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The Multiple Faces of the “Civis”

Is citizenship translatable?

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I.

In 1970 the French linguist Emilie Benveniste published an article entitled “Deux modèles linguistiques de la cite”[1]. The article discusses the meaning of the French word *cité*, which is somewhat difficult to translate into English since it seems to oscillate between “city”, on the one hand, and “citizenry” on the other. To begin with, it should be noted that the French language use favors the word *ville* for the concrete city, whereas since the Late Middle Ages *cité* can designate, as far as empirical realities are concerned, the historical centers of cities. Since the mid 19th century, however, it increasingly refers to the suburbs inhabited by workers and, in today’s France, often by migrants and their descendants. Where a translation of *cité* with “city” is advisable, one should rather think of the explicitly political meaning of the word, that is, of the political space *par excellence* that in political theory is mostly thematized by reference to the Greek *polis*.

Linguistically, however, *cité* corresponds with the Latin word *civitas*, which in turn forms an abstract noun derived from *civis* and is constructed by the addition of the suffix *-tas*. In order to understand the meaning of *civitas* – and correspondingly of *cité* – it should thus seem sufficient to grasp the exact meaning of *civis*, which is usually translated as "citoyen", "citizen" or, in German, "Bürger". At precisely this point, though, things begin to become a bit more complicated. In Benveniste's words: "The translation of *civis* by 'citoyen' is an error of fact, one of these conceptual anachronisms that get fixed by usage, of which one is ultimately no longer aware, and which block the interpretation of ensemble of relations."[2]

What is the problem with translating *civis* as "citoyen" ("citizen", "Bürger")? And which "ensemble of relations" are obscured by this translation? First of all, the translation of *civis* as "citoyen" contains a flagrant logical error. The word *citoyen* implies, as Benveniste points out, "a reference to a *cité*" or its alleged Latin equivalent *civitas*; hence it suggests that the *civitas* constitutes a pre-existing real or symbolic entity, in relation to which a *civis* could be understood as a *civis*. An interpretation like this, however, is obviously an inversion, "since, in Latin, *civis* is the primary term and *civitas* the derivate."[3] The question that we consequently have to pose is rather: How can we think of a *civis* without presupposing a reference to any kind of an underlying political entity or institution – that is, without presupposing a reference that would allow for a parallelization, contradictory to the linguistic findings, of the derived abstract noun *civitas* and its relation to the primary word *civis* with the relation between *cité* and *citoyen*?

What we are confronted with here is more than just a logical paradox. In fact the problem points to a widely eclipsed historical

meaning of *civis*, or at least to a meaning that in dictionaries is commonly listed only in the second or third place. As Benveniste stresses, this meaning can nevertheless give us a decisive indication of the primary signification of the word: in Latin the word *civis* is often constructed with a possessive pronoun, such as in *civis meus* or *cives nostri*. Once again we find ourselves compelled to profoundly question the common translation with "citoyen" ("citizen", "Bürger"). For what could "my citizen", spoken by any person, possibly mean? "The construction with the possessive," concludes Benveniste, "reveals in fact the true meaning of *civis*, which is a term of reciprocal value and not an objective designation: he who is *civis* for me is someone for whom I am the *civis*."[4]

It is not at all easy to find an "equivalent" expression for this meaning in modern European languages. According to Benveniste the best approximation in French would be the term *concitoyen*, "co-citizen" or "fellow citizen", which – in order to truly correspond with *civis* – would of course have to be understood strictly in terms of a mutual relation rather than in terms of any kind of common reference to or membership in a pre-existing *civitas*. It is therefore crucial within such a translation to place the emphasis on the "con-" or the "co-"; this is the only point from which the horizons of meaning linked with the word components "-citoyen" or "-citizen" can be measured, as vectors devoid of any signification that could be assigned to them independently of the relation which is indicated by the prefix. Moreover, it is not the least important aspect of Benveniste's account that this also shifts the meaning of categories which are usually believed to "identify" a *civis* in terms of a "civic identity": "One is the *civis* of another *civis* before being *civis* of a certain city. In *civis Romanus*, the adjective only adds a localizing indication, not a definition of a status."[5]

We can now clarify what are – beyond the merely linguistic relations of derivation – "the ensemble of relations" that are obscured as long as we translate *civis* with "citizen": it is nothing other than the relations between *cives* and, consequently, the very type of relations which constitute a *civis* as a *civis*. More precisely and in view of the fact that a single *civis* is unconceivable, due to the crucial reciprocity of this type of relations: what constitutes *cives* as *cives*. If the abstract noun *civitas* can be understood as "the ensemble of *cives*"[6], then we would consequently have to avoid any understanding of the word "ensemble" in the sense of a totality identical in itself; rather we would inevitably have to take into account an irreducible *plurality* of "co-citizens", a plurality which is of course not so much defined by the mere number of *cives*, but precisely by the relations and interrelations that those *cives* maintain among themselves. In the same way, the adjective *civilis* would have to be revisited as well, in order to be understood as a strictly relational term or, as Benveniste puts it, as referring to "what takes place between *cives*." Thus the linguistic model of the Latin words *civis/civitas/civilis* provides a whole model for reexamining questions of citizenship (in the field of tension between the juridical meaning of this concept, on the one hand, and the designation of an irreducible plurality of co-citizens on the other), of the "city" or *cité* as a political space, or again of so-called "civil society"; a model which does not take its starting point from an always already institutionalized political space, but from a primordial and irreducible relationality.

We should not forget, however, that within the European context this Latin model is only one of two classic linguistic models with regard to the questions that I have raised: it stands in opposition to the Greek model, which takes *pólis* as the primary term from which *polítēs* ("citizen") or the adjective *politikós* are derived. In contrast to

the *civis*, the *polítēs* appears as "'he who takes part in the *pólis*', who assumes the duties and the rights of his condition."[7] In accordance with this Greek model, modern European languages derive *citoyen* from *cité*, "citizen" from "city", or again the German word *(Staats-)Bürger* from *Burg*.

Moreover, the double reference in German to *Burg*, on the one hand, and *Staat*, on the other, cannot only be interpreted as a strange amalgam made of premodern and modern elements, which allows for example to delimit the *citoyen* from the *bourgeois*, that is, the *Bürger* as a juridical-political entity (and member of a given state) from the *Bürger* as a social entity (and member of a given class). *Burg* would also be one of the possible translations of the Greek word *pólis*, which, according to Benveniste, originally signified "fortress" or "citadel", even before a "politics" was to derive its name from it: "It is [...] an old Indo-European term, which in Greek – and only in Greek – assumed the meaning of 'city' [*'ville, cite'*], and later on 'state'."[8] – Whatever elements of this ancient signification of *pólis* might have been conserved in the linguistic forms of modern European languages, the debate around the "fortress Europe" is undoubtedly to be understood as one of the most recent examples for its *discursive* resurgence.

II.

In March 1997, the French philosopher Etienne Balibar read a short text at a meeting that had been organized as a solidarity action supporting the claims of the "Sans-Papiers de Saint-Bernard". The Sans-Papiers of Saint-Bernard were a group of immigrants without papers who, in order to claim their legalization, had engaged in a hunger strike in the church Saint-Bernard in Paris in 1996; in the month of August of the same year

they had been chased out of the church and later, at least the majority of them, forced to leave the country. Balibar's text was entitled "Ce que nous devons aux 'Sans-Papiers'" ("What we owe to the 'Sans-Papiers'"), and it opens by claiming that "we, French citizens of all sexes, origins, professions, are highly indebted to the 'Sans-Papiers' who, refusing the 'clandestinity' that was attributed to them, have forcefully posed the question of the right of residence."[9]

What is it that "we"[10] owe to the "Sans-Papiers"? – Balibar speaks of a "triple demonstration": The first part of this triple demonstration consists in the fact that the Sans-Papiers of Saint-Bernard have "broken down the barriers of communication" by making themselves be seen and heard "for what they are: not phantasms of delinquency and invasion, but workers, families, that are at once from here and from elsewhere, with their particularisms and the universality of their condition as modern proletarians."[11] In short: this first demonstration is about gaining visibility, the insistence on the right to speak, and the contestation of existing stereotypes which are spread by the media and the predominant discourses on migration issues. This struggle for visibility and the right to speak touches upon some crucial topics for democratic life. "By this," writes Balibar, "we understand better what a democracy is: an institution of collective debate, but whose conditions are never given from above. It is always necessary that those who are concerned conquer the right to speak, visibility and credibility, taking the risk of repression."[12] Thus, even though democracy is usually conceived of as a form of the state or a form of government, it cannot simply be identified with the reality of one or the other state, but rather is in need of constituent practices "from below."

The second demonstration that, according to Balibar, we owe to the Sans-Papiers is that they have highlighted the mechanisms of

institutional racism and the political practices on which this racism is based: that is, all the "politically realistic" programs stressing the necessities of migration control or the integration of legal immigrants, all the discourses evoking the menaces of insecurity, mass poverty or identity conflicts, all the manifold interactions between restrictive legislations and discriminatory ideologies, all the compromises or tacit alliances with neo-fascist political forces, all the political and economic practices of exploiting immigrated labor force – in short, all that which indeed has *produced* the "regime of illegality" that defines the situation of Sans-Papiers, without providing them with even a minimum of civil rights. In view of these political and institutional racisms, the Sans-Papiers' struggle for visibility and the right to speak turns out to be an immediate act of resistance that could be understood as a kind of politics of truth, based on the experiences, interests and forms of (self-) organization of those who are subjected to such a regime of illegality; a politics of truth whose function, says Balibar, consists in "re-establishing the truth about history and the condition of men, by offering their interests to mediation and negotiation."[13]

The third demonstration mentioned by Balibar is that the Sans-Papiers of Saint-Bernard (along with other groups of Sans-Papiers) have "recreated citizenship among us, insofar as it is not an institution, nor a status, but a collective practice."[14] At this point we find ourselves quite obviously led back to the Latin linguistic model of *civis/civitas* which I presented above: precisely where it turns out that, as Balibar says, "it is not necessary to be a national in order to contribute to the life of the 'cité' in a responsible way", a "recreation" of citizenship comes into view that is not based on any kind of membership in a political organism like a state, but on collective practices that challenge the very idea of citizenship by generating social ties this side of any institution.

And Balibar leaves no doubt about the fact that such a recreation of citizenship does not only concern the immediate interests and practices of Sans-Papiers, or rather, that those "immediate" interests and practices are closely linked to a more general issue of our time: "[The Sans-Papiers] have [...] contributed to endowing the political activity with the transnational dimension that we so urgently need in order to open the perspectives of social transformation and civility in the era of globalization."[15]

III.

Why have I chosen to bring together these two short texts in this form? – Certainly not, as Benveniste's rhetoric could suggest, in order to uncover some concealed origin of the word *civis*, on the basis of which the "true" meaning of citizenship could be sketched, so as to furthermore be smoothly "applied" to contemporary social conflicts and political struggles. A remarkable aspect even in Benveniste's text is in fact that an author whose linguistic work is strongly characterized by the effort to etymologically reconstruct "true" and "original" meanings here finds himself compelled to discuss *two* linguistic models that remain relevant for the modern verbal and conceptual complex *cité/citoyen/citoyenneté* or city/citizen/citizenship. And even though it is a buried meaning of the Latin word *civis* on which the quoted text by Benveniste primarily focuses, this meaning can certainly not be considered "original" – at least not with regard to an analysis of *modern* political languages: not only is it opposed by an alternative model from antiquity, but also by the history of a linguistic development in which at least both of these models are involved, and which necessitates a specific kind of reflection.

In his magnum opus *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* Benveniste has linked the question of the development of languages with the assumption that the heterogeneity of linguistic forms can and must be ultimately traced back to their initial point in "one and the same original."[16] It is this "originalness" of linguistic forms that allows Benveniste to superpose linguistical questions and questions concerning the problem of "institution" (in an "extended sense", which includes forms of life, social relations and developments of thought in general[17]). In an interesting formulation Benveniste ends up presupposing the congruency between these two planes, the linguistic plane and the institutional plane, with a direct view to the question of their respective historical developments: "We have strived to show how vocables which initially were little differentiated have bit by bit assumed specialized values and thus constitute ensembles, which express a profound evolution of institutions, the emergence of new activities or conceptions."[18]

The word that I have translated as "express" reads *traduire* in the French original (in the form *traduisant* as for the quote). The common and literal rendition of this word would certainly be "translate". But even the translation of words for "translate" is not always unambiguous, for the French usage frequently approximates the meaning of *traduire* to *exprimer*, "to express". And even if one wanted to render *traduire* by "translate" in the quoted sentence, this would hardly alter the content of Benveniste's assertion, given that for Benveniste every "translation" of the development of institutions through language development would still be linked back to "little differentiated" originals. But how if a particular linguistic-institutional "ensemble" is not based on *one single* original, as in the case of *civis/civitas* and *pólis/polítēs*?[19] – Benveniste's considerations inscribe themselves at this point (and

this is even more worth noting as Benveniste's own research on the question of enunciation has forged very different paths) into a tradition which anchors both the problem of expression and the problem of translation in a fixable meaning. According to this tradition it is always a pre-established meaning that is "expressed" or "translated", a meaning which delimits a domain that is not only presupposed by expression and translation, but also remains exterior and in a certain sense inaccessible to them.

In a first step we can contrast this with the following sentence by Walter Benjamin, whose conviction it was that "it is necessary to found the concept of translation at the deepest level of linguistic theory": "Translation passes through continua of transformation, not abstract areas of identity and similarity."[20] A perspective like this leaves no scope for reducing translation to the rendition of pre-established meanings. And Benjamin was not the only one who has pointed this out. The idea that it is not translation which is based on meaning, but rather that meaning is based on translation has been articulated, within the framework of linguistic sciences, very clearly by Roman Jakobson: "For us, both as linguists and as ordinary word-users, the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign [...]"[21] Jakobson's approach transfers, as it were, the idealism of meanings into a theory of *practical* linguistic capacity. And since it is the capacity to translate that constitutes such a thing as meanings in the first place, the first kind of translation mentioned by Jakobson is also not the translation between distinct given language systems, but "[i]ntralingual translation or *rewording*": the "interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language."[22]

However, we should not overhastily consider intralingual translation as forming the "fundament" of the other two kinds of translation mentioned by Jakobson, namely of interlingual

translation and intersemiotic translation (i.e., translation between different, for instance verbal and pictorial, sign systems) – as if every translation were nothing other than a mere actualization if not of given meanings, then still of a pre-established sign system. [23] Translation could instead be understood, to use a kind of formula, as an *actualization* of a capacity that simultaneously operates a *virtualization* of linguistic forms, which opens up their potentials of signification just as it opens their contextual concretization. I am explicitly speaking of an *opening* – and not of a "realization" – of potentials of signification and contextual concretizations, since this is precisely what the concept of virtuality points to: certainly any virtualization is in itself a kind of actualization, but it is not a simple matter of implementing preexistent possibilities, as if the possible were nothing other than a "sterile double of the real"[24], awaiting the kisses that call it into its no less sterile existence. Neither is there ultimately a pre-established pool of meanings nor a pre-fixed pool of linguistic forms (and even less a "national spirit" haunting these forms). Nor can the multiplicity of linguistic *qua* translational actualizations be narrowed down to an a priori defined field of "possible" contextual concretizations. It is precisely for this reason that Benjamin can say that the question of translation has to be founded "at the deepest level of linguistic theory": translation does not "render" a preexistent stratum, but traverses virtual continua. In the strict sense we can speak of a virtualization only in relation to the presumed stability of linguistic forms and meanings, which become destabilized, as it were, in the translational act. But this stability is no primary fact, it is the product of an a posteriori stratification, which allows the delimiting of distinct linguistic layers and distinct languages from each other, in order to then register identities and similarities in the strata and domains thus "obtained".

By taking recourse to a different set of concepts, in his book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*[25] from 1930, Valentin Vološinov [Mikhail Bakhtin] has accentuated the same problematic with a view to one of its most practical manifestations: conversation. The replies in a conversation are, to transpose Vološinov's [Bakhtin's] argument into the terminology of Jakobson, always dependent on a capacity of rewording – and the same can already be said about the understanding of a speech:

"In this way, we translate every separate significative element of an enunciation just as the enunciation as a whole into another context, which is actively responding. *Every understanding is dialogical.* It relates to the enunciation as the reply of an interlocutor does within a dialogue. To understand means to seek a *counter-word* for the word of the speaker. Only in order to understand the word of a foreign language, one seeks the 'same' word of one's own language."[26]

It may appear as though the last sentence of the quotation expresses a significant limitation with regard to the stated principle of dialogicity, specifically where it is a matter of processes of understanding and translation that are related to a "foreign language." But this is only the case at the first glance, for Vološinov [Bakhtin] is careful enough to put the word "same" between quotation marks. Strictly speaking, as he has already suggested in a previous passage, there is no such sameness, neither in the sense of a sameness constituted through correspondence and equivalence within the interlingual translational process, nor in the sense of an intralingual "self-sameness" of a word: "In fact *the word is a two-sided act*. It is determined by *from whom it is* in the same way as it is determined by *for whom it is*. It is, as a word, precisely *the product of the interaction between the speaker and the listener*."[27] The fact that the understanding of a word from a foreign language

may seek the "same" word thus eventually implies a certain superposition of the linguistic interaction by the construction of languages (for example: national languages) that are homogeneous in themselves, as well as of standardized differences that allow for relations of sameness and correspondence to be established.

It is not by coincidence that Vološinov's [Bakhtin's] language philosophy claims to simultaneously formulate a theory of ideology. For in contrast to the direct correspondence between language development and the development of institutions as maintained by Benveniste, "ideology" serves as the name here, which indicates that the relationship between languages and institutions is in principle open, that it remains consigned to conversation or again to confliction – yet that it is simultaneously superposed by the search for a "same" word (certain attitudes towards interlingual translation provide a model here), which allows not only integrating the unknown into the known and into "abstract areas of identity and similarity" (Benjamin), but which also has the dubitable advantage of being "identical with itself" and of thus guaranteeing a supposedly stable meaning.

In view of all this Benveniste's reconstruction of the two linguistic models, which may be seen as a starting point (at least as far as the European context is concerned) for the conflicts around "citizenship", can hardly be regarded any longer as a narrative about origins. Rather we would have to assume a permanent process of language crossings[28], which not only concerns the models *civis/civitas*, on the one hand, and *pólis/polítēs* on the other, but which is instead inextricably associated with the irreducible dialogicity and multiplicity of the word, of enunciations and processes of understanding and contextualization. Nevertheless Benveniste's analyses remain instructive, for they refer to crucial aspects of the conflicts around citizenship, which are open to a virtualization of

the languages of the political through an actualization of the capacity to translate.

IV.

We have thus circumscribed, in terms of language theory, the field in which Etienne Balibar's speech of solidarity with the Sans-Papiers of Saint-Bernard could be located. Balibar virtualizes the meaning of the French word *citoyen* by envisaging himself as an interlocutor in a conversation. The beginning of his speech invokes an understanding of the citizen that appears completely indebted to the Greek model of the relationship between *pólis* and *polítēs*, that is, to a model of the membership of citizens in an existing polity. But he also formulates – by presenting it as a "debt" – the insufficient, unsaturated und thus fundamentally open character of this model of membership: "we, French citizens of all sexes, origins, professions, are highly indebted to the 'Sans-Papiers' [...]." And this fundamentally open character is once again corroborated towards the end of Balibar's speech, when he holds that "it is not necessary to be a national in order to contribute to the life of the 'cité' in a responsible way." It appears as though Balibar not only addressed a meaning of citizenship that enters into a conflict with the models of membership – in the sense of reciprocal relations among *cives*, for example –, but also as though he wanted to *demonstrate* this reciprocity on his part by *responding* to the demonstrations of the Sans-Papiers described above.

There is an obvious problem, however: this reciprocity is *interrupted*, because a part of the Sans-Papiers of Saint Bernard, with whom Balibar engages in a dialogue, had long been deported at the time of his speech. What is the ultimate consequence of such an interrupted reciprocity? What remains of it is eventually a

monologue, which certainly *would wish* to be a dialogue, but which finds itself thrown back to *fixing* the *meaning* of what the – henceforth absent – interlocutors have "demonstrated", instead of virtualizing it (given that the virtualization, as has been argued above, is less a matter of the intentions of a speaker, but rather a matter of verbal interaction). Such a fixation of meaning takes place, for example, when Balibar speaks of the Sans-Papiers' entering into a visibility and audibility "for what they are": "not phantasms of delinquency and invasion, but workers, families, that are at once from here and from elsewhere, with their particularisms and the universality of their condition as modern proletarians." The rejection of the "phantasms of delinquency" and the affirmation of the "universality of their condition as modern proletarians" are the two elements that frame Balibar's designation of "what they are". Nothing guarantees, however, that the qualification of the Sans-Papiers as "proletarians" is not just another (European) phantasm; the fragmented living conditions, permanently exposed to the menaces of deportation or detention, as well as the reduced possibilities of social and political organization resulting from these conditions, are as inconsistent with such a qualification as the fact that proletarian revolutions aiming at a takeover of power may be envisageable, whereas this is hardly imaginable for Sans-Papiers revolutions.[29]

Moreover, to qualify delinquency as a mere phantasm can counteract precisely a political potency that is part of what the name "proletarians" invokes, namely the potency of solidarization. Thus a "Declaration on Prisons" published a few years ago in France, and signed by the groups or networks Ouvriers sans papiers and Organisation politique, stated the following: "Prisons are something for thieves and bandits. People who have killed somebody or who have stolen something are put into prison, that's

normal. That a worker who doesn't have papers is also put into prison, alongside thieves and bandits, is not normal. It's not just." The name "Ouvriers sans papiers" (Workers without papers) already suggests a certain subordination of what it means to live without papers under the supposedly fixed political meaning of "workers"[30], and this specifically with regard to a context where the denial of the right to work counts among the most common mechanisms of marginalization. The fact that this denial of work permits results in situations, in which a number of Sans-Papiers find themselves compelled to finance their lives through petty criminal activities remains inaccessible to the statements of the declaration cited. The quoted sentences invoke a "normality" that exists only at the price of splitting off a void abstraction of the prison function from the complex conjunction that persists between the *ensemble* of juridical and judicial regulations and the production of social and individual forms of living. And this abstraction has in effect another price: that of a desolidarization between working and non-working Sans-Papiers.

At the beginning of her chapter – frequently cited in recent years – on "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of Human Rights"[31], which offers an analysis of the situation of minorities and stateless people in the period between the two World Wars in Europe, Hannah Arendt wrote a sentence which, to my mind, much better applies to today's situation than many other of Arendt's analyses, sometimes overhastily invoked in contemporary debates: "Unemployment, statelessness or homelessness, even though millions of people were exposed to them, were regarded as anomalies in an otherwise normal world, with the effect that, in view of the impossibility to normalize the increasing anomalies by normal means, both victims and observers tended to consider the way things developed to be the normal course of the world with a

cynicism that was just as bigheaded as clueless."[32] Apart from all the direct forms of racism, nationalism and supranationalism that we see at work each and every day: isn't it "a cynicism that is just as bigheaded as clueless", when even the implementation of crucial claims of Sans-Papiers, as in the case of the legalization of approximately 700.000 "Sin Papeles" that was initiated in Spain in 2005, only results in a short-term reconditioning of constitutional standards – while at the same time whole sectors of the Spanish economy, such as the agricultural or the care sector, remain structurally dependent on the inflow of new disenfranchised foreign workers?

However, the fact that Sans-Papiers are subject to relations of exploitation does not necessarily mean that they are "proletarians". Indeed, the Spanish example shows that the juridical-political conflicts around citizenship cross and interlace with a capitalist device of a neoliberal-globalized type, which marks its own specific domains of sameness and singularity and which applies its own specific measure: according to the "translation" of citizenship performed on the basis of this measure, new – "naturalized" – citizens can in principle be just as useful as workforces that are situated outside of any kind of stated citizenship. For this reason, it also appears insufficient to me to orient the question of citizenship in the present European context along the conceptual couple of inclusion/exclusion, as it is frequently deployed. This kind of conceptualization is all too indebted to models of membership, without being able to actually pose the question of intersecting devices that perform a specific repartition of inclusions and exclusions. In contrast the impulse that can be picked up from Benveniste's reconstruction of the horizons of meaning of the Latin word *civis* points to an *interrupted reciprocity*, which is installed *within an irreducible plurality of "virtual" citizens* and

determines their repartition; in other words, it points to a conceptual pair that has been suggested by my friend and colleague Klaus Neundlinger, namely, to the distinction between *relations of exchange* and *refusals of exchange*. It is a refusal of exchange that *unintentionally* gives Balibar's speech of solidarization with the Sans-Papiers of Saint Bernard the touch of a monologue, as the possibility of a dialogic translation is interrupted and as its implicit address *to* the Sans-Papiers can henceforth only appear as a "debt"; it is a refusal of exchange that regulates the present European border policies, in the face of which the same Balibar calls for a "democratization of borders" with good reasons; and it is also a refusal of exchange that underlies a mode of production of social wealth which systematically incorporates "illegal" workforces, while the redistribution of this wealth is interrupted by restrictive regimes of stated citizenship as well as of residence and employment regulations.

In view of all this it is all but certain that the comprehensive extension of a stated citizenship, as we know it, would open up a real perspective that corresponds with the globalized living conditions of Sans-Papiers. We cannot even assume that Benveniste's reading of the expression *civis Romanus*, interpreting the adjective "Romanus" as a "localizing indication", is still perfectly applicable to the *translocal* conditions that we are facing today. And it is not only a freedom of movement that is stake in conjunction with this translocality, but just as much a freedom to abide (in the countries of habitation *as well as* in the countries of origin) and a freedom to return. *Movement*, *abode*, *return* – and who could say which is the strongest of these three factors? However, as particularly the question of return is usually almost exclusively ceded to well-known phantasms of deportation within the European discourse on migration, I want to conclude here by

quoting a statement from a woman from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who – and this also should be a subject of considerations – after many years in Europe sticks to the name "Zaire" when she speaks of what she calls "her country":

"I am from Zaire, I have been living in Europe (France, Switzerland, and now Belgium) for almost 16 years. As I was a student at my arrival, I have always had a residence card for one year, which could be renewed every year. At the end of my studies I was asked by the French state to return home, which was impossible in view of the chaotic situation that prevailed there since 1997. I have now been living in Belgium for three years, I want to return to my country, but not without having anything to take along with me; but I can't exercise my profession, because I don't have papers, so I don't have money either, not even for making a living ... – my diplomas are of no use at all. I also don't fancy marrying my Belgian boyfriend (for three years now) only to become Belgian, I have already a home: Zaire. I would only like to be able to work here, until I have enough resources to return to my country as intended."[33]

Many thanks to Birgit Mennel for our intense exchange on the subject as well as for concrete remarks on the text.

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[1] Emile Benveniste, "Deux modèles linguistiques de la cité", in: Id., *Problèmes de linguistique générale 2*, Paris: Gallimard 1974, p. 272–280.

[2] Ibid., p. 273 (all translations here and in the following are done by myself, if not otherwise indicated).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 274.

[5] Ibid., p. 276.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. 277.

[8] Emile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes. 1. Economie, parenté, société*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit 1969, p. 367.

[9] E. Balibar, "Ce que nous devons aux 'Sans-Papiers'", in: Id., *Droit de cité*, Paris: Quadrige/P.U.F. 2002 (1st edition 1998), p. 23–25, here: p. 23.

[10] To begin with, I am including myself in this "we", even though I do not have the papers of a "French citizen". The alternative at this point would be to objectify the "we" and to claim an external position in relation to it, given that a discussion of the complex relations between "French citizens" and "EU-citizens" with, for example, Austrian papers (which is my case) is not possible here. Such an attitude, however, would ultimately eclipse my own "civic" involvements in the "we" pronounced by Balibar.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 24.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., p. 25.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Emile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes. 1. Écomonie, parenté, société*, op. cit., p. 10.

[17] Cf. ibid., p. 9.

[18] Ibid., p. 11.

[19] The duad of linguistic models only marks the starting point of an open series here, and not at all a contradiction that could be dialectically sublated; we can remain unimpressed by the fact that an analysis inspired by Hegel will be likely to disqualify this as a "bad infinity", because in our context it is precisely a matter of laying open history and language development as a field of *contingencies*.

[20]Walter Benjamin, "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen", in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II.1, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp ^{2}1991, pp. 140-157, here: p. 151.

[21] Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", in: *Selected Writings*, vol. II, The Hague and Paris: Mouton 1971, pp. 260-266, here: p. 261.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Naoki Sakai has rightfully criticized Jakobson's tripartition, pointing to the fact that it is still based on the assumption of given homogeneous sign systems, whose presumed homogeneity should rather be understood as a result of specific integrative-differentiative codifications of translational practices; cf. Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity. On "Japan" and Cultural*

Nationalism, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1997, esp. p. 1–18.

[24] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergson*, trans. Martin Weinmann, Hamburg: Junius 1989, p. 124.

[25] I am referring here to the German edition, which has been published as Valentin N. Vološinov, *Marxismus und Sprachphilosophie. Grundlegende Probleme der soziologischen Methode in der Sprachwissenschaft*, trans. Renate Horlemann, edited and prefaced by Samuel M. Weber, Frankfurt/M., Berlin and Vienna: Ullstein 1975. – The authorship of this book is disputed, which is why I add here and in the following the name Mikhail Bakhtin. Valentin Vološinov was a member of the so-called Leningrad School that had been formed in the 1920s around Bakhtin. Both scholars were closely collaborating at this time, and the intellectual proximity between *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and the works of Bakhtin (those published under his name) cannot be overlooked. In the German-speaking countries the thesis of Bakhtin's authorship has been particularly advanced by Rainer Grübel, specifically in his "Biographical Draft" prefacing the volume: M. Bachtin, *Die Ästhetik des Wortes*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1979. Yet, to my knowledge, even today there is no unanimity on this question, and maybe this is not the worst of all things, since the strange doubling of the author's name holds an important indication: if one takes the accentuation of dialogicity and linguistic interaction that can be found in the works of Vološinov and/or Bakhtin seriously, then questions about the concrete forms of cooperation within the Leningrad School as well as about their specific inscription in the Soviet context of the 1920s would be of at least equal importance as the possibility of a clear-cut ascription of an authorship to this or that individual.

[26] Ibid., p. 167.

[27] Ibid., p. 146.

[28] The concept of "language crossings" can be traced back to the Soviet linguist Nikolay Y. Marr, who considered all supposedly homogeneous languages (tribal languages, national languages, etc.) to be "crossed language types", that is, products of heterogeneous compositions. For Vološinov's [Bakhtin's] appropriation of this concept cf. *Marxismus und Sprachphilosophie*, p. 133 ss.

[29] This is not an argument based on the presumed number or the "political strength" of Sans-Papiers, but rather a structural consideration: within the history of proletarian revolutionary movements, the idea of a takeover of power has allowed the insertion, prior to the "withering away of the state", of the perspective of a sort of interregnum, which was marked by national "revolutionary governments" as well as by an "International". But how would one imagine state power in the hands of those who, by definition, are not members of the state?

[30] The fact that the quoted passages involve a fixation of meaning, or a closure of the social production of meaning, obviously does not imply that the term "worker" is completely inoperative with regard to a political reactivation in the sense of an opening and virtualization of the potencies of its meaning: one step in this direction would be to include female workers in the related horizons of understanding, with all necessary consequences; a second step, to situate the concept of workers in a context of international labour division, i.e., to avoid separations between the realities of working migrants in Europe and the multiple realities in the so-called "Global South"; a third step, to call attention not only to forms of exploitation, but also to the modes of rejection

that are produced by contemporary labor regimes; a fourth, to not inconsiderately and exclusively identify the question of social, political, and economic valuations with the value of labour. This list is probably incomplete, but it suffices to lay open some of the fixations of the declaration quoted above.

[31] In: Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft. Antisemitismus, Imperialismus, totale Herrschaft*, München: Piper 1986, pp. 559–625.

[32] Ibid., p. 560.

[33] Cf. www.universal-embassy.be/article.php3?id_article=87&id_rub=57 (last consulted on March 13, 2008).