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Voluntary work, transnational mobility and language learning in a social movement

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Voluntary work, transnational mobility and language learning in a social movement

In the current neoliberal era, work is increasingly connected to transnational relations that involve people crossing linguistic and national borders. Based on a multi-sited ethnography, this article explores a transnational social movement called Emmaus where voluntary work, geographical mobility, and language learning intersect. I analyse the role of language in narratives of mobile volunteers, or those with this intention, in the Emmaus network. Volunteers need to learn and use *linguae francae* (English and Spanish) for voluntary work, which they justify with inter-cultural and solidarity tropes. In addition, they must also navigate nation-state immigration laws and linguistic differences that contrast with their construction of Emmaus as a “safe zone” for transnational mobility and communication.

En el contexto neoliberal actual, el trabajo está cada vez más relacionado con relaciones transnacionales que implican la movilidad de personas a través de fronteras lingüísticas y nacionales. Basado en una etnografía en diferentes localizaciones, este artículo investiga un movimiento social transnacional llamado Emaús en que se entrelazan el trabajo voluntario, la movilidad geográfica y el aprendizaje de lenguas. Analizo el papel de la lengua en las narrativas de voluntarios móviles (o que quieren serlo) para realizar trabajo de solidaridad en la red de Emaús. Estos voluntarios tienen que aprender y usar lenguas francas (inglés y español) para su trabajo de voluntariado, prácticas que justifican con tropes de interculturalidad y de solidaridad. Además, tienen que navegar las leyes de inmigración y las diferencias lingüísticas de los estados-nación, que contrastan con su concepción de Emaús como una “zona segura” para la movilidad y la comunicación transnacionales.

Keywords: social movement, mobility, voluntary work, language learning, sociolinguistic ethnography

1. Introduction: Neoliberalism, voluntary work and mobility

In late modernity, work is increasingly connected to transnational relations that imply crossing linguistic and national borders. The new globalised economy demands and constructs flexible, auto-regulating and moral citizens/workers who invest in communication skills and language competences (Duchêne, Moyer and Roberts, 2013). In particular, voluntary work has become more widespread and socially recognised among Western citizens in forms such as voluntourism, internships and participation in non-profit and community associations. The post-Keynesian nation-state’s budget cuts and offloading of social services to the third sector has increased the need for volunteer workers (Gilbert, 2004). Post-Keynesian governments promote voluntary work through activation policies of passive populations who would otherwise be welfare recipients, such as the unemployed and underemployed, the retired and

the homeless. The current promotion of voluntarism draws on older Leftist traditions of solidarity and Catholic ones of sacrifice (Muehlebach 2009), newer alter-globalist opposition to neoliberalism (Garrido, 2014), and cosmopolitan stances towards other cultures and languages, including travelling for volunteer work (see Dlaske, 2016).

According to Andrea Muehlebach (2009), neoliberalism is a *complexio oppositorum* that contains oppositional moral orders, namely Leftist grassroots solidarity among peers and new Rightist agendas to activate passive populations to offload public services. Humanist discourses that justify voluntarism (i.e. solidarity, Catholic charity, alter-globalism or cosmopolitanism) challenge the neoliberal ideological order while their work practices are actually consonant with it. In fact, volunteering is based upon romanticised discourses of solidarity, cultural enrichment, and language learning in spaces imagined to be in the margins of profit, such as social movements or NGOs. Nevertheless, voluntary work for social causes contributes directly to the neoliberal economy (Harvey 2005), of which NGOs are part and parcel, and inadvertently constructs worker subjectivities in late modernity (Dlaske, 2016; Urciuoli, 2016). The altruistic orientation of unwaged workers undergoes skill-ification (Allan, 2013) as flexible, self-governing yet governed selves who are responsible for their linguistic choices: learning, speaking or not speaking certain languages in a given workplace (Dlaske *et al.*, 2016). Volunteer workers must act within the existing nation-state regimes and constraints for language usage and learning as well as for mobility.

Travelling for voluntary work is constructed as a choice in contraposition with coerced mobility such as asylum and as unremunerated work in contrast with the need for paid labour in economic migration. In line with the mobilities paradigm (Shelley and Urry, 2006), this article takes issue with sedentarist theories linked to methodological nationalismⁱ, as well as with celebratory discourses of flow and nomadism that obscure the infrastructures for and inequalities in mobility. The analysis of individual trajectories in a transnational network attempts to move away from essentialised ways of accounting for ‘mobile’ people. It foregrounds the importance of infrastructures for mobility, both (a) ‘transnational capital’ (Kiwana and Meinhof, 2011), defined as the varied cultural, social, linguistic and economic resources that people mobilise to live and work in different contexts, and (b) legal frameworks for mobility. These (re)create ‘power geometries’ with different capabilities for geographical mobility linked to territorial, including nation-state, concentrations of necessary material and symbolic resources (Sheller and Urry, 2006).

Regarding transnational capital, voluntary work abroad constitutes a typical context for inter-cultural communication in which people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds must communicate in a common lingua franca for work purposes. In this article, I will adopt Piller’s (2011) approach to intercultural communication, which explores how and under which circumstances the concept of culture is produced by participants as relevant to interpersonal negotiation. I do not assume preexisting cultural differences between different groups and participants’ communicative and discursive practices are studied in a given context. This situated analysis seeks to elucidate who makes ‘culture’ relevant to whom, in which context and for which purposes.

This article explores the intersections between voluntary labour, geographical mobility and language learning in a unique social movement called Emmaus. The focus of this paper will be on volunteers’ imagined/desired and actual trajectories, which entail crossing national

and linguistic frontiers as a choice for solidarity work in the transnational space of Emmaus. How is (voluntary) work and mobility narrated by social activists in this transnational space? What is the role of language in structuring their chances to move and shaping their desires for voluntary work abroad? In order to answer these questions, I will analyse narratives of Emmaus activists who are or who want to become mobile across different localities, acting as nodes of this transnational movement. The data presented here mainly come from my intensive multi-sited ethnography with a focus on two Emmaus communities, one in the Barcelona area and the other in Greater London in 2011-2012ⁱⁱ. I have also used ethnographic data gathered during my continuing engagement with the movement, involving visits to a range of Emmaus communities in different European nation-states and encounters with a number of longstanding activists over the years. My degree of engagement varied widely from informant to informant, since I frequently interacted with some of them in the two focal communities, whereas others were only met once, owing to their or my own mobility across communities in the movement.

The article is organised as follows. After this introduction to sociolinguistic debates on work and mobility, the ensuing section will briefly present the research context, the Emmaus movement. The third section will be devoted to the analysis of the role of language and language learning in the work-related mobilities of short-term visitors, mobile companions and transnational activists in Emmaus. The article will close with a discussion of these mobile and sociolinguistic trajectories in voluntary work in connection to broader processes of nation-state regulation and individualism in late capitalism.

2. Context: The Emmaus movement

Emmaus is a social movement dedicated to the social and labour (re)insertion of marginalised people through live-in ‘communities’ dedicated to recycling work and social projects organised for third parties. It is a holistic movement that merges unconditional shelter in live-in communities for people from different backgrounds, cooperative work that is typically waste recovery and recycling, and social projects (and sociopolitical activism in some groups) ‘in solidarity with those who suffer most’ both locally and abroad. In this movement, people who live in the community are called “companions” and they work full-time as volunteers in the cooperative - usually as rag-pickers – with a small weekly allowance but not a salary. There are also external volunteers who contribute some hours of labour a week to the cooperative or to the on-going solidarity projects. In most communities, there are also a handful of employees for administration or jobs which cannot be staffed, such as truck driving.

Emmaus is formed by hundreds of local ‘communities’ located in over 37 different nation-states. In the post-war depression, a French MP and worker-priest, the Abbé Pierre (1912-2007), created a live-in ‘community’ of homeless people, the first ‘companions’, who built houses for the poor thanks to donations and their work as rag-pickers in the Parisian *banlieue*. After 1954, it became a France-wide movement and later, in the 1960s, the movement evolved into a network of Emmaus groups worldwide thanks to the Abbé Pierre’s lecture tours overseas and also owing to the international work camps set up for young people in Europe. The first Emmaus World Assembly in 1969 adopted a Universal Manifesto (1971) which all Emmaus groups must adhere to. This document entextualises the movement’s founding principles ‘serve before yourself those who are less fortunate’ and ‘to serve first those who suffer most’ and defines its major principles, methods and economic means. In 1971, the second

World Assembly officially created an overarching coordination body, the Emmaus International secretariat. Concerning language policy, Emmaus International adopted three ‘official languages’ in 1971, French, English and Spanish, but in practice, until 1979 all debates and work documents were conducted only in French and to date, French has remained the main (but not the only) lingua franca.

The diversification and expansion of the movement in France in the 1950s, and overseas from the 1960s, gave rise to tensions between two (longstanding) trends, which Lefèvre rightly calls ‘les gestionnaires’ and ‘les aventuriers’ (2001, p. 36). The former trend focuses on professionalisation, education and transparent financial management. The founder’s illness in 1958 kept him away from the movement and Emmaus gradually underwent a process of professionalisation and organisation into autonomous branches. Faced with this incipient institutionalisation, the ‘aventuriers’, with the overt support of the Abbé Pierre, preferred spontaneity, emotion and a simple lifestyle among companions. They ran itinerant communities in France since 1956 and organised summer camps for youth in the 1970s. These trends continue to be present in the social movement today, with two co-existing visions of Emmaus: that of the NGO born out of the ‘gestionnaires’ trend (also called ‘emmausien’) and that of a cluster of alter-globalist grassroots communities within the ‘aventuriers’ tradition (also called ‘abbé-pierriste’).

Geographical mobility is a process that shapes all the companions’ and volunteers’ lives, including less-mobile and not mobile ones who become multilingual in their everyday interactions within the Emmaus network. As an illustration, the Catalan-born founder of Emmaus Barcelona mobilised her school French to act as temporary *responsable* in a French-speaking community in the 1980s, to participate in international meetings and to welcome African migrants to a temporary residential project during the last decade. In relation to the latter, she claims that ‘el projecte ha sigut molt important, no m'he mogut de casa però és com si hagués viatjat en certa manera’ [the project has been very important, I haven’t moved away from home but in a way it is as if I had travelled] (interview, 23-03-2012). This “transnationalism at home” (as it might be termed) led to multilingual practices in the everyday running of the residential project for migrants. In her words, French was indispensable since ‘no se m'havia acudit mai que em fes tanta falta com ara en el projecte d'immigrants que tenim a casa, malgrat ara que la majoria són subsaharians parlen francès’ [I never imagined that I would need it as I do now in the project for immigrants that we have at home, even though most of them are Sub-Saharan they speak French] (radio interview, 02-11-2011).

3. Analysis: Language and mobility among volunteer workers in Emmaus

This analysis explores how voluntary labour and mobility are narrated by volunteer workers in Emmaus and examines the role of language in structuring informants’ chances of and desires for mobility. At the time of my fieldwork, geographical mobility in the Emmaus movement mainly involved a minority of companions who lived and worked in local communities. All the informants in this section were or wanted to become mobile for (unwaged) solidarity work in Emmaus. Let us recall that their voluntary work involves manual labour in the recycling cooperative together with communicative work with companions as well as with “others in need” in the solidarity projects. However, they engage in and narrate various types of mobilities to other Emmaus communities differing in terms of duration, periodicity and motivations. What

is the role of language learning in these work-related mobilities? Thanks to my continued contact with Emmaus since 2009, I have seen that desires and plans for individual mobility within the transnational network motivate prior language learning and vice-versa, and that geographical mobility across communities as nodes in the Emmaus network typically extends multilingual repertoires.

I have devised three mobile companion categorisations for the purposes of analysis, which are based upon my ethnographic observations and sometimes informed by informants' emic categories. Certainly, there are links and commonalities among the three types of mobile activists, but there are also differences regarding their sociolinguistic and mobility trajectories that set them apart. First of all, I encountered short-term visitors. This is the broadest and most frequent type of mobility linked to the Emmaus solidarity mission. These people usually require language learning or ad-hoc interpreting into major *linguae francae* (mainly English, Spanish and French, see Section 2 above). Second, I encountered mobile companions in the Emmaus movement who choose to move from one community to another as a lifestyle choice. Language learning is part and parcel of their trajectories and sometimes even a motivation. Third, I also came into contact with transnational activists, who were companions physically working in a given Emmaus community and simultaneously belonging to another one abroad. In this last mobility type, having a shared language (i.e. Spanish) is backgrounded in the narratives.

3.1. Short-term visitors

The most frequent type of mobility that I documented is that of companions in a given community who decide to exchange places with another companion elsewhere for a short period. The visit typically takes place in a different nation-state but it is sometimes in the same country, which could imply linguistic frontiers as in Spain or Switzerland or none at all as in the UK. On the one hand, there are short stays organised top-down by and within Emmaus International to participate in work camps and in regular regional or world assemblies. For example, one of the senior companions in Emmaus London was a man from Germany who had participated in the Lake Nokoué Benin work camps. On the other hand, there are informal get-togethers and short exchanges organised bottom-up among people and communities without the intervention of the international NGO and which might go undetected by nation-states. In this sub-section, I will focus on this latter mobility.

What is most interesting about these short-term exchanges is the role of language learning in shaping desires and imaginations for future mobility. For my informants, learning a language is considered necessary to work in the host Emmaus group and to minimally participate in community activities. Some companions' desire for transnational mobility (both within and outside the Emmaus network) was the reason I was asked to teach foreign languages (English in Emmaus Barcelona and Spanish in Emmaus London) to one or more companions. In London, a group of companions who wanted to travel to South America for pleasure or to work with NGOs (including Iancu, who we will meet below) asked me to organise weekly Spanish lessons. In Barcelona, one of the youngest companions, Massin, asked me for one-to-one English lessons to learn this language for future exchanges in the movement. These are strategic language choices motivated by the dominant language in the desired destination.

In 2012, Massin – a 35-year old Amazigh man from Southern Morocco – wanted to learn English because in his view it is 'the international language' (interview, 15-02-2012). He

had been an Emmaus companion in Barcelona for over two years following his previous participation in the local community's residential projects for homeless migrants and voluntary work in the recycling cooperative. At the time of intensive fieldwork, he was learning English in a community college, partly because he wanted to live and work in an Emmaus community in England for some weeks. That is why Massin decided to ask me for private English lessons after work. The following excerpt comes from one of his essays for our informal lessons which we held after lunch.

Excerpt 1. Essay by Massin, Emmaus Barcelona companion, March 2012.

I'm thinking to visit Emmaus London in England for much reasons, in the first, I'm living in a community of Emmaus Barcelona, then I'm sure that they have the same principles and objectives, but each one operate different, in the segon, I'm interesting to make relationship with England's mans to know how is their vision of the life, in the third, i'm looking forwards to learn and practice English language.

In his essay, Massin puts forward three reasons to visit an English Emmaus community: (1) to get to know the local activities that aim to accomplish the same transnational mission of solidarity; (2) to learn about English people's (cultural) perspectives on life; and (3) to practise the English language. This transnationally-oriented companion refers to the discursive appropriations of the common solidarity message in specific countries, such as England, that among other differences have different language regimes embedded in local sociocultural and discursive traditions.

Massin constructs the concept of culture in connection to language. The first reason he gives concerns the tripartite Emmaus mission ('same principles and objectives') that involves companions' volunteer work in a recycling cooperative in order to economically sustain the live-in community and to organise solidarity projects 'to help those who suffer most'. The specific business setup and activities will vary from one locality to another, and this inspires Massin to learn and share work practices (personal communication). The common principles and objectives seem to point to a shared "Emmaus culture" which members can navigate across national borders without necessarily speaking the local language (see also Charlie, below). All communities share practices such as communal meals, community assemblies and sorting clothes, which socialised members can easily engage in. Secondly, Massin is attracted to this exchange by virtue of the cultural differences ('their vision of the life') and the possibility to 'practice English language'. Massin's motivation for this short exchange is mainly individual cultural enrichment and language learning in the Emmaus social movement. Thanks to his participation in Emmaus, he can adopt a different stance toward mobility as a global social activist that leaves behind his previous economic migration to Spain.

In fact, this young companion regarded transnational mobility as a unique chance to learn from diverse people, work experiences and educational opportunities (field notes, 21-01-2012). This learning process included language at its heart. In 2007, he migrated from the Sahara area of South Eastern Morocco to the Barcelona area. Since then, he has learned Spanish and Catalan in the context of Emmaus Barcelona. This shows that this Emmaus community was

- 4 *MRG: you don't know.
- 5 *CHA: some are slightly more adventurous and have probably travelled before # there are
6 a few who have talked about it here who have never travelled before so they're
7 looking at it as an opportunity and a safe way of being able to go visit a new country
8 where they don't speak the language and to go from one thing that they understand
9 into something else and chance is that most the communities they look at are Dutch
10 and more English-friendly communities or English-language friendly communities
11 # that becomes very appealing to them # and I think anyone who goes to another
12 country to get people out to see a different culture and see a different thing that's
13 great # if they mean to do it through Emmaus where they need the same structure
14 around them.
- 15 *MRG: to make sense of the world.
- 16 *CHA: for that to be safety zone for them then to start to absorb new things.

Like other companions I interviewed, Charlie referred to the 'same structure' (line 14) and lifestyle that provides a 'safety zone' (line 16) for those who are not used to 'a different culture' (line 12) and languages. The Emmaus network of local communities provides a safe opportunity for people to travel, notably those who were formerly marginalised or homeless, thanks to the shared work organisation and collective lifestyle, which Massin also pointed out in his essay. Nevertheless, this shared 'transnational culture' in Emmaus bypasses the need to learn a new language. According to the then Emmaus International Chief Executive, 'language is a barrier' and most companions in the UK decide to go on exchanges to Holland or Germany, where they will find English L2 speakers (interview, 13-09-2013). This constitutes a kind of *bubble mobility* (mobilité bulle, Veltz 2004) which consists in moving from and to familiar institutional and linguistic environments where English is the main language of interaction. In the next section, we consider other companions, who move across communities as a lifestyle choice in active search of cultural difference and who expand their linguistic repertoires thanks to their geographical trajectories.

3.2. Mobile companions

The second category is composed of mobile companions, who move as itinerants from one community to another as a lifestyle choice, often without a previous agreement between the communities, unlike the case of short exchanges. These companions engage in short to medium-term consecutive stays in Emmaus communities rather than having a primary "home" community and visiting another one elsewhere. I have met some companions who fall under this category but it has always been difficult to interview them. In my fieldwork, they were often EU citizens, because my research was carried out in three EU member states. However, these people may originally have come from Latin America, Africa or Asia. Itinerant companions have been present within the 'aventuriers' trend in the movement since the 1950s itinerant communities in France. Their profile corresponds to 'hippy' and 'altermondialiste' individuals both historically (Brodiez-Dolino, 2008) and according to my interviews with *responsables* (community leaders). This type of *individual* mobility outside institutional, top-down structures will go under the radar of Emmaus International and perhaps even of nation-

state apparatuses within the Schengen area since companions have the status of volunteers (and not employees). It is only through an ethnographic, bottom-up perspective of the Emmaus network that these individuals emerge as truly transnational activists and not simply as “foreign” citizens and companions in a given nation-state.

The following narrative written by Marco was displayed in a public space of an Emmaus community in the UK (a different one from the focal London one and Charlie’s home community) and it shows traces of and desires for such a trajectory. This companion ‘from Italy’ foregrounds his interest in Emmaus ‘internationally’ as the motivation for his mobility in the transnational network. Note that he does seem to adhere to the shared culture of solidarity present across communities rather than to Emmaus International as the institutionalised organisation. This echoes Massin’s interest in how each community operates its recycling business differently in order to put into practice the same transnational principles. After his experience in various Italian communities, this young man chose to move to a British community ‘to improve his English’. Voluntary work for social causes can expand an individual’s linguistic repertoire through work rather than formal tuition in line with discourses of linguistic immersion and inter-cultural experiences (Dlaske, 2016). Marco is also planning to visit a German community to expand his ‘experience’ of Emmaus, probably owing to the fact that the movement is taken up differently across countries and localities depending on the local socio-political situation and history of the local group (Garrido, 2014). Unlike Massin above, he does not mention language in this case. Like other companions in British communities, he might expect to use English there in order to communicate. Emmaus emerges as a transnational network that allows certain individuals to travel across communities as stable nodes provided that they can live and work locally. They learn major *linguae francae* such as English rather than local languages, since this allows them to communicate during temporary stays and to move across linguistic borders more easily, as there are speakers of French, Spanish or English in most communities I have visited.

Searching for cultural difference is linked to an alternative lifestyle that in practice requires voluntary/precarious work in the margins of mainstream society (Codó, 2014), in this case voluntary recycling work and collective residence in an Emmaus community. For companions, their life choices are inextricably connected to the social movement’s mission that (re)produces a humanist rhetoric that justifies voluntary labour to fulfil its solidarity goal with those most in need. In the case of present-day ‘aventuriers’ like Marco, these romanticised discourses also justify temporary locations to engage in (voluntary) work in a different culture and language in strikingly similar ways to *lifestylers* in Barcelona (Codó, 2014) or *voluntourists* in Workaway (Dlaske, 2016). Geographical mobility emerges as a condition for cosmopolitan stances involving a willingness to engage with the cultural and linguistic Other, which is presented as a matter of competence, as a personal ability (Hannerz, 1996). Echoing Charlie above, “more adventurous” and mobile companions are well-travelled and already possess transnational capitals including an ability to communicate and a legal right to cross borders (such as EU citizens). In late modernity, lifestyle mobilities are changing the nature of work since the priority is to sustain his/her lifestyle choices through temporary precarious or volunteer jobs that often involve communicating with others. All this constructs a flexible, multilingual and mobile worker that ultimately benefits the new economic order.

Figure 1. Companion introduction at the second hand-superstore, British Emmaus community. Transcription based on picture taken by the author on 05-09-2013.

(framed picture of companion, on the left)

Emmaus HOT SHOTS

I am from Italy, and have experience of Italian communities. I am very interested in the Emmaus internationally.

I have been at [British] Emmaus for about a year, and am here to improve my English.

I am hoping to go and visit a German Community in September to expand my experience.

This specific type of lifestyle mobility hinges on the individual's language learning in different locations and his/her interest in the solidarity movement through openness to the cultural Other. All in all, these mobile companions engage in individual mobility for personal cultural and linguistic enrichment closer to that of cosmopolitans rather than a collective one for local solidarity actions as in the case of Emmaus French itinerant communities of the 1950s (see Brodiez-Dolino, 2008).

3.3. Transnational activists

Thirdly, I had the opportunity to meet uncommon transnational activists who worked in a given Emmaus community but ideologically belonged to another one, overseas. I define "transnational" activists as those who lead a transnational lifestyle with a foot in each continent. According to Portes, 'transnational activities would be those initiated and sustained by non-institutional actors, be they organised groups or networks of individuals across borders' (2001, p. 186). Language seems to be backgrounded in this type of mobility, as Spanish emerges as a taken-for-granted language alongside French as the main language in Emmaus in my ethnographic observations.

Let us meet Helga, a companion from the rural Peruvian community known as the Emmaus Eagles, who I met in Barcelona in late 2012 with other transnational activists who were on their way to a critical reflection assembly in Southern France (see below). At the local assembly I observed, she introduced herself as 'on a mission in Irona' because she was working in Emmaus Irona to assemble second-hand product containers to be sent to her hometown community in Peru, as well as conducting awareness-raising campaigns. Voluntary work was the bridge between Helga's host community in Europe and her South American home

community. She used the metaphor of ‘*águilas errantes*’ [wandering eagles] who flew out of their nest (in Peru) and physically left to work for the Emmaus mission in different locations. In other words, her fulfilment of the tripartite Emmaus mission (community, work and solidarity/service) is geographically widespread. Helga was still a companion of the Peruvian community, as part of the wandering eagles who resided ‘outside the nest’ in her narrative, i.e. in another Emmaus community. Helga’s work takes place in a community located in Spain, but it benefits the eagles’ solidarity projects in the form of local services in her Peruvian municipality.

Excerpt 3. Definition of mobility as an individual and collective experience as *águilas errantes* (wandering eagles). Contribution by Helga, Emmaus Barcelona Assembly, 15-11-2011.

Yo quiero en breve lo que es eh # la experiencia de mi persona y de un grupo de **águilas que nos llamamos errantes porque estamos fuera del nido de www** [municipality in Peru] # estamos fuera del nido de www # nosotros estamos en Irona [...] bueno en nuestro caso las águilas que estamos fuera del nido no estamos de casualidad por ahí # tenemos como una misión muy clara # y cuando nos tocó venir a: a Irona la pregunta era # eh que va pasar con nosotros-? si es nuestra opción de vida # estamos fuera de nuestra comunidad estamos fuera de nuestro núcleo # qué va a pasar con nosotros con esa definición tripartita que tenemos- ? # somos fundamentalmente una comunidad de vida de trabajo y de servicio # que va a pasar con nosotros-? # entonces la comunidad nos ayudó a discernir eh cual era la forma de: seguir dándonos seguir entregándonos como como Emaús no-? y entonces constituimos un pequeño grupo de amigos # de Emaús con los **compañeros de Emaús que habíamos salido de la comunidad físicamente** #0_2 y dijimos # así como tenemos compañeros trabajando en el centro de rehabilitación y no por eso dejan de ser compañeros aquí esta el nido pero ellos están en el centro de rehabilitación otros están en la escuela bueno pues **nosotros vamos a estar al otro lado del charco y seguimos siendo compañeros.**

[I want to briefly about eh # my own personal experience and of a group **who call ourselves wandering eagles because we are outside the nest in www** [a municipality in Peru] # we are outside the nest in www # we are in Irona [...] well in our case the eagles who are outside the nest aren’t there by chance # we have a very clear mission # and when we came to: to Irona the question was # eh what’s going to happen to us-? if this is our life choice # we’re outside our community we’re outside our home base # what’s going to happen to us with that three-way definition of ours-? # we’re essentially a community dedicated to work and service # what’s going to happen to us-? # then the community helped us see eh how to: continue giving ourselves to continue devoting yourselves as as Emmaus right-? and then we formed a small group of friends # of Emmaus with the **Emmaus companions who had left the community physically** #0_2 and we said # just like we have companions working at the rehab centre who remain companions the nest is here but they’re at the rehab centre others are at the school well then **we’ll be on the other side of the pond and we’ll still be companions.**]

In our interview afterwards, I asked about the name ‘águilas’ and she gave an account of the *eagle’s* identity on the move (running, jumping, and surely flying) to any place where s/he is needed for the Emmaus mission with the poor, i.e. ‘beyond the confines of the earth’ in Biblical terms or ‘across the pond’ in her own case.

Excerpt 4. Being a companion “Beyond the confines of the earth”, Interview with Helga, 15-11-2011.

El nombre de águila lo escogieron por un mensaje de un pasaje bíblico # que los que se quedan en XX si se quedan en él aunque estén # afligidos **correrán y no se cansarán # saltarán y llegarán alto # sus alas se desplegarán como las águilas # más allá de los confines de la tierra** #0_2 más allá de los confines de la tierra # ahí viene el <primer> [!] punto # entonces sobre ese concepto que significa-? # que: un un : compañero águila de Emaús # **tiene que estar <no> [!] en una circunscripción geográfica sino allí donde haya # un pobre con el cual caminar y construir** # allí donde haya una vida que puede aportar una construcción colectiva # eso puede pasar en www en www en otra provincia # con los compañeros xxx por trabajo corporativo # o mas allá del charco.

[They chose the name eagle from a Biblical text # which said that those who stay in XX if they stay there even if they are # afflicted **they will run and will not tire # they will jump and reach the heights # their wings will spread like the eagles’ # beyond the confines of the earth** #0_2 beyond the confines of the earth # here comes the <first> [!] point # then this concept what does it mean-? # that a: **an Eagle Emmaus companion # must be <not> [!] in a particular geographical place but wherever there is # somebody poor with whom to walk and build** # wherever there is a life that can provide a collective construction # it could be in www in www in another province # with the companions XXX in joint work # or on the other side of the pond.]

Shortly afterwards, she discussed the range of individual motivations among the Eagles for transnational mobility, namely ‘*unos por opción, otros por motivos de formación, otros por motivos familiares, por motivos personales distintos*’ [some as an option, others for training purposes, others for family reasons, for diverse personal reasons] (interview, as above). For example, she is married to a man from Irona and they have both moved to the local Emmaus community. However, the *águilas*’ trajectories are not entirely dependent on their individual choices and agency. Transnational activism actually occurs between critical, *abbé-pierriste* communities that share a common language. The two groups of Peruvian eagles abroad are living in Emmaus Irona and in a community in Southern France, respectively. In fact, my meeting with Helga and other transnational activists in Barcelona was precisely because of their participation in a seminar among *altermondialiste*, *abbé-pierriste* and Liberationist Emmaus groups in Southern France.

Contrary to the other informants in this article, Helga did not thematise language at any point during our interview or in the assembly. Standard Spanish was the taken-for-granted lingua franca at the Barcelona stopover assembly among multilingual activists who spoke minority state languages from Spain, from Chile and from Peru. During my Barcelona fieldwork, the other assemblies observed were conducted bilingually in Catalan and Castilian Spanish, with monolingual Spanish being the marked choice on this occasion. Second to French, Spanish remains a historically and demographically important lingua franca in the Emmaus movement, due to the early Catholic expansion and to the presence of numerous Leftist groups in South America. The competences of activists arise from the officiality of Spanish in the former American colonies, such as Peru and Chile, and in the peripheries of the Spanish nation-state, where Emmaus Barcelona and Emmaus Irona are located.

4. Discussion

This article examines how Emmaus companions who engage in voluntary work abroad for the movement's solidarity mission narrate their mobility trajectories, often in connection to language. The different trajectories of transnationally-oriented and (aspiring) mobile activists in Emmaus afford a glimpse into the opportunities and constraints for mobility that companions enjoy and face, as well as their relationship to language. The analysis of these narratives reveals coexistence and the presence of tensions between the individual and the collective, between humanist voluntarism and neoliberal flexibility and between transnational circulation and nation-state constraints in the dynamic Emmaus movement.

The role of language(s) in shaping these mobilities varies on a continuum from language learning as a motivation for mobility and language learning through mobility, at one extreme, to the middle ground of using a common (post-colonial) lingua franca such as Spanish, to linguistic difference as a potential barrier to mobility at the other extreme. Language learning is discursively reserved for the 'more adventurous', well-travelled companions and in fact, multilingual companions such as Iancu and Massin who already have trajectories of migration actively seek to learn languages for their desired mobilities. Post-modern itinerant companions like Marco epitomise an extreme case of lifestyle mobility seeking the linguistic and cultural Other through their voluntary work with the Emmaus movement. Additionally, the use of *linguae francae* for mobility in Emmaus is linked to existing linguistic (and ideological) clusters that are (re)produced through connections among certain nodes and activists. The mobility of companions depends on and strengthens social networks. As an illustration, the existence of Spanish-speaking and Leftist Catholic networks in Spain and South America explain why Helga worked in Irona and her stopover in Barcelona. In the case of companions in UK communities, the use of English as a lingua franca in communities located in Northern Europe (e.g. Germany and the Netherlands) shapes their mobilities by virtue of a common lingua franca that erase the linguistic Other in inter-cultural experiences abroad.

Voluntary work in a different Emmaus community brings about a textbook situation of inter-cultural communication in a 'safe zone', as Charlie puts it, since all Emmaus communities are based on the same transnational mission. Concerning Piller's question of whether culture is made relevant in these situated narratives (2011), it is not usually foregrounded in these accounts of companion mobilities. For some companions, culture is linked to nation-states such as the UK (see Massin's excerpt) or Spain (for Iancu's desired mobility). There seems to be a fixed, essentialised link between (national) language and culture in these instances. Nevertheless, post-colonial *linguae francae* such as English and Spanish are generally imagined to open up possibilities for transnational mobility within (and also outside) the Emmaus movement. This is Helga's case above. Additionally, there is an *implicit*, transnational 'culture' which is overarching in all accounts: that of the tripartite Emmaus movement. Mobilities are facilitated by shared cultural practices in the movement such as assemblies and cooperative work. All in all, Emmaus as a social movement shows how new discourses of mobility and transnationalism coexist with fixed categories of language, culture and belonging within the modernist nation-state.

Voluntary work in recycling is similar in all Emmaus communities located in Europe but the discourses that justify travelling to (temporarily) work in another local community are

different. On the one hand, we find a majority of accounts that (seek to) take advantage of the existence of local communities as moorings for their desired *individual* mobility. These narratives depict a companion seeking inter-cultural encounters for personal enrichment against the background of the Emmaus mission for which they work. Some illustrations of this would be Massin's, Iancu's and Marco's imagined trajectories of mobility and language learning. On the other hand, Helga's account of the Wandering Eagles constructs a *collective* stance in which she works in the Irona community for the broader Emmaus mission and in particular, for her home community in rural Peru. Her personal motivations and circumstances are backgrounded in her narrative. Instead of inter-cultural experiences, Helga's Catho-communist discourse of situating herself with the poor aligns with solidarity discourses in *alter-mondialiste* networks in the movement.

My analysis suggests that companions' sociolinguistic and mobile trajectories in the context of Emmaus are not isolated and exclusively dependent on their transnational capitals (including linguistic repertoires). Firstly, we need to understand people's trajectories in the light of a historicising dimension of Emmaus communities within transnational networks that look into but surpass the here-and-now and the individual. An understanding of discursive and ideological trends/(dis)connections is crucial to trace companions' trajectories of mobility and language learning across the transnational network. My ethnographic perspective on the companions' trajectories and narratives illuminates bottom-up clusters and (dis)connections in this dynamic network. Brodiez-Dolino's *courants* (2008) sketch the discursive and linguistic clusters and frontiers within the Emmaus social network. As we have seen, companions in a given trend, e.g. abbé-pierriste and alterglobalist, are more likely to move across this dense cluster because of contacts and shared *linguae francae*, as in Helga's case, than to move to a place where there are no such links, as in the case of Iancu or Massin's desired mobilities between Emmaus Barcelona and UK communities.

Secondly, it is crucial to view these mobilities against the background of nation-state regimes that define the individuals' legal status and mobility constraints. The different trajectories analysed foreground the intersections and tensions between nation-state categories such as 'migrant' or 'foreigner' and Emmaus categories like 'companions' which extend across/beyond nations. Participation in the Emmaus movement provides a transnational identity as a 'companion' which questions the nationalist divide between native and migrant in a given locality. For instance, Massin is categorised as a Moroccan national and foreign resident in Spain, where Emmaus Barcelona is located, but his participation in Emmaus grants him another identity as a companion i.e. as a transnational activist. Although the latter identity *in principle* allows him to move across the transnational network, his temporary residence permit in Spain and his status as a non-EU citizen complicates his chances of travelling to the UK. In contrast, the Italian companion probably moves around Europe with relative ease from a legal standpoint. In legal and nationalist terms, not all companions are the same: thus, (non-EU) 'migrants' with transnational trajectories must engage in language learning locally and seem to face more obstacles in their transnational mobilities.

These Emmaus companions' (imagined) mobilities to acquire a romanticised inter-cultural or solidarity experience, achieved through volunteering in a transnational network, are in fact shaped by neoliberal tropes of flexibility and nation-state regimentation. These Emmaus companions become flexible volunteer workers who *choose* to become mobile in the

transnational network and who *have to* adapt linguistically to new contexts in spite of their ‘free choice’ and inter-cultural tropes. These solidarity-minded companions are self-governing and flexible speakers whose linguistic choices are governed by nation-state regimes and dominant *linguae francae*, namely English, Spanish and French, in ways that reinforce each other. For example, Marco’s choice of moving to a British Emmaus community to learn English is probably informed by his perception of it as “the international language” in Massin’s words and by the nativist/nationalist ideologies of England as the core. Neoliberalism is, after all, a *complexio oppositorum* that incorporates movements of solidarity whose disinterested voluntarism is instrumentalised to create mobile, multilingual and unremunerated workers for the new economy.

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Notes

ⁱ This vision assumes that “the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world” (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002, p.302). Methodological nationalism (a) obscures socioeconomic inequalities and regional disparities, (b) reifies native/migrant division based on nation-state as container and (c) ignores transnational networks of social actors creating institutions of daily life across and within borders.

ⁱⁱ The two main communities investigated agreed to disclose the name of the movement, which is so unique that it would be hard to anonymise, but the exact geographical locations and people’s identities have been kept confidential in this study.

ⁱⁱⁱ Today, most Emmaus communities in the world are non-English speaking, but Emmaus UK has become the second largest state federation in the movement. Although English has been an official language in Emmaus International since 1971, it has gained some terrain as a lingua franca, especially in Northern Europe, including the UK, and in South East Asia.