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Narrative Inquiry

Migrant identities in narrative practice: In-/out-group constructions of 'comrades' and 'rivals' in storytelling about transnational life

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**Migrant identities in narrative practice: In-/out-group constructions of ‘comrades’
and ‘rivals’ in storytelling about transnational life**

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From an interpretive, post-structuralist perspective, this paper analyzes the discursive constructions of fluid migrant identities through the lens of narrative practice. I describe the presentations of the Self /the Other which get inscribed in a series of truncated stories mobilized by three unsheltered Ghanaians who lived on a bench in a Catalan town. I explore their self-attributed /other-ascribed social categories and argue that these multifaceted identity acts are a lens into how heterogeneous migrant networks apprehend social exclusion in their host societies. I show that a narrative approach to the interactional processes of migrant identity construction may be revealing of these populations’ social structuration practices, which are ‘internally’ regulated in off-the-radar economies of meaning. I problematize hegemonic conceptions that present migrants as agency-less, decapitalized storied Selves, and suggest that stagnated populations may also be active tellers who act upon companions and rivals, when fighting for transnational survival in contexts of precariousness.

Keywords: Narrative practice; Migration; Identity; Social Structuration;

Catalonia

Introduction: Narrative practice as a venue into the migrants' in-/out-group identity constructions and 'internal' social stratification practices

From an interpretive, post-structuralist realist perspective, narratives are understood as ordinary, transformative interactional events whereby we act and react to our social surrounding, from our situated tale-worlds (Cohen, 2012; De Fina, 2009; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008a, 2008b; Fairclough, 1989; Wortham, 2001). That is, they are seen as rich historicized discursive actions that uniquely put into the fore the ways in which we negotiate who, where, and with whom we are or we are not, and why, in a given time and space (Bamberg et al., 2007; De Fina, 2003a; Georgakopoulou, 2007).

Within the various multidisciplinary sociolinguistics and discourse traditions that share this approach, the practice of narrative has proved extremely fruitful for the analysis of identity management (Bamberg, 2012; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; Georgakopoulou, 2006), particularly for the study of migrant populations, and of how their multifaceted identity construction projects intersect with the ways in which they discursively apprehend their transnational life trajectories, in the present era of "late capitalism" (Heller & Duchêne, 2012).

In fact, since the early twentieth century (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 206), storytelling analysis has provided a concise, comprehensive understanding of the inscription of variegated self-attributed (or other-ascribed) social categories into migrant narrative discourse. Basically, it has shown that these translocal identity (non)-

1 affiliations are closely linked to the ways in social actors deal with (naturalize, embrace,
2 ignore, fight or resist) lived experiences of social inequality, including racialization and
3
4 stereotyping practices, in their host societies (see Baynham, 2003, 2005; De Fina,
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6 2003a, 2003b; De Fina & King, 2011; Lanza, 2012; Relaño-Pastor, 2010; and Relaño
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8 Pastor & De Fina, 2005, by way of example).
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12 Despite this robust literature on the migrants' multi-local, polyphonic identity
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14 acts, the actual "internal identity dialectics" (Vertovec, 2001, p. 577) that materialize in
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16 narratives of transnationalism remain largely under-studied (Dong, 2012, p. 240).
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18 Therefore, we still do not know much about how (and why) heterogeneous groups of
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20 migrants of very different socioeconomic and ethnolinguistic backgrounds 'do' identity
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22 work among themselves, *within* migrant-regulated hierarchized social networks that
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24 tend to be hidden from view (Sabaté i Dalmau, 2014).
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30 In this paper, I explore the interplay of fluid, open-ended presentations of the
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32 Self and of the Other (i.e. 'I'/'we' and 'they' positionings; Gregg, 2011, p. 320) that
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34 emanate from a series of migrant stories narrated by a small group of Ghanaian men
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36 who, unsheltered, lived on a bench located at the periphery of a Catalan urban town.¹ I
37
38 first analyze the ways in which informants mobilize race, class, gender, ethnicity and
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40 religion in a gamut of homogenizing (inclusionary and exclusionary) constructions of
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42 close/distant migrant individuals and collectivities which include, for instance, local
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44 'Romanian drug dealers', 'Latino thieves' and 'better-off Ghanaians', and far-way 'non-
45
46 tolerant Muslim Nigerians'.² I argue that these social categories are revealing of the
47
48 informants' 'internal' "social structuration" (Giddens, 1984) or social organization
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50 practices, which are negotiated and regulated according to their own out-/in-group
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52 economies of meaning and to their fluctuating local orders of things, frequently in
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54 connection with, but at the margins of, institutional settings (Sabaté i Dalmau, 2013). I
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then claim that these narrated constructions of (non)-belonging unravel, in an unparalleled manner, complex social relationships based on neighborliness, love and comradeship, and, simultaneously, on hatred and even harassment. Thus, I posit that these Ghanaian narrators' stratification practices speak of how migrants strategically voice or manifest both solidarity and competition with one another in the race for the (re)-distribution of the scarce local material and symbolic resources which are vital for transnational survival (food, shelter, mobile telephony, crucial information concerning legality procedures, and so on). I finally problematize hegemonic conceptions of transnational living that present migrants as agency-less storied Selves. I suggest that socioeconomically stagnated and spatially demobilized transnational populations may also be powerful active storying narrators who have successfully mastered the art of narrating identity in order to act upon, and to navigate with, both close traveling companions and rivals, in contexts of extreme precariousness. I conclude that a narrative approach to interactive discursive identity management may bring us closer to how social difference and, hence, social exclusion get produced and reignited, and contested or overcome, *among migrants themselves*, in off-the-radar urban peripheries that still remain under-explored within the sociolinguistics of globalization.

**Situating the study: An ethnography of a small Ghanaian network of migrants in
Igalada**

Alfred, Benedito and Paul (pseudonyms), were, respectively, an English teacher, an accountant, and a cocoa farmer who were born in an urban town and two rural villages near Sunyani, the capital of the Akan region of Brong Ahafo, the second largest

1 province in Ghana, West Africa. They were in their early and late forties, and spoke
2 English (which is official there) and employed Ashanti among themselves, as a lingua
3 franca. Besides, they also had a command of other Akan variants (like Akyem), a
4 working knowledge of Spanish, and some competence in both Arabic and Catalan.
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9 Alone, they entered the Spanish state between 2000 and 2001, and started
10 working in the agriculture sector, growing vegetables in the Southern Spanish provinces
11 of Murcia and Andalucía. During this time, they traveled to Ghana regularly, and paid
12 some visits to their relatives in Italy and in the Netherlands. Later on, they moved up to
13 Catalonia in search of socioeconomic improvement, following some new Ghanaian
14 acquaintances. Benedito and Paul settled in Barcelona City, and Alfred moved to Lleida
15 (Western-Central Catalonia), to pick fruit. They all reported having a difficult time in
16 these places. This was the reason why, between 2004 and 2007, they decided to move to
17 a medium-sized (yet still well-connected) urban town, Igualada, where they met for the
18 first time. There, Alfred started working in a tannery, Benedito in one of the biggest
19 foundries, and Paul in the construction sector, becoming documented via the holding of
20 temporary residence permits.
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39 With 39,191 registered inhabitants, Igualada is the capital of a Catalan county
40 (called Anoia) that experienced scarce incoming mass migration movements during the
41 first decades of the twenty-first century (Ajuntament d'Igualada, 2012). At the time of
42 the fieldwork, 69.72% of the population there was born in Catalonia (55% in the very
43 same county), 15.62% in other parts of Spain, and 14.66%, abroad (Idescat, 2012). The
44 first largest migrant group consisted of people born in the African continent (2,411
45 inhabitants; 6.49% of Igualada's population), the Ghanaian networks under study (112
46 people in total, mostly single men aged between 35 and 44) being the second largest
47 sub-group, after the Moroccans (who were 2,037 people).
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Igualada was a pioneering leather cluster in Europe, with the biggest tannery market in Catalonia. With the global economic crisis, though, it experienced the collapse of the textile factories and the demise of the construction sector, soon showing the highest percentage of employment loss in Catalonia as a whole (Galí Izard & Vallès, 2010). As a consequence of this, the cheaply paid foreign labor workforce that had settled in town in order to do the flexible, manual work that the now troubled secondary sector had once required in this town became unemployed. In 2008, Alfred, Paul and Benedito were laid off and started working in the informal economy, collecting scrap from garbage containers, and begging in the open-air car park of a big supermarket that was located right in front of a public bench which had become their shared “public in private” protective space of “meetingness” (Urry, 2007, p. 68). None was receiving unemployment benefits at the time of the fieldwork, though they had established regular contact with four local temporary work agencies, and had gotten some social aid (e.g. clothes) from Càritas Arxiprestal Anoia-Segarra, a local branch of the official confederation of charities of the Spanish Catholic Church (see Càritas Arxiprestal Anoia-Segarra, 2013). Their transnational mobilities had become very limited, too (none had visited Ghana since 2008), because with their temporary residence permit they were not allowed to travel freely in the European Union. They could only pay for a room every now and then. Consequently, they became unsheltered and lived under very precarious conditions, developing serious heart, lung and stomach conditions, and experiencing states of anxiety, at times overcome through the practice of drinking (one of them even required hospitalization, in July 2013).

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I had been observing these informants for about a year, on my way back and forth to work. Upon receiving the approval of the Ethics Committee at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona –which ensured data confidentiality and identity protection

1 (reference file number 1818, 2012)– I tried to gain access to this small network by
2 introducing myself as an ‘English teacher’ who was interested in the languages of
3 African populations. After many failed attempts, I was allowed to take a sit on the
4 bench at least three times a week, during different times of the day (in bits of three to
5 four hours), including weekends (from July 2012 to January 2013, and then, more
6 intermittently, until September 2013).
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14 The data that I gathered during this time included participant observation, in-
15 depth exploration and “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of (a) some of their
16 systematized spatiotemporal movements and socioeconomic (im)mobilities in town,
17 including “walk-alongs” (Carpiano, 2009, p. 263) or spatialized journeys with them in
18 Igualada; (b) the ever-changing relationships established among themselves and with
19 other migrant networks; and (c) the multi-varied in-group and out-group routinized
20 language practices that they mobilized with these other migrant networks.
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31 In the second place, I also recorded some of the informants’ naturally-
32 occurring spontaneous interactions (basically greetings and chit-chats) with other
33 migrant men from Senegal, Morocco, and Kashmir, which took place in Spanish,
34 English, Arabic and/or Ashanti (only one such interaction is reproduced here). Thirdly, I
35 collected, too, highly informal narrative interviews which were conducted in English,
36 Spanish and/or Catalan, with English and Spanish being the informants’ preferred
37 language choice (I had no command of any of their African languages).
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48 The particular stories that emerged from our narrative interviews were mostly
49 about these men’s transnational life trajectories, their work experiences and prospects,
50 and their (non)-ascriptions to different migrant social networks, in Igualada. They
51 consisted of the sorts of unfinished recalled experiences, truncated slices of ongoing
52 events, deferrals or refusals to tell, and messy or vague allusions to individuals or
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collectivities that are normally taken as “instances of incoherent tellings” (Georgakopoulou, 2006, p. 124). That is, they were what has come to be known as “small stories” (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 382; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008a, p. 276; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 108; Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. x), or rich counter-hegemonic tellings which are worth investigating precisely because they do not fit into the typologies established for ‘grand narratives’ and, therefore, challenge us to problematize taken-for-granted narrative canons.

Narrative presentations of the Self and of the Other: The collective discursive construction of out-group ‘rivals’ and ‘compatriots’

Perhaps as a strategy to secure survival, Alfred, Benedito and Paul grounded their narratives of place on the day-to-day practice of *spatial immobility* and on *geographical fixity*, in Igualada. Basically, they all discursively rooted their transnational lives in the appropriation and occupation of a public bench located in the outskirts of the town, which was presented as their shared defensive “safe mooring space” (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 2) against the ‘problems’ that may ensue in other apparently dangerous parts of the town. To accomplish this goal, they used narrative devices consisting of (a) individual and collective first-person pronouns (i.e. “I” and “we”), (b) deictically anchored proximal durative verbs (e.g. “sit” or “stay”), and (c) emphatic canonical proximal adverbs (i.e. “here”), with recurrent statements like “I... we always sit here,” which I recorded from the three of them (see Sabaté i Dalmau, in preparation (a), for further examples). These re-orientation stories based on the shared colonization of that

particular bench were the discursive tools that they first used in order to present themselves to the researcher as an ethnolinguistically close, allied network of “paisanos” or fellowmen.

Simultaneously, informants also acted as a whole coordinated group of Ghanaians by together carving an identity that mobilized available racial traits like skin complexion (blackness), whereby they all vindicated their self-ascribed belonging to “a broader African people” (Lake, 1995, pp. 21–22). This is a collective, transgenerational identity category frequently embodied by African diasporas in the context of transnational xenophobic resistance and active combat against the subjugation of, and discrimination against, black peoples worldwide, which, with the rise of anti-colonialism movements of the nineteenth century (Edozie, 2012, p. 268), encompasses the widely studied, media-sponsored idea of ‘Diaspora pan-Africanism’ (see Ayithey, 2010, p. 89).³ This focus on blackness is illustrated in Excerpt 1, where Alfred and Benedito define themselves as “we the blacks” (in line 36).

Excerpt 1: Narrative co-constructions of ‘rivals’ and ‘compatriots’⁴

@Location:	Fri. 20 th July 2012. Bench near the train station. Igualada.		
@Bck:	When asked about whether they have befriended people from Romania or Latinos by the researcher (RES), Alfred (ALF) and Benedito (BEN) mobilize a plethora of social identities through which they categorize different migrant groups in a pejorative way, simultaneously showing some alliance with Nigerian and Ghanaian populations.		
→	1	*RES:	ok and do you have friends from Romania or Latinos?
→	2	*BEN:	no:!
→	3	*ALF:	+^ no no no no no.
	4	*RES:	no?
→	5	*BEN:	no <no no> [>].
→	6	*ALF:	<no no> [<].

1		7	*RES:	<i>por qué?</i>
2			%tra:	why?
3	→	8	*BEN:	these Romanians and these all these countries Santa Domingo and these they used
4		9		to +...
5				
6	→	10	*ALF:	+^ they are racist they are racist!
7				
8	→	11	*BEN:	they used to sell drugs and all other things but I don't want to +...
9		12	*RES:	they sell drugs and they are racists?
10				
11	→	13	*ALF:	yes they are racist.
12	→	14	*BEN:	and they used to sell drugs and eh xxx but I'm not interested in that kind of job.
13				
14	→	15	*ALF:	and they are thieves too most of them they are thieves they used to steal.
15		16	*RES:	they are?
16			%com:	The researcher couldn't hear the word 'thieves'.
17				
18	→	17	*ALF:	they are thieves.
19		18	*RES:	oh thieves.
20				
21	→	19	*BEN:	<i>sí</i> : # for me I don't have any other friend apart from Ghana and Nigeria -, Ghana I
22		20		have friends of Nigerian Ghana but Romanian or other people I don't have any
23	→	20		relationship with them.
24		21		
25	→	21		
26		22	*RES:	<no> [?] oh <and you as well> [?] <no relation no friends> [?].
27			%add:	To Benedito.
28				
29	→	23	*ALF:	no no no no no Romania o:r Poland no xxx.
30				
31	→	24	*BEN:	before they used to sell drugs and other +...
32				
33	→	25	*ALF:	+^ problems.
34				
35	→	26	*BEN:	yeah problems.
36		27	*RES:	do they work?
37				
38		28	*BEN:	some people work.
39		29	*ALF:	yes yes.
40			%com:	Car noise.
41				
42	→	30	*ALF:	especially in Igualada in <Morocco> [//] Moroccans they have more advantage
43		31		because if you go to <i>Cáritas</i> we have (?) you can.
44				
45		32	*RES:	to <u>Cáritas</u> .
46				
47	→	33	*ALF:	yes they there good employment with <i>ordenadores</i> and all these things so <they
48				are> [//] they have good advantage here in Igualada to me.
49	→	34		
50			%com:	'ordenadores' means 'computers' in Spanish.
51				
52		35	*RES:	< <u>sí</u> > [?] <the Moroccans> [?].
53	→	36	*BEN:	but but we the blacks.
54				
55		37	*RES:	+^ but are they nice to you the Moroccans?
56	→	38	*ALF:	yes.
57				
58		39	*RES:	the Moroccans they are nice to you?
59	→	40	*BEN:	yes yes.
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→	41	*ALF:	+^ yes they are good.
	42	*RES:	they are not racist.
→	43	*BEN:	no.
→	44	*ALF:	no no no no.

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11 I argue that the ‘we’-positioning as a Ghanaian group of ‘blacks’ that we can observe in
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13 Excerpt 1 (line 36) emerged *in opposition to* three projected macro identities (or ‘they’-
14
15 positionings) attributed to other migrant networks who had also settled in town: the
16
17 Eastern Europeans, the Latinos, and the Moroccans.⁵ As shown in line 1, it was the
18
19 researcher who first mobilized two of these identity categories (by contrast, comments
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21 on the Moroccans, the Nigerians and the Ghanaians were later made by the informants).
22
23 I decided to purposefully ask Alfred and Benedito about the Romanian and Latino
24
25 groups because these had passed completely unmentioned during our interviews, despite
26
27 the fact that they were frequently talked about in Iqualada –both informants seemed to
28
29 avoid telling stories about them, at first. Once the question was made, though, Alfred
30
31 and Benedito, overlapping, provided an effusive repeated negative answer to the
32
33 question of whether they had befriended them (in lines 2-3 and 5-6). In fact, a plethora
34
35 of hetero-ascribed homogenizing identities ensued, unveiling a discursive Othering
36
37 practice called “ethnicization” (Martín-Rojo, 2010). This means that the Romanians and
38
39 Latinos very pejoratively got co-constructed as ‘racists’, ‘drug dealers’ and ‘thieves’
40
41 (lines 10-11, 13-14, 15 and 17, and 23-24), and as entangled in mishaps and
42
43 wrongdoings (or “problems”; see lines 25-26). These presentations of the Other, crafted
44
45 by means of emphatic lexical repetition and paraphrases (like “they are thieves” - “they
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47 used to steal”), hinged upon a set of particular nationalities that both informants had in
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49 mind, perhaps as tokens or as category representatives. Benedito mentioned “Santo
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Domingo” when talking about the Latinos (line 8), and Alfred included “Poland” into the Romanian category (line 23).

The two narrators gradually seemed to assuage these negative perceptions, as they continued providing information about these darkened migrant populations. They first started off by locating the Romanians and the Latinos in the immediate ‘here-and-now’ of their transnational lives in Igualada, mostly with the use of present simple tenses (e.g. “they are racist”; line 10). However, they then shifted narrative frame by moving their tale-world to the ‘then-and-there’ of their past lived experiences with these other migrant networks, with distal deictic adverbs of time (“before,” in line 24) and past simple tense forms, which in English tend to mark the completion of an action (for example, they made frequent use of ‘used to’, which indicates finished routines and habits that have been given up). At the same time, though, the informants’ degree of detachment and non-affinity for these rivaling populations seemed to grow stronger, also gradually, departing from a feeling of ‘unwillingness to mingle’ (“I don’t want to”, line 11) or a statement of ‘no interest’ (line 14) to later finish with an explicit rejection to establish any kind of contact with them (“I don’t have any relationship with them”; lines 20-21).

Excerpt 1 also allows for the analysis of ‘we’ *and* ‘they’ (cf. ‘we’ *versus* ‘they’) positionings (see, also, Relaño, 2010, p. 82), concerning the recounted relationships that Alfred and Benedito established with three other migrant groups born in the African continent. These consisted of Moroccan, Nigerian and out-group Ghanaian men. Moroccans were constructed as enjoying an advantaged socioeconomic reality, through the use of the comparative quantifier “more” and the positivizing adjective “good” (“more advantage”, “good employment”, and “good advantage”, in lines 30, 33 and 34). Alfred stated, too, that this particular network, unlike them, was

1 provided with information and communication technology (mostly computers; lines 33-
2 34), which in the Spanish state is crucial for transnational family units to maintain
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4 contact with physically distant relatives (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010; Ros et al., 2007).
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7 Though they were categorized as considerate and perhaps as friendly (lines 38 and 40) –
8
9 as well as non-xenophobic (lines 43-44)–, in Excerpt 1 Moroccans were distinguished
10
11 from the Nigerian and the Ghanaian men because they were not seen as sharing their
12
13 blackness (note the contrast between “Moroccans” (i.e. they) versus “we the blacks” in
14
15 lines 30 and 36), a racial trait which, in turn, was taken up to present some Nigerians
16
17 and Ghanaians in an inclusionary manner, as “friends” and, therefore, as part of a shared
18
19 pan-African group (see lines 19-20).
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24 The under-narrated (and, at times, avoided or hidden) parts of the nuanced
25
26 identity politics that lie behind the more superfluous, dichotomous (‘good’ versus ‘bad’)
27
28 monitored migrant identities which are openly voiced in interviews may be better
29
30 captured when these are actually ‘on the make’; for example in naturally-occurring
31
32 interactions where the narrators and the narrated both feel compelled to greet each other.
33
34 In Excerpt 2, I focus on a face-to-face encounter between a Ghanaian and a Moroccan
35
36 man in order to dwell into what lies behind the manifested competition between these
37
38 two migrant groups in town. More specifically, I analyze how and why informant Paul
39
40 turned a racist Arabic slur (“a’azi,” equivalent to ‘nigger’) that he had first received
41
42 from his ‘friend’ Abdelmahid from Morocco into a humorous term of address which he
43
44 now strategically appropriated and used in order to contest this exclusionary insulting
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46 practice.
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56 *Excerpt 2: Unpacking identity politics which are latent in narrated social categories*
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@Location:	Wed. 18 th July 2012. Bench near the train station. Igualada.	
@Bck:	Abdelmahid passes by the benches, and Paul (PAU) greets him by inserting an Arabic word, 'a'azi', into his Spanish greeting. When he leaves, the researcher (RES) inquires about its meaning, which turns out to be equivalent to 'nigger'.	
→	1	*PAU: a'azi cómo está? %tra: nigger how are you? %add: To Abdelmahid.
	2	*RES: <u>hola</u> . %tra: hi. %add: To Abdelmahid.
<i>[Private conversation follows]</i>		
→	3	*RES: <qué hablas con él> [?] < a'azi qué significa> [?] a'azi <qué significa a'azi > [?]. %tra: <what do you speak with him> [?] <what does nigger mean> [?] nigger <what does nigger mean> [?].
	4	*PAU: <i>uno un un +...</i> %tra: one a a +...
→	5	*RES: +^ <i>amigo?</i> %tra: +^ friend?
→	6	*PAU: <i>claro amigo!</i> %tra: of course friend!
	7	*RES: <i>en qué lengua?</i> %tra: in what language?
→	8	*PAU: <i>árabe.</i> %tra: Arabic.
	9	*RES: ah!
→	10	*PAU: <i>él también él ha visto mi.</i> %tra: he also he has seen me.
	11	*RES: <u>sí</u> . %tra: yes.
	12	*PAU: <i>espera pera.</i> %tra: wait wait. %com: Laughs.
	13	*RES: <i>árabe?</i>
→	14	*PAU: <i>sí él también ha visto mi él dice +/?</i> . %tra: yes he also saw me he said +/?
→	15	*PAU: +? yo a'azi . %tra: +? I nigger.
→	16	*PAU: <i>www a'azi árabe árabe dice +/?</i> . %tra: www nigger Arabic Arabic he says +/?
→	17	*PAU: +? a'azi .

		%tra:	+” nigger.
1	18	*RES:	a’azi?
2		%tra:	nigger?
3	19	*PAU:	a’azi a’azi.
4		%tra:	nigger nigger.
5	→ 20	*RES:	<i>y significa amigo?</i>
6		%tra:	and it means friend?
7	→ 21	*PAU:	<i>amigo.</i>
8		%tra:	friend.
9	22	*RES:	ah!
10	23	*PAU:	<i>yo árabe yo speak un poco hablar árabe.</i>
11		%tra:	me Arabic I speak a bit speak Arabic.
12	24	*RES:	<i>vale.</i>
13		%tra:	ok.
14		%com:	Laughs.
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After having heard that Paul greeted Abdelmahid with “a’azi” (line 1), I insistently asked him about the meaning of this Arabic word (line 3). Paul explained that Abdelmahid was a friend of his (lines 6 and 20-21), and that the language he used was Arabic (lines 8 and 16) –confused, I actually thought, at first, that the word meant ‘friend’ (see line 5). Paul told me that Abdelmahid had also employed this slur with him (in lines 10, 14, 15, 16 and 17, while I kept interrupting him), and that he was now jokingly fighting back, bringing (latent) social tensions such as the ones that were highlighted in Excerpt 1 to the terrain of language. Thus, Paul, who had once been called by the pejorative term of reference synonymous to ‘nigger’ “a’azi”, now appropriated that very same word to categorize back and fight the speech act of insulting (arguably, not the blackness, though) by ascribing this racial attribute (black complexion) to a person of lighter skin color, in the offender’s language of habitual use. This particular local naming practice, which is mainly established humorously (here with laughter) as a ‘we-share’ (inclusionary) joke between interactants who display

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affinity to ‘pan-African’ identities (note that Moroccans were constructed as non-racists, in Excerpt 1, lines 43-44), shows that informants like Paul have the power to take the floor and to display a degree of social “agency” (Giddens, 1984) on the bench. This demonstrates that, by using non-globally legitimized but locally useful multilingual resources (like translocal insults), informants were able to successfully act upon, and navigate, other social networks who may be presented as monopolizers of resources which are crucial for transnational survival (see claims that Moroccans are ‘better off’ in Excerpt 1, lines 30, and 33-34), but who are in fact individuals with whom to complexly tie recognition and acknowledgement.

Apart from place of birth and skin complexion, transnational religious practices were also taken up by the informants when, at the “front-stage” (Goffman, 1959), they presented themselves as a homogeneous, distinct African group of Ghanaians. Alfred and Benedito defined themselves as non-practicing Christians, and they wore donated clothes and drank wine on a daily basis. Paul, by contrast, presented himself as a Muslim, used a *gallabja* (a loose robe), visited the Mosque located in a former tannery during Ramadan, and never brought wine cartons with him. And yet, local discrepancies among different religious Ghanaian communities that came together to the bench were systematically downplayed, and affinities were emphasized in narrative action, during interview time. When I made questions which explicitly broached religion, the three narrators insisted that they were all the same (I recorded comments including “no problem, no problem”). Besides, I saw Alfred and Benedito greet Paul with the Muslim salutation in Arabic *As-salam alaikum* (‘peace be with you’), seemingly out of respect. What is more, informants also engaged in Jehovah’s Witness practices. In September, I saw Benedito share the bench with a smartly-dressed Ghanaian Jehovah’s Witness follower, Jude from Techiman (a town which is also located in the province of Brong

Ahafo), whom he called “paisano” or fellowman. Jude came all the way from Barcelona at the weekend (always Saturdays, from 10 to 11 am), to read a bible printed in English and to share some religious thoughts with him, finishing with the routinized Ashanti farewell “ye be hyea” (‘we will meet again’): Jude always read, and Benedito, who kept insisting that they just simply ‘discussed matters’, listened and nodded. (This is how I discovered that there existed a Jehovah’s Witness Kingdom Hall in Igualada, in a peripheral industrial unit; and how I saw that the local network of Catalan Jehovah’s Witnesses drove Jude back home, upon completion of his assigned religious tasks with ‘immigrants’.)

I argue that this conscious acknowledgement of diverse religious beliefs among individuals within this small Ghanaian network strengthened the networking capital of the three informants and, therefore, gave them increased chances to access more social networks, and hence more symbolic and material resources. This is so because the acknowledgement of diverse religious practices made them different from other similarly ‘pan-African’ Nigerian men (the fourth largest migrant group of African origin in town, with 73 people), who, mostly Christian, were escaping from heightened religious violence in their place of birth. This is illustrated in Excerpt 3, where I present the ways in which Benedito and Alfred described Nigeria as undergoing “a civil war between Muslims and Christians,” as they put it to me later on in our interview.

Excerpt 3: Moral superiority stance-taking over similar ‘pan-African’ local networks

@Location:	Fri. 20 th July 2012. Bench near the train station. Igualada.
@Bck:	Benedito (BEN) and Alfred (ALF) present Nigeria as undergoing religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims, and oppose the situation of this part of Africa to that of Ghana, here constructed as a peaceful country, in front of the researcher (RES).

1	→	1	*RES:	and in Nigeria <are they Muslims or Christians?
2		2	*ALF:	no no no no no no.
3	→	3	*BEN:	in Nigeria we have <i>mitad mitad</i> .
4			%tra:	In Nigeria we have half half.
5		4	*RES:	<i>vale mitad</i> .
6			%tra:	ok half.
7		5	*BEN:	fifty and fifty.
8	→	6	*RES:	ah <i>vale</i> -, but eh <do you go together> [?].
9			%tra:	ah ok -, but eh <do you go together> [?].
10	→	7	*BEN:	yes they go together but eh but eh they used to fight to fight between them.
11	→	8	*ALF:	Nigeria is not a peaceful country.
12	→	9	*BEN:	is not a peaceful country.
13		10	*RES:	it's not?
14	→	11	*BEN:	no this country no eh Africa: you are not supposed to go to Africa but rather go
15	→	12		to Ghana.
16		13	*RES:	Ghana.
17		14	*ALF:	Ghana.
18		15	*RES:	Ghana is quiet.
19	→	16	*ALF:	v:ery peaceful.
20	→	17	*BEN:	Ghana is a quiet peaceful country.
21		18	*RES:	no problems between Christians and Muslims?
22	→	19	*ALF:	no.
23	→	20	*BEN:	not at all.

In Excerpt 3, Benedito, taking the role of the empowered storytelling Self with a self-attributed insider's knowledge of the Nigerian populations in Iqualada, narrated that Nigeria is divided into two halves consisting of two separate opposite religious groups, the Christians and the Muslims (he first uses Spanish, in line 3, and then English, in line 5) –according to the latest reports, Muslims account for 50% of the population in Nigeria; Christians for 40%, and other beliefs, for 10% (CIA, 2014). He then added that, as opposed to what happened in Ghana, in Nigeria faith discrepancies led to very serious fights (line 7) (a violence map of Nigeria with reports for the years 2007-2013 is provided in Campbell, 2012). Alfred first reacted to my question about religion in

1 Nigeria by repeating “no” (line 2), which I understand as indexical of being exposed to
 2 a heated topic of debate. He then backed up Benedito by presenting this country as
 3 unsafe (line 8), to which he reacted by almost quoting Alfred’s words (in line 9). He
 4 then reframed the storyline and used it to explicitly oppose religious violence in Nigeria
 5 to the quietness and safety of Ghana (lines 11-12, and 16; note emphasis with the
 6 elongation of the first vowel in “very peaceful”), to which Benedito, again, agreed by
 7 repeating Alfred’s words (in line 17). The exchange finished when the two informants
 8 categorically stated that religious conflict is non-existent in Ghana (lines 19-20).

19 Overall, Excerpt 3 shows that the discursively backshadowing of local
 20 religious discrepancies among the Ghanaian group of men under study is resourceful in
 21 that it allows them first to show in-group solidarity among themselves (social
 22 inclusion), and then to proudly express belonging and affinity to their country of origin,
 23 Ghana. In turn, with this they also position themselves as more religiously tolerant than
 24 the Nigerians back ‘there’ in Africa, in an also post-colonial English-speaking country.
 25 Note that their narrative frame does not include their Nigerian fellows who in Excerpt 1
 26 were located in the ‘here-and-now’ of their narrative worlds, and that solidarity toward
 27 the local Christian Nigerian men who were forced to leave Africa was expressed
 28 through the deictic personal pronoun “we”, in this case as arguably indexical of a ‘we’-
 29 with-‘them’ positioning (when Benedito stated that “in Nigeria we have”; in line 3).
 30 Thus, I posit that, indirectly, informants took a “moral stance” (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p.
 31 44) with which they presented themselves as a ‘morally superior’, more united,
 32 respectful and neoliberally ‘civic’ ‘pan-African’ migrant group.

57 **Narrative presentations of the Self and of the Other: The individual discursive**
 58 **construction of in-group ‘rivals’ and ‘compatriots’**
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In this section, I suggest that, against what Alfred, Benedito and Paul claimed, the bench in the peripheral transports area at times also turned into a “togetherness of loners” (Bauman, 2001, p. 68) for the three of them. On some occasions, this piece of urban furniture also emerged as a collective space of individual non-engagement and “mismeeting” (Larsen & Hviid Jacobsen, 2009, p. 83), which they actually inhabited with the aim of accessing a very much needed resourceful umbrella, at the expense of coping with some compelled cooperation and with some ‘internal’ hostility. This emerged in narrative when I interviewed them on an individual basis (in an unplanned manner), for then they had the possibility to discursively construct the other members of this small network when these were not physically present, as occurred in Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4: ‘Internal’ rivalries among individuals in the local network of Ghanaians

@Location:		Wed. 18 th July 2012. Park near the train station, in front of the bench. Igualada.	
@Bck:		Sitting on another bench of a park, the researcher (RES) asks Paul (PAU) about Alfred, who gets categorized as a ‘fellow’ that has the advantage of receiving monthly subsidy.	
→	1	*PAU:	<i>y éste de dónde es?</i>
		%tra:	and that one where does he come from?
		%com:	Talking about Alfred, who converses with Benedito on the bench opposite the street.
→	2	*PAU:	<i>él bebiendo un poco.</i>
		%tra:	He drinking a bit.
		%com::	Laughs.
→	3	*PAU:	<i>Él tiene vino un poco para beber.</i>
		%tra:	he has wine a little to drink.
→	4	*RES:	aha <y de dónde es> [?] <sabes si es de Ghana o si no> [?].
		%tra:	aha <and where is he from> [?] <do you know whether he is from Ghana> [?].
→	5	*PAU:	<i>él de Ghana sí de Ghana también.</i>

1		%tra:	he from Ghana yes from Ghana too.
2		6 *RES:	también.
3		%tra:	too.
4	→	7 *PAU:	<mi pai> [//] mi paisano.
5		%tra:	<my fell> [//] fellowman.
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7			<i>[Narrative follows]</i>
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9		8 *RES:	y cada día está aquí?
10		%tra:	and every day he is here?
11			
12	→	9 *PAU:	sí porque no hay trabajo.
13		%tra:	yes because there is no work.
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15			<i>[Narrative follows]</i>
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17	→	10 *RES:	sois paisanos amigos o no +...?
18		%tra:	your are fellow Friends or no +...?
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20	→	11 *PAU:	sí mi paisano.
21		%tra:	yes my fellow.
22			
23	→	12 *RES:	tus paisanos te ayudan cuando no hay dinero?
24		%tra:	your fellows help you when there is no money?
25			
26		13 *PAU:	qué?
27		%tra:	what?
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29	→	14 *RES:	si tus paisanos de Ghana te ayudan?
30		%tra:	if your fellows from Ghana help you?
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32	→	15 *PAU:	<él> [?] él cobra ayuda.
33		%tra:	<he> [?] he gets subsidy.
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35		16 *RES:	ah.
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37	→	17 *PAU:	él cobra ayuda.
38		%tra:	he gets subsidy.
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Intrigued about their relationships, in Excerpt 4 I asked Paul where Alfred came from (line 1). Instead of answering, Paul pointed to one of Alfred's habitual practices and replied that Alfred was drinking (line 2), on the bench opposite the street (we had seen and greeted each other, but Alfred and Benedito had decided to stay in their original bench, conversing). Laughing, Paul insisted by repeating the same idea in line 3. I tried to be more explicit and asked whether he knew that Alfred was from Ghana (line 4), to which he then replied that Alfred was Ghanaian indeed (line 5), and

1 presented him as his “paisano” or fellowman (line 7, with some hesitation) –perhaps not
 2 as a really close friend (see lines 10 and 11). Paul then links the daily practice of
 3 inhabiting that bench with their difficult socioeconomic situation (“no work”, line 9). I
 4 tried to investigate further and insisted in asking whether Alfred and Benedito helped
 5 him out with his money problems (lines 12 and 14), to which Paul reacted by apparently
 6 questioning Alfred’s Self as a helper (note question “he?” in line 15), and by positioning
 7 him in a notably advantaged position, perhaps with some reproachful overtones.
 8 According to Paul, Alfred was getting subsidy (this idea is repeated twice in lines 15
 9 and 17): the “ayuda” stands for a scarce temporary minimum income to attain social
 10 insertion (423.70 euros a month, in 2011) provided until recently by the Catalan
 11 government (see Generalitat de Catalunya, 2013), which none of the informants claimed
 12 to be receiving.

13 I argue that Excerpt 4 may be pointing to some latent clashing practices,
 14 interests, and subjectivities among the three informants which are normally hidden from
 15 view. I understand Paul’s comments about Alfred as oozing criticism for being ‘better
 16 off’ and, besides, for spending the much appreciated subsidy in ‘morally censurable’
 17 habits, like alcohol-drinking in public (recall that he, unlike Benedito and Alfred,
 18 defined himself as a Muslim). Snapshot 1 (taken from my fieldwork notes, on
 19 November 28, 2012), more explicitly unravels the sorts of troublesome relationships
 20 established among narrators. More specifically, it describes a serious un-narrated
 21 incident between Benedito and Alfred, which I witnessed through participant
 22 observation, by rooting narrative analysis in the practice of ethnography.

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 56 *Snapshot 1: Hidden in-group ‘conflictive togetherness’*
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An example of how Benedito and Alfred networked side-by-side but definitely not eye-to-eye was provided to me when Benedito was thrown out of his rented room and asked Alfred for help. Alfred first stated that he could stay in his place because the owner was on holidays (at that time, he still lived with three other Ghanaians). When Benedito took his bag to that new place, though, Alfred had changed his mind, and he ended up sleeping on the floor of a small shop owned by a man born in Iqualada. For a while, Benedito and Alfred moved around the supermarket area pretending not to know each other. They went back to sharing the bench in the nearby in a few weeks, though they did not share meals or wine again.

Excerpt 4 and Snapshot 1 contradict the informants' narrated 'we'-positioning and highlight that in-group solidarity may at times be actually fraught with 'internal' social difference and social exclusion practices. I argue that small migrant networks like this one may hinge upon what Castells (2004) calls "conflictive togetherness" (p. 30); that is, upon ever-changing social relationships based on simultaneous trust and distrust, on mutual friendship and enmity, on concurrent love and competition, and on neighbourliness and, at the same time, malfeasance, hatred and even violence (see, also, Lewicki et al., 1998; and Tilly, 2007).

Conclusions

In this paper, I have contributed to the analysis of the dialogic, transformative "discursive processes of migrant identity construction" (Dong, 2012, p. 240) through the lens of sociolinguistic and discourse narrative practice. I have explored the interplay

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of fluid, ambivalent and, at times, conflicting presentations of the Self and of the Other that emanate from a series of unfinished, messy migrant stories narrated by a small group of unsheltered Ghanaian men who lived on a bench at the periphery of a Catalan urban town.

I have analyzed the ways in which informants mobilize homogenizing (inclusionary and exclusionary) co-constructions of close/distant migrant individuals and collectivities which include, for instance, local ‘Romanian drug dealers’, ‘Latino thieves’ and ‘better-off Ghanaians’, and far-way ‘non-tolerant Muslim Nigerians’. I have shown that these self-attributed and other-ascribed social categories unveil unknown aspects of these transnational populations’ actual social stratification regimes, which are ‘internally’ negotiated according to their own translocal order of things, in off-the-radar transnational economies of meaning, from a myriad of subjectivities.

I have argued that the ‘conflictive togetherness’ in which pauperized, demobilized migrant narrators navigate is a unique venue into how these transnational groups make sense of, and react to, the solidarity and rivalry that characterizes the race for the survival of the fittest, in contexts of extreme precariousness. Finally, I have problematized totalizing conceptions of transnational living that present the migrant networks of the twenty-first century as agency-less, decapitalized Selves, and I have posited, instead, that these may in turn become powerful active storying tellers with the capacity to narrate identity in order to act upon both close companions and competitors, in their host societies.

I have concluded that a narrative approach to identity management and identity work, if rooted in the practice of ethnography, may bring us closer to how social difference and social exclusion practices get inscribed (produced and reproduced) in discourse but, this time, in storytellings which are mobilized among migrants

1 themselves, at the margins of institutional realms, in unexplored discursive spaces of
2 meetingness and mismeting, such as the public benches of rich globalized urban
3 geographies.
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11 **Acknowledgements**

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19 Strategies), which is here acknowledged.
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27 **Notes**

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32 ¹ Catalonia is an officially Catalan-Spanish bilingual autonomous region with
33 its own quasi-autonomous government, located in the north-eastern part of the Spanish
34 state, below France (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2006).
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41 ² The detailed situated gender dynamics in such a masculinized discursive
42 space are out of the scope of this paper, due to space constraints. I focus on the in-depth
43 analysis of class issues in Sabaté i Dalmau (in preparation, b).
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51 ³ Key Ghanaian figures like Kwame Nkrumah (the pro-independence, anti-
52 imperialist first Prime Minister of Ghana and secretary-general of the Pan-African
53 Congress) took active part in the Diaspora Pan-African movement worldwide (Ayittey,
54 2010, p. 89), through the fostering of the idea that “the independence of particular
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1 African states takes on its full meaning only if all of Africa is free and if African unity
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3 is achieved” (Emerson, 1962, p.275).
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8 ⁴ Interactions were transcribed following a slightly modified version of the
9 LIDES transcription system (see Sabaté i Dalmau, 2014). In [@Bck] the background of
10 the exchange (i.e. the participants, the context and the topic) is briefly described. In
11 [%com] (comment) contextual information concerning the previous utterance is
12 provided. In [%add] (addressee) the addressee of the previous turn is mentioned. In
13 [%tra] (translation) free translations of the exchanges presented in the main tier uttered
14 in languages other than English are provided. These are Spanish if the typeface is in
15 italics, Catalan if it is highlighted, and Arabic if it is marked in bold. All exchanges are
16 reproduced *verbatim* in non-standard talk and were translated by the author. Non-
17 transcribed confidential materials are indicated with [www]. [xxx] indicates non-
18 audibility. Following De Fina (2009), I use ((*Follows narrative*)) for parts of the
19 interactions that have not been presented due to space constraints.
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39 ⁵ I understand all identity categories and social labels such as ‘Ghanaians’,
40 ‘Romanians’ or ‘Latinos’ to be locally-meaningful *social constructs*. I do not signal
41 them as such by means of using single quotation marks in the main text in order to
42 facilitate smooth reading.
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