Revista Guillermo de Ockham
Reflection article | Open Access

Migration and (Loss of) Language—or about the Problems of Loneliness Caused by Migration and the Implications for Intercultural Dialogue Today

Migración y (pérdida de) la lengua: o sobre los problemas de soledad causados por la migración y las implicaciones para el diálogo intercultural de hoy

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Received: 09/26/2023

Revised: 10/19/2023

Accepted: 11/30/2023

Cite as follows: Boteva-Richter, Bianca. (2024). Migration and (loss of) language—or about the problems of loneliness caused by migration and the implications for intercultural dialogue today. *Revista Guillermo de Ockham, 22*(1), pp. 91-103. https://doi.org/10.21500/22563202.6675

Editor in Chief: Norman Darío Moreno Carmona, Ph.D., https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8216-2569

Guest editor: Raúl Fornet Betancourt, Ph.D., https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0819-8002

Declaration of interests: The author has declared that there is no conflict of interest.

Availability of data: All relevant data can be found in the article. For further information, please contact the corresponding author.

Funding: None. This research did not receive any specific grants from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or nonprofit sectors.

Abstract

Migration and language are closely interrelated fields that have not been sufficiently investigated. In particular, the state of speechlessness caused by migration has so far received little philosophical attention. Hence, this article explores speechlessness due to migration based on a dialectical human existence (*Dasein*). The condition of loss of language is philosophically significant because it shows who we are and who we can become through migration. It also unveils the individual and his or her development, as well as the condition of the receiving societies. The loss of language is the seismograph of human existence.

Keywords: intercultural philosophy, social philosophy, migration, Watsuji, *Ningen*, language.

Resumen

La migración y la lengua son campos estrechamente interrelacionados que no se han investigado lo suficiente. En particular, el estado de mudez que provoca la migración ha recibido, hasta ahora, escasa atención filosófica. Así, este artículo explora la falta de habla a causa de la migración, basándose en una existencia humana dialéctica (*Dasein*). La condición de pérdida del lenguaje es filosóficamente significativa, porque muestra quiénes somos y quiénes podemos llegar a ser a través de la migración. También, desvela al individuo y su desarrollo, así como a la condición de las sociedades receptoras. La pérdida de la lengua es el sismógrafo de la existencia humana.

Palabras clave: filosofía intercultural, filosofía social, migración, Watsuji, *Ningen*, lenguaje.

This article is dedicated to all migrants who are trying to communicate.

Introduction

Migration is not a phenomenon, contrary to widespread naming and attribution. It is neither a purely geographical movement tough, nor purely a matter of statistical record of people or masses, moving from one country to the other, crossing seas, climbing mountains, climbing over walls and hills, to save, secure, or improve their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. In sociological considerations, as well as in philosophy, migration is commonly reflected as a movement rather than a mode of existence grounded in time (Bauböck, 2008; Cassee & Goppel, 2012; Miller, 2017). Bauböck (2008) writes: "Migration can be forced or voluntary, but it is always perceived as an act of the wandering persons" (p. 818). Yet the focus on the geographical aspect based on the movement is misleading; it leads away from the real core of the problem and is therefore criticized in this article.

Migration, whether in the movement itself or the state of exile, that is, in the resting phase, initiates an ontologically exceptional situation that deeply intervenes in existential structures and thus fragments and changes the existence of those affected and of entire societies in the long term.

It is a geopolitical process, ongoing for many millennia only seemingly out of control at the current moment, spurred by capital, or rather its accumulation in a few rich countries of the world. This unequal weighting initiates a movement of the poor, desperate, and oppressed (Fornet-Betancourt, 2023, pp. 150–151); so that a new global anthropological situation is created; nowadays there is no human being, no society and no nation, be it open or closed, be it surrounded by water or surrounded by walls, that has remained untouched or unaffected by migration, by migrating people and migratory movements (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023).

Even island nations like Japan, which have extremely restrictive migration policies and try to curb immigration through policies that take advantage of their geographic location, are already affected by migration and its consequences through the geopolitical decisions of their governments and are already affected in the attempt to legislate the restrictions and keep people from entering. The Hungarian President Viktor Orbán for example, proudly emphasized on television during his last visit to Austria that his country had taken in "zero migrants." But this statement reveals him to be, not only a denier but also a politician who always focuses on migration and tries to deny the fact of demographic change (Smekal, 2022).

Humanity once again finds itself in an exceptional anthropological situation and to deny this or to wear out one's eyes in front of it, to abandon migrating people or to banish them behind walls, fragments our future and causes a strong moral discomfort and send the people, who are directly or indirectly affected by migration, into an uncertain tomorrow. Humanity currently has two important and urgent problems to solve, that is, the climate crisis and migration movements, whereby these two fields are strongly intertwined.

In this article, however, I would not like to write about the nexus of migration and environment, but to argue for an *anthropological turn* and explain migration, as well as the state and condition of migrating people and their exceptional situation, based on; language and above all on the *basis of its loss*.

This is to counter the prevailing, partly poetic descriptions of exile and homeland (Di Cesare, 2020, pp. 128–139; Heidegger, 1982, pp. 60–61, 68–69, 73, 89) as well as of loss and being exposed, with a realistic, philosophical reflection on existential hard-

 https://doi.org/10.21500/22563202.6675

ships (Améry, 1988, pp. 59–70), and to explain the fragmentation of the existence and the destroyed structures of the being (*Dasein*).

For migration and exile are cold[1] (Améry, 1988, pp. 69–70; Fornet-Betancourt, 2023, p. 150), they are mute inside and loud outside, they are felt physically and mentally, and they transport experiences from outside to the inside of the structure of being (*Dasein*), fragment it, and in turn, through introspection and exprospection, transport the processed inner experiences to the outside as bodily movements and expressions.

What exactly is meant by this and how the functionality of the extended existence is shown by the intersubjective connections will be discussed in the course of the article. The article ends with a conclusion about what this exceptional situation means for the migrants and with the explication, how the speechlessness catapults people into isolation in the middle of a society and prevents any further communication, also in the sense of an intercultural dialogue.

Migration—a Journey to the Others or to Oneself?

> The intransitive Verb "to migrate" is not—as often thought—a synonym of "to move." […] it comes from the Latin *migrare*. It is thought that the Latin root *mig-*, which means moving from a place, comes from the Sanskrit root *miv-*. This *is* seemingly attested in the noun or adjective *migros*, made up of the suffix **-ro* and the Indo-European root **h2mei-gw*. […] In all its combinations means "to move," "to change place," "exchange place," like how offerings are exchanged, such that the foreigner is welcome as a guest rather than an enemy. (Di Cesare, 2020, pp. 69–70)

Di Cesare's (2020, p. 70) initial elaboration of migration raises a problem of enormous importance for the present article because it expands the interpretation and concludes that *migrare* must have something to do with intersubjective exchange; the verb, in its etymological elaboration, points to human activity as interconnection and not to a mere wandering, a mere exchange of space. This elaboration sets in motion the intersubjective nuance that will further shape the mode of reflection.

While Di Cesare's (2020, pp. 128–135) turn of concept is significant, even if, and I must criticize this, borrowed from Heidegger, she romanticizes a notion of exile and what a life away means. In doing so, she not only poeticizes exile but, again according to Heidegger's figure of the wanderer, draws a blurred silhouette of migrating people (pp. 135–139).

Nevertheless, her elaboration comes closer to my definition and understanding of migration than any other philosophical-political conception I have read so far; she describes the condition of migration, but especially of being a stranger, in a way that is forceful and calls for moral culpability. (Di Cesare, 2020, pp. 33–36, 49, 81–84; Fornet-Betancourt, 2021, p. 26).

But what is meant by this and what does migration mean in a *Dasein*-focused account concerning intersubjective time?

Migration is, according to my understanding, an existence-fragmenting process associated with a rupture of previous cultural aspects, artefacts, and practices, with stepping beyond oneself, it is an intervention in the human structure and that is why Bauböck (2008) calls migration "not only an aspect of the *condition humana*, but in certain ways also constitutive of the human nature" and admits that "[t]he philosophi-

1. This article is about forced migration. The considerations therefore do not apply to the cases of expats or voluntary migration, or only in part.

cal consideration of migration does not refer to the purely spatial aspect of the change of location, but rather to the associated crossing of cultural and political borders" (pp. 818–819). Even if in the field of intercultural philosophy culture is not understood as an entity but as a kind of process, a movement that is maintained by receptions that are received and transmitted (Wimmer, 2004, pp. 45–49), as an open porous structure, however, migration changes parts of the cultural structure that before and after (pre- and post-migrant) gave people a sense of belonging or at least suggested it.

We, therefore, speak of migration if there is not only a change in place but also an intersubjective and cultural change that differs from that in the destination culture in terms of at least one cultural practice and artefacts, such as language, clothing, religion, climatic conditions, cultural tradition, etc.—in any case with a kind of visible or perceptible break with the prevailing intersubjective environment, with a kind of cultural change and interpersonal displacement.

This "cultural change and interpersonal displacement" is most noticeable in the intersubjective connections that are broken and need to be reconstituted. It is the ruptured intimate relationships that the subject undergoes in the course of migration and that must be reknotted, reconstituted and lived anew in the destination country. In this process, intersubjective time expresses itself in a simultaneous experience of yesterday by leaving the beloved ones, today by building a new home, and tomorrow by preparing and building a future for oneself and for the family (Fornet-Betancourt, 2021, p. 101).

This journey, which extends to a real or supposed new home, is due to the subsequent elaboration of the subject as a dialectical being, both a journey to other people and to novel places and a journey into the interior, a journey to oneself. Rolf Elberfeld (2016) writes about this:

> Anyone who has ever led a life in a foreign cultural environment and language knows that, on the one hand, it is not easy to lead such a life, and on the other hand, in most cases, one first learns more about oneself than about the others. In other words, by trying to understand the others, one gets to know oneself. (p. 5)

The Migrating Subject or *Ningen* on the Run

By noting this intersubjective interconnectedness in the course of wandering, as well as by expanding the migration narrative, we immediately strike at the heart of the problem: the subject and its elaboration. After all, if migration is to be intersubjectively, culturally, and socially connoted rather than merely as an activity in the sense of movement from one place to another, then it makes sense to first deal with the subject and its philosophical representation.

This debate under changed premises shifts the spatial focus in favour of intersubjective time and gains a new nuance through the importance of language.

Not helpful in this regard is the European-historical elaboration of the subject as a monologic egoistic individual who questions himself, and above all is self-sufficient (Hatfield, 2018; Heidegger, 2008, p. 10). In many works, especially in the field of postcolonial research, this European-American focus is meanwhile strongly criticized. However, there are hardly any proposals or approaches that draw from non-European cultures to reframe human existence. Some of these exceptions include the work of Kimura Bin (1995) and David Johnson (2019).

To avoid this European trap and to give being (*Dasein*) an all-round shaping, I have been working for more than 10 years with the concept of *human-in-between*

 https://doi.org/10.21500/22563202.6675

(*Ningen*) of the Japanese philosopher Tetsuro Watsuji. Watsuji, who is to be criticized because of his political conviction and entanglement during the military time in Japan (Brüll, 1989; Carter & McCarthy, 2019; Heisig, 2001) is nevertheless considered the most important ethicist of modern Japanese philosophy and, meanwhile, receives increasing attention abroad (Johnson, 2019). This attention is due to his dialectical conception of the subject, which offers an all-round intersubjective elaboration that is particularly suitable for work in the intercultural field. David Johnson (2019) writes: "The Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro (1889–1960) was a thinker whose work extended across a remarkable range of topics in cultural theory, intellectual history, religion, the arts, and, above all, philosophy" (p. 3).

In a profound engagement with Asian and European philosophy, Watsuji (2005, pp. 29–30; 1996, pp. 87–90, 113–117) forms a new concept of "being-in-relation-to-others" based on the Buddhist negation of negation and defining the human being as a human-being-in-between (*Ningen*) or as a dialectical being (Brüll, 1989, pp. 152–155; Johnson, 2019, pp. 101–117). He writes about the human existence as an existence in-betweenness:

> In an existence so constituted, the PERSON, while appearing as an individual, realizes the whole. This individual can become body, thus against the body of a subjective I, through abstraction from SUBJECTIVE existence; this totality can, as a community of such individuals, if one abstracts from their SUBJECTIVE existence, become society as an objective figure, thus an interaction between the subjective egos. As a SUBJECTIVE existence, however, this existence is always practical and action-related and neither consciousness nor being. Such an existence is existence only within the movement, in which, by being individual, it becomes the whole […] It is exactly this movement that now makes any HUMAN community possible. As a mode of behavior for the manufacturing of being in between, it generally intersects the correlation of action itself. (Watsuji, 2005, pp. 29–30)

This statement of philosophical significance models a being that is harmonious and meets many requirements: it is a dual, relational existence that is generated and destroyed again through the "negation of the negation": In one moment the *individual aspect predominates* and the human being is, for example, predominantly a woman/or man/or nonbinary, someone's wife, husband, partner, mother, father, colleague, or a member of a family, a company, a country. Here one lives out in its respective individual relationships and interdependencies.

This "I" is nonetheless not only individualistic, as the society is also inherent within it. Therefore, in the next moment, through the previously mentioned relationships, *social consciousness outrages egoistic goals* within the small personal structure. As a result, the individual aspect must be overcome by negating it with all strength so that society in the "I" can take over leadership from this point forward. Then the "I" is now a social whole, living and generating history and sharing memory, functioning as a citizen or as part of a country, nation, or group as a member of a formation (Watsuji, 1996, pp. 87–90, 113–117). Yet, this social side cannot exist for a long time, because there is a danger of losing oneself as an individual with their own characteristics and thus fading in everything big and social; so, the social is now bitterly fought and *the individual "I" appears again* anew in its existence (Watsuji, 1996, pp. 23, 117). Existence is then, when viewed from all sides, an individual-social existence, which in its spiral structure is alternatively spatiotemporally designed as a double helix (individual-social; Boteva-Richter, 2022, p. 23).

For the migrating subjects, however, this means that their inner social structure is torn apart, damaged and destroyed from the moment of migration. "Human-in-between" or "*Ningen* on the run" therefore means not only loss of external structures, of social

ties, of natural and cultural environment. "*Ningen* on the run" means fragmentation of inside and of outside, it means a fatal movement which initiates a multi-part spiral and a maelstrom of experiences, an introspective and exprospective perception. The being or "*Dasein*," in a word, is internally disrupted by migration, because the intersubjective connections that form this dialectical being, experience incurable ruptures, new assignments, and even reversing pervertive connections. Through these, the loved ones left behind are assigned new, inappropriate roles by turning grandparents into parents, grandchildren into children, and partners into former lovers (Boteva-Richter, 2017, pp. 265–269; Gheaus, 2013).

But this reversal of roles, the fragmentation of the former connections would be surmountable, if—in the new home—there would be new healing connections, to putty the old suffering, in a resumption of the connections and a re-situating. Whether and how this succeeds, however, depends on an individual-social aspect that is so important that philosophy has devoted a whole branch, a separate line of research, to it; it lies in, and it depends on language.

Language and Speechlessness—Inner and Outer Language, Loneliness

Heidegger (1982) writes in *The Nature of Language*:

> If it is true, that man finds the proper abode of his existence in language-whether he is aware of it or not-then an experience we undergo with language will touch the innermost nexus of our existence. We who speak the language may thereupon become transformed by such experiences, from one day to the next or in the course of time. (p. 57)

And he carries on: "Language is the house of being" (Heidegger, 1982, p. 63).

Yes indeed, the language is our house of being, it forms and literally speaks out, how we feel and who we are. However, Heidegger, like other philosophers dealing with language, even some postcolonial philosophers like Bhabha (2004)[2] speak and write not about a certain language, but about a language common to all human beings. They write about the language that is the primordial ground of all of us as human beings (Gadamer, 2021, pp. 401–506; Heidegger, 1982, pp. 57–139) and that is available to all of us to a certain extent as soon as we outgrow it a little (Watt, 2010, p. 76). Even though it is of enormous importance to deal with the language on a meta-level, it is the respective language that first enables us to become aware of ourselves as individual-social beings by communicating within us and also with others.

Frantz Fanon (2008) is aware of the importance of the interconnection through language, particularly for migrants. He writes:

> We attach a fundamental importance to the phenomenon of language and consequently consider the study of language essential for providing us with one element in understanding the black man's dimension of being-for-others, it being understood that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other. (p. 1)

And he continues: "To speak a language is to appropriate its world and culture" (Fanon, 2008, p. 21).

I agree with Fanon (2008, pp. 19–21), especially because here we can observe that it is not only the theoretical language, not the ability to speak as a human being of enormous importance but also the *understandable speaking,* which enables us to communicate and

2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is one of the few exceptions, along with Frantz Fanon, who writes about participation in a specific language that is understandable. But she only mentions it and does not explore the meaning of not understanding (Butler & Spivak, 2011, pp. 73–74).

 https://doi.org/10.21500/22563202.6675

to initiate a dialogue, the ability that enables us to interweave and maintain interconnections with other people. The language is also according to Gadamer (2021) not a theoretical feature, as

> Language has its true being only in dialogue, in *coming to an understanding*." […] [Above all] [c]oming to an understanding is not a mere action, a purposeful activity, a setting up of signs through which I transmit my will to others. […] It is a life process in which a community of life is lived out.[3] (p. 462)

Gadamer shows very clearly the double function of language and its dialectical action: On the one hand, it is an individual feature, our own language, or a certain language we are socialized in and which enables us to speak to ourselves, within ourselves, but also outwards to other people, who can understand us. On the other hand, it shows our social aspect of the self, if we analyze the subject as an individual-social being according to the *Ningen* concept. Here, in the social modus, the language knots this community of life, if it is spoken in a *respective, understandable language*. Here the speaking is focused on the outside and it is not an inner matter, it is not a solitary inner, purely individual affair. Speaking outside the self is speaking with others, and this "speaking with" is sharing and exchanging of meanings or "practical understanding" (Watsuji, 1996, p. 37). "Speaking with" and not "speaking about" initiates a dialogue and includes at least two, if not more participants; it presupposes people who speak to each other and interact somehow linguistically. But this also means, that "coming to an understanding" or "a dialogue" hast to be *understandable*, it means that a dialogue has to be shared in *a common language*, *in a language all participants speak and understand*. "Coming to an understanding" is therefore not merely a theoretical matter of a meta-language nor just a linguistic ability of us as humans.

The linguists Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2010, pp. 18–19), who research the anthropology of language and develop socio-linguistics that are individual-socially based and which does focus on the nexus of the individual-social understanding are well aware of this problem. They, and Bulgarian Philosopher Aneta Karageorgieva (2016, p. 8), write about the linguistic individual-social interaction and about the inner and outer focus of speaking.

To differentiate the concept of speaking as understanding from the linguistic ability as humans, an individual but also sociocultural and anthropological embedding of the problem is needed.[4] Interestingly, the European-American philosophy works on the one hand for centuries with an individualistic concept of the being (Watsuji, 2005, pp. 32–107), while on the other hand, it studies language at a meta-level as a linguistic ability for all humans as if we all had the same idiom! Preferably an English or German one (Heidegger, 1982).

The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, on the other hand, examines the significance of language in his so-called polyphonic expulsion (Simpson, 2023, p. 226). The voices that he locates according to Dostoyevsky, are mono- and polylingual, also individually faceted, i.e. his protagonists speak within themselves, like Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov and his comrades-in-arms in social, gender, etc. diverse ways and thus articulate the colourful faceting of the self that expresses itself in the external world (Haye & González, 2021, pp. 750–752; Sasse, 2010, pp. 91–92; Simpson, 2023, p. 226). For him "the basis of

3. It is very difficult to translate Gadame and Heidegger, the nuances that make up an important part of their philosophy are lost in another language. It should therefore be added to this quotation that it is not a problem of agreement, but of understanding a particular language, of the general conditions of being able to understand. It is about the ability to speak and to understand (Gadamer, 2010, pp. 388–389).
4. The German philosopher Gabriele Münnix (2019a, pp. 18–19) also writes about the importance of understanding in the context of intercultural translation.

being human (or human beings) is not self-identity but the opening of dialogue, an opening which always implements the simultaneous inter-animation of more than one voice" (Simpson & Dervin, 2020, as cited in Simpson, 2023, p. 226). He also considers language and interculturality of the human being as a "condition of the modern culture since utterances are conceived as an always fragmentary and incomplete part of the inter spacetime, that is, as borders *between* speakers and *across* languages" (as cited in Haye & González, 2021, p. 75). Bakhtin concludes that

> Discourse becomes more historically configured in such a way that there is never only one discourse, but always contestable discourses. This entails that there is not a metadiscourse, a total language, organizing discursive multiplicity within a unitary system, an integrative genre, or a finished and closed utterance. The condition of modern culture is "heteroglossia," which means there is not only a multiplicity of languages but also an interrelationship of languages, discourses and genres, through which, and across which, speakers move. (as cited in Haye & González, 2021, p. 751)

Accordingly, Watsuji's being as an individual-social, dialectical being, is constituted through the "negation of negation"—we see the factuality with other eyes. Then we see, what the anthropological situation shows, namely, that language is an individual-social, i.e., private-public or, to put it more precisely, monolingual-multilingual affair. It shows that language, as we have already said, speaks to and in us, but also to others and with others, and it does this in different idioms. Language speaks in (different) languages!

Aneta Karageorgieva (2016), Gabriele Münnix (2019b) and Dieter Lohmar (2008) also analyze philosophically the different orientations of language: towards the inside and outside. Karageorgieva (2016, pp. 8–10) and Münnix (2019b, pp. 159–162) examine the importance of private language for the formation of consciousness. Dieter Lohmar (2008, p. 176), on the other hand, examines the entanglement of inner and outer language phenomenologically and contrasts public communication with inner (linguistic) thinking. Their works are important, but I want to add to it a new aspect, an aspect that even postcolonial philosophers have not thought about: the question of language loss due to falling out of the cultural-social environment.

To start with, we have first to recall that speaking, even as a private language, even as speaking to oneself, is not a solitary action. Speaking to oneself is spoken in a common language, that is, the words I use to speak to myself are words and phrases of a particular but common language. Watsuji (2005, pp. 124–125) speaks in such a context of a communal-individual act. Here—in this entanglement of inner-outer focus of the language—it shows its dialectical function, that is, the dialectical mode of speaking through the anthropological embedding of the self, which enables us to speak inwardly and outwardly, to lose oneself in thoughts, to formulate them in a certain idiom and to communicate with others in a common language. Here, this common language is what makes communication possible in the first place. Because "[e]very conversation obviously presupposes that the two speakers speak the *same language*" (Gadamer, 2021, p. 403). And in a common conversation the language reveals its own core, as "language has its true being only in *dialogue*, in *coming to an understanding* [emphasis added]" (p. 462).

Here through this inversion of the Heideggerian thought, the contextuality of language in everyday being is elaborated and located in a living togetherness. Without this living togetherness, without exchanging and shaping our lives through communication, there is no We, but also no I. Aristoteles (1994, p. 3) also advocated this position, since he saw humans as always being in a speech community (Gadamer, 2021, p. 463). But I would add, an individual-social being living in a speech community. This also means, however, that we need a common, mutually intelligible language to have a hermeneutic

 https://doi.org/10.21500/22563202.6675

and linguistic experience (Gadamer, 2021, p. 469; Münnix, 2019b, pp. 154–156), or simply put, in order to understand something. Language, then, is a medium through which we act out our individual-communal side, it is a nexus of introspection and exprospection (Karageorgieva, 2016, pp. 7–8; Münnix, 2019b, p. 159), and a central element of our consciousness (Watt, 2010, p. 76). But what happens when people migrate and arrive in a country where they initially do not understand the language spoken there by the majority and cannot communicate in it? The Austrian philosopher and author Jean Améry (1988), who lived in exile for a long time as a resistance fighter against the Nazis, writes forcefully about this:

> What was, what is this homesickness of those expelled from the Third Reich at the same time because of their convictions and their pedigree? [...] The past was suddenly buried, and one no longer knew who one was. [...] My identity was bound to a badly and quite German name to the dialect of my closer country of origin. But I no longer wanted to allow myself the dialect, since the day when an official regulation forbade me to wear the folk costume, to which I had been dressed almost exclusively from early childhood. By then even the name had little meaning [....] It was just good enough to be entered in the register of undesirable foreigners at Antwerp City Hall, where the Flemish officials pronounced it so strangely that I hardly understood it. And the friends with whom I had spoken in the native dialect were also erased. (p. 61)

In such intense moments, when the intersubjective ties are broken and "[i]n situations when coming to understanding is disrupted or impeded, we first become conscious of the conditions of all understanding" (Gadamer, 2021, p. 402). However, the moment language is lost through migration, we not only lose our intersubjective connections; we further lose the present with its immediate perception. We also lose our past, as our intimate intersubjective connections are fragmented and cut, and we even lose our coming future, as it seems uncertain and vague. The intersubjective time here has a very haunting and intense effect: the loss of language catapults people directly into the cold external exile.

Améry (1988) writes:

> Exile [is] perhaps not an incurable disease [...], since one can make the foreign country one's home by living in it and with it for a long time; this is called finding a new homeland. And it is right insofar as one slowly, slowly learns to decipher the signs. Under certain circumstances, one can be so "at home" in the foreign country that in the end one has the ability to situate people socially and intellectually according to their language, their facial features, their clothes [...]. However, it will be true that even in this favourable case, for the exile who came to the new country as an already adult person, seeing through the signs will not be spontaneous, but rather an intellectual act associated with a certain mental effort [...]. [For] [s]ome as one learns the mother tongue without knowing its grammar, so one experiences the native environment. (p. 66)

But what happens when you leave your home world, go to a foreign country and do not know the signs or the language at first? How does the grammar of exile manifest itself? How can one participate politically, if one cannot articulate oneself in a common, understandable language? How can one interact or communicate, if one lacks the linguistic means? How can one exchange experiences, how can one communicate in a world of silence? What happens to one, in oneself, when speechlessness sets in during adulthood?

Human identity is complex, we are dialectically individual-social beings (Watsuji, 1996, p. 24; 2017, pp. 8–9), but also multi-faceted and multi-dimensional at our innermost core (Joseph, 2010, pp. 9–18; Watt, 2010, pp. 76–86). Multilingualism increases or extends the facets of personality through a multidimensional (linguistic) experience of reality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010, pp. 18–19). When one crosses over into an alternative linguistic world, into an idiom that one has not mastered, a reductive movement is initiated, a process that shrinks the linguistic experience through not being able to express oneself;

a process of impoverishment and withdrawal into inner experience begins. The faceting of the self, formerly so dazzling and rich, shrinks into itself and retreats into the supposedly safe interior of the personality. An emptiness in experience and in communication spreads, and "singularization" (Vereinzelung) occurs, as Heidegger (1992, p. 9) calls it.

It is here at this initial moment of migration, or more precisely at the moment of arrival in the destination country, that loneliness and singularization are most noticeable. Améry (1988) writes:

> Those who know exile have learned some life answers, and even more life questions. Among the answers is the initially trivial realisation that there is no return, *because never the re-entry into a space is also a regaining of lost time* [emphasis added]. [….] We lost [...] everything [...], but also the people: the comrade from the school desk, the neighbour, the teacher. [....] And we lost the language. (pp. 59–60)

And Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (2023) writes:

> Lo que nos proponemos aquí es más bien. Ampliando lo antes indicado, reflexionar sobre la migración como un proceso personal de despedidas y encuentros que, para la persona que emigra, connota experiencias biográficas marcadas por formas específicas de una soledad que, como intentaremos describir en lo que sigue, se puede llamar una doble soledad. (p. 150)

The loss of language completed Améry's (1988) final displacement and catapulted him into a hard and cold exile. The former intersubjective connections that existed with friends, teachers, and neighbours, and that were transported and lived in a particular language were fragmented and disintegrated. Here, it can be well observed, that language is not a mere theorem, not a dead idiom that is good for writing and reading but above life. Language, the respective spoken living language, has its being in understanding (Gadamer, 2021, p. 462), and this understanding is the communication that is mediated through the intersubjective strands. Even Heidegger (1982, p. 51) had to admit at last that language is always a dialogue.

But a dialogue is not a meta-language, not a dead syntax, not a purely theoretical hermeneutic. Language is something living, it consists of respective, intersubjective acts that connect people and make them live with each other. If these interconnections are interrupted or minimised by a lack of language, impoverishment and a void arise in the inner experience, because the interpretation of the vitally important signs *must be replaced by an interpretation from the imagination. This means that in the case of not being able to understand, the necessary signs or sounds are replaced by imagining the meaning* since understanding is essential for survival. Here, many European philosophers can be criticised for not considering the importance of speechlessness for the generation of knowledge. But this is essential because if a (foreign) language cannot be understood, this *speaking degenerates into noise or chatter*.

If a language cannot be understood, it degenerates into an external noise and loses the meaning of what is spoken. In such a case it is not possible to distinguish between meaningful and meaningless sounds, in such cases a bell sound is of equal meaning to a spoken sound. Or more precisely, of equal meaninglessness. But what is the effect of this "noise" that is brought to us from outside, in the case of non-understanding? With the import of this "noise" or of meaningless sounds an emptiness inside is created. This emptiness is generated through the effort to process the external impressions, yet above all to establish and maintain the vital intersubjective connections. But to establish or to maintain the intersubjective connections understanding is needed, i.e., what is spoken must also be understood and processed inside. Therefore, by the impossibility of interpreting the signs and what is being spoken, the intersubjective connections are fragmented and a tremendous emptiness inside the self is created; an inner emptiness

 https://doi.org/10.21500/22563202.6675

that soon turns into a cutting loneliness. This is the moment when the aforementioned singularization and isolation of the individual occurs in its sharpest form. Here the self becomes further fragmented, for the social connections of the *Ningen* are cut and wither away *in an imagined but not really lived togetherness*. *In a prolonged state of lack of understanding, the external exile is ultimately imported into the interior of the self through the acts of non-understanding.*

Conclusion

What does the state of speechlessness mean for our new fellow citizens, for the respective societies, and for necessary intercultural dialogue?

Watsuji (2005) writes about the importance of understanding in speaking:

> We can recognize the unity of two assertions. On the one hand, the *logos-practice forms society*. The fact that man is different from the animal and possesses *words* means nothing other than he possesses differentiation, i.e., reason. And a unified relationship between self and other through words, i.e., reason, is the basis of human community. This can be understood in the sense that human relationships are an exchange of understanding between self and other and that this understanding already includes the distinction between good and evil, right and wrong. (pp. 38–39)

In this article, I have tried to explain the importance of understanding for individuals and societies using the Japanese philosopher Tetsuro Watsuji's model of being, the "human-between." In my opinion, the problem of understanding, or the lack thereof, is an important one for philosophy, but also for facticity; because it not only affects individuals, but shapes societies and structures ethical questions.

Understanding or speechlessness opens up a view inwards and outwards: the state testifies to our inner life as a "polyphony of being," and at the same time to our connections to others, new and old fellow citizens. Connections that, according to Watsuji, are an important *part of ourselves,* whose dysfunction leads to the fragmentation of Self. Just as in the terrible state of not being able to speak and of not being able to understand described above, it is not only the external exile that is imported into the interior of the self. It leads after some time to a silencing of those concerned and to the inability to tell and share one's own feelings, thoughts, history, and experiences. The constant misinterpretation through imagining is like experiencing through a glass wall, it is isolating and segregating. This process must therefore urgently be brought to an end, as it means not only loneliness and isolation of the individual, but also the *loneliness of the society*, which cannot communicate with these people, cannot act with and cannot share their experiences. Finally, *it is a dialogue that is prevented*, a development that diverges in all directions, *the opposite of intercultural togetherness*. Not being able to understand prevents therefore the "embedding in the anthropological situation" (Fornet-Betancourt, 2021, pp. 24, 43, 64–65), and it prevents the intercultural dialogue that all target societies need.

Many philosophers have investigated what dialogue is and what facets the human language exposes. In my opinion, this is best shown in the moment of silence. When the human being is not able to speak, when interaction is prevented in the moment, the power and powerlessness of language becomes apparent. And in this moment it shows the power and powerlessness of our (multicultural) societies.

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