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ARTICLES

Marginality and Linguistic Cartographies of African Denizens as Spheres of Possibility in Regional Australia

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Abstract

The received view on refugees and other displaced people (hereafter ‘denizens’) is that they constitute a disadvantaged social group—disadvantaged economically, socially, politically, linguistically and in many other ways. Such a reading of ‘denizens’ ignores the prospects, opportunities and spheres of possibility that belie the temporal experiences of multilingual migrants. In this article, I use the concepts of ‘denizenship,’ ‘marginality’ and ‘cartography’ to provide new insights into our understandings of the benefits of multilingualism among African denizens in regional Australia. The specific focus is on how the psychosocial distribution of multiple linguistic usages by African denizens maps onto everyday interactional processes, social welfare and some aspects of migrant resettlement. The overall intention is to capture previously undescribed language practices of individuals and groups, their linkages with life stories, migration histories and temporal experiences, and how these constitute spheres of possibility for building new friendships and social networks leading to better quality lives.

Introduction and Background

The number of Australians born in Africa has grown extremely rapidly, from a very small base, over the last two decades. Different cohorts of African immigrants have arrived, including humanitarian and refugee entrants as well as economic migrants. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data indicate that the number of people born in Africa rose from about 250,000 in 2006 to around 338,000 in 2011, representing an increase of 35.2 per cent within a period of five years (ABS, 2007 & 2012). The major countries of birth are South Africa, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Mauritius, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Zambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi and Eritrea

(ABS, 2012; Jakubowicz, 2010). Most Australians born in Africa come from multilingual communities and bring with them a rich repertoire of homeland languages and additional ones acquired in transit during their migration journeys.

Drawing on oral interview data from African-born Australians with refugee backgrounds (hereafter called 'denizens') from the New South Wales regional areas of Wagga Wagga, Newcastle and Coffs Harbour, this article posits that their multiple language profiles constitute a resource that enables them to do more things better than they would otherwise be able to do if they were monolingual. Thomas Hammar (1990) introduced the term 'denizen' to describe the unique and rather ambiguous situation of people "who are foreign citizens with a legal and permanent resident status" (p. 15), that is, people with a legal status which is more than that of a foreigner but less than that of a citizen. In much of the citizenship and migration studies literature the term denizen is often used to refer to "foreign citizens who have been allowed to enter a state's territory [but] are usually not allowed to stay on without restrictions" (Hammar, 1990, p. 12). Thus, the classical view of denizens considered them to be foreigners who reside in another country and "enjoy neither political rights nor a complete equality of social rights" (Castels & Davidson, 2000, p. 95). However, Hammar's more detailed explanation of the notion of denizen revealed that the traditional definition of who is a foreigner and who is a citizen has become untenable, as it does not correspond easily with the actual situation on the ground.

In many immigration countries, great numbers of foreign citizens have established intense and close relations to their host country. Some have lived there most of their lives. Some may even have been born there to parents of foreign citizenship. They may have grown up in that country and gone to school there. They may be absolutely fluent in the language, which may be their mother tongue. They may own property in the host country and some may be influential businessmen or professionals, while others may hold other high positions. But, for various reasons, they have remained foreign citizens, and perhaps also prefer to retain their original citizenship (Hammar, 1990).

African denizens are an extremely diverse group, reflecting the linguistic, cultural, ethnic and political diversity of the African continent as well as their different immigration trajectories, histories and life journeys. Before final settlement in Australia, most African denizens lived in at least two countries as asylum seekers for significant periods of time, during which they picked up other languages, cultures and life

experiences that broadened their already significant levels of diversity. Their cultures, identities and language practices are far more complex than is often suggested in Australian academic studies (Marlowe, Harris, & Lyons, 2013; Musgrave & Hajek, 2010) and political and public/media discourses. Like most emerging migrant communities in Australia, African denizens are often described in terms of their perceived lack of (or limited) English language proficiency, and how this supposedly diminishes their chances of living good quality lives. The emphasis that government and non-government agencies put on the 510 hours of Adult Migrant English Language Programme (AMEP) lessons is one example of the tendency to prioritise English language skills over proficiency in other languages. This emphasis overlooks the different cultural, linguistic and experiential capabilities of members of migrant communities. While there is no doubt that English is a very useful language for African denizens in Australia, this article argues that not everything in the everyday lives of migrant communities is done (well) using the English language. African denizens have an overlay of other categories of languages and language types that include African cross-border languages, refugee journey languages, small ethnic languages, and symbolic languages such as discursive and cultural practices. These linguistic resources are rarely considered from a perspective that focuses on how multiple language types and practices enrich and strengthen the abilities of groups and individuals. Recognising such levels of language and cultural diversity would help us better understand the community's capacities and the depth of established social networks among multilingual African denizens, which are used to support each other and also reach out to other non-African background communities. Proficiency in many languages is an important skill that enables African denizens to get by, broaden their social networks and make sense of life in their new environments.

The main argument is that the past experiences of African denizens—whether they be experiences of conflict, war, hunger, political persecution, displacement and/or loss of property, along with their associated emotional, social and economic consequences—should not prevent us from seeing the capabilities and the 'spheres of possibility' (the prospects and opportunities of intra- and cross-cultural networking that are facilitated by the ability to speak multiple languages in remote rural and regional areas of Australia) that lie beneath these tragic events. As will be indicated in the data and analysis section, African denizens have the freedom to use language varieties that are not widely recognised in the national language policies of their countries of

origin. Language varieties such as pidgins and creoles enable African denizens to broaden their circles of social networks at different sites of interaction, with significant positive impacts on the quality of life for both individuals and communities. All of these cultural and linguistic resources are crucial 'spheres of possibility' that need to be looked at from a positive perspective in order to offer new insights into the capabilities and experiences of denizens. For this reason, they require the attention of the academic community, policy makers, service providers and other practitioners at the point of service delivery.

Denizenship, Marginality and Linguistic Cartography

The conceptual framework of this paper is built around the concept of 'denizenship' (Benton, 2014; Castles & Davidson, 2000; Hammar, 1990; Rosbrook-Thompson, 2014) which I combine with the concepts of 'marginality' and 'linguistic cartography' to articulate key issues around the resettlement experiences of refugees and migrants. These issues have so far not been adequately addressed in scholarship. The concept of marginality is generally used to refer to zones and forms of exclusion, disadvantage and vulnerability (Anderson & Larsen, 1998; Bodwin, 2001; Davis, 2003; Gurung & Kollmair, 2005). This article, however, adopts a more positive view of margins and marginality and considers them to be spheres of possibility, transformation and new beginnings (Seshadri-Crooks, 1969; Viljoen, 1998). Seen from this perspective, the margin is a privileged place for writing one's identity, history, cultural values, desires and fears and not a space of victimhood and exclusion. The third concept, linguistic cartography, refers to an approach to the study of the interfaces between linguistics and geography (Williams, 1988). Its major focus is on the spatial distribution of languages and dialects across the different regions where they are spoken (Crystal, 1980). This article extends the meaning of linguistic cartography to also cover mental and social spaces – those complex and mixed language practices that are often disregarded in mainstream conceptualisations of linguistic cartography and how their psychosocial distribution intersects with the everyday life experiences of African denizens in rural and regional Australian settings.

This broader framing of the theory of denizenship, and its coarticulation with the concepts of 'marginality' and 'linguistic cartography,' is used to shed new light on our understanding of issues of belonging and identity in immigrant contexts. The overall argument is that, regardless of whether they are citizens, permanent residents or hold temporary visas, migrants can still be seen as outsiders and not

belonging to the ‘mainstream’ national identity. They have their own specific status, particularly in relation to citizens-by-birth or those who were naturalised several decades ago. A much broader and more refined concept of denizenship must, therefore, include the existence of subordinate second-class groups of people in countries committed to equal citizenship (Benton, 2014). These are people who—for several reasons—live both within and outside a particular socio-political construction of the ‘citizen’; that is, not quite alien but not quite belonging either. The point of greater significance here is that there is an understanding of citizenship in terms of its formal dimensions that include privileges, social benefits, responsibilities and so forth (that are extended to citizens and permanent residents of a country). However, there is also the substantive understanding, which signals that psychological membership of a group is the most decisive because citizenship and belonging do not only draw external boundaries between members and outsiders on the basis of formal dimensions. Rather, they also delineate internal status boundaries between citizens along the lines of differences in linguistic, cultural and historical backgrounds. For instance, numerous aspects of the refugee experience often make refugee-background citizens somewhat unequal to fellow non-migrant-background citizens and this puts them into the category of denizens.

The African denizens who took part in this study exhibit almost all of the vulnerability indicators that have been identified by the literature as being the hallmark of denizenship. Such vulnerability indicators include immigration history, country of origin, length of residence in the new country, level of dependence on social welfare and charity, language skills and level of education (Benton, 2014). As indicated in the introduction, African immigration to Australia is relatively recent. This means that, although they may have been naturalised into Australian citizens (or at the very least hold permanent residence visas), most African denizens have very limited established social networks, employment opportunities and other special connections when compared to more established Australian citizens of European and Asian backgrounds. However, as will be demonstrated below, African denizens have enormous linguistic and cultural capabilities that can be deployed toward circumventing the challenges that come with identified vulnerability indicators. Here I extend the concept of denizenship beyond its traditional meaning of being vulnerable to domination and disadvantage to also include the fact that denizens can express sentiments of belonging, commitment and allegiance and practice social networking by utilising their multiple linguistic and cultural resources as

well as other life skills and experiences acquired during migration journeys.

This is a germane and revealing line of argument with significant implications for our understanding of African denizens and their linguistic repertoires. We are talking here about people who occupy a marginal space within the Australian immigrant context—their cultures are seen as marginal when compared to dominant Anglo-Saxon cultural norms and their languages are considered to be marginal and less favourable compared to English, which is perceived to be the only language of access, participation and engagement in the necessary social transactions of everyday life. The linguistic repertoires of migrants reveal that the languages of African denizens exist on the fringes or periphery of the broader Australian language map. However, such location of African denizens and their languages in this seemingly powerless and negligible space does not necessarily mean they are unimportant and, therefore, exposed to the whims of the centre, where categories of relevance are laid down, decreed and enacted. Rather, the margin that they occupy is a zone where categories and systems of relevance become deconstructed, where the power to control and dictate meaning becomes irrelevant, and where power is questioned and no longer applies automatically or self-evidently (Viljoen, 1998). This means the margin is a site for transformation, (re)creating, brainstorming and charting the way forward. In the words of Seshadri-Crooks (1969) the margin is a space of agitation, subversion and theoretical innovation—the condition of possibility—the “unthought and unsaid that makes a positive knowing possible” (p. 59). Viljoen (1998) extends further the idea of the margin, noting that it contains the elements of the good life and is a site of freedom, fecundity and a point from which the world can be surveyed intellectually. This means the margin is a privileged position; a space where new ideas are formed, trialed and then disseminated.

The next section considers the cultural identities, linguistic repertoires and temporal experiences of African denizens and how they constitute spheres of possibility and not the spectre of disadvantage or vulnerability. While there is no doubt that many African denizens in Australia were forced out of their countries of origin by conflict, war, persecution, and/or other forms of oppression, domination and/or abuse, I argue that we need to move beyond the exclusive focus on the negative aspects of their experiences. We need to think through and look positively at the wealth of linguistic, cultural and other experiential resources accumulated by African denizens along the convoluted

refugee journeys that ultimately brought them to Australia. The premise of this line of argument is that the lives of African denizens did not freeze or come to a halt at the time they fled their countries of origin, only to pick up again upon their permanent settlement in Australia. As the next section will show, the linguistic and cultural skills that African denizens gained during the course of their asylum and refugee journeys have now become a permanent and defining feature of who they are and how they live their lives in Australia. These capabilities remain the least understood and under-theorised, as most previous studies and social policy frameworks in this area have adopted deficit-led approaches that consider the profiles and life experiences of migrants and denizens as characterised merely by conditions of lack, disadvantage and vulnerability.

Overview of Methods and Data

The data that inspired my theoretical arguments on linguistic cartographies was collected in 2012 through focus groups and one-on-one interviews with African denizens originally from three regions of the African continent, namely: the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan); East-Central Africa (the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Kenya) and West Africa (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Ghana and Nigeria). Focus groups were organised using the criterion of region of origin in Africa, in order to facilitate the comparison of patterns of response both within groups and across groups with different historical, linguistic and cultural experiences. All participants were recruited from the New South Wales regional areas of the Mid North Coast (Coffs Harbour), the Hunter Valley (Newcastle) and the Riverina (Wagga Wagga). In order to ensure representativeness in relation to ethnic and linguistic diversity within the target population, 60 people (20 from each of the three research sites) were initially contacted and requested to participate. However, by the end of the study 36 people had been interviewed, with this number determined by theoretical saturation and the availability of people to participate in the study. Both male and female participants aged 18 years and over who had lived in Australia for at least two years were included in the sample. Participants were asked to narrate personal stories about their life journeys as refugees, highlighting their linguistic repertoires and language practices. In order to safeguard participants' anonymity, every interviewed person was allocated a name code derived from the research site in which they were interviewed (NC = Newcastle; WG = Wagga Wagga; CH = Coffs Harbour) followed by a number; that is,

NC1, WG4, CH9, etc. All interviews were carried out in English since it is one of the languages spoken by all of the people included in the sample and also because the study did not aim to do a linguistic analysis of the participants' speech.

The study found that most African denizens in regional Australia use multiple and complex linguistic resources in different contexts and with different people. African migrant languages such as Swahili, Kriol, Arabic and Amharic, which are spoken across the national borders of more than two African countries, were found to be important means of facilitating social networking and community-building by people originally from the same regions in Africa. For example, Kriol (and its variants) is a common language for people from the West African nations of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Gambia and Cameroon. Similarly, Swahili is a common language for most people from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, South Sudan and the DRC. A second category of languages is that of small ethnic languages spoken mainly at the family level, where they function as a means for intergenerational transmission of close-knit family ties and cultural practices. This picture of language mapping was found to be enriched even further by the use of a third category of languages—those acquired along the refugee journey, in countries of first, second or third asylum. For instance, some people who migrated as refugees from the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi were found to be proficient in the Shona and Chinyanja languages of Zimbabwe and Zambia, respectively. These participants had stayed in refugee camps in Harare (Zimbabwe) and Lusaka (Zambia) for periods ranging from six to nine years and had picked up Shona and Nyanja as additional languages while there.

Another category of language types is that of discursive and cultural practices. These are various symbolic and pragmatic ways of communicating which are not necessarily expressed in verbal terms but which nevertheless constitute a particular language type with wider implications for social networking and living a good quality life. Discursive languages were evident from the stories and tales that African denizens indicated they narrate to their children; and in unspoken and other symbolic gestures, memories and desires.

Linguistic Cartographies of African Denizens - Insights from Regional NSW

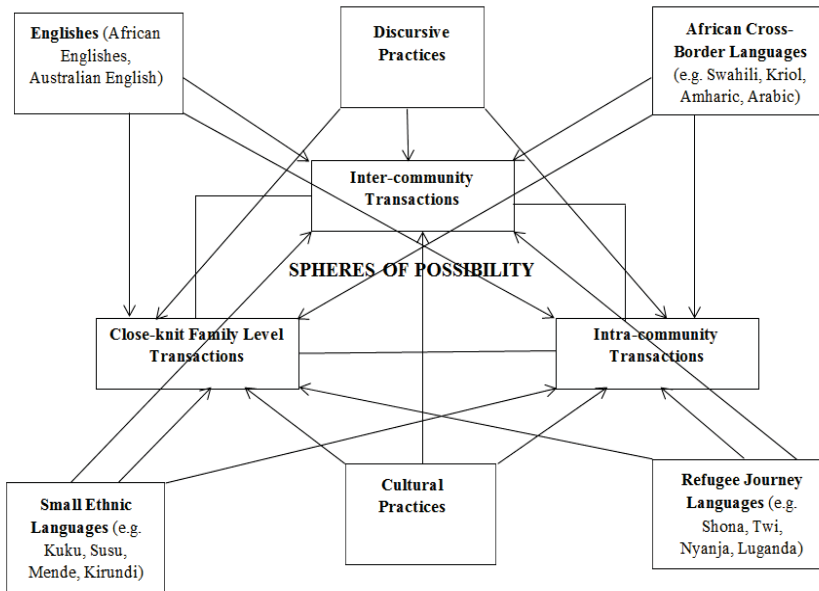
Based on the data presented and discussed here, I introduce the language map of African denizens to provide a fresh look at two commonly held beliefs and perceptions about the linguistic usages of

these people: (a) that English language proficiency is *the* key to living successful and fulfilling lives in Australia; and (b) that migrant languages have no greater role beyond that of being repositories of migrant cultures and traditions and as a medium to connect with ‘people back home’. The diagram on the opposite page attempts to visualise the level of complexity characterising linguistic cartographies of African denizens and their usages in regional Australia. In the next few paragraphs I discuss different categories of languages (represented in the linguistic cartography diagram in Figure 1) to illustrate the ways in which linguistic repertoires are mapped onto the everyday interactional processes of African denizens.

First are varieties of English, namely Australian English and African Englishes. There are two scale-levels at which the different varieties of English operate among African migrant communities. The obvious one relates to the de facto official status of Australian English, whereby this language assumes the unrivalled role of lingua franca within and across different communities. English occupies the realm of bridging capital, enabling people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to connect with one another and perform all the necessary social transactions that transcend their immediate friendships and family circles. Out-group social networking is crucial for active and productive participation in employment and other socio-economic activities and this is facilitated by a working knowledge of the lingua franca, which is Australian English in this case. As it is the default language of widest communication in domains such as employment and education, Australian English can determine who has access to schools, who has opportunities for economic advancement, who participates in political decisions, who has access to government services, and who gets treated fairly by government agencies (Brown & Ganguly, 2003). In short, Australian English language skills can affect the prospects of success for ethnic groups and for individuals in these groups. It was in recognition of the pragmatic and symbolic functions of Australian English that study participants overwhelmingly concurred with the predominant view that this language occupies an important space in social transactions at inter- and intra-community levels.

The second scale-level is in relation to other varieties of English (especially African Englishes) as the main languages of intergenerational communication between African denizen parents and their children. This dimension was raised by almost every interviewed parent, not as an enviable thing but as somewhat of a concern revolving around generational differences in linguistic repertoires and the

Figure 1: Linguistic cartographies as spheres of possibility¹



compromises that parents have embraced to circumvent the ensuing intercultural communication problems at the family level. As studies on language acquisition have long demonstrated (see for example Baker, 1992; Carreira, 2005; Norris-Holt, 2001), it is generally expected that the process of learning a new language and the ability to use it with a near-native level of proficiency will be fairly easy among young children and youth. For adults it is a different story altogether and the consequence of this is clearly captured in the submission from WG1, who arrived in Australia in 2003 as a refugee from Sudan via Cairo, Egypt.

WG1 is a single mother who indicated she speaks Kuku (a variety of Bari) and Arabic, and has a working knowledge of English. She narrated in the following terms her experiences with the tenuous act of balancing her language abilities with those of her five children, who now have near-native English language skills:

¹ This language map of African denizens was adapted from the language nesting model (Ndhlovu, 2014), which was developed from the same dataset reported in this article.

[...] the language I think; because like my young one, he can speak English very well but sometimes when he speak and I don't understand what he is saying, and when I speak he doesn't understand what I mean, I think that's the difficult decision... I don't know what can be done because for us, I don't know... we pushing our self to learn the English yeah... also because we are trying our best for the kids also to understand the English and my language, their language. (WG1)

While the acquisition of English language skills is generally seen as desirable to facilitate interaction between African denizens and other Australian communities, the sentiments expressed in the above transcript suggest that there are additional motivations that further complicate the language maps of these people. The desire to close communication gaps between immigrant parents and their young children is projected as one of the key pragmatic motivations for parents to push themselves very hard to acquire communication skills in Australian English, the main language of their children. What we see here are overlapping spaces for Australian English whereby this language claims its due right across the entire spectrum of African denizens' everyday interactional spaces including the inter-community level, intra-community level and, most importantly, the family level. This view challenges the predominant assumption that the family level constitutes a bastion for intergenerational transmission of heritage languages among migrant communities. If anything, what is suggested by the findings of this study is that the family is yet another site for contestation, negotiation and re-evaluation of languages and language practices. The family has, indeed, become an arena that carries a rhetorical function as a surrogate barometer for language use wherein some languages and language practices are validated (Australian English in this instance) while others are silenced or diminished (specifically migrant heritage languages such as Kuku and Arabic in the case of WG1). All of this points to the emergence of previously unpredicted linguistic cartographies that contest and defy dominant assumptions about the language practices of African denizens and other migrant communities in Australia.

The foregoing line of argument and analysis was attested to by 20-year-old NC6 who arrived in Australia in 2005 as a refugee from Uganda. While her parents were originally from Sudan, NC6 was born and spent her early childhood years in Uganda until she migrated to Australia at the age of 13. In addition to English, NC6 reported that she

has some knowledge of Maadi and Luganda, both being indigenous languages of Uganda. This is what she had to say regarding the use of languages between African denizen parents and their children:

Let the parents go to school too and learn how to speak a little bit of English, which will help them and also when the kids come back from school they can just speak their normal language at home. (NC6)

This is an explicit call for the broadening and (re)negotiation of linguistic cartographies within families of African denizens. The main point highlighted in this excerpt regards a two-way process whereby both the parents and the children are expected to put effort into learning each other's languages. However, as has already been noted, because English has more socio-political clout than migrant languages, and because the process of learning a new language is much easier for young people, the scales are obviously tipped against parents who have to put a lot of effort into re-drawing their own language maps. As for the children, there appears to be very little or no motivation at all for them to learn the languages spoken by their parents, given that English is increasingly becoming the predominant home language for most migrant families and communities.

In light of the foregoing there is, therefore, no doubt that English is a very useful language among African denizens in Australia, as is the case with other comparable immigrant communities around the world. Debates around the benefits of English language proficiency for emerging migrant communities are too well known to rehearse (see for example the work of Crystal, 2006; Davies, 1991; Graddol, 2006; Ndhlovu, 2011). The utility of English has, however, been over-played, with most supporting arguments, such as the communicative currency and language of widest communication theses, telling us only half the story. The other half is this: not everything in the everyday lives of migrant communities is done (well) using the English language. This leads us to other categories of languages and language types, namely African cross-border languages, refugee journey languages, small ethnic languages, and symbolic languages such as discursive and cultural practices. In the paragraphs that follow I discuss these language types and how they are mapped onto the identities and interactional processes of the people who use them.

Let us consider African cross-border languages first. These are "languages that are common to two or more states and domains

straddling various usages” (ACALAN, 2009, p. 4)². The concept of cross-border languages is concretised by reference to both the history of African national borders, which were arbitrarily drawn during the 18th century European scramble for Africa, as well as the general nature of the African language ecology. The latter is characterised by the existence of many languages that cross the borders of multiple countries (see Barro, 2010; Ndhlovu, 2013; Prah 2009).

The cross-border languages that featured prominently in the study reported here are Kiswahili and Arabic. Their significance was highlighted by participants sampled from all three research sites. NC2 underscored the importance of cross-border languages as essential social capital for overcoming ethnolinguistic fragmentation, thus leading to the formation of strong and viable pan-African denizen communities in Australia.

It is true that it is important that we have to speak our dialect. I think the major problem here is that Africa itself is fragmented; we have so many tribes, so many ethnic groups, divided [...] for example, take Sudan alone, there are about 400 dialects in Sudan, massive 400. But if there were, like ... only one language from West Africa, and one from Eastern Central Africa, like Swahili, it would have been fantastic. Like now nearly 20-30% of people, Africans in Newcastle are Swahili speakers, either from Congo, Kenya, from East and Central Africa, which brings people closer together. (NC2)

NC2's comments highlight how the need to interact within a narrow circle of friends/relatives and to also engage cross-culturally gives rise to language maps characterised by the co-existence of different language types within the same psycho-social spaces. This observation was evident in the responses of many participants, who emphasised in particular the increased role of Kiswahili in forging cross-cultural and cross-linguistic ties among people who originally came from different African countries. Narrating her experiences with how Kiswahili enables her to network easily within and across different African communities in Wagga Wagga, WG8 stated:

² ACALAN is an acronym for the African Academy of Languages, an arm of the Social Affairs Commission of the African Union (AU) which is charged with the responsibility of developing and providing expert advice on language policy matters for the AU.

Kiswahili is big, Kiswahili you can speak with Congolese, you can speak with Rwanda. Swahili is common, you know, even some people from Sudan, they speak Kiswahili, even Kenya, even Uganda. So I have different friends who speak Kiswahili, so I use Kiswahili most of the time. Even Tanzanians I speak with them Kiswahili most of the time. I think I have more friends in Kiswahili language than Kirundi. (WG8)

WG8 was born in Burundi and here she mentions five other national groups that she easily identifies with on account of her knowledge of Kiswahili. This is a clear example of how African cross-border languages occupy an important space in the entire discourse of transnational identity formation and community building among people who would otherwise be seen as belonging to different national identity categories. Furthermore, cross-border languages were reported as being especially useful among speakers of small languages, whose ethnic groups are not well represented within the wider African community in Australia. Cross-border languages enable these people to connect with other African denizens, thereby reducing the incidence of social isolation and overreliance on service providers for basic needs. The problems associated with social isolation for minority groups with no working knowledge of either English or any one of the African cross-border languages were summed up by NC7:

They get their way around through service providers; if they have bills, they have issues that are complicated, they go to service providers. Service providers in turn use the telephone interpreting service to get things sorted for them. They have been doing this for over years and years. Secondly, these are people who just flock around their own communities only. From their friends to members from the same community, that is all you will find them. They don't go; they don't mix with other people from outside. Even with other African communities, they don't mix. So they just flock around their own communities. (NC7)

However, as the example of WG8, cited above, shows, having working knowledge of an African cross-border language is a useful skill that can help people from small ethnolinguistic groups avoid social isolation by building cross-linguistic friendships and relationships that enable them live independent and fulfilling lives. This is one of the benefits of looking at margins and marginality as zones of transformation and creativity.

Further analysis of participants' stories shows that linguistic cartographies of African denizens clearly constitute spheres of possibility for people who belong to small ethnolinguistic groups. Having a cross-border language as part of one's linguistic repertoire is, indeed, another site for new beginnings that enables the building of new and wider social networks. Therefore, unlike bureaucratic approaches that tend to reify and literally view cultural groups as discrete entities based on nationality, a linguistic cartography approach considers such boundaries to be fluid, porous and capable of contracting and expanding depending on the dynamics of spatial and virtual scales of social interaction.

When WG8 says she has more friends in the Kiswahili language community (as opposed to her ethnic Kirundi community) she clearly projects a typical African denizen identity—characterised by the complex use of transnational language varieties—which transcends the limitations of nation-state-centric identity imaginings. Cross-border languages are thus envisaged as meeting points and bridges into all forms of cross-community and cross-cultural engagements among African denizens. The significance of cross-border languages resides in their ability to create cultural links and linguistic unity that go beyond the identity categories born out of political maps and national borders. Therefore, in African diasporic contexts, the cross-border language phenomenon provides new and empirically-grounded lenses for looking at identities in a manner that takes into account the everyday multilingual and discursive practices, as well as histories, of both individuals and groups. A consideration of the ways in which cross-border languages are strategically deployed to achieve the best social outcomes for individuals and communities indicates that there is much to be gained from a multi-dimensional conception of diversity, in terms of moving beyond the ethnic group as either the unit of analysis or sole object of study (Glick-Schiller, Caglar & Gulbrandsen, 2006). The breadth and depth of diversity associated with cross-cultural interactional processes mediated by the use of African cross-border languages surpass the reach of monolingual approaches. This means that theories about people's past experiences have significant application in the study of multi-group relations in contemporary societies characterised by unprecedented and complex forms of diversity. It is for this reason that we have to appreciate the coalescence of factors that condition people's choices as to who they network with and in what medium.

The participants' narratives of their identities, linguistic repertoires and life stories analysed in this paper suggest that African denizen identities do not proceed in a straight, unbroken line from some fixed, single point of origin. Rather, they are framed and shaped by multiple vectors and axes of similarity, continuity, difference and rupture all simultaneously operative in dialogic relationship. In other words, difference persists in and alongside continuity, in which boundaries of difference are continually being repositioned in relation to different points of reference (Hall, 1990). This is how we should look at the linguistic cartographies of African denizens, seeing them not as fixed or complete markers of identity but rather as reflexive categories whose usages swing unsteadily between the poles of contingency and essentialism in a manner that reflects the temporalities of African denizens' lived experiences.

Another point worth noting here is one relating to the predominant mention of Kriol among participants originally from West Africa, who saw it as one language that straddles several borders and domains of usage in their region of origin and a significant point of reference for their identity imaginings in immigrant contexts. For people from countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria and Guinea, Kriol (and its variant, Pidgin English) is an important cross-border language that enables them to connect and forge new identities and social networks among themselves. Responding to a question on what she thought was the place of each of the five languages she claimed to have a working knowledge of, WG4 emphasised in particular the importance of Kriol and its variant Pidgin English:

We have like six to eight families here from my country that we can speak the same language, some can speak different dialects because of the ethnic group, but we all speak the Pidgin English, the Kriol, so we communicate in that most of the time. Even when we meet in gatherings, with all the people we still communicate in Kriol. [People from] Sierra Leone, Liberia, speak that Kriol, Ghana, speak that Kriol, but just theirs are different versions but when they speak their Pidgin English we can understand them. They have different names how they call theirs, we call it Kriol, they have got different names. Like the Liberians they call it Pidgin English, but it's the same Kriol, it's like borrowed English ... Most times when we meet in gatherings like parties or any social gatherings, we speak that Kriol more to one another, we only turn into English if we have like

white people there that we want to tell them what we are saying. (WG4)

Again, we see here language maps that overlap and transcend nation-state-centric approaches to linguistic cartography. The above observation on the role and place of Kriol was corroborated by other participants interviewed in all three research sites. For instance, when asked about the language varieties that are widely used in community meetings of West African people in Coffs Harbour, CH1 was quick to say:

Pidgin English, the Kriol and Pidgin English is the best one that people can express themselves ... someone who is in his forties or fifties, just expresses themselves speaking the Pidgin or the Kriol. At least with that you can best express yourself. (CH1)

The above excerpts are important submissions that point to how new transnational identity categories and new linguistic cartographies are evolving among African denizen communities through the widespread use of language varieties that are not highly regarded back in Africa. Like other emergent languages all over the world, Kriol does not have a prestigious official status within the language policy regimes of those African nation-states in which it is spoken, as it is seen as a variety that is incomplete, broken, corrupt and not worthy of serious attention (see, for example, Bickerton, 1976; Holm, 2000; Kouwenberg & Singler, 2009; Siegel, 2008). While these attitudes might still be prevalent, there are also some rapid changes taking place, particularly among denizen communities, about the significance of creoles and pidgins as an integral part of transient postmodern identities. The stories elicited from members of the African denizen community originally from West Africa suggest that creoles and pidgins are, in fact, not wrong versions of other languages. Rather, they constitute emergent linguistic cartographies whose socio-pragmatic functions are shaped and mediated by the everyday interactional and communicative needs of their speakers. We see here language varieties that have traditionally not been highly regarded on the African continent assuming an important role as an overriding medium of communication and marker of group identity among African denizen communities in Australia. This is not because Kriol has suddenly found a space in the centre. Rather, this is the positive outcome of being in the marginal space—the periphery—that zone of undecidability which simultaneously constitutes a favourable environment for self-actualisation.

The widespread use of Kriol does indeed reflect the transnational, constantly evolving, emergent and incomplete nature of the linguistic and cultural identities of contemporary African denizen communities. Therefore, the cultural and linguistic landscape of African denizens in Australia is a sphere of possibility; a zone of opportunity to freely use language varieties that are not highly regarded in their countries of origin. This supports the proposition that margins are, in fact, privileged zones for questioning and challenging hegemonic impositions (such as standard language ideologies). African denizens in Australia are immune from and beyond the reach of the national language policies of West African states that constrict and curtail the use of creoles and pidgins. Such are the benefits of occupying a marginal space: African denizens are now able to express their genuineness and authenticity with very little or no hindrance at all. This is a privilege, which people occupying the centre both in countries of origin and here in Australia do not have access to. So, in short, being on the margin does not always mean being in limbo; it sometimes means being in a privileged place for writing one's identity, for self-assertion, for creativity and for doing things the way you like. Existing on the margins is, in fact, a liberating experience for African denizens, one that frees them from the shackles of linguistic and cultural normalisation, at least for as long as they are not yet fully 'integrated' into the monolingual mindset that is endemic in Australia.

Small ethnic or heritage languages (for example, Kuku, Mende, Kirundi and Maadi) constitute yet another category of languages that are an essential part of African denizen identity. Although they might appear to be less significant when compared to the widely used cross-border languages and English, small ethnic languages were highly regarded by the sampled members of the African denizen community, who consider such languages to be the most important symbols of who they are as a people. Most parents, in particular, indicated that they strongly encourage their children to practice speaking heritage languages in order to ensure they can communicate with grandparents and other relatives who do not normally speak English. They projected the maintenance of or desire to continue using heritage languages as something that is directly connected to prospects of 'going back home' in the future. This line of thinking was evident in a submission by WG11, who shared similar sentiments to those of WG10:

I don't want my child to grow up to a stage where all she knows is I am African because I can tell by my colour. But she should be able to identify by customs, belief systems.

Even if she doesn't really even believe it, she knows it by head knowledge – I know where I come from, where my people come from, these things are not done, this is not done, you can't say this here, you can't do this. Some day we hope to take them home, one day. They wouldn't be total strangers when they get back home because they can easily identify, when people speak they can understand, they know how to relate to the elderly back home. (WG10)

Cultural competence is crucial for successful communication with the family and friends who stayed behind in countries of origin, therefore, for example, WG11 considers it only prudent for African diasporas intending to go back home to continue developing these skills even among their young children. This is a sphere of the possibility of building social cohesion among African denizens and cultural understandings across different generations both within Australia and in countries of origin.

Conclusion

This article has suggested a much broader conception of the capabilities of African denizens in Australia by taking into account prior cultural experiences, migration journeys, linguistic practices and cultural resources. The suggested framework considers language maps or linguistic cartographies of African denizens as consisting of various types or forms of languages that include varieties of Englishes, refugee journey languages, African cross-border languages, small ethnic or minority languages, cultural practices and discursive practices, and so on. The overall mapping of the linguistic repertoires of African denizens also takes into account past and present communication needs with friends and relatives in countries of origin; cultural and linguistic experiences accumulated along refugee journeys; and the exigencies of present and future-oriented relationships and social networks in Australia. The quality of life for African denizens moving into the future is not just about interacting with other people within the confines of Australian national borders. Rather, for the future of these people to be open, space must be open too (Massey, 2005). This means imaginings of linguistic cartographies must sufficiently capture and articulate the transnational frames needed to comprehend the cultural identities, language practices and capabilities of denizens resident in predominantly immigrant societies such as Australia.

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