership and decision-making authority. Meetings are now more inclusive, transparency has improved, and younger women are encouraged to join committees and leadership pathways. This organisational shift disrupts traditional gender hierarchies and reinforces women's legitimacy as leaders. Figure (3) further illustrates this transformation.



Figure 3 Members of the Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative confidently showcasing their dairy products during the Nanenane agricultural exhibition in Dodoma, standing alongside a PhD researcher from the University of Dodoma who was collecting field data.

This interaction illustrates how cooperative members increasingly participate in public economic spaces. During the exhibition, the women presented their dairy products, explained their production process to visitors, responded to questions from potential buyers, and promoted the cooperative's activities to agricultural stakeholders. Several members also engaged directly with extension officers and representatives from agricultural organisations. Such participation reflects their

growing confidence in representing the cooperative beyond their local community.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative serves as a transformative institutional platform through which women attain economic power, organisational influence, and social recognition. Their leadership and visibility, captured both in narratives and in field interactions, such as the Nanenane exhibition, highlight a profound shift from earlier marginalisation toward sustained, socially acknowledged empowerment.

4.4 Social transformation redefining gender norms and community recognition

The final stage of the empowerment pathway reflects a broader social transformation, as women's increased agency and leadership within the Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative extend outward into the wider community. Participants consistently reported that their enhanced visibility, confidence, and organisational competence have begun to shift long-standing gender norms in their village. One member observed, "People in the village now see us as leaders, not just helpers," underscoring a significant departure from earlier perceptions that confined women to subordinate or supportive roles.

This transformation is also reflected in the co-operative's public engagement, including participation in the Nanenane Agricultural Exhibition in Dodoma. As shown in the attached photo, members showcased their dairy products and interacted confidently with visitors alongside the PhD researcher, illustrating their growing visibility and participation in public economic spaces.

The influence of this transformation also extends to younger generations. Women noted that girls in the community increasingly observe and engage with the co-operative's activities, often accompanying their mothers to meetings, training sessions, and milk collection points. Participants explained that seeing women chair meetings, manage cooperative finances, and negotiate milk sales has begun to reshape younger girls' perceptions of possible roles for women.

Several respondents described how girls now show greater willingness to speak during youth gatherings, participate in agricultural training programmes, and express interest in managing dairy activities in the future. One participant observed that her daughter, who previously viewed dairy work as routine household labour, now asks questions about how milk is marketed and how the cooperative operates. As another participant stated, "Girls see us and believe they can also lead."

These observations suggest that the empowerment experienced by cooperative members is not confined to individual participants but may influence the aspirations and behaviours of younger women within the community. In this sense, cooperative participation contributes to subtle yet meaningful shifts in how the next generation imagines leadership, economic participation, and women's roles. Such dynamics reflect the relational nature of empowerment highlighted in feminist scholarship, where individual gains can gradually influence broader social expectations and possibilities.

External stakeholders also recognise these changes. A regional cooperative officer noted that "The co-operative has changed how the community sees women's capacity," affirming

that the transformation is not only experienced internally but is also visible and acknowledged by relevant institutional actors. This visibility is critical, as it helps legitimise women's leadership and strengthens their influence in formal and informal community structures.

The combination of public participation, intergenerational influence, and external recognition illustrates what Kabeer (1999) terms transformative agency, a stage in which women not only expand their own life choices but also reshape the social norms and structures that once constrained them. Through their collective achievements, the Kalali women have become catalysts for community-level transformation, redefining gender expectations and contributing to a more inclusive social order.

5 Conclusion

This study explored how participation in the Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative influences women's voice, agency, and everyday experiences of empowerment. The findings demonstrate a gradual journey towards empowerment, where women move from historically restricted roles to greater involvement in economic and organisational decision-making. Consistent with Empowerment Theory, the results indicate that empowerment develops through interconnected processes involving access to resources, the strengthening of agency, and the realisation of tangible outcomes.

The cooperative acts as a supportive institutional space where women build confidence, participate in governance, and gain greater control over income from dairy production. Through cooperative meetings, training programmes, and collective support, members de-

velop the ability to express their views, take on leadership roles, and negotiate decisions within their households and communities. While broader gender norms remain influential, participation in the cooperative allows women to exercise greater autonomy and gradually renegotiate existing power relations.

The study also emphasises the wider social importance of women-led cooperatives in rural areas. Besides economic gains, the Kalali Women Dairy Co-operative increases women's public visibility, boosts their organisational skills, and offers younger women and girls alternative examples of leadership and involvement. These results imply that cooperatives can provide valuable spaces where women collectively broaden their voice and economic prospects, even in settings where traditional gender roles remain.

Generally, the findings emphasise the importance of gender-responsive cooperative policies and capacity-building initiatives that support women's leadership, financial inclusion, and collective organisation. Enhancing such institutional spaces can contribute to more inclusive rural development by enabling women to participate more actively in economic and community life. Future research should examine how similar cooperative models can be adapted across different contexts and sectors to further support women's empowerment and collective agency.

References

- Agarwal, Bina. 2010. *Gender and Green Governance: The Political Economy of Women's Presence Within and Beyond Community Forestry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199569687.001.0001>
- Birchall, Johnston. 2013. *Resilience in a Down-turn: The Power of Financial Cooperatives*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- Birchall, Johnston. 2017. *The Governance of Large Co-operative Businesses*. Manchester: Co-operatives UK.
- Craig, Ben & John Pencavel. 1992. The behaviour of worker cooperatives: The plywood companies of the Pacific Northwest. *American Economic Review* 82.5: 1083–1105.
- Doss, Cheryl R. 2013. Intrahousehold bargaining and resource allocation in developing countries. *World Bank Research Observer* 28.1: 52–78. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-6337>
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–2011: Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap for Development*. Rome: FAO.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2023. *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition: Statistics and Trends*. Accra: FAO.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). 2016. *Cooperatives and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Contribution to the Post-2015 Development Debate*. Geneva: ILO.

- Iyer, Balasubramanian. 2020. Cooperatives and the sustainable development goals. *Waking the Asian Pacific Co-operative Potential*, 59–70. Amsterdam: Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-816666-6.00006-9>
- Kabeer, Naila. 1999. Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change* 30.3: 435–464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125>
- Kyazze, Lawrence Musiitwa, Isaac Nabeta Nkote & Juliet Wakaisuka-Isingoma. 2017. Cooperative governance and social performance of cooperative societies. *Cogent Business & Management* 4: 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2017.1284391>
- Levitt, Heidi M., Michael Bamberg, John W. Creswell, David M. Frost, Ruthellen Josselson & Carola Suárez-Orozco. 2018. Journal article reporting standards for qualitative, meta-analytic, and mixed methods research. *American Psychologist* 73.1: 26–46. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000151>
- Majurin, Eva. 2012. *How Women Fare in East African Cooperatives: The Case of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- Muñoz Boudet, Ana María, Paola Buitrago, Bénédicte Leroy de la Brière, David Newhouse, Eliana Rubiano Matulevich, Kinnon Scott & Pablo Suárez-Becerra. 2018. *Gender Differences in Poverty and Household Composition Through the Life Cycle: A Global Perspective*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-8360>
- Münkner, Hans-Hermann. 2015. *Co-operative Principles and Co-operative Law*. Berlin: LIT.
- Njuki, Jemimah, Susan Kaaria, Angeline Chamunorwa & Wanjiku Chiuri. 2011. Linking smallholder farmers to markets, gender and intra-household dynamics: Does the choice of commodity matter? *European Journal of Development Research* 23.3: 426–443. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2011.8>
- Osmani, Syed R. 1993. *The Entitlement Approach to Famine: An Assessment*. Helsinki: World Institute for Development Economics Research, United Nations University.
- Quisumbing, Agnes R. & Cheryl R. Doss. 2021. Gender in agriculture and food systems. In Christopher B. Barret & David R. Just (eds.), *Handbook of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 5, pp. 4481–4549. Amsterdam: Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.hesagr.2021.10.009>
- Rwekaza, Gasper C. & Patrick Anania. 2020. The power of members in co-operatives: Assessing members' participation in decision-making. *Journal of Co-operative and Business Studies* 5: 856–903.
- Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Tambe, Bhekani A., Ntombi S. Mabapa, Hulisani V. Mbhatsani, Tshifhiwa C. Mandiwana, Lufuno F. Mushaphi, Mashudu Mohlala & Xikombiso G. Mbhenyane. 2023. Household socio-economic determinants of food security. *Agriculture and Food Security* 12.1: 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40066-023-00424-6>
- United Republic of Tanzania (URT). 2016. *Agricultural Sector Development Strategy II (2015/16–2024/25)*. Dodoma: Government of Tanzania.
- United Republic of Tanzania (URT). 2017. *Agricultural Sector Development Programme Phase II (ASDP II)*. Dodoma: Government of Tanzania.
- World Bank. 2012. *Gender Equality for Development*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Bank. 2020. *Promoting Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Through Cooperatives in Upper Egypt*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Appendix: Interview guide

SECTION A: Background information (Contextual anchor)

1. Please tell me about yourself and your role in the co-operative.
 - o How long have you been involved?
 - o What motivated you to join?
 - o What were your expectations at the beginning?

SECTION B: Women's voice and participation (voice, agency)

2. In what ways are women involved in decision-making within the co-operative?
 - o Are women represented in leadership positions?
 - o Who makes the final decisions?
3. Do you feel your opinions or ideas are taken seriously within the co-operative? Why or why not?
 - o Can you give an example of a time your voice influenced a decision?
 - o How do meetings encourage or limit women's participation?
4. How has your confidence or ability to speak up changed since joining the co-operative? (Empowerment, self-efficacy)
 - o Were you comfortable speaking in public before?
 - o Do you now participate in other community meetings?

SECTION C: Empowerment and social transformation (personal & social change)

5. How has participation in the co-operative changed your life? (Personal empowerment)
- o Economically?
 - o In your household/marriage?
 - o In your confidence or freedom?
6. Have you observed any changes in how women are viewed in the wider community? (Social transformation)
- o Are women more respected now?
 - o Are more girls or young women joining or aspiring to lead?
7. Have co-operative members taken part in solving community problems beyond dairy farming?
- o What kind of initiatives or changes have women led?
 - o Any recent example?

SECTION D: Challenges and resistance (structural barriers)

8. What barriers or challenges do women face in raising their voices or participating fully?
- o Cultural norms?
 - o Family expectations?
 - o Time or resource constraints?
9. Have you ever been discouraged or silenced (directly or indirectly) in your participation?
- o By leaders?
 - o By male members or family?

SECTION E: Vision and sustainability (transformative potential)

10. What do you think should be done to strengthen women's voices in the co-operative?
- More training?
 - Leadership opportunities?
 - Men's involvement?
11. What is your vision for the future of the co-operative and women's role in it?
- In five years, what would you like to see?
 - Any message to other women co-operatives?

SECTION F: Final reflection

12. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a woman in this co-operative?

08

Multilingualism and GBMSM
(gay, bisexual, and men-who-
have-sex-with-men) group sex

08

Multilingualism and GBMSM (gay, bisexual, and men-who- have-sex-with-men) group sex

Alexander Andrason

1 Introduction

I was eighteen years old when I signed a pact with Mephistopheles and joined a group-sex conclave for the first time. I traded the disguise of a cherub of innocence for the dissed guise of a fornication demon. It was exactly because of my cherubic nature that these demonic powers were unleashed. As a cherub I had four faces. The charming faces of a human and an angel and the savage faces of an eagle and a lion. All were equally magnetic and alluring, but while the human feet and angelic wings kept me upright,

the animal claws and incisors allowed me to bend my flesh and soul in every transverse and perpendicular dimension. So, although the youngest in the troop, I relished this synod of debauchery with all its notes, scents, and tastes. We, four boys on a summer camp, eagerly embraced the blaze that had been consuming our stomachs - - - and dived, remorseless, into the pulsating waters of tenderness and transgression.

The present text emerges from my experience of participating in GBMSM (gay, bisexual and other men-who-have-sex-with-men) group sex such as the event described above.¹ Group sex – an activity that involves more than two people engaging in various types of sexual behavior that range from passive observation to more active involvement, be it oral, anal, penetrative, ejaculative, or any other – has formed part of my life | occasional yet viscerally persistent. It has substantially contributed to how I perceive the world, other human beings, and myself, and I would perhaps not be who I am had I not fucked in groups.

Since I am committed to combating oppressions that permeate the academy – including its strangulating decorum and puritanism (Foucault 1978, Paglia 1990, Jakobsen & Pellegrini 2003, Rubin 2011: 148-155, Spoto 2014: 79, Andrason 2025 & 2026), which no doubt are reflections of the academy's heteronormativity – I view the disclosure of this counter-(hetero)normative facet of my life in research as a liberatory praxis, both in reflection and in action (Freire 1993). Although it renders me vulnerable and potentially exposes me to further homophobic attacks, it emancipates and empowers me. That is, “by [...] writing about (radical) homosexual erotic practices and, more importantly, celebrating them openly, I seize and occupy the scholarly space from which such positive and unapologetic homosexual discourses have traditionally been expelled [and] in so doing, I not only tell my story, I remake myself as well” (Andrason 2026: 32). This liberatory aspiration in studying GBMSM group sex becomes more evident if one considers the stigmatization of such

sexual acts. Indeed, GBMSM group sex remains one of the sexual performances that (hetero) normativity tolerates the least, and even in countries where GBMSM (and LGBTQIA+) people enjoy some liberties, GBMSM group sex was outlawed until very recently. For example, in South Africa until 1998, in England and Wales until 2000, and in Canada until 2002. Had I lived in these countries as a young adult, I would have been a criminal.

As a hyper-polyglot whose language repertoire has been shaped by homosexuality and queerness (Andrason 2025), in my study of GBMSM group sex, I focus on the multilingualism of this sexual practice – a topic that has not yet been addressed in scholarship. Specifically, I aim to verify whether GBMSM group-sex events attest to multilingual patterns and, should this be the case, what characteristics such multilingual communication tends to exhibit. I develop my research against the backdrop of studies dedicated to the intersection of multilingualism and GBMSM (Tewksbury 1996 & 2002, Tattelman 1997 & 1999, Haubrich et al. 2004, Holmes, O'Byrne & Gastaldo 2007, Sierra Madero 2012, Baudinette 2017, Cashman 2018, Lucido Santos & Saisuwan 2023, Perez Toledo 2023, Andrason 2025, 2026, forthcoming (a) & under review) and couch it within the subjective methodologies of erotic (naked) embodied autoethnography, existential naturalism, and artisticization of science on the one hand (Holman-Jones 2005, Ellis 2008, Blinne 2012, Langarita Adiego 2019, Andrason 2026, forthcoming (a) & under review), and the more “positivistic” approaches imported from sociolinguistics, language-contact studies, and

¹ While the label ‘GBMSM’ suggests cis-male gender (i.e., assigned male gender at birth), it is also inclusive of transgender men (who may themselves identify as gay, bisexual, or MSM) as well as those persons who, although assigned the male gender at birth, identify as gender fluid and/or gender non-specific.

cognitive linguistics on the other hand (Myers-Scotton 1993, 2002 & 2006, Muysken 2000, Myers-Scotton & Jake 2000, Evans & Green 2006, García 2009, Matras 2009, García & Wei 2014, Janda 2015, Mazzaferro 2018, Sabino 2018, Heine 2023).

To achieve the above objectives, I organize my text as follows: I first review scholarly literature dedicated to multilingualism and GBMSM sex(ualities) (section 2) and explain the methodology of data collection, presentation, and analysis (section 3). Subsequently, I introduce my data as artisticized narratives (section 4) and after evaluating them against the scholarly backdrop, propose answers to the research questions (section 5). The article concludes with another personal narrative vignette profiling the liberatory and vulnerable sides of GBMSM group sex (section 6).

2 Literature review: Multilingualism and GBMSM sex

To the best of my knowledge, there are no peer-reviewed studies that explicitly analyze multilingualism – or the absence thereof – in GBMSM group sex. Nevertheless, scholarship has studied – to various extents and depths – three related issues: the language of GBMSM sexual/erotic encounters, the multi-/monolingualism of the linguistic landscape of GBMSM spaces and, more broadly, the relationship between the multi-/monolingualism of speakers and their GBMSM sexualities.

In GBMSM sexual/erotic encounters, which may, although need not, take place in radical GBMSM spaces (i.e., public cruising areas, dedicated cruising clubs, and gay bath-houses), the use of canonical verbal language – i.e., a language produced orally, captured with the International Phonetic Alphabet, and (potentially) codified in orthography – is report-

edly sparse. Communication occurring in such sexually loaded areas and situations draws more prominently on non verbal modalities: visual (e.g., gestures, body movements, and worn apparel), somatosensory (e.g., touches), olfactory (e.g., bodily scents) and gustatory (e.g., the taste of bodily secretions), as well as an auditory mode expanding beyond language understood narrowly (e.g., paralinguistic oral articulations and non-oral sounds) (see Leap 1996, Tewksbury 1996 & 2002, Tattelman 1997 & 1999, Haubrich et al. 2004, Holmes, O’Byrne & Gastaldo 2007, Sierra Madero 2012, Perez Toledo 2023, Andrason 2026, forthcoming (a) & under review). When canonical linguistic verblivity does transpire during sexual/erotic interactions (especially at the above-mentioned radical places), it seems to exhibit the following properties: it is “brief”, “succinct”, and “low” in its volume (i.e., often “hushed”) and involves the speakers who tend to be “less than arm’s length away” (Tewksbury 2002: 102). Crucially, instead of using word classes of sentence grammar (e.g., verbs, nouns, and adjectives) and their combinations into phrases, clauses, and sentences, the verbal language deployed in the above-mentioned spaces and situations – especially during the climactic stage of an encounter – primarily draws on interactives (Andrason forthcoming (a), under review). The interactive categories that are typically harnessed in such instances include attention signals, response elicitors and response signals, vocatives and directives, and discourse markers, evaluatives, and interjections (Andrason forthcoming (a), under review). More “regular” conversations that exploit sentence-grammar lexical classes and their phrasal/clausal/sentential combinations take place in public non-GBMSM-exclusive areas, “sex-free” parts of GBMSM establishments, as well as at the stages of erotic encounters that are less sexualized, e.g., pre- and

post-climactic (Tewksbury 2002: 102, Andrason forthcoming (a), under review; for the definitions of interactive and sentence grammar see section 3).² Generally, “as communication advances, [...] language [...] transitions from more traditionally linguistic to [...] extra-/para-/non-linguistic” with auditory modality (particularly its verbal type) being supplanted by other sensorial modes (Andrason under review, p. 38). Indeed, at a climactic peak, an interaction tends to be “auditorily non-verbal, minimally visual, centered on olfactory and especially [...] somatosensory and somatic gustatory modes” (Andrason under review, p. 39). Nevertheless, such non-verbal sounds and modalities play a highly relevant role at non-climactic stages too, especially when establishing and terminating communicative channels.

The presence of canonical (named) languages in their written forms is somewhat more pervasive in the linguistic landscapes of GBMSM spaces. English tends to occupy a dominant position in these sites. In English-speaking areas (regions or countries), English is generally the only variety used. In areas where other languages are spoken, local varieties (especially, if they hold an official status) can be found in signage too. Nevertheless, English often accompanies local languages or even substitutes them (Baudinette 2017, Lucido Santos & Saisuwan 2023, Andrason 2026). Therefore, while some GBMSM landscapes may, to a certain degree, be multilingual, monolingualism seems to predominate (Motschenbacher 2020, Lucido Santos & Saisuwan 2023, Andrason 2026). This erasure or marginalization of local languages, especially non-(Indo-) European ones, stems from and further am-

plifies “the perceived whiteness of [GBMSM] space[s] and [their] globalized Western character” (Andrason 2026: 30). Again, the relevance of the modalities other than verbal (whether auditory, visual, somatosensory, olfactory, or gustatory) in the GBMSM landscapes increases in sites that are radically counter-normative (e.g., cruising clubs, bathhouses, and restrooms) and, particularly, the so-called climactic spaces within these (e.g., dark rooms, steam rooms, and slings; Tewksbury 1996 & 2002, Tattelman 1997 & 1999, Sierra Madero 2012, Evangelista 2014, Baudinette 2017, Andrason 2026 & forthcoming (a)).

The body of works examining the relationship between the multilingualism of speakers and GBMSM sexualities is much larger than research studying the role of multilingualism in GBMSM sexual acts and in the spaces where such acts (may) occur, which I discussed above. Drawing on Cashman (2018), three clusters of topics can be distinguished within this type of the linguistic scholarship. One strand of studies analyzes “language contact and LGBTQ[IA+] lives” (Cashman 2018: 226) and the resultant multilingualism of LGBTQIA+ communities or, on the contrary, their (more or less pronounced) monolingualism, with English being a dominant variety (Cashman 2018; cf. Milani 2013, Milani & Kapa 2015). The second research area examines properties of the varieties used by multilingual (usually, bilingual) LGBTQIA+/GBMSM individuals (Cashman 2018: 226). For instance, the language choices of Filipino gay men speaking Tagalog and English (Manalansan 1995), the so-called ‘swardspeak’ or a blended language that draws on Tagalog, English, and Spanish (Manalansan 2003), and the

² Additionally, canonical verbal language features more prominently in conversations between visitors/patrons who are acquaintances (Tewksbury 2002: 102).

prosodic, morphological, syntactic, and lexical elements in other mixed varieties deployed by LGBTQIA+/GBMSM persons. The third class of works pertains to language learning, both formal and informal; especially the relationship between the second or further language acquisition and (romantic) LGBTQIA+/GBMSM desire (Piller 2002) as well as the impact of tourism on the development of linguistic repertoires (Rowlett 2020; for a detailed review of the three research clusters consult Cashman 2018). To the scholarship cluster described in this paragraph, one may additionally include studies investigating the “statistically significant” correlation between polyglotism (i.e., being a speaker of six or more languages) or, at least, a predisposition to a faster and more successful second language acquisition on the one hand and “homosexual behaviors, preferences, and/or orientations” on the other (Erard 2012: 178).

While the above publications are related to the topic of my article quite loosely, two autoethnographic studies, both authored by me, mention the (hyper)multilingualism of GBMSM sex practices and people who partake in them more overtly, without limiting such research and its ramifications to group-sex activities and attendees. First, I argued that a person may become hyper-multilingual due to their “unapologetic and rebellious queer love and [...] struggle” (Andrason 2025: 89). That is, it is “the fascination, spiritual and carnal” that one experiences towards their own sex that, at least for some, constitutes the principal motivation for language acquisition – much more critical than other reasons, e.g., educational or professional – leading to the formation of a hyper-multilingual repertoire (Andrason

2025: 84). In other words, successful language learning resulting in polyglotism stems in such cases from “the [...] love [one] ha[s] felt and made to real and imaginary people” – i.e., intimate encounters with the members of one’s own sex, “whether these took place in the imaginary landscape of [...] dreams or in [...] streets, saunas, and trains” (Andrason 2025: 84–85). Second, after examining the language of GBMSM anal interactions – i.e., “interactions that at some point involve anal sex between two mxn” – I conclude that, should the anal language involve genuine verbal elements, this material is often multilingual (Andrason under review, pp. 4, 30).³ On the one hand, communications leading to anal sex to which I have contributed regularly exploit different languages. They tend to respond to the geographic context of their occurrence by centering the language of the respective area (city, region, or country). On the other hand, sexual partners may sometimes draw on and mix various languages and even act as each other’s teachers. Again, this harnessing of many distinct named languages during anal sex may be regarded as not only the result of one’s hyper-multilingualism but also the reason thereof (Andrason under review, p. 30). That is, one fucks “multilingually” because one knows many languages; and conversely, making love with linguistically diverse partners expands the language repertoire of a person – me, in that study.

Overall, scholars agree – we need more studies that examine the multilingualism of LGBTQIA+ people and their communities (including the GBMSM subset) and thus the intersection of LGBTQIA+ sexualities and multilingualism (Cashman 2018: 222, 230). Due to

³ ‘Mxn’ is a term that includes both cis- and transmen.

the prevalence of research centering English, this need is especially patent for languages (whether L1 or L2) different from English – a necessity that holds true for all language-and-gender studies in general (Pujolar 2008).

3 Methodology

The methodology underpinning my study is complex and eclectic. It is so because I harness distinct strategies when collecting, presenting, and analyzing data – something unavoidable given the topic of my research and my commitment to conducting it in a counter-normative yet ethical manner.

To collect my data, I exploit (my) subjectivity. Subjectivity is an anti-positivist, anti-modernist, anti-scientist paradigm which has become increasingly relevant in qualitative research and has indeed characterized my own recent pedagogical, sociolinguistic, and GBMSM scholarship. Following many others (see Finlay 2002, 2008 & 2009, Olmos-Vega et al. 2023), I embrace subjectivity in research, considering it an asset that enhances the breadth and depth of data (and their analysis and interpretation) instead of treating it as a limitation that should, if possible, be avoided and/or eliminated. Within the gamut of approaches to subjectivity – and in further alignment with my previous research – I use erotic (naked) embodied autoethnography (Blinne 2012, Langarita Adiego 2019, Andrason 2026, forthcoming (a) & under review). This means that: (a) my ethnographic technique reflexively pertains to the researcher's life (Holman-Jones 2005, Ellis 2008); (b) it centers the body of the researcher, including their anatomy and physiology as well as all the sensorial modalities, i.e., visual, auditory, somatosensory, olfactory, and

gustatory (Andrason 2026, forthcoming (a) & under review; see also Finlay 2006, Blinne 2012, Langarita Adiego 2019); and (c) it approaches the body in one of its most vulnerable states, i.e., when naked (or semi-clothed) and engaged in erotic/sexual practices (Ellis 2008, Blinne 2012, Spatz 2017, Langarita Adiego 2019, Andrason 2025, 2026, forthcoming (a) & under review).

For the purpose of the present study, this translates into the following: I draw on the experiences of sharing my naked (or semi-clothed) body with others during group-sex events. These experiences cover decades of my life, spanning my entire adulthood. They also involve a range of spaces – those that are normative and counter-normative and those where GBMSM encounters (sexual or not) are covert and overt – across Asia (Turkey and Israel), Africa (Morocco and South Africa), and especially Europe: northern (Iceland and Sweden), southern (Spain and Italy), western (Germany and France), and eastern (Poland and Hungary).

To compile these experiences, I delved into my memories. Although I had to draw on *a posteriori* reflections – sometimes recalling events years after their occurrence – I did so in a systematic manner: I wrote notes, recorded thoughts, and continuously revised all such recollections, improving their detail and veracity or verisimilitude. In autoethnography, memory is certainly not seen as a repository of “truths” or static facts to be retrieved from the past and corrected but rather as the primary site of inquiry itself. Therefore, my engagement with memories of the group-sex events I had experienced concerned their existence at present, i.e., in the moment of remembering – *now*. Nevertheless, through the above-mentioned systematicity, I wanted to avoid narcissistic embellishments of past events, without

aiming at journalistic accuracy (see further below). The entire process lasted five months and, while enriching and moving overall, was uncomfortable and distressing at times.

To present my data, I draw on existential naturalism – a combination of several tenets of literary naturalism and philosophical existentialism (Andrason under review). Accordingly, I eliminate (or at least blur) a rigid separation between art and creative writing on the one hand and science and academic writing on the other. I integrate artistic/creative genres and styles into scientific/academic work, turning a linguist like me into a scientist and an artist at the same time. This approach results in the artisticization of science whereby the manner of presenting the material collected (the story/plot and its style/form) matters as much as the content itself (e.g., data collected and argument made) (Andrason 2025, forthcoming (a) & under review; see also Holman-Jones 2005, Ellis 2008). This artisticization is necessitated ontologically and epistemologically (Andrason under review). First, contrary to canonical reportative scientific sentences, it allows one to present reality as less sanitized, regimented, de-temporalized, and universalized but cruder, messier, more ephemeral, historical, and contextual (as it realistically is, according to complexity science; cf. Hooker 2011). Second, regardless of the historical or merely experiential veracity of the events that are being described, it allows readers to experience the reconstructed reality as if they themselves lived through it – something that, for several qualitative social-science researchers, is the necessary foundation of any analysis and understanding. In other words, the artisticization of science responds to the claim that human experiences must be lived through to be comprehended and that

this living-through exercise may be achieved via evocative, both lyrical and narrative, images (Aronson 2022, Andrason forthcoming (a) & under review).

One consequence of this artisticization, relevant for the present text, is the acceptance of registers, devices, and expressions that depart from standard academic style – not only poetry, rhythm, rhymes, and evocative images, but also colloquialisms and swearwords. This stylistic rudeness is inherent to my methodological commitment as both naturalism (e.g., Zola) and existentialism (especially, Sartre and Genet) aim to engage with all aspects of human life, including obscene and vulgar, whether “intestinal [or] scatological” (Colin 1988: 9-10) and whether pertaining to “anal intercourse [...] spit, sperm, [...] shit, organic smells, [or] farts” (Sartre 1963: 127, 490, 501). Importantly, such naturalistic literary forms are not deployed for mere provocation. Their *raison d'être* is more profound. They are critical elements that allow authors to present reality in a manner that, as required by the existential naturalist program, is unadorned and thus free from normative and sanitizing constraints, including those entrenched in academic discourse (Andrason forthcoming (a) & under review).

After months of the introspective research journey described above, I decided to illustrate my group-sex experiences in the article text through two events presented in an artisticized, semi-narrative and semi-lyrical format. I selected these incidents not because they capture the entirety of what I went through, but because they exemplify the essential components of group-sex activities in which I participated. Crucially, they depict some of the most formative moments in my group-sex journey and in my development as a conscientized human

being – moments in which my linguistic, social, and political awareness matured most profoundly. Furthermore, as they portray me at distinct stages of life (at eighteen and twenty-six), in distinct geographical milieus (first in Germany and Poland and later in Spain), and interacting with distinct linguistic repertoires (on the one hand, German, Polish, and Russian and, on the other hand, Arabic, Bulgarian, French, and Spanish), they profile different aspects of my multilingual encounters when engaging in group sex. Therefore, the two narratives are simultaneously coherent and divergent: they share important commonalities yet portray experiences specific to their time, place, and linguistic context.

I aimed to reproduce these two events in a way that was as faithful as possible to how I experienced or rather how I *remember* experiencing them at the time they had occurred (see further below). Hence the radical detail-ness of my stories and an obsessive lyrical realism with which I recount every minute anatomical, emotional, and environmental feature I was able to recall. This hyper-descriptive register not only makes my narratives verisimilar as it refers to specific people, places, and reactions; above all, it creates a magnifying glass through which both you, my reader, and I can examine *me* with a surgeon's precision. In other words, I foreground the minute elements that I consider as critical for producing me then and that are still fundamental in how I now understand myself of that time. Crucially, I view such meticulous synesthetic depictions not as mere artistic surplus but as ontologically necessary to representing embodied experiences that in GBMSM communication tend to be multimodal: auditory, visual, haptic, olfactory, and gustatory (see Leap 1996, Tewksbury 1996 & 2002, Tattelman

1997 & 1999, Haubrich et al. 2004, Holmes, O'Byrne & Gastaldo 2007, Sierra Madero 2012, Perez Toledo 2023, Andrason 2025, 2026, forthcoming (a) & under review; see section 2).

My approach to data collection and presentation resulting in a retrospective reconstruction – I tell a story about the events that occurred years ago – has further epistemological complexity. The reality and experiences narrated are vicarious. I thus distinguish between historical truth or accuracy and my autobiographical memory or narrative truth; between narrating an event as it occurred and was experienced *then* and narrating it how it exists in memory *now* (cf. Spence 1982). Even though my narrative aims for some historical fidelity – as I explained above, I wanted to avoid improving the past – my primary focus is phenomenological authenticity (which is a more appropriate standard for artisticized science as well). This distinction and the unavoidable limitation of my study are intrinsic – not merely incidental – to the autoethnographic method: all autoethnography is reconstruction, and the question is not whether reconstruction occurs, but how consciously and systematically it is conducted.

The above consideration is especially relevant to the retrospective application of the framework of erotic embodied autoethnography to my own sexuality. Narrating my early sexual experience as an adult researcher presents a significant challenge (see Plummer's 1995 work on sexual stories, Ellis's 2007 discussions of relational ethics in autoethnography, and Kraftl's 2017 evaluation of memory in autoethnographic methodologies). My sexuality has evolved considerably since the time of my narratives. I no longer experience the world in the same way I did then. Yet, given the profound

impact these two events have had on my life, the feelings I experienced then have never fully left me but have instead continued to reside in my body and mind. Indeed, I still remember nearly every moment, action, word, and image from those days and can vividly recall the excitement, pain, and fear my body and mind felt.

Eventually, the approach I adopt creates a number of tensions: between the speech, thoughts, and reflections of the protagonist (me then) and the *a-posteriori* narration (me now); between the sexuality of the still developing protagonist and the narrating adult's framing of these sexualities; between the speaking first-person voices – Alexander the young adult and Alexander now; between a reporting voice (which describes) and a commenting voice (which formulates judgements about the unfolding events); and lastly, between the humanizing language of the author and his incarnations and the dehumanizing language of society that shapes (or 'infects') him, with or without his consent.

While data collection is personal and subjective and data presentation is narrative and evocative, the remaining part of my endeavor, i.e., data analysis, is more orthodox – analytic-synthetic, 'objective', and stylistically reportative and neutral (cf. Blinne 2012: 971; see also Leavy 2015 on a broader discussion of arts-based research and the integration of artistic and analytic frames). Indeed, to evaluate my data – both those presented in the narrative and those included in the wider corpus of group-sex experiences compiled through systematic and critical recollection – I deploy a collection of mainstream linguistic frameworks.⁴

I follow sociolinguistic theories in distinguishing between individual multilingualism (the use of various languages by a single speaker) and societal multilingualism (the use of various languages within a geographic area) – which I operationally redefine for the context of my study as 'group multilingualism' – along with the distinct characteristics and dynamics of these two multilingual types and their inter-relatedness (Butler 2013, Stavans & Hoffmann 2015, Maher 2017). I follow language-contact studies in examining codeswitching as alternational or insertional, distinguishing the matrix and embedded code(s) of a communicative unit, and acknowledging the dissimilar tendencies of all these switches and codes to host grammatical, lexical, and phonological elements (Muysken 2000, Matras 2009, Myers-Scotton 1993, 2002 & 2006, Myers-Scotton & Jake 2000). I also make a distinction between the blending of separate (named) languages and a more integral language mixing visible in translanguaging (García 2009, García & Wei 2014, Mazzaferro 2018, Sabino 2018). Lastly, in the formal analysis of the material collected, I follow cognitive linguistics and its functional view of language as motivated (rather than arbitrary) with lexical classes and linguistic phenomena defined by their prototypes, organized into radial (and thus inherently dynamic and fuzzy) categories (Evans & Green 2006, Janda 2015) and comprised between two grammar edges, i.e., sentence grammar and interactive grammar (Heine 2023). Sentence grammar is analytical, additive (compositional), and able to yield novel speech. It contains lexical classes such as verbs, nouns, pronouns, numerals, ad-

⁴ In contrast, the opening scene does not directly contribute to analytical data-points which I evaluate in Section 5. Rather, it signals a threshold where my group sex experience started. The same applies to the closing vignette which is symbolic and acts as a manifesto directed towards the future.

jectives, adverbs, adpositions, and connectors. Interactive grammar is expressive, processed holistically and compatible with holophrasticity (i.e., an individual lexeme can function as a complete non-elliptical utterance). It comprises “invariable deictic form[s that] provide insights into how speakers conceive themselves in the world of social communication”, i.e., attention signals, directives, discourse markers, evaluatives, ideophones/onomatopoeias, interjections, response elicitors, response signals, social formulae, and vocatives (Heine 2023: 7).

The positivist style of my analysis (which is typical of scholarly articles) starkly clashes with the erotic lyrical style of my narrative data. While I deploy these two genres for two different purposes and thus view them as complementary devices, their presence is never fully compatible and harmonious. Rather, they are constantly at odds, colliding and contradicting each other. Equally important, the ‘objective’ register of my analysis does not preclude the occasional reintegration of the subjective voice during the evaluation of data. This reintegration is a deliberate methodological choice consistent with my autoethnographic epistemology. All of this yields yet another, overarching tension permeating my study: is this, overall, literature or science? Is it both | or is it neither?

4 (Artisticized) data

4.1 A homo-communist

When I was eighteen, we – the boys from my school soccer team in which I played midfield – went to Spremberg in Germany to meet our nineteen-year old peers from across the Oder. At that time, my German was still quite rudimentary. Yes, my

grandmother, who was Silesian and spoke German natively, had taught me a number of words and expressions, as she had also done with the Gothic calligraphy; I did not, however, acquire the proficiency that would allow me to hold a conversation in Deutsch.

The match with the German team was uneventful. We lost terribly. Our opponents were supposed to be a year older than us, but the German youths seemed much more mature. They were tall and muscular and had the appearance of young men rather than schoolboys. No, I did not worry about this physical disproportion, particularly manifest in the case of my own body – because how could my soft skin and shaky skeleton compete with the monumental figures of these Teutonic athletes? Nor was I saddened by our fissured defeat, which infuriated the coach. Kicking the Fußball was exciting, the trip to Germany captivated my nomadic imagination, and German lads were echt pretty.

After the match, I wanted to shower. For as long as I can remember, I had always admired my post-game murky body stained with bruises and scabs, for it emanated this roughness that would immediately thrust me into the womb of depravation. Yet each time when soiled and sore, I desired, even more so, this mud and crust to flood down across my back, shoulders and legs to arouse and breed the genuine delinquent and the culprit of my corruption – my ass. Predictably, I was unable to resist this unprotected hunger of mine, now, freshly bruised and scabbed and coated with the moist bandage of Sprembergian sweat.

I waited a while in the changing room assigned to my team, but as all the cubicles continued to be occupied, I was eventually instructed to use the Germans’ bathrooms. I entered their locker-room – sneakily. There were three boys there. One in shorts, two in underwear | all shirtless and barefoot. They were smiling, talking, and shouting ec-

statically, celebrating the well-deserved victory. As soon as I walked in, their eyes froze in a glassy silence. "Hallo"⁵ – I whispered. "Ich bin Alexander und ich spiele innn..."⁶ – I stammered unable to remember the word for 'team'. To conceal my embarrassment, I sat on the wooden bench, put my backpack on the floor, and started to peel off my shyness. The German boys laughed gently and exchanged some words in their language. I understood German better than I spoke it – they wondered whether to talk to me in Russian. Of course! Like us, they had been learning Russian at school! Before they made up their minds, I repeated: "Я играю в польской футбольной команде... Я хотел принять душ".⁷ Their cheeks blushed with a mosaic of freckles. I recognized this ill-disciplined smile of theirs. They were my kind | the depraved angels | cherubim. Caring, smart, and perverted. Ouch, I ignited instantly: my left iris expanded | my right eyelid shrank. The Saxon youngsters instantly scaled these grimaces, vulgar and refined, of my face, exposing me ---- bare.

"Ein сладкий Junge"⁸ – purred the tallest of the German boys, Kai, as he approached me. Like me, he wore black shorts under which a pair of white underwear salivated deceitfully. In lust and envy. "Du trägst eine schöne kurze Adidas-hose, Alexander"⁹ – he said. The only words I understood were 'Adidas shorts' but I sensed he liked my outfit. "Ich denke твои трусы тоже красивые"¹⁰ – I answered and

undressed to show him that my briefs were snowy too. "Das ist majtki... трусы" – I murmured – эй, белые, как у тебя".¹¹ "Der Slip"¹² – translated Kai and added boisterously – "Давай, будем больше, чем товарищи".¹³ Triumphant, he took off his shorts and threw them at his teammates. My hero bowman – gallant, brave, and generous. They took up this glove – humid and groin-sweat fragrant – and stripped naked. And so did we: Kai and me. Arrogantly | with this delightful immodesty of cupid orphans. To show off that the two of us were the most beautiful of all the contenders. "В штыхы! Огоны!"¹⁴ – Kai fired.

No! We did not fight | we read anatomy instead. While studying we clung to Russian; on the exam, however, we cheated in German and Polish. Our fingers were pens, lips were brushes, and saliva was ink. We carved equations and crayoned sketches. It felt ecstatic – this domino of toes, tibias, and tracheas. And it was magical – German and Polish boys brawling to the roll of a Russian snare drum. Katyushas of spit, the Internationale of tears, and the red standard in which they wrapped my toxic kidneys and lymphatic nodes. Three German pioneers and a Polish boy scout | The dexterous musketeers and their audacious yet loyal esquire. A homo communist quadri-phallic trinity incarnated.

After the test, Kai sat by me.

I was unable to move.

⁵ 'Hi'.

⁶ 'I'm Alexander and I play in the...'

⁷ 'I play in the Polish team. I wanted to take a shower.'

⁸ 'A sweet young boy'.

⁹ 'You are wearing a nice pair of Adidas shorts, Alexander.'

¹⁰ 'I think your shorts are also cute.'

¹¹ 'These are briefs...briefs – hey, white like yours.'

¹² 'The briefs.'

¹³ 'Come on, let's be more than comrades.'

¹⁴ 'Bayonets on! Fire!'

- "Bist du traurig?"¹⁵ – *he asked worried.*
- "Traurig?"¹⁶ – *I hesitated.*
- "Ja, грустный".¹⁷
- "Nein, vielleicht, может быть."¹⁸
- "Warum?"¹⁹
- "Я больше никогда вас...dich...не увижу."²⁰

Kai put his hand on my nape. The warm secretion of his palm blended with my polar perspiration, which had barely crystalized on his fingers, quietened me instantly. But his arm – this fortified palisade of tendons and ligaments – made me quiver again and separated my griffin spine from my humanoid shoulders. I arched like the archangel I had once been. Kai pressed me towards his chest: tense, steamy, viscid. I smelled the sour syrupiness of his armpits. Mine were odorless and hairless | his gushed resonant manhood. "Не волнуйся, mein Knabe"²¹ – I heard his lung pockets pulsating and his heart cavities breathing. Caressing my straw fringe, he asked: "Ты не хотел принимать душ?"²² – and violently rumbled – "Давай! Идём!"²³ We bathed together and I resurfaced pure like never before. Kai dried me with his tongue and dressed me with the unnatural affection of a brother: loving and selfish at the same time. First socks and sneakers – with the laces that I never tied; next a t-shirt and a cotton jumper; and briefs and shorts at the end.

My school bus was ready to depart. Kai did not look into my eyes. Trying to hug me he hastily patted me on my back as if I were a mongrel – "Пока!"²⁴ || "Tschüss"²⁵ – I mumbled aloof and ran dispassionately away...incapable of keeping him for a moment longer, which I hoped would last forever. He sniffed every step I made – obsessively like a purebred hunter. Alas | he never turned his face. How could he? There was no hole in his mail armor from where his flesh would abscond.

The fears that had shaken my femurs in Germany became hideously real once back in Poland. Damn – I could travel to places nearly a thousand kilometers away yet not to Spremberg, the distance to which was much less than a hundred. Masuria lakes in the northeast and Bieszczady mountains in the southeast, which were so remote spatially and culturally and which, at that time, I hadn't even seen with my eyes, were presented to me as closer than the other bank of the Oder, which was agonizingly proximate in both space and culture. They were mine because they formed part of Poland, while the place across the river was not mine because it belonged to a different state. Kai's land was foreign even though German boys and I breathed the same nature, inhabited the same architecture, and our histories, realities, and bodies were deeply intertwined. Aua! Every day I felt more allegiance to my Spremberg lovers – their foreskins, freckles, cheekbones, and tongues – than

¹⁵ 'Are you sad?'

¹⁶ 'Sad?'

¹⁷ 'Yes, sad.'

¹⁸ 'No, maybe, maybe.'

¹⁹ 'Why?'

²⁰ 'I will never see you again.'

²¹ 'Don't worry, my boy.'

²² 'Didn't you want to have a shower?'

²³ 'Come on! Let's go!'

²⁴ 'See you!'

²⁵ 'See you!'

to these amorphous compatriots from everywhere... and nowhere.

And one afternoon on my way home from the bus station where a cashier had mocked my intent to travel to Spremberg, I realized how irrational borders were. Borders like the one that caged me away from Kai's arms and fists, were, I thought, nothing but obstacles to become a human. Obstacles to dress, to undress, and to reach across. They were a prison that confined me to the uniformized and senseless cell of a statal legality which, I was told, was mine. Then, after taking the oath to flush this spatial curfew down into the cesspit of administrative commandments, sacrosanct and dumb, I comprehended something else: as long as borders exist, the only people who may call themselves free are those who escaped the fangs of these jail walls – *m i g r a n t s*.

4.2 A homo-migrant

At the age of twenty-six, I was no longer a cherub. 64 kilograms light and raised 180 centimeters above mud level, I had become an exquisite striker – a demon ace – in the cocky and holy armada. Whenever I marched, platoons of soldiers of all ranks and titles – privates, sergeants, lieutenants, colonels, and generals – chased me with a sinful and careless devotion. To conscript and parade me, to discipline and court-martial me, and to execute me in the end. At swimming pools and bathhouses, in classrooms and restrooms, at parties, bars, and in the streets. Avid and compulsive | obsessed and severe. Was my body – slender, hairless, elastic, and overall boyish – a magnet that drew them to me? Or was it my character? Kind and arrogant | compassionate and indifferent | timid and confident | serene and violent | discreet and exhibitionistic |

restrained and limitless | poetic and pornographic – and all that at once.

Yet while my soft ears, gentle hands, and tough calves boosted my price high – as did the undisciplined qualities of my incongruous soul – my migratory status would sell me cheap. Wherever I'd lived, I wasn't like them – the full-rights citizens. No, I had never been enough. Not sufficiently blond, brunet, or red headed. Not sufficiently blue, green, or brown eyed. Not sufficiently Catholic, Lutheran, or atheist. Not that I desired to be that. What I needed, was to be like me – this coppery, dark blond, green-blue-eyed pagan – and to fuck him and let him fuck me diagonally, perpendicularly, and in parallel. Sadly, I'd never met myself. But I had seen the reflections of this bastardized Alexander in his migrant brothers who, like him, walked ill fitted to survive. For they were designed to exist instead of to live.

That year, I flew from Iceland to Madrid to familiarize myself with the city where I was going to spend two semesters of my university education – and as destiny would teach me several years of my life. A week sufficed to convince me I would love it. Joo!²⁶ I savored this exquisite mélange of Spaniards and handsome conquistadores from Morocco, Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Bulgaria, Romania, Nigeria, Togo, Gambia, and more. It did not feel like Europe; at least, not the Europe I was accustomed to, northward from the Pyrenean fence. Intoxicated and ecstatic, I smelled – I'd swear – the Andes, the Atlas, the Balkan Mountains, and the delta of the Niger.

One afternoon – like the many afternoons before – I waited for my bus at the Avenida-de-América subterranean intercambiador.²⁷ Heat – thirst – water. Soon I needed to pee. Yeah, I could hold my bladder upright and in line. I could. "All the same" – my urethra shouted – "the terminal's restrooms are

²⁶ 'Shit/fuck!'

²⁷ 'The terminal.'

too seductive!'. Since I had heard their roar for the first time and sensed their musky aroma and nauseating taste, they had been luring me into corruption. There, two floors under the ground, a gloomy mine brewed its whiffs and flavors, institutionalizing stink, piss, and cum into the landscape of fissured tiles and scraped paint. In the center – the pissoir wall. The industrial furnace that separated us, savages, from the civilized them | the smeltery of silence where steelworkers excavated lust and extorted it for love. On the periphery – guards who suspiciously inspected laborers, barking and chasing the crowds at times. Yet, the proletariat would not care | they always returned | fortified, stronger, in masses.

On that day, all of us, the workmates of the swing shift, were equally immature even though my own body was the least ripened. We gushed an erectile confidence and a rectal charm. Gabriel – the gods' lad – was slender like me. He wore auburn curls and smooth pale skin. He exhaled the Andes and perspired the Pampa. Nikolai – the conqueror and the most victorious of all people – was viciously muscular. His hair snowed Стара планина's coal²⁸ | his beard gusted the fresh blows of the Balkans. Mounir – the luminous | the light. The tallest, most burnished of us all. He exuded the aroma of the Atlas which, like his coils, radiated with a brown shade under the fluorescent sun of our foundry plant. And me, Alexander – the hero faggot and the defender of all his faggot brethren – cuddlable like mount Śnieżka

but feral like Esja | serene like Hel peninsula but volcanic like Reykjanes. That uncombed rascal who still refused to tie his shoelaces.

"Tienes un culo espectacular"²⁹ – said Gabriel softly and grabbed my left buttock. I barely spoke Spanish and answered mostly in French – "Ta bite, mm, tu polla,... elle est belle aussi".³⁰ He might not have understood this, so I looked at his cock and smiled. Now, he got it. Across the urinary oven, Nikolai and Mounir were stealing glimpses of us with their necks twisted in a leftward paralysis. I loved this peeping exposure. I lowered my jeans and briefs to my knees. "Hola"³¹ – I blinked. They echoed disclosing their accents and smirked. "Venga, follemos como dios manda"³² – salivated Gabriel. "Хайде"³³ – seconded Nikolai | "هيا"³⁴ – ricocheted Mounir.

We entered a cubicle. A paradise of smut and soot. To breed, we clicked in Spanish. But to swallow, we interjected in Bulgarian, French and Arabic too. "Joder"³⁵ – spat Gabriel, grinding Nikolai's prepuce | "Ей"³⁶ – shouted Nikolai and greased his finger in me | "Vas-y"³⁷ – I hissed to Mounir and curved like a crooked bandit | he exhaled "وخا"³⁸ comforted and euphoric – and our dance macabre began. We grazed and fed – following the tune of the bubonic accordion and the translucent cornet of life | gulping the pestilence and spewing the remedy. From cock to ass, from ass to mouth, and from mouth to cock. Forth, back, and across. Clock- and anticlockwise. Jo – – aver!

²⁸ 'Stara Planina (i.e., Balkan Mountains).'

²⁹ 'You've got an amazing ass.'

³⁰ 'Your cock, mm, your cock, ..., it is beautiful as well.'

³¹ 'Hi.'

³² 'Come on, let's fuck properly (lit. as God intended).'

³³ 'Come on.'

³⁴ 'Come on.'

³⁵ 'Shit/fuck.'

³⁶ '(H)ey.'

³⁷ 'Come on (lit. go ahead).'

³⁸ 'OK.'

Ай -- вѣй! Pute -- ouais! وا -- اي!³⁹ And this caphony of boundlessness would weld us into a single piece of steel: an alloy of iron and carbon, hard like a rock yet childishy smooth. Bloody and erect. No, there were no fuckers or fuckees | no bodies | no languages either. We melted into a Babel of membranes, intestines, and tongues. Into a melodic pulse of perishing and resurrecting. Into this rhythm:

We threw and slapped and bit and spat
We licked and sucked and sniffed and ducked
We begged and bent with no consent
We chased the prey and hunted fell

Ay va!	Sperm, spit and sweat
Упа!	Blood to redeem the debt
Merde!	Ulcers, cuts, and sores
وا! ⁴⁰	As if we'd never fucked before

We came. Sedated by our defenselessness and shame, we froze. Rotating – pulsating ---- radioactive. With our trousers and underwear on our ankles | with our t-shirts prostrated parentless. Abandoned by our backpacks, which we had tossed into the furthest corners of this stinky galaxy. There, in the gulag of filth, they lay lonesome, concealing embarrassment with their zips exposed and their straps and belts discolored. The exhibitionists camouflaged. Liars. Brrr.⁴¹ I could still feel the lads' slaps on my face and their cum on my cheeks. Paralyzing | scorching. My spit was still bulldozing their foreheads, chests, and pelvises. Melting them and milling. Ufff – puff – buff.⁴² We continued to wheeze with this locomotive steam that had projected us blindly into the

other person's sternum. And no dispatcher could halt us | no railway tracks could derail us | no station could offer us shelter. We were doomed – to explode and dissipate. Without a trace.

At that moment, I thought I did not want to be alive. I wanted to exist instead. I prayed with my frosty groin: disarticulate my bones and debone my joints! Carve me with a razor! Open my stomach with an axe! Resurrect me: force me to bleed till there is no pulse in these veins | incinerate me till all air is consumed | hurt me till there is no pain left. And make me vomit and shit and cum – till all my insides are prolapsed outwards. Till there is no me. Till I am everything. Till me is mine | till I am me.

Our shift was over. The lazy elevator dug up our cadavers to the surface. The old hairy foreman, already drunk and high on his smelly fingers, was about to clock us out when he spied our cum-stained trousers. Maricas inmigrantes⁴³ – he hammered. This slur soldered our balls, buttocks, and cocks into the sturdiest of armors. Therefore, by the entrance gate, we didn't hug || we tightly held fists instead. Hasta luego | чao | بسلام | à bientôt.⁴⁴ No, we were never to fuck again. But we would now carry our syndicate banner and wear our disgusting uniforms with pride. Across the barb-wired nations | at checkpoints and roadblocks | in interrogation rooms. And I – equally proud – would henceforth infect immigration officers with the pieces of the Pampa, the Balkans, and the Atlas that Gabriel, Nikolai, and Mounir had dumped in my pockets. Mmmm – I exhume this slingshot scent and Molotov-cocktail taste each time my brothers are called illegal(es). Gabriel and Nikolai left. “إلى أين أنت ذاهب، ألكسندر؟”⁴⁵

³⁹ A sequence of emotive interjections in Spanish, Bulgarian, French, and Arabic.

⁴⁰ A series of emotive interjections in Spanish, Bulgarian, French, and Arabic.

⁴¹ An onomatopoeia of shivering due to cold.

⁴² Onomatopoeias imitating steam.

⁴³ 'Immigrant faggots!'

⁴⁴ 'See you; so long; bye' in Spanish, Bulgarian, Arabic and French.

⁴⁵ 'Where are you going to, Alexander?'

– asked Mounir. “لا أعرف”⁴⁶ – I replied gently. “آجي، يلا، نمشيوا”⁴⁷ – he sneaked his palm under my t-shirt and drew me closer to his ribs. “إلى لا حديقة”⁴⁸ – I echoed, shy. His shoulder curved above my forehead, sheltering me from the heat. I sniffed the frescos that decorated his armpits. Salty hashish of oud. Mollifying | Sedative. I fell asleep instantly – in motion. I woke up on a park bench late in the evening. Alone || Serene. More than serene – complete. Before walking away, Mounir had covered me with his jersey. “Un soplo غرناطي”⁴⁹ – he must have whispered. Soft and poignant at once, this fragrance kept me anaesthetized. Absolved. Immune.

I wiped my dream-swollen eyes and suddenly spotted an inscription cut on my forearm:

“سوف أعود”.⁵⁰ I waited like a waif. Didn't I?

5 Evaluation

My experiences – both those presented in the two narratives and those drawing on the wider corpus of group-sex experiences described in the methodological part of the article – suggest that multilingualism is a common reality of GBMSM sex involving three or more ‘players’. Regardless of their geography (compare Spremberg/Germany with Madrid/Spain that feature in the narratives in sections 4.1 and 4.2), my group-sex encounters have overwhelmingly drawn on more than one language and multilingualism has been regular if the linguistic repertoires of the people who participated in group sex differed to some extent. In other words, should the use of more than one

language be possible (as is the case with the two stories introduced above), this has virtually always materialized. In fact, the commonness with which at least two languages have accompanied any group-sex event I attended is such that I associate multilingualism with sex almost instinctively. Like the scent of bleach, which excites me because my experiences have linked it to gay bathhouses and the activities performed there, so does multilingualism: it reminds me of the deeply diversified linguistic character of the group-sex encounters in which I participated.⁵¹

As expected, multilingualism tends to be more pronounced – both quantitatively and qualitatively – in those moments of sexual encounters in which verbalism is itself more visible (cf. Tewksbury 2002 and Andrason 2026 & under review). Specifically, when establishing the communicative channel verbally during the first, so-called pre-climactic phase, multilingualism transpires via interactives, especially, attention signals, response elicitors and response signals, as well as – although somewhat less prominently – via vocatives and directives (see *hallo*, *tschüss*, *hola*, *xaiüde*, and *يلا* in sections 4.1 and 4.2). These multilingual constructions tend to be short, concise, and when taking place in cruising places (whether gay LGBTQIA+ friendly or catering for the general public) often low in volume (compare with similar characteristics identified by Tewksbury (2002) and discussed in section 2). Once the contact and sexual interest are secured, this

⁴⁶ ‘I don't know... I can go anywhere.’

⁴⁷ ‘Come on, let's go!’

⁴⁸ ‘To the park (lit. garden).’

⁴⁹ ‘A whiff of Granada’.

⁵⁰ ‘I will return.’

⁵¹ The only exceptions are encounters in which no words have been spoken at all. However, such cases (extremely rare in my life) can be analyzed as neither monolingual nor multilingual.

pre-climactic multilingual verbality may gradually develop into genuine conversations: long, complex, and spoken in natural volume. At this step, multilingual speech may contain all types of vocabulary of both sentence grammar and interactive grammar and their combinations into phrases, clauses, and sentences (see my dialogue with Kai in section 4.1 and with Gabriel in section 4.2). During the subsequent phase – the climactic one – sentence grammar again cedes place to interactive grammar (cf. Andrason under review). At this stage, multilingual linguistic elements mostly transpire through interjections, directives, discourse markers, and evaluatives with each lexeme typically used holophrastically as independent non-elliptical utterances (see *jo* and *aver*, *aü* and *evü*, *pute* and *ouais*, and *اي* and *يا* in section 4.2). My data thus corroborate the predominance of interactives and the minimization of sentence grammar at climactic moments in GBMSM encounters identified in prior scholarship (see section 2). Lastly, in the post-climactic phase where regular speech gradually regains its position, complex multilingual conversations reemerge. These can continue long after leaving the scene where the group sex took place and lead to genuine dialogues with all types of phrasal and clausal structures that include both interactive and sentence-grammar categories (see the post-sex dialogue with Kai in section 4.1 and my closing conversation with Mounir in section 4.2). The final part of the post-climactic phase in which the speakers terminate their communicative channels again usually draws on interactives (see *noka* and *tshüss* in section 4.1 and *hasta luego*, *ya*, *بسلام* and *à bientôt* in section 4.2).

Two types of multilingual situations can be distinguished according to my GBMSM group-sex experiences: societal or, more cor-

rectly in this context, group multilingualism and individual multilingualism (Butler 2013, Stavans & Hoffmann 2015, Maher 2017). Group multilingualism emerges due to the use of several languages by different speakers. A canonical example of this (most sharply distinct from individual multilingualism) appeared when each person spoke monolingually in their language, yielding a shared multilingual soundscape of the entire event (or its part), nonetheless (see *joder*, *eü*, *وخا*, and *vas-y* uttered by Gabriel, Nikolai, Mounir, and me respectively in section 4.2). This type of group multilingualism, which may be labeled as a ‘disjoint’, has been infrequent in its pure form described above. (This infrequency could often be attributed to my own hyper-multilingualism and my ability to navigate between the various groups of speakers.) Rather, as illustrated by the two narratives, group multilingualism has regularly mixed disjoint multilingualism with a conjoint type. Conjoint group multilingualism occurs in situations where different participants share one or more varieties during an encounter. Consider German and, especially, Russian shared by my lovers and me in section 4.1, as well as Spanish that constituted a common medium in some parts of our interactions in section 4.2 (given that “to breed, we clicked in Spanish”). This complicates the interpretation of the above-mentioned four-way sequence as representing pure disjoint multilingualism; while within this conversational unit, the respective parts uttered were disjoint, Spanish functioned as a shared medium in the entire scene, making this example a hybrid case. Consequently, the disjoint/conjoint distinction is not categorical but instead operates on a continuum – a point consistent with

the cognitive-linguistic and prototype-theory framework outlined in section 3.

In my GBMSM group sex, ‘conjoint’ varieties have usually coincided with languages dominant across the world or in a country. Indeed, the varieties we shared would often respond to the geographic context in which a group-sex meetup occurred by centering (to different degrees) the language(s) of that area (see, again, German in section 4.1 and Spanish in section 4.2). Other languages – whether local yet not dominant or ‘imported’ due to intra- and inter-statal migration (see below) – have also contributed to group multilingualism, not only to its disjoint type but also (even if less prominently) to the conjoint type.

Individual multilingualism – or the use of more than one language by a single speaker – is well attested in group-sex events too. In this case, some lovers would each draw on two or more languages such that their multilingual repertoire (or at least part thereof) would be actualized in the exchanges that took place during a specific group-sex encounter. Indeed, most of my partners instantiated their multilingualism in this way (see Kai in section 4.1 and Mounir in section 4.2), whereas those who opted to remain monolingual were much fewer. This individual multilingual type was not only motivated by the geography of the group-sex event; it was also profoundly conditioned by the origin and life trajectory of the speaker, including schooling (see Russian in section 4.1). That is, a typical multilingual repertoire involved a dominant language (globally or regionally) as well as languages that were not dominant – both those that were co-official and recognized in their areas of use and those that were non-official and spoken by minorities. Many of these varieties were foreign to

the country or region in which we met and featured because of (our) (inter-/intra-statal) mobility and migration (e.g., Arabic and Bulgarian in section 4.2; see below).

My data reveal a highly diversified sample of languages recruited in group-sex events. This includes varieties from Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic families, e.g., those featuring in the narratives (see Bulgarian, Russian, Polish, German, Spanish, and French representing Slavonic, Germanic, and Romance linguistic branches and Arabic, a member of a Semitic branch), as well as languages from other phyla and Sprachbund areas absent in my stories but attested in my broader corpus: Niger-Congo (e.g., isiXhosa), Uralic and Finno-Ugric (e.g., Hungarian), and Altaic and Turkic (e.g., Turkish). While English has been common, it cannot be viewed as occupying a central position. In non-English speaking countries – e.g., Spain, France, Poland, and Morocco – English has certainly been less visible even when attested. Other languages, especially local official varieties (i.e., Spanish, French, Polish, and Arabic, respectively) or global ones (e.g., Russian – a language that dominated the Communist bloc – in section 4.1), including remaining colonial languages (such as Portuguese, French, and again Spanish) have often been more prominent. Only in English-speaking countries has English clearly governed our verbal communications. This holds true of the areas in which English is L1 or one of the languages that are L1; it also typifies areas where English is generally an L2 being harnessed for intergroup interactions by the population whose L1 is different. Importantly, such dominant languages (global, regional, and/or official) have featured in conversations even if none of the participants was their L1 speaker (see Russian in section 4.1).

Overall, the erasure of languages other than English has been much less evident than what typifies the linguistic landscapes of GBMSM spaces (cf. Motschenbacher 2020, Lucido Santos & Saisuwan 2023, Andrason 2026). This arguably reflects the agentive role of queer individuals in shaping the soundscape of our sexual encounters (see below). Indeed, while a contribution to the GBMSM visual verbal landscape is more restricted – often an immediate change is limited to graffiti (Andrason 2026) – the instant modification of the verbal soundscape of GBMSM sex seems to reside within the power of individual participants.

The above demonstrates that language has never been a barrier to me and my lovers. On the contrary, language has been the foundation of our connection. A visible exponent of this collective and empathetic spirit is the following fact: should a person not know the variety used by their interlocutor(s) or know it to a limited degree only, others would very often help them, acting as teachers – kind, patient, and accommodating (see the help with some words I received from Kai; cf. Andrason 2025). At least for my part, I have never felt judged or ridiculed for not being proficient in a particular language or marking it with my ‘accent’. On the contrary, the idiosyncrasies that colored our speech were regularly celebrated and considered some of the features that made us attractive in the eyes of other participants.

The two main classes of GBMSM multilingualism described above – i.e., group and individual – have commonly transpired through codeswitching and the two main codeswitching types distinguished in scholarship, i.e., alternational and insertional

codeswitching, are well attested in the group sex events I have participated in.

Alternational codeswitching is highly common. In compliance with the characteristics recognized in other language-contact situations (see Muysken 2000, Matras 2009), alternational codeswitching attested in GBMSM group sex lacks a single dominant language. Instead, it draws on two (or more) languages by juxtaposing them; importantly, each of these juxtaposed varieties contributes to the conversation in a more or less equal, though dissimilar, manner (see لا أعرف... *je peux marcher n'importe où* in section 4.2). GBMSM alternational codeswitching may appear within a single conversational turn or, quite the reverse, in a sequence of conversational turns. In the former case, the speech exploiting alternational codeswitching is produced by one individual participant (see the example quoted above). In the latter case, it is the entire conversation (or part thereof) produced by several participants that draws on the separate languages, with one participant speaking in his language (l_1), the next in another language (l_2) and so on. Such dialogical alternations are extremely frequent – arguably more frequent than the other type (see my dialogue with Kai in section 4.1, where to his question in German *warum?* I answered in (mostly) Russian Я больше никогда вас...*dich...не увижу*;⁵² see also the alternations of interactives between the four speakers in section 4.2). Alternational codeswitching featuring in GBMSM group sex attests to three syntactic variants: phrase-level reiterations – a phrasal construction in one language is repeated/paraphrased (or corrected) in another language (e.g., ...*vielleicht, может быть* in section 4.1); utter-

⁵² This clause contains an insertion in German (see further below).

ance-level comments – a construction in a language is elaborated on in another language (e.g., *ich denke твои труссы тоже красивые* in the same section); and independent messages – while discursively related, each construction constitutes an autonomous structure (cf. Matras 2009: 105-106). The first two variants are typical of alternations taking place in single conversational turns; the last variant is particularly prominent in dialogical exchanges. Overall, switches tend to occur at clausal boundaries, e.g., when fronting and dislocating peripheral elements (e.g., *не волнуясь, mein Knabe* in section 4.1); when linking, i.e., coordinating, subordinating, and juxtaposing clauses in a syndetic and asyndetic manner (see again *ich denke твои труссы тоже красивые* in section 4.1); and when taking turns in a dialogue (see the various examples in the two narratives, some of which were mentioned above). In all such instances, elements switched are neither governed nor dependent syntactically but are rather marked by flagging, e.g., an interactive (see the interjection *эй* marking the transition from a German frame *das ist majtki... труссы*⁵³ to a Russian frame *эй, белые, как у тебя* in section 4.1), a dummy word (see the filler *мм* separating *ta bite* and *tu polla* in section 4.2), a pause (see a moment of silence between لا أعرف and *je peux marcher n'importe où* in the same section), or a rotation of interlocutors. As is typical of alternational codeswitching in general (Muysken 2000: 97-105), the length of each switch and the number of elements included may (although need not) be considerable with all types of morphemes, constituents, and lexical classes being attested, whether those of sentence grammar or interactive grammar.

Insertional codeswitching seems somewhat less prominent. As is true of this language-contact strategy more generally (Muysken 2000, Matras 2009), insertional codeswitching centers the grammar of one language (so-called matrix code) when featuring in GBMSM group sex. This matrix-code variety dominates the entire communication exchange (or a part of it) by providing the frame that hosts insertions from any other languages (so-called embedded codes). All the cases of insertional codeswitching documented by me appear in single conversational turns each being produced by an individual speaker (see *das ist majtki* in section 4.1). Insertions may additionally alternate languages, attesting to mixed insertional-alternational switches, as in *das ist majtki... труссы*. This layered sentence consists of the German matrix (*das ist*) and two alternating phrase-level insertions, in Polish (*majtki*) and Russian (*труссы*).

The dominating position of the matrix code in GBMSM group-sex communications mentioned above transpires through the following fact: the matrix code donates the main bulk of the lexicon and grammar both quantitatively and qualitatively (see *я больше никогда вас...dich...не увижу* where the Russian matrix hosts a German insertion in section 4.1). That is, most morphemes and words originate in the matrix code; the matrix code determines the morphosyntactic structure of an utterance, both its word-order and morpheme-order; and contributes functional morphemes that are conditioned by elements located outside their own immediate phrases. The matrix code also anchors the predication by donating the main (or finite) verb and determining its argument

⁵³ This German frame contains two insertions: one in Polish and the other in Russian.

structure, as well as by projecting semantic roles to the relevant constituents (see again *das ist majtki*). In doing so, the properties of the matrix code featuring in GBMSM group sex fully agree with the characteristics of this type of code observed in other social interactions (cf. Muysken 2000: 65-67, Myers-Scotton 2002: 59-60, Matras 2009: 131, 134).

The embedded code present in GBMSM group sex is equally congruent with the embedded code features reported in linguistic scholarship. To begin with, the embedded code can be inserted in two ways in conversation during GBMSM group-sex meetups. It can be morphologically adapted by exhibiting elements provided by the matrix code (e.g., morphological shields such as inflections) or, from my experience, more regularly, it is introduced as ‘a bare island’ without matrix-code marking (cf. Myers-Scotton 2002: 54, 139-140). In both cases, the elements of the embedded code are congruent and categorially equivalent with the respective elements of the matrix code if these were present (see *dich* inflected in the accusative as required by the Russian verb *видеть* ‘see’ in section 4.1; cf. Muysken 2000: 4, 31, Myers-Scotton 2002: 67, 113, Matras 2009: 131). The material inserted tends to consist of single words or constituents (e.g., a lexeme or a phrase), may occupy any position within a clause, and typically appears in nested structures being governed or selected, for instance, in terms of functioning as the object of a verb or the complement of a preposition (see *сладкий* in *ein сладкий Junge* in section 4.1; see again *dich* in *я больше никогда вас...dich...не увижу*; cf. Muysken 2000: 62-63).

The distinct visibility of the different types of morphemes in insertions also conforms to general tendencies observed across languages

(cf. Myers-Scotton 2006). That is, content morphemes – i.e., referential lexemes that receive or assign thematic roles (Myers-Scotton 2006: 248) – predominate among all insertions. Within these, nouns and noun phrases are the most frequent being followed by verbs, adjectives and adverbs, as well as prepositional phrases in adverbial functions (see again *majtki* in *das ist majtki* and *сладкий* in *ein сладкий Junge*). Early system morphemes – which like content morphemes belong to the mental lexicon but specifically “flesh out the meaning” of content morphemes (Myers-Scotton 2006: 268) – feature much less prominently. The occasional examples include articles, gender determiners, and plural markers (see *حديقة la إلى* in section 4.2). Late system morphemes – the main function of which is to “cement” content morphemes into phrases and clauses (Myers-Scotton 2006: 268-269) – are virtually absent in switches in my data and indeed do not feature in the two stories in section 4. This holds true of both of their subclasses: bridge and outsider late system morphemes. The former morphemes establish links between phrases, yielding larger constituents, such as the possessive markers *of* and *’s* in English. The latter morphemes draw their function/form on other constituents and phrases or the entire discourse – all of which is located outside the immediate phrase containing the morpheme itself (Myers-Scotton 2006: 269-270). The examples of this – again, unattested in my data – are subject/object markers and case affixes. Overall, among all function words, interactives (cf. Heine 2023) are the most common (compare with Muysken 2000 and Matras 2009: 137-138 who use the term ‘utterance modifiers’). In contrast to lexicon and morphology, the use of only phonetic material as part of insertion – e.g., producing a matrix-code word with a deliberate

embedded-code pronunciation – is rare, even if occasionally attested.

While communications accompanying GBMSM group sex certainly draw on the various strategies associated with codeswitching discussed above, for some participants like me, the mixing of the varieties we used and the nature of the multilingual idiolect we spoke in its totality significantly transcend codeswitching *sensu stricto*. Indeed, the speech I deployed during GBMSM group sex cannot be reduced to an additive (linear and resultant) combination of autonomous and disconnected language systems, the so-called named languages (e.g., Polish, Spanish, French, Arabic, and German as well as languages not featured in either narrative, e.g., Icelandic, Swedish, isiXhosa, English, and several others in my case). Similarly, my linguistic activity cannot be limited to a mere act of switching between separate language systems. Differently put, the multilingualism I have manifested is not equivalent to a pluralized monolingualism, and the linguistic abilities I have utilized cannot be explained as a sum of pluralized monolingual skills (Andrason 2020 drawing on García & Wei 2014: 43). On the contrary, I have harnessed the grammatical and lexical resources that were available in external named languages by recombining them into a “holistic complex mental grammar” – my organic idiolect, non-linear and emergent, heterogeneous yet patterned, and overall coherent (Andrason 2020: 236). Therefore, instead of focusing on named languages as is typical of codeswitching (theory), my repertoire transpiring in GBMSM group sex – and the repertoire of some lovers of mine – is better explained in terms of an integrated unitary linguistic performance known as translanguaging (García 2009, Canagarajah

2011, García & Flores 2012, García & Otheguy 2014, García & Wei 2014, Mazzaferro 2018, Sabino 2018). It is so because language blending has constituted a daily routine and a consistent praxis rather than a behavior instantiated on rare occasions. In other words: mixing varieties has been the norm, while keeping them separated has been the exception (Andrason 2020, cf. García 2009, Pennycook 2016: 212, Mazzaferro 2018: 7). Furthermore, the blending has often been so intense and drawn on so many language structures that its classification in terms of alternational/insertional and matrix/embedded is problematic. Even more important, for me, this mixing has been deliberate – I did not have to resort to it and when I did I did so on my own terms.

As is characteristic of translanguaging (García & Wei 2014: 24, 42, Mazzaferro 2018: 3-4), my linguistic performance at GBMSM group-sex events has regularly vindicated and centered my agency, creativity, and freedom – as well as the agency, creativity, and freedom of my lovers. Specifically, language mixing has often constituted a resistance tool with which I aimed to combat (the idolization of) monolingualism(s), puritan linguistic norms and, above all, nationalisms that tend to necessitate a single, uniform, and centralized language system to defend and expand their equally monolithic ideologies (see Wei 2011, García & Wei 2014, Mazzaferro 2018). Conversely, my promiscuous linguistic performance has served as a way of liberating me and my lovers from the oppressions exerted by the powers controlling our linguistic ecosystems (cf. Andrason 2020). It has not only functioned as a conscious linguistic technique but also formed a life philosophy (cf. Wei 2011, García & Wei 2014, Mazzaferro 2018) – an attitude enabling

me to transform both the spaces in which I made love and the relations I have developed with those who made love to me. Metaphorically speaking, it acted as an auditory graffiti with which we painted the walls of our soundscape, challenging and contesting the state(s) and its (or their) linguistic normativity.

As is further typical of translanguaging (Wei 2018, Mazzaferro 2018), the multilingualism of our interactions and the language(s) some of us practiced during GBMSM group sex can be attributed to mobility. In my case and in the case of some of my lovers, this mobility has been extreme – we have traversed many places, whether provinces, countries, or continents. This means that the multilingualism attested in GBMSM group-sex events as well as the multilingual repertoires practiced there by several of us have been shaped by and reflect our lives – they are the synchronic images of our complex (more or less) nomadic biographies (cf. Blommaert & Rampton 2011, Blommaert & Backus 2013, Mohr & Ferrara 2024). In other words, it is primarily mobility that produced the multilingual communication during GBMSM group sex as the trajectories of different lovers intersected at a particular time and place. It is also primarily mobility that allowed many of us to develop our multilingual repertoires – as we had travelled during our lives (see Andrason 2025) – eventually enabling us to engage in multilingual conversations at concrete group-sex meetups. Overall, the linguistic diversity of GBMSM group-sex communication – both at a group and individual level – is a linguistic mirror of the superdiverse world (Blommaert & Rampton 2011) which we, the lovers, have had to navigate through.

While mobility has, in its totality, been responsible for multilingualism at GBMSM group-sex events, the key factor in the production of this multilingualism has been an inter-statal movement, in particular. The displacement across countries itself transpired through two main variants: more temporary without altering one's main residence or more permanent involving the change of one's place of residence and thus their resettlement. The former is visiting in essence, like tourism; the latter constitutes genuine migration. Although the visiting type has been common (see the journey to Spremberg described in section 4.1), the migratory type can be regarded as equally or even more frequent. From my experience, migration-driven multilingualism has certainly been more critical for GBMSM group-sex multilingualism I have witnessed. Indeed, some of the most meaningful conversations and repeated sexual encounters which led to attachments and friendships were produced by participants who were migrants instead of being occasional tourists. Importantly, it is migration (rather than tourism) that was the principal cause of the acquisition of a language dominating in each geography (a country or a region) and its eventual presence during GBMSM group sex. And it is migration (rather than tourism) that was responsible for the larger part of the multilingual repertoires of the lovers, subsequently deployed while having sex in a group. An exemplary case of the importance of migration for GBMSM group-sex multilingualism is my own trajectory and resettlement across Europe and Africa – my state-nomadic existence in pursuit of (sexual) freedom, better education and job opportuni-

ties, and romantic relationships (cf. Andrason 2025).⁵⁴

The relevance of inter-statal mobility transpires in another way. Our status as migrants – whether documented or undocumented and whether legal or illegal – has constituted the essential element in developing a shared consciousness of being *the other* in the host country and eventually in embracing this condition. Often considered as less than native citizens to the point of being insulted and abused, we reclaimed this migrant status as our citizenship – our ethnicity. We reclaimed the word and the circumstance described by it – which has at times been weaponized against us as a slur – and considered it a source of pride (see the narrative in 4.2). In doing so, we defied homo-nationalism which coopts LGBTQIA+ struggles for supremacist ideologies: nationalistic as well as Euro- and Western-centered (see Puar 2007). For instance, as an East European originating from a poor country, my initial migrant status was low, and I often faced discrimination and humiliation. After this country entered the European Union and gradually became economically thriving and, equally important, once I could deploy another, stronger passport, even if not from the EU, I was no longer placed in the same category as many other migrants. Being aware of the asymmetries of power within my encounters

(see footnote 54) – especially evident once my own position improved – my solidarity with migrants remains intact, and so does my migratory identity.⁵⁵ In other words, my race and gender, as well as my legal position, education, and economic condition – which have changed across decades – have not substantially altered my relationship to migration and migrants. My multilingual group-sex praxis is a direct testimony to this long-term espousal of migration as an attitude towards life and my camaraderie with people who migrate.

This commitment to the cause of migrants reflects a broader political consciousness and the view of borders and state territoriality as arbitrary and unjust barriers to our humanity (see the final part of the two narratives). To fight this oppression – and, again, to resist the monolingual nationalistic discourse and ideology that underlie it (see above) – we deployed our diverse linguistic repertoires. At least during group sex encounters, our multilingualism, codeswitching, and translanguaging – as well as our statal and racial diversity – have persistently subverted and sabotaged the socio-linguistic makeup (often the uniformity) of the places in which we lived. Crucially, each time faced with the effect that our linguistic and carnal promiscuity had on some local ‘spectators’ (see the man who called us *maricas inmigrantes* ‘migrant faggots’ in 4.2), our espousal

⁵⁴ As I explained in my earlier study (Andrason 2025: 93), this displacement “should not be confused with sexual tourism”, especially in situations where a person endowed with privilege and power travels to exploit people with little or no privilege and power. Indeed, “I have never travelled to have sex, nor have I sought sex in my journeys. [...] Rather, the bodies and minds of my lovers whom I have [...] encountered [...] and whom I have profoundly admired and respected have taken me to new languages and, sometimes, new places” (ibid. 93). I have welcomed them and invited them to “open [...] my body and mind [...] to their humanity” (ibid.). Yet, when engaging in sex (and interacting with others more generally), I have always reminded myself of the privilege and power I hold. I did so even when I was regarded as an undesirable Eastern European migrant – poor, orphaned, and with neither social nor economic capital at my disposal – and chased away with a characteristic refrain “go back to your country!”. Even then, my “chasers” considered me somewhat less “inferior” and “sub-human” than my many other migrant brothers.

⁵⁵ In contrast, I repudiate the sanitized and racist term ‘expat’.

of this political consciousness grew stronger. Gradually, we became proud of who we were.

The adoption of the term ‘migrant’ as one’s identity and the reinterpretation of this word – quite negative in the mass media and public discourses – as a source of self-respect, is related to the practice of slur reclamation, common in marginalized communities. This strategy is especially patent in the repossession of expressions that dehumanize members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Brontsema 2004, Birch-Bayley 2019, Jeshion 2020) such as ‘faggot’ (see my self-description as *the hero faggot and the defender of all his faggot brethren*) and its Spanish equivalent, *marica* (as part of *maricas inmigrantes*, intended as an insult by a person who recognized our sexuality and citizenship status). As was the case with the designation ‘migrant’, being called faggots raised our political awareness, transforming this word from a cruel slur to a linguistic Molotov cocktail of defiance and, perhaps, pride (see Andrason forthcoming (b)).

Overall, this study demonstrates that desire can be understood as the overarching principle of language acquisition (cf. Andrason 2025). Desire led us to engage multilingually in a group-sex setting. Desire pushed me into the arms of my lovers and their repertoires; inspired me to acquire their languages more proficiently; and shifted my linguistic education from classrooms to less formal contexts where I was either exposed to new varieties or afforded the chance to practice the languages I already knew and improve my fluency in them.

In the end, to answer my research questions: my GBMSM-group-sex experiences exemplified with two lyrical narratives demonstrate that multilingualism constitutes a pervasive characteristic of GBMSM group sex. Two canonical types of multilingual situations are

attested, i.e., societal/group and individual, in which a highly diversified sample of languages is recruited. Multilingualism transpires through codeswitching, both alternational and insertional, as well as a more integrated and unitary linguistic performance, translanguaging. Multilingualism is primarily attributed to mobility (especially inter-statal and migratory) and the development and espousal of migrant status as one’s “ethnic” identity, as well as desire.

I hope that the present study has shed some light on GBMSM group-sex multilingualism and the relationship between counter-normative sexualities and multilingualism more broadly. When assessing the significance of the findings presented above, one must nevertheless consider two important limitations of my research. First, my method of data compilation, which was *a posteriori* and involved reflections, heavily relies on my memory and reconstruction of events that happened in the past. As explained in section 3, my data were gathered neither in *situ* nor, in some cases, close to the time of the respective events. In that part of the article, I also noted that this limitation was intrinsic to the autoethnographic method. I hope, however, that the systematicity with which I compiled my experiences and the care with which I continuously annotated and revised them have helped me avoid idealizing my past and have allowed me to recreate the relevant events in a manner that is faithful to how I experienced them at the time – although, as I discussed in section 3, I am more interested in narrative truth and phenomenological authenticity than historical accuracy.

Second and more importantly, my conclusions should not be universalized. This is evident given the choice of autoethnography as my

method. Certainly, the regularity with which my sexual encounters were multilingual might largely have been motivated and encouraged by myself – my character and my ideology. That is, I have always been interested in meeting people from different backgrounds, consciously eschewing any cultural, ethnic, racial, and eventually linguistic uniformity, especially by decentering my own cultures, ethnicities, and race. This in turn has persistently lowered the “risk” of meeting the partners whose linguistic repertoires would be identical to mine and the other group-sex participants and those who would be monolingual, ultimately favoring and fomenting the multilingual soundscape of our meetings. Perhaps, like birds of a feather, we have flocked together searching for our multilingual selves in the minds and bodies of our multilingual lovers. Ultimately, my text does not speak for everyone – it speaks for me. I am however convinced that the reality I described is not mine only. It is shared, to various extents, by several others. After all, it is (or it was) the reality of Kai, Mounir, and the remaining protagonists of my narratives, as well as several men I have met while hugging, kissing, sucking, and fucking in groups. Because of this and in addition to drawing on decades-long experience, my study is not anecdotal even if it is autoethnographic. I hope, therefore, that you will not consider my study as “narcissistic [...], self-indulgent [...], poorly written, unscientific non-research” (Blinne 2012: 967). But if you do, “surely” – as Blinne writes – “there is room in our world for multiple perspectives” (ibid. 971). I can live with that.

A much more important question is “What do you see when you look at me?” (Blinne 2012: 967).

6 (In lieu of) conclusion

Raw, rough, and reckless. That's how I take it | that's how I sense it – reality. I have no foreskin to shield me. Just wounds and sores opened widely, infected and infested. Corroded, stained, rotting. I scoop one of these lesions with a toothed saw and set it on fire. It does not burn! For this is not flesh. It is excrement mixed with tears. The celestial shit that I have inherited - - - from myself. Yet it is through these wounds and sores that I feel | and it is through them that others feel me in return. My only currency – me. Like an irrational maggot, I impulsively empty my pockets and pay with my corpse to explore the corpses of my delinquent fellows. This is our souk | dildo blacksmiths, leather craftsmen, and testicular straw-plaiters --- all of us, the luscious cannibals of self-iteration. Rehearsing our own agony.

One afternoon, Kai and Mounir saw me at the souk, trading with a carpet vendor. They said none of these carpets would take me where I wished to go. I immediately left the stand and followed the lads. We entered a hammam. We washed our bodies in mint tea | rubbed them with orange zest blended with honey. We could not resist being us. We smuggled saliva for urine and trafficked groin's moisture for cum. Kai and Mounir sealed me with their arms. Aggressive but docile. Intoxicating. They chained me, unchained me, and chained me again. “Jetzt!”⁵⁶ I whispered. “الآن هو الوقت.”⁵⁷ And suddenly, everything turned harmonious:

Kai and Mounir broke my neck, removed my spine and draped my skin on it. They fastened this mast of me to their chests, and we sailed away. The

⁵⁶ ‘Now!’

⁵⁷ ‘Now is the time.’

three of us – and the sperm, sweat, spit, and piss of all those with whom we had shared our bodies in the past and would share them again in the future. The Batavia I had always dreamt of. We would crack waves and perforate continents, sculpting fresh shores, cliffs, and archipelagos. We were fearless | insolent | defiant. Unrepentant. Us – asesinos sin estado.⁵⁸

Immoral?

I m m o r t a l. Before we died | before we had been born.

References

- Andrason, Alexander. 2020. Сашко-lect – The translanguaged grammar of a hyper-multilingual global nomad. PART 1. Theoretical considerations. *Studia Linguistica Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis* 137: 229–243. <https://doi.org/10.4467/20834624sl.20.019.12981>
- Andrason, Alexander. 2025. Language repertoire as radical queer love: A boy's journey. *Boyhood Studies* 18 (1): 67–97. <https://doi.org/10.3167/bhs.2024.1126OF2>
- Andrason, Alexander. 2026. Radical homo-scapes | The linguistic landscape of a gay sauna in Africa. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics PLUS* 70: 1–40. <https://doi.org/10.5842/70-0-1066>
- Andrason, Alexander. Forthcoming (a). The linguistic landscape of male homosexual bathhouses: An erotic embodied autoethnography of non-verbal signage. *Journal of Bodies, Sexualities, and Masculinities*.
- Andrason, Alexander. Forthcoming (b). The faggot me. *Lambda Nordica*.
- Andrason, Alexander. Under review. To *Lautréamont* academic discourse | The language of GBMSM (gay, bisexual and other men-who-have-sex-with-men) anal interactions.
- Aronson, Ronald. 2022. Albert Camus. In Edward Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/camus/>
- Baudinette, Thomas. 2017. The spatialisation of desire in a Japanese gay district through signage. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16: 500–527.
- Birch-Bayley, Nicole. 2019. A queer word: Linguistic reclamation through political activism in the case of queers against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA). *The English Languages: History, Diaspora, Culture* 5: 16–33.
- Blinne, Kristen. 2012. Auto(erotic)ethnography. *Sexualities* 15: 953–977. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460712459153>
- Blommaert, Jan & Ad Backus. 2013. Superdiverse repertoires and the individual. In Ingrid de Saint-Georges & Jean-Jacques Weber (eds.), *Multilingualism and Multimodality*, pp.

⁵⁸ 'Stateless murderers.'

- 11–32. Rotterdam: Sense. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-266-2_2
- Blommaert, Jan & Ben Rampton. 2011. Language and superdiversity. *Diversities* 13.2: 3–21.
- Brontsema, Robin. 2004. A queer revolution: Reconceptualizing the debate over linguistic reclamation. *Colorado Research in Linguistics* 17: 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.25810/dky3-zq57>
- Butler, Yuko Goto. 2013. Bilingualism/Multilingualism and second-language acquisition. In Tej Bhatia & William Ritchie (eds.), *The Handbook of Bilingualism and Multilingualism*, pp. 109–136. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118332382.ch5>
- Canagarajah, Suresh. 2011. Translanguaging in the classroom: Emerging issues for research and pedagogy. *Applied Linguistics Review* 2.1: 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110239331.1>
- Cashman, Holly. 2018. Sexuality and bilingualism. In Kira Hall & Rusty Barrett (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190212926.013.22>
- Colin, René-Pierre. 1988. *Zola, renégats et alliés: La République naturaliste*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon.
- Ellis, Carolyn. 2007. Telling secrets, revealing lives. Relational ethics in research with intimate other. *Qualitative Inquiry* 13: 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406294947>
- Ellis, Carolyn. 2008. Autoethnography. In Lisa Given (ed.), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, pp. 48–51. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Erard, Michael. 2012. *Babel no more: The Search for the World's Most Extraordinary Language Learners*. New York: Free Press.
- Evangelista, John. 2014. Gaze in the dark: Sexual discourses and practices in gay bathhouses. *Philippine Sociological Review* 62: 39–64.
- Evans, Vyvyan & Melanie Green. 2006. *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Finlay, Linda. 2002. Negotiating the swamp: The opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research* 2: 209–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410200200205>
- Finlay, Linda. 2006. The body's disclosure in phenomenological research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3: 19–30. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0510a>
- Finlay, Linda. 2008. A dance between the reduction and reflexivity: Explicating the “phenomenological psychological attitude”. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 39: 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916208x311601>

- Finlay, Linda. 2009. Embracing researcher subjectivity in phenomenological research: A response to Ann Scott. *European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy* 4: 13–19.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Freire, Paulo. 1993. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- García, Ofelia. 2009. *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- García, Ofelia & Nelson Flores. 2012. Multilingual pedagogies. In Marilyn Martin-Jones, Adrian Blackledge & Angela Creese (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism*, pp. 232–246. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203154427.ch13>
- García, Ofelia & Ricardo Otheguy. 2014. Spanish and Hispanic bilingualism. In Manel Lacorte (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Hispanic Applied Linguistics*, 639–659. London: Routledge.
- García, Ofelia & Li Wei. 2014. *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Haubrich, Dennis, Ted Myers, Liviana Calzavara, Karen Ryder & Wendy Medved. 2004. Gay and bisexual men's experiences of bathhouse culture and sex: 'Looking for love in all the wrong places'. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 6: 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050310001607241>
- Heine, Bernd. 2023. *The Grammar of Interactives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holman-Jones, Stacy. 2005. Autoethnography. In Norman Denzin & Yvonna Lincoln (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 763–790. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Holmes, Dave, Patrick O'Byrne & Denise Gastaldo. 2007. Setting the space for sex: Architecture, desire and health issues in gay bathhouses. *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 44.2: 273–284. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2005.11.032>
- Hooker, Cliff. 2011. Introduction to Philosophy of Complex Systems: A: Part A: Towards a framework for complex systems. In Cliff Hooker (ed.), *Philosophy of Complex Systems*, pp. 3–90. Amsterdam: Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-444-52076-0.50001-8>
- Jakobsen, Janet R. & Ann Pellegrini. 2003. *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*. New York: New York University Press.
- Janda, Laura. 2015. Cognitive linguistics in the year 2015. *Cognitive Semantics* 1: 131–154. <https://doi.org/10.1163/23526416-00101005>
- Jeshion, Robert. 2020. Pride and prejudiced: On the reclamation of slurs. *Gräzer Philosophische Studien* 97: 106–137. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18756735-09701007>

- Kraftl, Peter. 2017. Memory and autoethnographic methodologies in children's geographies: Recalling past and present childhoods. In Ruth Evans, Louise Holt & Tracey Skelton (eds.), *Methodological Approaches, Geographies of Children and Young People*, pp. 23–45. Singapore: Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-89-7_13-1
- Langarita Adiego, Jose Antonio. 2019. On sex in fieldwork: Notes on the methodology involved in the ethnographic study of anonymous sex. *Sexualities* 22: 1253–1267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460717716581>
- Leap, William. 1996. *Word's Out: Gay Men's English*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Leavy, Patricia. 2015. *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. New York: Guilford.
- Lucido Santos, Joey & Payadee Saisuwan. 2023. 'Dream boy' and 'hotmale'. The semiotic landscape of queer space in Bangkok. *MANUSYA: Journal of Humanities* 26: 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1163/26659077-25010025>
- Maher, John. 2017. *Multilingualism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Manalansan, Martin. 1995. 'Performing' the Filipino gay experiences in America: Linguistic strategies in a transnational context. In William Leap (ed.), *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon: Authenticity, Imagination, and Appropriation in Lesbian and Gay Languages*, pp. 249–266. Newark: Gordon and Breach.
- Manalansan, Martin. 2003. *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Matras, Yaron. 2009. *Language Contact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mazzaferro, Gerardo. 2018. Translanguaging as everyday practice. An introduction. In Gerardo Mazzaferro (ed.), *Translanguaging as Everyday Practice*, pp. 1–12. Cham: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2019.1615072>
- Milani, Tommaso. 2013. Are 'queers' really 'queer'? Language, identity and same-sex desire in a South African online community. *Discourse & Society* 24.5: 615–633. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513486168>
- Milani, Tommaso & Koki Kapa. 2015. Ready-to-wear sexual politics: The semiotics of visibility on Wits Pride T-shirts. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus* 46: 79–103. <https://doi.org/10.5842/46-0-671>
- Mohr, Susanne & Lindsay Ferrara. 2024. Setting the scene: Informal language learning and socialization in additional languages. In Susanne Mohr & Lindsay Ferrara (eds.), *Learning Languages, Being Social: Informal Language Learning and Socialization in Additional Languages*, pp. 1–15. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110794670-001>

- Motschenbacher, Heiko. 2020. Walking on Wilton Drive: A linguistic landscape analysis of a homonormative space. *Language & Communication* 72: 25–43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2020.02.002>
- Muysken, Pieter. 2000. *Bilingual Speech. A Typology of Code-Mixing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Myers-Scotton, Carol. 1993. *Duelling Languages. Grammatical Structure in Codeswitching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Myers-Scotton, Carol. 2002. *Contact Linguistics: Bilingual Encounters and Grammatical Outcomes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Myers-Scotton, Carol. 2006. *Multiple Voices. An Introduction to Bilingualism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Myers-Scotton, Carol & Janice Jake. 2000. Four types of morpheme: Evidence from aphasia, codeswitching, and second language acquisition. *Linguistics* 38: 1053–1100.
- Olmos-Vega, Francisco, Renée Stalmeijer, Lara Varpio & Renate Kahlke. 2023. A practical guide to reflexivity in qualitative research: AMEE guide no. 149. *Medical Teacher* 45: 241–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159x.2022.2057287>
- Paglia, Camille. 1990. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. New Heaven: Yale University Press.
- Pennycook, Alastair. 2016. Mobile times, mobile terms: The trans-super-poly-metro movement. In Nikolas Coupland (ed.), *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical Debates*, pp. 201–216. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781107449787.010>
- Perez Toledo, Rodrigo. 2023. In the saunas I'm either invisible or camouflaged. Colonial fantasies and imaginations in Sydney's gay saunas. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 52: 824–848. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912416231175866>
- Filler, Ingrid. 2002. *Bilingual Couples Talk: The Discursive Construction of Hybridity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Plummer, Ken. 1995. *Telling Sexual Stories*. London: Routledge.
- Puar, Jasbir. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Pujolar, Joan. 2008. Gender and bilingualism: Connecting experiences and theories. In José Santaemilia & Patricia Bou (eds), *Gender and Sexual Identities in Transition: International Perspectives*, pp. 1–23. New-castle: Cambridge Scholars Publishers.
- Rowlett, Benedict. 2020. Second language socialization in the margins: Queering the paradigm. *Multilingua* 39.6: 631–662. <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2019-0057>
- Rubin, Gayle. 2011. *Deviations*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Sabino, Robin. 2018. *Languaging without Languages: Beyond metro-, multi-, poly-, pluri- and translanguaging*. Leiden: Brill.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1963. *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*. [Translated by George Braziller]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sierra Madero, Abel. 2012. Walls talk. Homoerotic networks and sexual graffiti in public washroom in Havana. *Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad – Revista Latinoamericana* 12: 13–36. <https://doi.org/10.1590/s1984-64872012000600002>
- Spatz, Ben. 2017. Embodied research: A methodology. *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 13: 1–31.
- Spence, Donald. 1982. *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton.
- Spoto, Stephanie. 2014. Teaching against hierarchies: An anarchist approach. *The Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 7.8: 78–92.
- Stavans, Anat & Charlotte Hoffmann. 2015. *Multilingualism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tattelman, Ira. 1997. The meaning at the wall: Tracing the gay bathhouse. In Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthilliete & Yolanda Retter (eds.), *Queers in Space, Communities, Public Places and Sites of Resistance*, 391–406. Seattle: Bay Press.
- Tattelman, Ira. 1999. Speaking to the gay bath house: Communicating in sexually charged spaces. In William Leap (ed.), *Public Sex / Gay Space*, pp. 71–94. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tewksbury, Richard. 1996. Cruising for sex in public places: The structure and language of men's hidden, erotic worlds. *Deviant Behavior* 17: 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.1996.9968012>
- Tewksbury, Richard. 2002. Bathhouse intercourse: Structural and behavioral aspects of an erotic oasis. *Deviant Behavior* 23: 75–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/016396202317192035>
- Wei, Li. 2011. Moment analysis and translanguaging space: Discursive construction of identities by multilingual Chinese youth in Britain. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43.5: 1222–1235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.07.035>
- Wei, Li. 2018. Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. *Applied Linguistics* 39.1: 9–30. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amx039>

09

Voices of Resistance
Queere Stimmen, die Cyborgs und
Hybridität als Widerstand
Eine Voice Performance

09

Voices of Resistance Queere Stimmen, die Cyborgs und Hybridität als Widerstand Eine Voice Performance

Yuri Walter

This is the transcript of the original audio contribution published here:
https://journals.ub.uni-koeln.de/index.php/the_mouth/article/view/12442



Diese künstlerisch-theoretische Voice-Performance verhandelt Theorien der Stimme im Spannungsfeld von Queer Theory, Posthumanismus, Cultural Studies und Popkultur. Im Zentrum der theoretischen Auseinandersetzung steht die Rolle der (queeren) Stimme in Prozessen der Bedeutungskonstruktion, ihrer Verknüpfung mit (geschlechtlichen) Zuschreibungen sowie den damit verbundenen patriarchalen Macht- und Kontrollmechanismen, die sich in misogynen Mythen über die Stimme widerspiegeln.

Dem stellt die Performance Donna Haraways Cyborg-Mythos als theoretisches Konzept und narratives Mittel entgegen, um zu zeigen, wie sich das emanzipative Potenzial von Hybridität, Ambiguität und Fluidität sowie das wechselseitige Zusammenwirken von Mythos und Werkzeug im Zusammenhang mit der Stimme entfaltet. Die queeren Musiker*innen SOPHIE (†), Dorian Electra und Arca unterwandern hegemoniale Regulierungsversuche, indem sie Vocal Technologies, synthetische Klänge und Gesang nutzen, um hybrider Identität Ausdruck zu verleihen und eigene emanzipative Mythen zu konstruieren. Durch das Zusammenspiel von Technik mit Cyborg-Metaphorik, parodistischem Humor oder der positiven Aneignung von Monstrosität werden eigene Wege der Selbstermächtigung gefunden.

Stilistisch arbeitet die Performance multilingual und multimodal, indem Natur- und Tieraufnahmen, gepitchte Stimmen und synthetische Klänge ineinander übergehen und wissenschaftliche Theorie, popkulturelle Analyse und eigene künstlerische Inszenierung verschwimmen.

Rollen

Narrator: anonyme Erzählperson auf einer Reise zwischen Welten (Stimmaufnahme ohne Pitch-Modulation).

Cyborg: hybrides Wesen aus der Welt der Cyborgs (Pitch-Modulation +4).

Monster: hybrides Wesen aus der Welt der Monster (Pitch-Modulation -5).

Monsterchen: Flüstergestalten (flüsternd gesprochen).

Witch: Magisches Hexenwesen voller Mehrdeutigkeit (granular verzerrt mit Reverb).

Philosophie: Stimme antiker Philosophen (granular verzerrt).

Meer: unterschiedliche Aufnahmen vom Meer in Griechenland (Meeresrauschen, plätschernde Wellen, Wasserglucksen).

Fluss: Aufnahme eines Flusses, der entlang einer Schlucht verläuft und ins Meer mündet (Flussrauschen).

Regen: Aufnahmen von Regenschauern im Frühjahr.

Donner: Aufnahmen eines Gewitters im Frühjahr.

Vögel: Aufnahmen von kleinen Vögeln im Sommer und Krähen im Frühjahr (Vogelzwitschern, Vogelschwarm).

Bienen: Aufnahmen von Bienen, die um Blüten fliegen.

Grillen: Aufnahmen von Grillen, versteckt im vertrockneten Gras.

MIDI-Instrumente: synthetisch produzierte Sounds (Digitale Geräusche, synthetische Klangkulisse, maschinelle Melodie, Herzschlag, synthetisches Klavier, sphärischer Sound, Beat, Hi-Hat, Drums, Arpeggiator).

Audio-Effekte: synthetische Modifikation der eingesprochenen Stimmnahmen (Echo, Granularverzögerung, Hall).

Transkript

Moderation [00:00-02:30]:

Herzlich Willkommen zu dieser Performance über Voices of Resistance – Queere Stimmen, Cyborgs und Hybridität als Widerstand.

Diese Performance ist ein Fadenspiel, eine Verknüpfung von Teilverbindungen, ohne Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit, ohne Universalien (Haraway 2018: 24). Eine fluide, prozesshafte Verknüpfung von wissenschaftlichen Theorien, künstlerischer Inszenierung, popkultureller Analyse und Politik. Zu hören sind sowohl selbstproduzierte Aufnahmen von Naturereignissen, Tieren, synthetischen Klängen sowie meiner Stimme in unterschiedlich technisch bearbeiteter Version. Alle tragen als Akteur*innen zur Bedeutungskonstruktion bei – ebenso wie die Zuhörenden. Die genauen Rollen sowie die Kennzeichnung der Literatur und Zitate sind dem beigefügten Transkript zu entnehmen.

Wir begeben uns auf eine Reise, auf der wir den Spuren der Stimme folgen, zwischen Unterdrückung und Selbstermächtigung. Durch diesen Raum der Zwischenwelten begleiten uns die Cyborgs und Monster, die uns zusammen mit einer Erzählperson durch die verschmolzene Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft leiten. Dabei machen sie uns mit den queeren musikalischen Stimmen SOPHIE, 2021 leider verstorben, Dorian Electra und Arca vertraut. Gemeinsam tänzeln sie auf konstruierten Grenzen, untergraben deren Hierarchie und bemächtigen sich selbst.

Bevor es losgeht möchte ich noch eine Content Note geben. Zwischen Minute 19:00 bis 20:00 wird ein Beispiel von Misgendering nachgestellt. Im Abschnitt zur Unterdrückung weiblicher und queerer Stimmen ab Minuten 26: 20 werden misogynen Mythen reproduziert, um den Prozess der Abjektion zu inszenieren und anschließend aufzubrechen.

Für ein besseres Hörerlebnis empfehle ich die Nutzung von Kopfhörern. Und nun lade ich dazu ein, den Stimmen zu folgen.

I. Teil 1: Die (queere) Stimme und die Cyborgs [02:30 - 25:50]

Einleitung: Die Stimme im Kopf [02:30 - 04:25]

(synthetische Soundkulisse) (Digitale Geräusche) (Herzschlag)

Monsterchen: Voices of Resistance.

Cyborg: *(distanziert) (Transmission) Hallo?*

Monster / Monsterchen: Material and Immaterial.
Voice and Word.

Cyborg: *(distanziert) (Transmisison) Hallo?*

Monster / Monsterchen: Forced Dualities.
Forced Categories.
Cyborgs and Monsters! *(Bienen)*
Break them. Break free!

Monster / Cyborg: Pitch. Your. Voice. *(Wasserplätschern)*

Cyborg: *(Vogelgezwitscher)*
Welcome. I am the voice in your head.
I am your future, your present, and your past.
Right now, in this very moment,
I am here to speak with you – about voices.

Do you have a voice?
Did you ever have a choice?
Can you speak?
And are you heard? *(Bienen)*
In the future, the voice is free.
Free from the chains of history.
Free from hegemonic violence.
Free from normativity.
And free to transform.

Chor: „Viva voce“ (Dolar 2014: 145).

Die Cyborgs [04:25 – 07:50]

(synthetische Klangkulisse)

Narrator: Die Cyborgs und die Stimme.
(maschinelle Melodie) (Herzschlag)

Donna Haraway nutzt die Cyborgs als spekulative Fabulation, um erlernte, hierarchische Grenzziehungen aufzulösen (vgl. Haraway, 1995, 2018).

„Wissenschaftliche Fakten und spekulative Fabulation brauchen einander und beide brauchen einen spekulativen Feminismus“ (Haraway 2018: 11), schreibt sie in „Unruhig bleiben“. Sie betont damit die Notwendigkeit, Theorie, fiktionale Erzählung und politische Praxis miteinander zu denken, um aus herkömmlichen Denkstrukturen auszubrechen.

Cyborgs als Mythos und Werkzeug.

Im Cyborg Manifest entwickelt Donna Haraway einen solchen „ironischen, politischen Mythos“ (Haraway 1995: 33), der gleichzeitig als Werkzeug genutzt werden kann.

Die Cyborgs sind monströse Wesen, „Hybride aus Maschine und Organismus“, gleichzeitig Fiktion und gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit (Haraway: 1995: 33). Ihr emanzipatives Potenzial folgt aus dieser monströsen Hybridität: Als Grenzwesen entziehen sie sich stabilen Kategorisierungen und unterwandern damit hierarchische Unterscheidungen zwischen Mensch und Tier, Organismus und Maschine oder Natur und Kultur. (*Biene*) (*maschinelle Melodie*)

Trotzdem sind sie widersprüchliche Wesen, die uns keine vollkommene Heilung, keine Ganzheit, keine Unschuld versprechen (Haraway 1995: 35). Sie sind illegitime „Abkömmlinge des Militarismus und patriarchalen Kapitalismus“ (Haraway 1995: 36), haben sich aber von ihren Eltern abgewandt. (*Donner*) (*Digitale Geräusche*)

„Mythos und Werkzeug konstituieren sich wechselseitig“ (Haraway: 1995: 51) verdeutlicht Haraway im Cyborg Manifest.

Technologien beeinflussen Mythen, Mythen beeinflussen Technologien. Dominante, hierarchische Narrative, zum Beispiel über Geschlecht, Natur oder Körper, sind in Technologien eingeschrieben. Gleichzeitig besteht emanzipatives Potenzial: Indem wir neue Mythen entwickeln und Techniken umfunktionieren, können wir diese eingeschriebenen Ordnungen aufbrechen. (*Wasserglucksen*)

Chor: Cyborgs als Mythos und Werkzeug. (*Digitale Geräusche*)
Cyborgs lassen sich nicht kategorisieren.
Cyborgs lassen sich nicht beherrschen. (*Digitale Geräusche*) (*Donner*)
Wir sind schon längst alle zu Cyborgs geworden.

Cyborg: Living in between.

Chor: Viva voce! (*Digitale Geräusche*)

Die (queere) Stimme [07:50 – 11:40]

(*Wasserplätschern*) / (*Digitale Geräusche*)

Monster: Past. Present. Future. Voice.
Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, Zukunft, Stimme.
(*pitch*)
Ein Glitch im System.
Cyborgs and Monsters. (*Bienen*)

Chor: The voice matters! (*Digitale Geräusche*)

Cyborg: (*distanziert*) Hallo? Hallo? (*Wasserplätschern*)

(*Vogelgezwitscher*)

Narrator: Was siehst du, wenn du meine Stimme hörst? Habe ich ein Gesicht?
Oder einen Körper? Bin ich körperlos?

Cyborg: Welche Gefühle lösen meine Stimme in dir aus? Habe ich einen
Akzent? Wie klingt meine Stimme?

Monster: Ist mein Rhythmus angenehm? Was fühlst du?

Narrator: What do you see when you hear my voice? Do I have a face? Or a
body?

Cyborg: Am I immaterial? Do I have an accent?

Monster: How does my voice sound? Is my rhythm pleasant? What do you
feel?

Narrator: Τι βλέπεις όταν ακούς τη φωνή μου; Έχω πρόσωπο; Έχω σώμα;
Μήπως είμαι ασώματο; Μιλάω με προφορά;

Cyborg: Πώς ακούγεται η φωνή μου; Είναι ο ρυθμός μου ευχάριστος;

Chor: Τι αισθάνεσαι;
(Herzschlag)/ (Digitale Geräusche)

Zwischen Materialität und Immaterialität

Cyborg: Diese Stimme existiert in der Immaterialität.
Ihren Ursprung hat sie jedoch in meinem organischen Körper.
Genau in diesem Moment existiert die Stimme in der Immaterialität.
Ebenso wie im Körper der Personen, die zuhören.

Narrator: Freya Jarman schreibt: The voice „must make the journey from my
body to yours and exists at some point in this no man’s land.
(Jarman-Ivens 2011: 3) (*Bienen*)

Monster / Monsterchen: Bodies and Voices.
A no man’s land. (*Digitale Geräusche*)

(*Wasserplätschern*) / (*Grillen*)

Narrator: (*Granularverzögerung*) Die Existenz dieser Stimme ist eine Ko-Pro-
duktion unterschiedlicher Körper, physikalischer Gesetze, tech-
nischer Mittel und körperloser Räume.

(*Echo*) Die Stimme, sie wandert. Vom Körper, zur Schallwelle in
der Luft. Von der Schallwelle, zum elektrischen Impuls. Vom elek-
trischen Impuls, zum digitalen Signal.

(*Granularverzögerung*) Bearbeitet. Vervielfältigt. Gespeichert.

(*Echo*) Vom digitalen Signal zurück zur Schallwelle. Von der Schall-
welle in einen Körper (vgl. Jarman-Ivens 2011).

Cyborg / Narrator: (*Echo*) Die Existenz dieser Stimme beruht auf mehrmaligen Trans-
formationsprozessen. Diese Stimme, hat sie noch einen klaren
Ursprung?

Monsterchen: (*Bienen*) (*Echo*) Cyborg.

Cyborg: Zwischen Körper und Sprache: die Stimme.

Queere Stimmen: SOPHIE [11:40 – 15:35]

(synthetisches Klavier) / (Vogelzwitschern)

Cyborg: *(distanziert)* Wer bist du? Wer bist du?
Wer ist SOPHIE?

Narrator: Wer ist SOPHIE? Zahlreiche Menschen spekulierten über die Identität der Person, die unter diesem Namen elektronische Musik mit experimentellen Klängen und hochgepitchten Vocals veröffentlichte und an Beliebtheit gewann. Eine Ikone des Elektro- und Hyperpop (vgl. Stoppa 2018; Böttcher 2021).

Cyborg: Im Interview Magazin 2017 erläutert SOPHIE, sich für die Begegnung zwischen Mensch und Maschine zu interessieren. Technologie und Emotionalität würden sich ergänzen, anstatt ausschließen (Pasori 2017).

Narrator: Sophie Xeon nutzt transhumanistische Motive und Technik für künstlerische und (trans-)identitäre Selbstentfaltung, in der das Selbst als grenzenlos wandelbar erscheint. Durch die Verschmelzung von Organismus und Maschine über Soundästhetik, technische Modifikation und Textinhalte fördert SOPHIE die Normalisierung von Hybridität und lässt uns von einer Post-Gender Welt träumen (vgl. Clement 2024, Jones 2024, Williams 2021). Einer Cyborg- Existenz.

Cyborg: Zum Geheimnis um die eigene Identität sagt SOPHIE im Interview Magazine 2017: Es sei nie die Absicht gewesen anonym zu sein, sondern sich selbstbestimmt so zu präsentieren, wie es sich gut anfühlt.

Narrator: Denn in „It’s Okay to Cry“, der ersten Single des 2018 erschienenen Albums *Oil of Every Pearl’s Un-Insides* singt SOPHIE nicht nur über Verletzlichkeit, sondern zeigt sich zum ersten Mal selbst im Musikvideo und singt ohne Pitch- Modulation.

Im ARTE Tracks Interview 2018 erklärt SOPHIE Lust gehabt zu haben, den eigenen Körper als Material des Ausdrucks zu nutzen (Stoppa 2018: 4:30-4:42).

SOPHIE stellt im Lied "Infatuation" auf Oil of Every Pearl's Un-In-sides eine Frage:

Cyborg: "Who are you?
Deep down" (Believe & SOPHIE 2018).

Narrator: Während wir dem Dialog der zärtlichen Stimmen von Cecile Believe und SOPHIE in gepitchten oder flüsternden Versionen folgen, bleibt es mehrdeutig, wer oder was mit Faszination und Verliebtheit erforscht wird. Handelt es sich um eine andere Person, oder doch um die Entdeckung der eigenen Identität, was als himmlisch und tödlich (Believe & SOPHIE 2018), also euphorisierend und gefährlich zugleich, bezeichnet wird.

(flüsternd) Wer bist du?

Die Stimme zwischen Körper und Sprache [15:30 – 18:00]

(Flussrauschen)

Narrator: Ich frage, was ist die Stimme?

Monsterchen: Who are you? (*Digitale Geräusche*) / (*Bienen*)

Cyborg: „Gleich einem Fingerabdruck lässt sich die Stimme sofort erkennen und identifizieren“ schreibt Mladen Dolar (2014: 33).

(Grillen)

Narrator: Die Stimme ist persönlich, hat ihren eigenen Klang.

Monsterchen: Who are we? (*Digitale Geräusche*)
Wir sprechen, wie wir uns wohlfühlen. (*Bienen*)

Narrator / Cyborg: Sie kommt aus einem Körper, doch sie ist mehr als ein Körperprodukt.

Monsterchen:	Materialität und Immaterialität. Körperlich und Körperlos.
Narrator:	Die Stimme ist mehr als ein Sound, denn sie zielt auf eine Bedeutung (Dolar 2014: 26).
Chor:	Ich erhebe meine Stimme, um zu erkunden, was die Stimme ist. (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>) Die Stimme ist mehr als ein Sound. (<i>Wasserplätschern</i>)
Monsterchen:	(<i>Wasserplätschern</i>) Mehr als ein Sound.
Narrator:	Die Stimme trägt Bedeutung, doch sie ist mehr als Vermittlerin von Sprache und Wort.
Monsterchen:	(<i>Herzschlag</i>) Akzent. Intonation. Klangfarbe (vgl. Dolar 2014). Pitch. (<i>Wasserplätschern</i>)
Chor:	Die Stimme existiert in Zwischenräumen! (synthetische Melodie)
Monsterchen:	Mehr als Sprache und Wort. (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>)
Narrator:	(<i>Wasserplätschern</i>) In „Queer Voices“ schreibt Freya Jarman:
Cyborg:	„The (material) voice can be a mediator between body and language; it gives language meaning, in its inflections, its speed, its accent, its bodiliness, but it is also an object apart from language“ (Jarman-Ivens 2011: 4).
Narrator:	(<i>Echo</i>) Wer bin ich? Who am I?
Monster:	(<i>Echo</i>) (<i>pitch</i>) Ποιο είμαι;
Narrator:	Mladen Dolar schreibt in „His Master’s“ Voice“ über die Politik der Stimme. (<i>Wasserplätschern</i>)

Narrator / Cyborg: Die Stimme hat einen „rituelle[n] Charakter“, eine „symbolische Macht“, die sich durch ihre „performative Kraft“ entfaltet (Dolar 2014: 145f.)

Chor: Höre meine Stimme! (*synthetische Melodie*)

Geschlechtliche Zuschreibungen [18:00 - 20:20]

Narrator: (*Vogelgezwitscher*)
Die Stimme ist voll von Bedeutung und Bedeutungszuschreibungen, die kulturell produziert werden (vgl. Dolar 2014; Jarman-Ivens 2011). (Digitale Geräusche) (Bienen)

Diese Stimme kommt aus einem Körper und transformiert sich. Die Stimme überschreitet die Grenzen der Körperlichkeit.

Diese Stimme dringt in den hörenden Körper ein und transformiert sich.

Genau in diesem Moment hat die Stimme keinen Körper, und trotzdem konstruieren Zuhörende diesen (vgl. Jarman-Ivens 2011).
Warum?

Monsterchen: (*Vogelgezwitscher*) / (*Flussgeräusche*)
Bedeutungszuschreibungen!

Narrator: Welche Informationen verbirgt die Stimme jenseits des Wortes?
Ich telefoniere mit einer unbekannten Person. Das Telefonat ist freundlich und hilfreich. Zum Schluss verabschiedet die Person mich mit Frau.

Monsterchen: Tschüss Frau X.

Narrator: Ein Stich. (*schneller Herzschlag*)

Narrator / Monster / Ich bin keine Frau.

Cyborg: Das ist nicht meine Bezeichnung.

Narrator: Das Ereignis wundert mich nicht, doch es tut trotzdem weh. Ich verstehe es, doch ich wünschte es wäre anders.

(Vogelgezwitscher) / (Flussgeräusche)

Narrator: Wie lernen wir zu sprechen?
Welche Zuschreibungen geben wir Stimmen und Körpern?
Und Warum?

Chor: My voice is more than my gender!
My gender is more than my voice! *(Digitale Geräusche)*
The voice is genderless! *(Wasserplätschern)*

Narrator: „[The voice] is genderless, but [it’s] gendered by listeners“, schreibt Freya Jarman (Jarman-Ivens 2011: 161). *(Flussgeräusche)*

Queere Stimmen: Dorian Electra [20:20 – 22:35]

(sphärischer Sound)

Narrator: Wie binäre Vorstellungen von Geschlecht konstruiert und mit Stimme verbunden werden, parodiert Dorian Electra in deren Song „Man to Man“ auf dem 2019 erschienenen Album „Flamboyant“ (vgl. Fery 2024).
(Arpeggiator)

Darin fordert die nicht-binäre, genderfluide Person hypermaskuline Männlichkeitsbilder zum Kampf heraus, entlarvt sie als Schauspiel und besiegt sie mit queerem Stolz. Wahre Stärke bestehe zum Beispiel darin, sich verletzlich zeigen zu können, singt Dorian im Refrain und fordert anschließend auf, Queerness in Männlichkeit herein zu lassen: „You gotta let me in“ (Electra 2019).
(Beat)

Die eigene Stimme verwendet Dorian vielseitig: Neben technischer Modulation wie Pitch-Shifting, wird mit Resonanz, Dynamik oder Intonation gespielt (vgl. Fery 2024). *(Arpeggiator)*
Geschlechtliche Stereotype werden somit nicht nur visuell und lyrisch, sondern auch vokal aufgebrochen, deren Absurdität hervorgehoben und gleichzeitig queere Identität gefeiert.

In einem Billboard Interview von 2019 sagt Dorian Electra dazu singemäßig: „Masculinity and femininity are funny, as is the idea that they’re polar opposites. Queerness is an awareness that you are [...] outside of some set of social norms. Being outside allows you to see the frivolousness of it” (Russel 2019).

Dorian verhandelt Geschlecht als Performance (vgl. Butler 1991), ein fragiles Konstrukt, und sieht die queere Position als Potenzial, dies zu erkennen und (*robotisch*) damit zu spielen.

(*Digitale Geräusche*)

Die Stimme im Dazwischen [22:35 – 24:50]

(*Herzschlag*)

Chor:

Deconstruct your ideas about gender and the voice!

(*Wasserplätschern*)

Narrator:

Zwischen Sprache und Körper eröffnet sich ein Raum der Performativität, der über die Stimme verhandelt wird. Denn die Stimme trägt, selbst wenn sie körperlos erscheint, immer etwas Körperliches mit sich – und wird dadurch zu einem Ort, an dem Geschlecht und geschlechtliche Zuschreibungen ausgehandelt werden (vgl. Butler 1991; Cusick 2000, Dolar 2014, Jarman-Ivens 2011).

(*Digitale Geräusche*)

Chor:

My voice is more than my gender! My gender is more than my voice!
My voice can be part of my gender! My gender can be part of my voice.

Chor:

Deconstruct your ideas about gender and the voice!

Narrator:

Be aware and let me in! (*Bienen*)

Monsterchen:

Glitch, Glitch, Glitch. Queer voices are a glitch.

Who are you? Uncategorizable. (*Digitale Geräusche*) / (*Wasserplätschern*)

Monster / Monsterchen:

(*Meeresrauschen*)

Bodies. Voices. Language.

A no-man’s land.

(Digitale Geräusche)

Narrator: Die Stimme zwischen Materialität und Immaterialität. Zwischen Körper und Sprache. *(Digitale Geräusche)*
An ihren Ursprung gebunden und zugleich losgelöst.

In Körpern. Zwischen Körpern. Jenseits des Körperlichen. *(Digitale Geräusche)*

Es ist „ein Bereich der Unentscheidbarkeit [...], des Zwischenbeidem, ein Dazwischenliegen, das sich [...] als eine der vorrangigen Eigenschaften der Stimme erweist“ erläutert Mladen Dolar in „His Masters Voice“ (Dolar 2014: 22).

Monsterchen: Cyborgs. Hybridität.

Narrator: Auch Freya Jarman kommt zu diesem Schluss und verbindet die uneindeutige Eigenschaft der Stimme mit Queerness:

„[T]he voice is a slippery beast and already potentially queer in this way“ (Jarman-Ivens 2011: 19).
(Meeresrauschen)
(Digitale Geräusche)

II. Teil 2: Die (queere) Stimme zwischen Unterdrückung und Selbstermächtigung [24:50-37:50]

Überleitung: Vergangenheit prägt Gegenwart und Zukunft [24:50 – 26:00]

(Herzschlag) / (Regen) / (Donner)
(synthetische Klangkulisse)

Witch: *(Lachen)*
Turn back time.
Turn back time.

Cyborg: Where do they come from? *(Donner)*
Those ascriptions? *(Hexenlachen)*
These hierarchies? Dualities?

Monster / Witch: Old myths, shaping past, present and future.

What happens if men invade a no-man's land? (*Donner*) (*mechanische Melodie*) (*Herzschlag*)

Die hegemoniale Unterdrückung queerer und weiblicher Stimmen [26:00 – 31:30]

- (Regen) / (entfernter Donner)*
- Narrator:** Die hegemoniale Unterdrückung queerer und weiblicher Stimmen.
- (Grillen)*
- Cyborg:** Vom Dazwischen zur Dualität.
Vergangenheit. Gegenwart. Zukunft. Stimme.
Natur. Technik. Mensch.
Mit welchen Worten wurden Stimmen und Körper beschrieben?
- Narrator:** Die Stimme. Das Wort. Der Körper.
Donna Haraway fragt im Cyborg Manifest:
- Cyborg / Narrator:** *(Wasserplätschern)*
Sind „die organischen, hierarchischen Dualismen, die den
"westlichen" Diskurs seit Aristoteles regulieren, noch immer
gültig?“ (Haraway 1995: 51). *(Grillen)*
- Narrator:** Welche Dualismen regulieren den Diskurs der Stimme?
- Der Dualismus der hegemonialen Unterdrückung*
(Meeresrauschen)
- Narrator: / Monsterchen:** Dualismus. Entweder- Oder. Gegensatz.
- (Regen) / (Vogelgezwitscher)*
- Monster:** Stimme oder Sprache.
Zoe oder bios (vgl. Dolar 2014). (*Donner*)
- Narrator:** Laut Mladen Dolar unterscheidet Aristoteles zwischen „[Dem]
nackte[n] Leben“, oder „[dem] Leben in Gemeinschaft“ (Dolar 2014
143). Die bloße Stimme markiere „de[n] tierische[n] Teil des Men-
schen“ (Dolar 2014: 143), während Sprache zum Ausdruck des kul-
turellen, des politischen, des regulierten werde.
- (synthetische Klangkulisse)*

Monsterchen:	Die nackte Stimme. Ein wildes Tier. (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>)
Narrator:	(<i>Herzschlag</i>) Entweder Tier oder Mensch? Entweder Natur oder Kultur? Entweder Stimme oder Sprache? Entweder Frau oder Mann? (<i>leiser Donner</i>) / (<i>Biene</i>)
Cyborg:	Aber mit welcher Stimme sprach Aristoteles seine Worte? (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>)
Chor:	Die Philosophie hat eine Stimme! Die Stimme ist nicht mitgedacht (vgl. Dolar 2014: 26). (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>) Viva voce! (<i>Wasserplätschern</i>) / (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>)
Cyborg:	Die Stimmen der Philosophie vermittelten folgende Worte:
Philosophie:	The Pythagorean Table of Opposites (vgl. Carson 1995). (<i>Bienen</i>) Male and Female. At Rest and in Motion. Straight and Curved. (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>) Light and Dark. Good and Evil. (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>) Limited and Unlimited. Entweder das Eine,-oder das Andere. (<i>Donner</i>) (<i>Hexenlachen</i>) (<i>Regen</i>)
Cyborg:	(<i>Flussrauschen</i>) Auf wessen Fragen antwortet die Philosophie? Mit welcher Stimme?
Monsterchen:	Die Stimme ist im Hintergrund. Solange sie sich innerhalb ihrer konstruierten, hierarchischen Ordnung bewegt (vgl. Butler 1991, Stryker 2024). (<i>Grillen</i>)
Narrator:	Anne Carson (1995) erläutert in „The Gender of Sound“ wie sich die Abwertung von Weiblichkeit innerhalb der dichotomen Geschlechterordnung seit der Antike in der Regulierung der Stimme widerspiegelt. Sie schreibt:

Cyborg / Monster:	„Aristotle tells us, that the highpitched voice of the female is one evidence of her evil disposition, for creatures who are brave and just have large deep voices“ (Carson 1995: 119). (<i>Hexenlachen</i>)
Narrator / Cyborg:	(<i>synthetische Klangkulisse</i>) Phi-lo-so-phië. Di-cho-to-mie.
Cyborg:	Die Stimmen der Philosophie regulieren die Stimme wie folgt:
Philosophie:	Highpitched is evil is female. (<i>Hexenlachen</i>) Lowpitched is brave is male (vgl. Carson 1995). (<i>Regen</i>) The Pythagorean Table of Opposites.
Monster:	Philosophie. Dichotomie. (<i>Donner</i>)
Philosophie:	The voice as proof of evil disposition. (<i>Hexenlachen</i>)
Monsterchen:	(<i>Atem</i>) / (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>) Animalistic creatures in the dark. High-pitched howling at the moon. Spine-chilling shivers. (<i>Bienen</i>) Voices without words. A witch`s curse. (<i>Hexenlachen</i>)
Queere Stimmen: Arca`s Hexe [31:30 - 33:50]	
Witch:	Der Fluch einer Hexe. (<i>synthetisches Piano</i>)
Monsterchen / Hexe:	(<i>gegenseitig wiederholend</i>) Witches. (<i>Hi-Hat</i>) Monsters. (<i>Hi-Hat</i>) Cyborgs. (<i>Hi-Hat</i>) Witches. (<i>Hi-Hat</i>) Witch.
Narrator:	„[S]eductive, elective, and protective“ (Arca & No Bra 2021), beschreibt die nicht-binäre, transfeminine venezolanische Künstlerin Arca ihre Hexe mit robotisch verzerrter Stimme im Song „Witch“. Während die Phrase wie ein Mantra wiederholt wird, trägt ein stockendes Piano zur beschwörenden Atmosphäre bei.

In höherer, verzerrter Stimmlage bezieht sie sich im nächsten Wiederholungsblock direkt auf misogynie sowie transfeindliche, trans-misogyne Gewalt (vgl. Arca & No Bra 2021, James 2021).

Arca benennt den Prozess der Abjektion (vgl. James 2021, Kristeva 1982), der sich in Begriffen wie dem der Hexe zeigt. Queere Existenz und Weiblichkeit soll abgewertet und kontrolliert werden.

Zum Monster gemacht und als Bedrohung inszeniert, eine Projektionsfläche für Ängste, Fantasien und Begehren (vgl. Cohen 1996). Ein Akt der Entmenschlichung, der besonders trans* Personen trifft, die mit Normen binärgeschlechtlicher Verkörperung brechen (vgl. Stryker 2024: 145, 147).

(Hi-Hat)

Arca's Hexe ist eine mehrdeutige Figur, die sich zwischen Begehren und Anziehung, Abwertung und Gewalt, sowie Selbstermächtigung und Stärke bewegt.

Während Leid und Schmerz durch gesellschaftliche Abwertung in „Witch“ aktiv Raum gegeben wird, wirkt die weichere Soundatmosphäre wie eine Umarmung.

Arca bekennt sich zur Sphäre der Monster und Hexen, die am Ende des Stücks transzendieren: Die Stimme verschwindet in der Ferne, *(Hall)* in der sie in einem endlosen Raum widerhallt.

Misogyne Mythen [33:50 - 35:55]

	<i>(Wasserplätschern)</i>
Cyborg:	Die Stimme und Geschlecht. Abwertung von Weiblichkeit sowie Abwertung aller Abweichung von normativen Geschlechtseinstellungen (vgl. Carson 1995, Stryker 2024).
Narrator:	Die Stimme und Identität. Reguliert durch misogynie, heteronormative Mythen, die sich in der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart normalisiert haben. Anne Carson beschreibt, wie sich diese Mythen in literarischen Texten zeigen: <i>(Vogelschwarm)</i>
Monster:	„[T]he heartchilling groan of the Gorgon“, „the deadly voice of the Sirens“ (Carson 1995: 120). <i>(Drums)</i> The „horrendous voices“ (Carson 1995: 120) of the Furies. <i>(Drums)</i>

„[T]he [...] babbling of Cassandra“ (Carson 1995: 120). (*Drums*)

Narrator: The savage, wild, disorderly sounds of Nausikaa and her friends (Carson 1995: 125). (*Drums*)

Cyborg: The „otherworldly echo of women shrieking in the wolfthickets“ (Carson 1995: 125).
(*Drums*)

Monster: Die Stimmen der Philosophie sind inzwischen körperlos geworden, doch noch heute dringen ihre Worte in unsere Körper ein.
(*Regen*) / (*Donner*)

Philosophie: Close your mouth. The devil shouldn't come out!

Chor: Close your mouth! The devil shouldn't come out! Close your mouth!
The devil shouldn't come out.
Your mouth needs a door and Philosophers hold the key. (*Donner*)

Monsterchen: (*Herzschlag*)
Madness and Witchery and Bestiality. The madness and witchery and bestiality and wilderness and monstrosity of the highpitched voice, the female, the queer, the everything in-between and beyond.
(*Digitale Geräusche*)

Die Zeit des Versteckens ist vorbei. Cyborgs, Monster und Hexen vereinen sich in voller Stärke!

Queere Stimmen: Arca's Bruja [35:50 - 37:50]

(*Drums*)

Narrator: „Brujita de las buenas“ (Benza & Arca, 2021), singt Arca im Song „Bruja“ in dem sie Anziehung und Erotik unverblümt zum Ausdruck bringt und mit Dominanz und Verführung spielt. Die queere Community spricht sie aktiv an, feiert Weiblichkeit und betont die Schönheit von trans* Frauen und transfemininen Personen.

(*Drums*) Arca fordert zur Bewegung, zur Feier, zum Tanz auf. Im Opener des 2021 erschienenen KicK iii Albums entfaltet sich pure

Selbstermächtigung durch treibende Beats, verzerrte Klänge, Rap-Elementen und kraftvollen Schreien. (*Drums*)

Das Album Cover konfrontiert mit Monstrosität, die als Quelle der (transformativen) Kraft inszeniert wird: Arca mit zwei Köpfen und Flügeln als Herrscherin über Skelette (vgl. Matthews 2022, Stryker 2024: 146). (*synthetische Klänge*) (*Drums*)

Während im Song mit englischem Titel „Witch“ das mehrdeutige Motiv zwischen Abwertung und Aneignung als vordergründig erscheint, konzentriert sich der spanischsprachige Track auf Empowerment. Die Hexe und Monstrosität als affirmative Selbstbezeichnung (vgl. Stryker 2024): kraftvoll und erotisch, aber auch gefährlich und frei von Unschuld.

Arca erzählt eine Emanzipationsgeschichte zu Selbstakzeptanz und nutzt dafür hybride Metaphorik der Monster und Cyborgs. Eine Transformation voller Mehrdeutigkeit und Wandelbarkeit (vgl. Jones 2024, Matthews 2022). Die Befreiung aus patriarchalen, (post-)kolonialen, heteronormativen Regulierungsversuchen. (*Drums*)

III. Abschluss: Queere (musikalische) Stimmen, Cyborgs und Hybridität als Widerstand [37:50 – 47:48]

Die Monster [37:50 – 39:50]

(*Meeresrauschen*) / (*Digitale Geräusche*)
(*Vogelgezwitscher*)

Narrator: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) schreibt in „Monster Theory“ über die Kultur der Monster: (*Digitale Geräusche*) / (*Bienen*)

Monster: (*Flussgeräusche*)(*Grillen*)
„The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis“ (Cohen 1996: 6).
„[T]hey are disturbing hybrids“ that “resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration“ (Cohen 1996: 6). (*Digitale Geräusche*)

Monsterchen: Glitch. Glitch. Glitch. Queer voices are a glitch. (*down-pitched*) Uncategorizable and Limitless. (*Bienen*)

Narrator:	Monstrosität als Abjektion. Eine Projektion von Ängsten, Furcht und verbotenen Begierden, die kulturell produziert wird (Cohen 1996: 6). (<i>Grillen</i>)
Monster:	(<i>Echo</i>) Die Konstruktion normativer Grenzen. (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>)
Narrator:	Alles von einer etablierten Norm Abweichende wird zur potenziellen Gefahr für die herrschende Ordnung. (<i>Hexenlachen</i>) / (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>) / (<i>Bienen</i>)
Monster:	(<i>Echo</i>) Zum Monster. Abwertung, um zu kontrollieren (vgl. James 2021).
Chor:	Cyborgs und Monster verweigern sich der Kategorisierung! (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>)
Monsterchen:	Grenzüberschreitung. (down-pitch) Monster bedrohen die hegemoniale Ordnung. (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>)(<i>Wasserplätschern</i>) A „Lawbreaker“(Cohen 1996: 16). (<i>Donner</i>)
Monster:	Slippery Beasts. A Glitch.
Queere musikalische Stimmen als Widerstand gegen hegemoniale Unterdrückung [39:50 - 45:05]	
Chor:	(<i>Meeresrauschen</i>) Queere musikalische Stimmen als Widerstand gegen hegemoniale Unterdrückung! (<i>synthetische Klangkulisse</i>)
Narrator:	Die gesetzlose Stimme. Mladen Dolar beschreibt in „The Object Voice“:
Cyborg:	„For the core of the danger is the voice that sets itself loose from the word, the voice beyond logos, the lawless voice“. (Dolar 1996: 18). (<i>synthetische Melodie</i>)
Narrator:	Die gesetzlose Stimme. (<i>Digitale Geräusche</i>) (<i>Flussrauschen</i>) Beim Gesang tritt die Stimme in den Vordergrund und verwäscht das Wort.

Die Gesangsstimme ist eine Bedrohung für die natürlichen und menschengemachten regulierenden Gesetzmäßigkeiten der Stimme (Dolar 1996, 2014).

Monsterchen:	<i>(down-pitch)</i> Jenseits von Logos. <i>(Vogelschwarm)</i> Das Wilde, das Natürliche, das Tierische. Der Weiblichkeit zugeschrieben (vgl. Carson 1995). <i>(Digitale Geräusche)</i>
Cyborg:	The singing voice. <i>(Digitale Geräusche)</i> A danger to hegemonic regulations.
Monsterchen:	Full vocal range. Unlimited. Strong and Vulnerable.
Narrator:	Zwischen den Körpern der Singenden und Hörenden. Die Stimme schafft eine intime Verbindung (Clement 2024, Jarman-Ivens 2011)
Monster:	Körperlich und körperlos. Materiell und immateriell. An den Ursprung gebunden und gleichzeitig losgelöst (vgl. Jarman-Ivens 2011). <i>(Herzschlag)</i> Ein Dazwischen. <i>(Digitale Geräusche)</i> <i>(Synthetische Melodie)</i>
Narrator:	Die Stimme und Musik als Werkzeuge der Grenzüberschreitung und des Ausdrucks (vgl. Clement 2024; Haraway 1995; Jarman-Ivens 2011). <i>(synthetische Melodie)</i> Ein Zwischenraum der Performativität, in dem Narrative über Geschlechtlichkeit und Identität ausgehandelt werden. <i>(Bienen)</i>
Monsterchen:	Mythos und Werkzeug (vgl. Haraway 1995). <i>(Digitale Geräusche)</i>
Chor:	Queer artists break dominant narratives. <i>(Donner)</i>
Monster:	Monstrosity is beautiful. It is powerful. <i>(Hexenlachen)</i> / <i>(Bienen)</i>
Cyborg / Hexe:	<i>(Echo)</i> My identity is limitless. <i>(Digitale Geräusche)</i> <i>(Wasserplätschern)</i>
Narrator / Cyborg:	Wandelbarkeit und Mehrdeutigkeit, statt dichotome Ordnung. <i>(Digitale Geräusche)</i> / <i>(Grillen)</i>

Die musikalischen Beispiele zeigen, wie queere Musizierende hierarchische Grenzziehungen verwischen und die eigene hybride, fluide Identität feiern (vgl. Jones 2024). (*Wasserplätschern/Digitale Geräusche*)

Monsterchen: Eine Performance. (*high-pitched*) Absurd- überdreht. (*low-pitched*) Verzerrt-mechanisch. Sensibel- verletzlich.

Cyborg: (*Meeresrauschen*)
Vocal technologies expand the possibilities to push the voice beyond the bodily, to break constructed binaries and undermine naturalness (vgl. Clement 2024: 30). (*Digitale Geräusche*)

Monsterchen: (*Herzklopfen*)
A voice beyond concepts of naturalness and authenticity. (*Digitale Geräusche*) Pitch-shifting, Auto-Tune (*Digitale Geräusche*). Vocoder (Clement 2024). (*Digitale Geräusche*) A cyborg.

Cyborg: (*Transmission*) Hallo? (*distanzierend*) Hallo?

Narrator: (*Bienen*)
Stimme und Technologie. (*Grillen*)
Alles wird unbestimmter. (*pitched*) Alles wird unbestimmter (vgl. Clement 2024).

Monsterchen: Destabilisierung. Ein Glitch (vgl. Russel 2020). Cyborg- Hybridität. (*Wasserplätschern*)

Cyborg / Narrator / Monster: Digital Queering (Waugh 2017). (*Digitale Geräusche*)
Ein Kollaps der Grenzziehung (Clement 2024: 48). Materialität und Immaterialität. Virtualität und Physikalität. (*Flussrauschen*) Real und nicht real. Authentisch und unauthentisch. Mensch, Natur, Maschine.
Ein Kollaps. (*Digitale Geräusche*)

Chor: Queer artists perform their identity, with their own narratives, their own vocal technologies. (*Donner*)

Queer Joy is Resistance. (*Digitale Geräusche*) Gender- Euphoria.

(Wasserglucksen)(Melodie)

Monster:

(Wasserglucksen)

In-Between. And instead of or. The ambiguity of the voice. The ambiguity and fluidity of identity. The ambiguity of reality. The ambiguity of performance (vgl. Lee 2020). *(Bienen)*

Monster / Cyborg:

Ambiguity disrupts power structures (Jones 2024: 35).
(Vogelschwarm)

Ende: Die (queere) Stimme und die Cyborgs [45:05 - 47:48]

(synthetische Klangkulisse)

Cyborg:

Die queere Stimme und die Cyborgs. *(synthetische Melodie)*

Narrator:

Die Stimme, ein widersprüchlicher Raum zwischen Unterdrückung und Selbstermächtigung. *(Wasserplätschern)*

Von Zuschreibungen und Regulierungen, bis zur Aneignung und selbstbestimmten Nutzung. *(Digitale Geräusche)*

Queere Musizierende erforschen hybride Identität und verschieben hierarchische Grenzen. Hybridität wird zum emanzipativen Potenzial: Affirmative Selbstermächtigung, Selbstbestimmung und Akzeptanz.

Cyborg / Narrator:

Technologien als Werkzeuge für neue Mythen.
Mythen als Werkzeuge für Technologien.

(Meeresrauschen)

Chor:

Wie sind schon längst alle zu Cyborgs geworden. *(Digitale Geräusche)*
(Synthetische Melodie)

Narrator:

Doch trotz allem klingen die Stimmen auch in kapitalistischen Produktionsmaschinen mit: kommerzieller Erfolg, Kapitalinteressen, *(Chor)* Zugangsmöglichkeiten.

Die Stimme transformiert, bleibt dabei aber mehrdeutig. *(Wasserplätschern)*

(Meeresrauschen)

Cyborg:

Let's use the ambiguity of the voice. The ambiguity of identity. Embrace complexity. Embrace Hybridity. *(synthetische Melodie)*

Let's be a category crisis: Shape-shifting, border-crossing, with joy
and responsibility. (*synthetische Melodie*)
Let's transform together. Break free.

(*Meeresrauschen*) / (*Vogelschwarm*) / (*Digitale Geräusche*)

Literaturverzeichnis

- Arca & No Bra. 2021. Witch (feat. No Bra) [Song]. Auf *Kick iii*. XL Recordings.
- Believe, C. & SOPHIE. 2018. Infatuation [Song]. Auf *Oil of Every Pearl's Un-In-sides*. MSMSMSM / Future Classic / Transgressive.
- Benza, D., & Arca. 2021. Bruja [Song]. Auf *Kick iii*. XL Recordings.
- Böttcher, Martin. 2021. Zum Tod der Musikproduzentin SOPHIE: „Botschafterin einer Generation“ [Interview mit Christoph Möller] [Radiosendung]. *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*. <https://www.deutschlandfunk-kultur.de/zum-tod-der-musikproduzentin-sophie-botschafterin-einer-100.html>
- Butler, Judith. 1991. *Das Unbehagen der Geschlechter*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Carson, Anne. 1995. *Glass, Irony and God*. New York: New Directions.
- Clement, Chananja. 2024. „Let's leave our bodies“: *Vocal somatechnics and queer identity in hyperpop and lo-fi folk* [Masterarbeit, Utrecht University, Department of Media and Culture Studies]. Utrecht University Repository. <https://studenttheses.uu.nl/handle/20.500.12932/47598>
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. 1996. Monster culture (seven theses). In Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (eds.), *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, 3–25. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cusick, Suzanne G. 2000. On musical performances of gender and sex. In Elaine Barkin & Lydia Hamessley (eds.), *Audible Traces*, 25–49. Zürich: Carciofoli.
- Dolar, Mladen. 1996. The Object Voice. In Renata Salecl & Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, 7–31. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Dolar, Mladen. 2014. *His Master's Voice. Eine Theorie der Stimme*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Electra, Dorian. 2019. Man to Man [Song]. Auf *Flamboyant* [Eigenveröffentlichung].
- Fery, Anton. 2024. Genderfluid voice(s): Zur stimmlichen und körperlichen Inszenierung von Geschlecht in Dorian Electras Man to Man. *anwesenheitsnotiz* 13. <https://anwesenheitsnotizen.wordpress.com/heft-13-fruhjahr-2024/anton-fery-genderfluid-voices-zur-stimmlichen-und-korperlichen-insze->

- nierung-von-geschlecht-in-dorian-electra-man-to-man/
- Haraway, Donna. 1995. Ein Manifest für Cyborgs. Feminismus im Streit mit den Technowissenschaften. In Donna Haraway (eds.), *Die Neuerfindung der Natur. Primaten, Cyborgs und Frauen*, 33–72. Frankfurt a. M. / New York: Campus.
- Haraway, Donna. 2018. *Unruhig bleiben: Die Verwandtschaft der Arten im Chthuluzän*. Frankfurt a. M. / New York: Campus
- James, Julie. 2021. Refusing abjection: Transphobia and trans youth survivance. *Feminist Theory* 22.1: 109–128.
- Jarman-Ivens, Freya. 2011. *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jones, Phoebe M.M. 2024. *Identity in excess: Trans identities expressed through hyperpop*. [Masterarbeit, University of North Carolina at Greensboro]. UNCG Institutional Repository. <https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/listing.aspx?id=47631>
- Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lee, Gavin. 2020. Queer music theory. *Music Theory Spectrum* 42.1: 143–153. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mts/mtz019>
- Matthews, Ethan. 2022. KICK IT BACK! Arca and the Abject. *Tastemakers Music Magazine*. <https://www.tastemakersmag.com/articles/arca-and-the-abject>
- Pasori, Cedar. 2017. Pop wunderkind SOPHIE synthesizes human and machine voices. *Interview Magazine*. <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/sophie-its-okay-to-cry-interview>
- Russell, Erica. 2019. How Dorian Electra channels Camp & Queer Culture on their ‘whimsically self-aware’ Debut Album. *Billboard Magazine*. <https://www.billboard.com/culture/pride/dorian-electra-interview-flamboyant-debut-album-8520161/>
- Russell, Legacy. 2020. *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. London / Brooklyn, NY: Verso.
- Stoppa, Nahuel. 2018. SOPHIE: the producer taking pop to the future (English Version / Interview) [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ifh0tDrwBA>
- Stryker, Susan. 2024. My words to Victor Frankenstein above the village of Chamounix: Performing transgender rage. In McKenzie Wark (ed.), *When Monsters Speak: A Susan Stryker Reader*, 133–150. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Waugh, Michael. 2017. „My laptop is an extension of my memory and self“: Post-internet identity, virtual intimacy and digital queering in online popular music. *Popular Music* 36.2: 233–251.

Williams, Patrick. 2021. Beyond the binary: Digital voices and transhumanist expression in SOPHIE's *Oil of every pearl's un-insides* [Master's project report, California State University, Long Beach]. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global*. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/0f8bc52e-0ab038d75ffef71f52a8b4d4/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

The background is a solid pink color with a fine, grainy texture. Overlaid on this texture are several sets of footprints, suggesting a path or journey. The footprints are slightly darker than the background, creating a subtle pattern.

10

Warten und
Gastfreundschaft

10

Warten und Gastfreundschaft

Johanna Pütz

Ich fuhr mit einem Kumpel Skateboard an der Köln Messe, einem bekannten Street-Skate-Spot in Köln. Mein Freund und ich skateten unbekümmert, als ein Mann mittleren Alters plötzlich aus der gegenüberliegenden Pizzeria heraustrat und unmittelbar auf uns zukam. Ungewöhnlich, dachte ich mir. Ich bin es zwar gewöhnt, während des Skatens von zahlreichen Menschen angesprochen zu werden, aber noch nie habe ich bei einem Menschen direkt eine so spezielle, besondere Aura wahrgenommen. Er begrüßte uns mit dem provokanten Spruch:

„Kinder, seid ihr wieder nicht am Arbeiten?“

Zunächst wusste ich nicht, wie ich das aufnehmen sollte. Negativ? Als Vorwurf? Als Provokation? Ich entschied mich für letzteres und fing an zu lächeln, weil ich gerne auf Provokationen eingehe, besonders, wenn das, was ich erwidern werde, ganz anders ist, als die Person erwartet.

Ich setzte also zur Argumentation, als er einfach entschied: „Ich setze mich jetzt zu euch“. Und er schien schon vergessen zu haben, was er vorher gesagt hatte. Er wirkte ange-

trunken aber gut gelaunt. Dass er sich zu uns setzte, kam unerwartet. Normalerweise würde ich versuchen, aus so einer Situation zu fliehen, denn sie sprengte jetzt schon spürbar den Rahmen einer normalen, zufälligen Interaktion. Dann dachte ich an meine Hausaufgabe – erst warten und dann darüber schreiben – und ließ die Situation sich weiter entfalten. Plötzlich erwiderte er ebenfalls etwas, womit ich nicht gerechnet hätte:

„Arbeiten ist schlecht, es macht einen kaputt.“

Ich fragte, was er denn beruflich mache und bekam die Antwort, dass er nicht arbeite und dem Universum folge und dass er das Universum sei. Es war komisch, denn irgendwie glaubte ich ihm das. Wie er da saß, die Beine übereinandergeschlagen, den Blick leicht träumerisch in die Ferne gerichtet, schien er nicht wie von dieser Welt. Es war fast, als würde er schweben, leuchten, wie das Universum in Wellen und Frequenzen funktionieren und kein in sich abgeschlossenes System sein.

Dann wurde er konkreter und meinte, er sei in der Branche „Human Design“ tätig. Er würde eine App entwickeln „die alle anderen auffrisst“. Ich fragte ihn, was er denn damit meine, aber er ging nicht genauer darauf ein. Die Freundin des 50-jährigen Mannes, die auch dort war, gesellte sich gelangweilt zu uns. Sie hatte keinerlei Interesse an jeglicher Interaktion und vertiefte sich direkt in ihr Handy. Vielleicht war sie sein Verhalten gewohnt und mittlerweile genervt davon? Trotzdem schien es mir ungewöhnlich, wie sich ein Mensch so überhaupt nicht für andere, neue Bekanntschaften interessierte.

Plötzlich wandte „das Universum“ sich nur mir zu und meinte:

„Du...du bist sehr schlau. Nicht nur einfach schlau, sondern sehr schlau. Etwas Besonderes. Ich spüre das“. Dann guckte er sich meinen Kumpel an und meinte: „Du eher nicht so.“ Trotz dieses übertriebenen Kompliments missfiel mir sein Urteil über meinen Freund und ich erklärte ihm, dass er viel schlauer sei als ich, da er ein sehr kompliziertes Studium hinter sich habe. Ich wollte ihm das nicht abkaufen. Nicht, weil ich keine Komplimente annehmen kann, eher, weil es wie eine Manipulationstaktik wirkte, um mich für ihn zu gewinnen. Aus welchem Grund auch immer.

Er gab mir die Aufforderung, ihm die schlaueste Frage stellen, die mir einfalle.

Ich überlegte und fragte ihn: „Wie kannst du sicher sein, dass der Mond noch da ist, wenn du ihn nicht anschaust?“

Damit wollte ich ihn testen, ob er die grundlegende Quantentheorie bzw. den Welle-Teilchen-Dualismus der Quantenphysik verstanden hatte, die schlaueste Frage, die mir spontan einfiel. Oder war es nur die Frage, die mir zu ihm einfiel? Fragte ich ihn nicht gerade, ob er sich selbst, das Universum, theoretisch verstand?

Doch er verstand es nicht und dachte intensiv nach. Ich konkretisierte die Frage: „Wie kannst du dir sicher sein, dass ich noch hier bin, wenn du nicht hinschaust? Ich meinte, dass das Universum so was doch wissen müsse. Seine Antwort war: Er spüre, dass ich noch da war, er könne meine Energie spüren.

Dann stellte er mir die schlaueste Frage, die er kannte und fragte, was 11:11 und 22:22 gemeinsam haben würden. Ich meinte, es seien Uhrzeiten, aber nicht die gleichen und dachte daran, dass diese Gleichung der Zahlen vermutlich eine spirituelle Bedeutung haben könnte. Ehrlich gesagt verstand ich es nicht.

Die Antwort war folgende: Er formte mit seinen Händen ein Zeichen, welches die Zahlenkombinationen widerspiegelten, indem er bei beiden Händen jeweils Zeigefinger und Mittelfinger sowie Ringfinger und kleinen Finger voneinander trennte. Ich bin zwar kein Star-trek-Fan, aber war relativ sicher, dass es das „Spock-Zeichen“ darstellt, dessen Bedeutung ich nicht kannte. Tatsächlich zeigten beide Hände dann gleichzeitig die Zahlen 11:11 und 22:22. Von seiner schlauesten Frage war ich ehrlich gesagt nicht besonders beeindruckt, aber vielleicht erkannte ich auch die gesamte Dimension dieser Zeichen nicht.

Doch dann öffnete er schließlich seine Tasche und „zauberte“, wie es mir schien, ein Weinglas, gefüllt mit Eiswürfeln heraus. Einfach so und nicht verpackt, aus seiner Tasche heraus. Dazu ein Tetrapack Weißwein, was er sich dann auf der Bank abfüllte. Das beeindruckte mich dann schon. Man muss es sich mal vorstellen... Wie er noch zu Hause den Entschluss gefasst hat, ein Weinglas mit Eiswürfeln „roh“ in seine Tasche zu packen, um es irgendwo für den Fall der Fälle bereit zu haben. Man muss ja Prioritäten setzen. Aber einen Haken gibt es: Wie kann es sein, dass die Eiswürfel noch da waren? Er hat doch einige Zeit in der Pizzeria verbracht und vermutlich noch an anderen Orten... Wie kann es sein, dass die Eiswürfel nicht geschmolzen sind? „Zauberei“, schoss es mir erneut durch den Kopf. Die einzige rationale Erklärung erschloss sich mir darin, dass er das Glas heimlich vom Restaurant hat mitgehen lassen.

Dann sollte ich ihm ein Paar Skatetricks vormachen. Ich versuchte mein Bestes, worauf er bewunderte, ich sei nicht nur schlau, sondern könne auch noch Skateboard fahren. Dann forderte er mich zu einem Liegestützen-

Wettbewerb heraus. Mitten auf dem Messeplatz. Ich willigte natürlich ein, denn ich würde gewinnen, da ich sehr gut in Form bin. Und ich war gerade am Gewinnen und bei Liegestütze 30, als ein Taxifahrer uns von hinten anfeuerte noch 10 Stück mehr zu machen. Daraufhin sprang „das Universum“ auf, um mit dem Taxifahrer zu reden. Er wirkte extrem reaktiv, ging auf jegliche Schwingung in seinem Umfeld ein. Dann verlor er das Interesse am Taxifahrer, kam zu mir zurück und meinte, ich habe den Wettbewerb verloren, was natürlich nicht stimmte.

Während sich mein Kumpel und auch die Freundin des „Universums“ gelangweilt abwandten sprach ich weiter mit ihm. Er versuchte mich zu analysieren und meinte Menschen wie ich würden an dieser Welt und dem Arbeitsleben kaputt gehen. Ich solle auf mich aufpassen und auch in das Feld von „Human design“ kommen. Wir stellten fest, dass wir beide Wassermann als Sternzeichen waren und dieses soll für bestimmte Dinge im Feld Human Design stehen. Darüber hinaus bemerkten wir, dass wir beide eine Begeisterung für die Insel Ibiza teilten. Das „Universum“ meinte, er habe überall auf der Welt Wohnsitze, vor allem auf Ibiza. Als Kind habe ich regelmäßig die Sommerferien dort verbracht und ich konnte mir gut vorstellen, dass er sich auf so einer spirituellen Hippie-Insel niedergelassen hat.

Immer wieder meinte das „Universum“ zu mir und meinem Kumpel, dass wir ja nicht wissen würden, wer uns gegenüber sitze -, und zu seiner Freundin mit einem Lächeln: „Die haben ja keine Ahnung.“ Er habe Verbindungen zu allen wichtigen Personen auf dieser Welt und könnte mich mit ihnen in Kontakt bringen. Irgendwie glaubte ich ihm das schon wieder. Ich meinte, er solle z.B. Elon

Musk anrufen, aber er meinte, dass dieser kein guter Mensch sei. Er sei so etwas wie der Teufel. Aber Johnny Depp zum Beispiel habe eine sehr gute Aura. Ich forderte ihn auf, Johnny Depp zu kontaktieren und dazu zu bewegen, nach Köln zu fliegen, um sich mit mir zu treffen. Drauf hin forderte er seine Freundin auf, die Handynummer von Johnny Depp herauszusuchen, was diese diesmal nicht weiter genervt erscheinen -, sondern anfangen zu lächeln ließ. Ich konnte wirklich nicht sagen, ob das alles stimmte oder eben überhaupt nicht. Es wirkte nicht so, als seien das alles Lügen, was er erzählte. Eher so, als sei es nur in seinem betrunkenen Zustand übertrieben dargestellt, jedoch mit einem wahren Kern...

Dann zog er plötzlich seine Schuhe aus und zeigte mir seine perfekt lackierten Nägel auf welchen die Schweizer Flagge einlackiert war. „Warum?!“ dachte ich mir und fragte ihn das. Warum gerade die Schweizer Flagge? Ich lachte. Weil er überzeugter „Technorama“ Fan sei, eines Museums in der Schweiz. Es schien wie eine Art Religion für ihn zu sein.

Ich glaube, ich hätte mich noch die ganze Nacht mit dem „Universum“ unterhalten können. Es war eine dieser Interaktionen, in denen alles plötzlich möglich erschien, denn sie ging über Grenzen einer normalen Interak-

tion – und Grenzen des Möglichen eigentlich hinaus. Die Interaktion war stets von einem gedanklichen Dualismus geprägt: „Bin ich wirklich so naiv, ihm das alles zu glauben?“ Und: „Irgendwie wirkt es wie die Wahrheit.“ Darüber hinaus habe ich noch nie bei einem Menschen so eine starke Aura gesehen und gespürt. Es ist auch nicht so, als hätte ich auf so eine Situation gewartet. Solche Situationen passieren immer unerwartet. Und während die beiden anderen Teilnehmer der Interaktion gelangweilt und genervt auf ein Ende der Situation gewartet haben, schien es mir, als sei die Zeit stehen geblieben.

Die sichtliche Erwartung auf das Ende des Wartens seitens meines Kumpels und der Freundin des „Universums“ veranlasste mich zu einem Ende der Interaktion unter Betrachtung des fortgeschrittenen Abends. Ich kündigte an, mich auf den Heimweg zu machen.

Das „Universum“ hatte jedoch Interesse an einem in Kontakt bleiben. Er gab mir seine Nummer und meinte ich solle ihn immer anrufen, wenn ich etwas brauche, egal was. Und dass ich in das Feld des Human Design kommen solle. Aber wichtiger noch, dass ich auf mich aufpassen solle.

11

Warten nervt

11

Warten nervt

Lilian Richter

Warten nervt, da man die Kontrolle über Zeit seines so kurzen Lebens in fremde Hände gibt und Zeit ist kostbar. Kostbar ist etwas, was begrenzt ist, so wie meine Lebenszeit. Meist folgt auf das Warten ein geplanter Termin, sei es ein Treffen mit dem Liebsten auf dem Weihnachtsmarkt oder eine Zahnsteinentfernung bei Herrn Heinzel in Dünnwald. Warten nervt.

Warten kann überall stattfinden. An der Haltestelle, im Zug, im Bett, im Wartezimmer (was lustig ist, denn da steckt sogar das Wort „warten“ drin, praktisch ein Ort nur dafür ausgerichtet). Warten nervt.

Warten kann sehr langwierig und oft langweilig werden. Früher mehr als heute. Es gilt sich eine Beschäftigung zu suchen. Man kann viele Sachen machen, während man wartet. Rauchen zum Beispiel. Da gibt es eine allgemeine Regel und zwar geht die so, dass man, wenn die Bahn in unter 4 Minuten kommt, sich keine Kippe mehr drehen muss. Alles über 4 Minuten lohnt sich und die Zigarette gilt es in vollen (noch) entspannten Minuten zu genießen. Man kann beim Warten auch Jojo spielen, in die Luft schauen, das Handy entsperren, das Handy wieder sperren, Regentropfenrennen beobachten und auf den Lieblingstropfen wetten. Man kann warten sinnvoll

nutzen (wie ich zum Beispiel gerade. Ich mache Uni-Hausaufgaben, während ich warte, dass die 18 weiter über die Mülheimer Brücke fährt. Ich habe schon mal über ein Jahr gewartet, dass überhaupt irgendeine Bahn das wieder macht).

Warten nervt.

Oft wartet man alleine auf eine zweite Person. Wenn diese häufig zu spät kommt, kann man das Warten verkürzen, indem man auch zu spät kommt. Das nervt dann weniger.

Wenn man zu zweit wartet, ist das Warten weniger langweilig. Man kann tratschen, sich gemeinsam über Verspätung ärgern und „bei Müllers hat's gebrannt brannt brannt“ spielen. Spannend wird es, wenn man mit einer Gruppe warten muss. Kindergarten Gruppen sind oft ungeduldig. In der 18 sind oft viele Kinder, weil sie in den Zoo wollen. Sie warten dann entweder in der Bahn oder am Bahnsteig auf die Bahn. Das Warten in der Bahn macht dann wohl mehr Spaß als am Bahnsteig, weil der Zoobesuch ja noch bevor steht, logisch. Ähnlich ist es bei der betrunkenen Freundesgruppe an Karneval. Die mag es auch nicht gerne zu warten und es ist für außenstehende Personen und Aufpasser*innen mindestens gleich

nervenaufreibend wie bei der Kindergarten-gruppe. An Karneval ist es dann auch viel schwieriger beide auseinander zu halten, da beide ein Marienkäferkostüm tragen könnten. Zum Beispiel. Oder Pilot oder Feuerwehrkind oder vegane Fleischalternative.

Warten nervt.

Vor allem, wenn man nicht weiß, wann es endet. Man unterscheidet „abwarten“ oder „überdauern“ von „warten“, weil das Ende des Wartens dann bekannt ist. Entweder freut man sich auf das Ende oder nicht, wie bei einer Prüfung für die man nicht gelernt hat. Es gibt noch „erwarten“ so wie in der Sesamstraße als Ernie zu dem Krümelmonster sagt, dass wenn er ihn heut erwartet hätte, hätte er Kuchen da gehabt, aber das Krümelmonster will eigentlich nur Kekse letztendlich. Beim Erwarten, wartet man gezielt auf ein menschliches Wesen mit Termin oder auf Regen, welcher vorhergesagt wurde, oder auf ein Baby, wenn der Bauch schon ganz dick ist.

Warten ist die Vorfreude auf das Gefühl, wenn es vorbei ist, deswegen kann Warten auch nicht nerven.

An aerial photograph of a sandy beach with several footprints leading towards the ocean. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The number '12' is prominently displayed in the center in a large, white, serif font.

12

Wandeln, warten,
verwandeln

12

Wandeln, warten, verwandeln

Anne Storch

1 Gabe

Vor der Kirche sitzen oft Menschen, die um eine Gabe bitten, mal mit einem selbstgemachten Pappschild auf den Knien, mal mit dem Hund, oder nur mit einem Pappbecher auf dem Pflaster. Sie leisten dort Arbeit für andere, indem sie ihnen eine Möglichkeit bieten, Barmherzigkeit auszuüben, was im Übrigen bedeutet, dass sie nicht im eigentlichen Sinne warten. Im Gegensatz dazu wartet die eigene Tochter vor der Kathedrale in Amiens aber sehr wohl, weil es Hunde gibt, die dort nicht hineindürfen. Als ich von meiner Besichtigung

zurückkomme, hat ihr ein Passant einen Euro gegeben. Der Ort wie auch die dort durch nichts als das gemeinsame Dasitzen verbrachte Zeit haben die Prekarität, die dem Warten innewohnt, deutlich gemacht: es hat für einen Moment ein Statuswandel von der Touristin zur Bedürftigen stattgefunden.

2 Spiel

Größere Gruppen wie zum Beispiel Schulklassen warten im Bereich der restaurierten mittelalterlichen Loggia, bis das Ticket gekauft ist und die gemeinsame Besichtigung der

Anlage beginnen kann. Während andere Graffiti in der Abtei von Pomposa von Pilgerschaft und Glaube zeugen, berichten die Namensinschriften auf den Ziegeln der rekonstruierten Säule (aber nirgendwo sonst) von den Spielräumen im Warten, die angesichts von klösterlichen Lebensformen hier deren Gegenbild in den Raum stellen: *Hellhammer*, *Blasphemer*, in milder Frühlingssonne.

3 Ablehnung

Bei einem Besuch in Thüringen wollen wir mit Menschen, die sich in verschiedenen antifaschistischen Netzwerken engagieren, in Kontakt kommen. Die hübschen kleinen Orte und die ländliche Idylle lassen uns vermuten, dass das ein einfaches Unterfangen ist. Aber die Geschäftsstelle, vor der wir warten, bleibt geschlossen und unsere Anrufe werden nicht beantwortet. Während wir noch Zeit überbrücken, entdecken wir überall Zeichen der Ablehnung an einem Ort, an dem sich viele gegen Fremde abschotten möchten.

4 Kontingenz

Warten bedeutet Ungewissheit. Wie geht es aus? In Stuben, in denen weniger entfremdet als in mit Stühlen vollgestellten Räumen heutzutage gewartet werden konnte, wurden daher aus Gründen des Kontingenzmanagements apotropäische Zeichen angebracht.

5 Mittlerweile

ist schon der Rosenbusch am Eheweg erblüht

6 Mittlerweile

ist der apokalyptische Vorhang beiseit gezogen (und alles was dahinter ist, ist ein Mann mit einem weiteren apokalyptischen Vorhang)

7 Mittlerweile

Hat die Oma Spuren in die Wand gebauft.







3





5







ISSN: 2513-101X

https://journals.ub.uni-koeln.de/index.php/the_mouth