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Constructing spaces of otherwise: Performing a politics through Linguistic Citizenship

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Abstract

This paper aims to make visible the alternative social projects hidden beneath everyday Crimean Tatar landscapes. Drawing on audio recordings and field data from narrated walking tours led by young citizens, it illuminates how these *spaces of otherwise* emerge and are co-constructed through participants' re-readings of material artefacts, resemiotisation of place semiotics, and resignification of communal spaces. For Povinelli (2011a: 7), a space of otherwise is a social project in a state of 'indeterminate oscillation' consisting of 'interlocking concepts, materials, and forces'. Participants navigate among such spaces, negotiating the legacies of historical acts of material, cultural, and linguistic dispossession and disruption, and the contemporary forms that such acts take.

In narrating semiotic landscapes, participants perform acts of linguistic citizenship (Stroud, 2001, 2018), a concept which recognises that speakers express agency, voice, and participation through a variety of semiotic means; engage or disengage with political institutions of the state; and advance claims for alternative forms of belonging.

This paper thus expands linguistic landscape research through its design as a linguistic ethnography (LE), using interactional data to account for individuals' perceptions of lived spaces and spatial practices. It also adds to research on linguistic citizenship by foregrounding invisibilised linguistic repertoires and performative acts of meaning-making in a charged political context.

1. Introduction

> '*I remember when the transition took place in 2014, we [our school] boycotted Russian and only tried to speak Ukrainian*'.

Crimean Tatar school children were taken aback when one morning they found out that Crimea was no longer 'Ukraine', but a 'new republic of the Russian Federation'. Instead of leaving politics to the realm of politicians, the students overnight took what was not yet stolen from them — the Ukrainian language — to protest. By holding true to the Ukrainian language and thus wilfully refusing to accept the new Russian reality, young citizens claimed their political allegiances with the Ukrainian state. In doing so, they performed acts of *linguistic citizenship* (Stroud, 2001, 2018), actively opposing the 'transition' that was being enforced. As this study shows, in addition to the detrimental consequences of Russia's recent annexation of Crimea on individuals' lives and linguistic practices, the events of the more distant past — the forceful deportation of Crimean Tatars in the 1940s — also continue to haunt young people today. Beyond performing words in a certain language, speakers resist obliteration by recollecting their pasts and undoing injustice by semiotically reconstructing bygone landscapes.

Drawing on audio recordings and field data from narrated walking tours, this *linguistic ethnography* deploys an eclectic approach to the study of semiotic landscapes to make visible the alternative social projects hidden beneath everyday Crimean Tatar sceneries. As will be shown, although primarily designed to capture the daily spaces of present-day occupation, the walking tour and interview data used in this paper reveal an unfolding of Crimean Tatar

spaces of otherwise — those social projects in a state of 'indeterminate oscillation' that vacillate between potentiality and risk (Povinelli, 2011a: 7, 11). Participants navigate among such spaces, performatively opposing the legacies of historical acts of material, cultural, and linguistic dispossession and disruption (cf. Butler & Athanasiou, 2013), and the contemporary forms that such acts take.

Treated them as socially invested, multi-layered, constitutive elements of space (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009; Zabrodskaja & Milani, 2014), a *semiotic landscapes* approach emphasises meaning-making practices through symbolically loaded semiosis, reaffirming everyday landscapes of occupation as arenas of contestation (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, & Trumper-Hecht, 2006; Blackwood, Lanza, & Woldemariam, 2016; Rubdi & Ben Said, 2015). In narrating the semiotic landscapes through which they walk, participants perform acts of linguistic citizenship (Stroud, 2001, 2018), expressing agency, voice, and participation through a variety of semiotic means; engaging or disengaging with political institutions of the state; and advancing claims for alternative forms of belonging.

Drawing from and seeking to develop linguistic ethnographic scholarship, a field that engages with interactional data, this paper attends specifically to the ways in which participants recollect their individual past when interacting with landscapes. It illuminates how participants narrate spaces of otherwise in as far as they make visible the spatiotemporal frames at work in such spaces by reading the semiotic landscape visible in the present (cf. Backhaus, 2007; Blommaert, 2010; Train, 2016), and hence evoke layered historical and contemporary experiences (cf. Silverstein, 2003).

In brief, the paper attends to the ways spaces of otherwise emerge through interactions between the researcher, participants and (natural and semiotic) landscapes. Studying interactional data to account for individuals' perceptions of lived spaces and spatial practices, it also adds to research on linguistic citizenship by foregrounding invisibilised linguistic repertoires and performative acts of meaning-making in a charged political context.

In the following sections, I will situate the study historically by introducing the Crimean Tatar history of dispossession. The events of the Crimean Tatar deportation under Stalin in 1944, their return in late 1980s-early 1990s, and an attempted reconstitution of the past, are pieced together with the recent occupation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 (§2). This section is followed by the theorisation of Crimean Tatar spaces of otherwise along with the discussion of linguistic citizenship (§3). Subsequently, I introduce the study participants (§4), present the analysis (§5), and end with a conclusion (§6).

2. Resisting dispossession

The events of the Crimean annexation in March 2014, and the subsequent international sanctions, added new dimensions of uncertainty to the lives of individuals in Crimea. Sensing isolation from the rest of the world, people lived under the conditions of shadowy legislation, immobility, and stagnation. As became clear from the ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author in Crimea during September and October 2019, not only did the Western world turn its back on Crimean people, but Ukraine and Russia also accordingly treated Crimea as a liminal space, where alternative legislations, travel regulations, and simply other rules seemed to apply.

In this light, the position of Crimean Tatars as an ethnic group that actively boycotted the Crimea referendum in March 2014 is especially vulnerable, as evident in the reports of the numerous rights violations carried out against them (cf. Amnesty, 2015, 2016). To have a divergent political position in Crimea oftentimes means risking one's own life. A number of critically minded Crimean Tatars were reportedly tortured and many today are still declared missing or kidnapped. Their houses have been unlawfully searched and their relatives intimidated. In addition to these everyday interventions, since the shift of power in Crimea to Russia, the work of the Crimean Tatar executive-representative body Mejlis has been outlawed on the grounds of 'extremism' in 2016[1]; major Crimean Tatar political figures have been banned from the territory of the peninsula; and Crimean Tatar traditional assemblies have been disallowed (cf. Korostelina, 2015: 42-43; Amnesty, 2015, 2016).

The discourse of Crimean Tatars' being 'out of place' in Crimea stretches from the post-war period back to the 1940s, as the map of the Soviet Union was significantly re-designed[2]. Shortly after the liberation of the Crimean ASSR (Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic) from the Nazi regime, between May and June 1944, 195,200 individuals from the 'Crimean contingent' — Crimean Tatars, Armenians, Greeks, and Bulgarians — were forcefully deported from the Crimean territory. In just three days between the 18th and 20th of May 1944, 191,044 Crimean Tatars were displaced to the predominantly Uzbek Soviet Republic, where, in the first years of exile 46.2% of Crimean Tatars died due to disease and hunger, according to the self-conducted census (Куртсеитов, 2017: 224-225).

The forceful deportation of ethnic minorities referred to in literature as 'cultural ethnocide' (Абдульвапов, 2018: 28), 'genocide' (Куртсеитов, 2017: 229), or, in regard to the erasure of geographical names, as 'toponymic repression' (Polian, 2004: 152), deprived the people of both their humanity and their agency. In the years of their absence in Crimea, the Crimean Tatar people's history was erased and its knowledge made invisible/non-legitimate. Soviet authorities filled the subsequent empty houses with Slavic populations, thus expanding the process of 'Slavonisation' within the Crimean territory. Renaming Crimean Tatar toponyms, destroying Islamic cemeteries, repurposing mosques, and obliterating Crimean Tatar history in textbooks, are some examples of this ideological regimentation (cf. Sobolieva, 2019:119). The physically enforced deportation of people together with the invisibilisation of their legacy created conditions where 'one was fundamentally dependent upon the terms that one never chose in order to emerge as intelligible beings' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 79). Dispossession as it 'encompassed ways [people were] performatively constituted and de-constituted by and through [their] relations to the others among who [they] lived' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013:92) — or were made unable to live — provoked a political response.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when returning to Crimea in mass waves of repatriation, despite the obstacles from authorities, Crimean Tatars sought to both renegotiate the conditions of their presence and repair the injustices of the past (cf. Sobolieva, 2019: 121). By resisting the otherness imposed upon them, many Crimean Tatars who decided to return to Crimea rejected their assigned proper place as being 'out of place', thus challenging the normative ideas about 'who belonged in Crimea', hence echoing Santos' call to recognise absent knowledges and reclaim lost agency (Santos, 2014: 154; Kerfoot & Hyltenstam, 2017: 2). Being made into a minoritised ethnic group with their return, Crimean Tatars aimed to

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[1] 'Appeal ruling of the Judicial Collegium for Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation' dated 29/09/2016 N 127-APG16-4 https://legalacts.ru/sud/apelliatsionnoe-opredelenie-verkhovnogo-suda-rf-ot-29092016-n-127-apg16-4// (Accessed 19/10/2020). In addition to that, Roskomnadzor refused to register the TV channel ATR under Russian legislation.
[2] The Soviet socialist ideology aimed to create a unified Soviet nation across the boundaries, whereby the 'smaller' peoples would themselves be 'incorporated into still larger nations' (Hirsch, 2005: 311).

revert both the normative preconceptions about their way of being in the world and reconstitute their non-being in Crimea.

Upon return, initially with the goal to resettle in the places of their former residence in the predominantly coastal areas, Crimean Tatars found their calls for land declined. This forced many Crimean Tatar returnees to occupy alternative less lucrative pieces of territory near urban centres. One such place is the micro-district Aqmeçıt, founded as a result of land-squatting practices («самозахват»). Despite the fact that the micro-district was founded 30 years ago and counts more than 5,000 residents, it is still invisible on geographic maps. Fluctuating between legality and illegality, presence and absence, being and non-being, Aqmeçıt is discussed in this paper as a Crimean Tatar spaces of otherwise — the social project in a state of 'indeterminate oscillation' consisting of 'interlocking concepts, materials, and forces' (Povinelli, 2011a: 7).

3. Performing a politics through linguistic citizenship, constructing spaces of otherwise

Approaching the Crimean Tatar district Aqmeçıt as a political space, one that has emerged out of a history of subjugation, this paper attempts to capture the elements that constitute its 'otherwise'. The question, in a most general sense, is how Aqmeçıt in particular and Crimean Tatar spaces of otherwise in general, can be understood as they unfold in the walking tour with participants. Described as evolving 'social projects' that go beyond 'simple human sociality or human beings' (Povinelli, 2011a: 7), spaces of otherwise can effectively be grasped with the sensitising concept of linguistic citizenship (Stroud, 2001, 2018). Piecing together language, materialities, bodies, subjectivities, and memories (cf. Bock & Stroud, 2018: 5; Peck et al., 2019), linguistic citizenship allows a re-centring of individual agency and participation outside of the dominant frameworks of the state. When engaging with the semiotic landscapes that evoke the past and point to the future, linguistic citizenship figures as a suitable tool to examine the spaces of otherwise as they are experienced and structured by participants' interpretations, often unconsciously influenced by their spatial and conceptual awareness (also cf. Peck et al., 2019: 8).

When practicing linguistic citizenship, individuals troubled by socio-political deterioration and material deprivation reconstitute themselves as agents of change. As linguistic citizens, the individuals on the margins can position themselves as political agents and regain both their voice and visibility when utilising their linguistic and semiotic resources performatively (also cf. Milani, 2017: 175). Their meaning-making practices transform everyday mundane spaces into political spaces of (epistemological) otherwise. These practices gain in importance and weight since they are now recognised as individual or collective acts of politics disrupting the established normative frameworks. Carrying the potential of disruptive action, the workings of linguistic citizenship allow us to 'unthink' dominant structures. They subvert the idea of one legitimate power centre, or epistemological authority, by operating 'outside of those prescribed or legitimated in institutional frameworks' (Stroud, 2018: 4). In this way, linguistic citizenship is productive in analysing spaces of otherwise as social projects that are 'at odds with dominant, and dominating, modes of being' (Povinelli, 2011b).

By focusing on 'what people do with and around language(s) in order to position themselves agentively, and to craft new, emergent subjectivities of political speakerhood' (Stroud, 2018: 4), it is possible to grasp the performances of voice and visibility (cf. Deumert, 2018: 289; Stroud & Kerfoot, 2020) by analysing the various modalities and semiotic resources that individuals use (cf. Iedema, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In this sense, the narrated walking tour, being itself an act of political participation and performance, unlocks the

semiotic and linguistic practices of the inhabitants of the Crimean Tatar district of Aqmeçıt as materialised performances of linguistic citizenship, tracing the relations of power in material artefacts (e.g. elements of the environment such as car tyres, street name signs, flags, city limits signs) (cf. Cavanaugh & Shankar, 2017: 15) with which the participants are seen to negotiate.

4. Introducing the participants

This study draws on data with Nina, Ayperi, and Edie. These young women in their 20s study English and report speaking Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tatar. They use Russian in their everyday communication, with two of them speaking Crimean Tatar with older family members at home. The participants were motivated to take part in this project as they would be able to practice their English. The analysed walking tour as well as two out of three interviews were conducted in English. Despite the agreement to use English while on walking tours, we did not manage to stick to one language and instead utilised heteroglossic repertoires acquired through our simultaneously similar and different life trajectories.

All of the three participants came to Simferopol to study. Nina is the only one who lives apart from her family and rents a room in Simferopol while completing her studies. Ayperi and Edie reside in remote districts of Simferopol, making a 1.5-hour to 3-hour journey one way (public transport has a 'sliding' schedule, that is to say, no schedule) to attend classes. Whereas Ayperi and Edie come from a Crimean Tatar family, Nina emphasises her interethnic background. She has a Russian father and a Crimean Tatar mother. As reported by teachers, all three participants are talented students, actively contribute to academic life, and participate in extra-curricular activities at the university and beyond.

In order to analyse the places encountered together with the research participants, the paper draws on a narrated walking tour technique. Different to other studies which have utilised a technique similar to the walking tour (Garvin, 2010 on walking tour interviews; Lou, 2017 on video walks; Stroud & Jegels, 2014 on narrated walks; Szabó & Troyer, 2017 on co-conducted walking tour techniques; Trumper-Hecht, 2010 on walkers' readings), the walking tour approach taken in this study sets minimal 'demands' on participants. Designed in a way to level the unequal power relations between the researcher and researched, the participants are the ones to choose a place, time, and duration of the tour, thereby allowing for the free flow of data as well as the creation of new unpredictable insights. Building on 'dialogue and reflexive recognition of the researcher's own positioning' (Rampton, Maybin, & Roberts, 2014: 5), the walking tour can be seen as an inclusive ethnographic method, which, in comparison to many other traditional qualitative research methods, allows for 'greater space and independence to the participant's agency' (Pietikäinen, 2012: 168), balancing the power between participants and researcher.

In total, three walking tours were conducted together with Nina, Edie, and Ayperi with four of us present for each tour. Each participant suggested one site for a tour and then played the leading role of a guide. In addition, individual interviews were conducted both in English (Ayperi and Edie) and Russian (Nina). When asked to show places, participants chose to walk in (1) Aqmeçıt, conceptualised as a Crimean Tatar place (Nina), (2) a botanic garden, 'where one can forget about everyday life' (Edie), and (3) an 'unremarkable' settlement called Gvardejskoe (Ayperi). Walking in a particular place was thus a matter of the participant's conscious decision: a place they experienced every day and which they knew well. In this paper, I draw from the data obtained from the walking tour in Aqmeçıt, supported by interview extracts. The whole walking tour lasted approximately three hours.

Prior to the data elicitation, each participant signed an informed consent document, in which the project aims and ethics statement were provided. It informed the participants of their guaranteed anonymity, the ways in which I would make certain the confidential treatment of personal data, and the possibility for them to partially or totally withdraw from the project at any stage. By signing the form, the participants agreed to my making audio recordings of both the walking tours and the interviews, with the former conducted collectively and the latter individually.

5. Analysis

In this section, I show how spaces of otherwise arise from participants' encounters with landscapes permeated by a history of loss and displacement, but also one of potentiality and hope. I demonstrate how participants rip open the fabric of time and space as derived from their lived experiences of semiotic landscapes and later enable new social projects to unfold when moving through landscapes of occupation (§5.1). The encountered material artefacts bear the traces of absences and emergences, which participants read and narrate when walking.

As will be shown, spaces of otherwise rematerialise as fragile semiotic landscapes. Car tyres and street names are filled with nostalgia (§5.2), flags hold witness to past erasures (§5.3), and the displaced and dispossessed bodies are revealed as still remembering histories of pain (§5.4). As analysis progresses, it shows however that young Crimean Tatar citizens, despite their lasting sense of out-of-placeness (§5.5), position themselves agentively in re-sculpting their past, present, and future. They actively oppose the invisibilisation of their history through the renaming of geographic places and street names (§5.6, §5.7), and reclaim visibility of Crimean Tatars in Crimea through city limits signs (§5.8).

5.1. Making visible spaces of otherwise on the route: from natural beauty to deportation

Taking us on a walking tour, Nina, who came up with the idea of showing us Aqmeçıt, wanted to share 'the beauty of the place' that she knew well. She took us to cliffs and wild landscapes with almost no human trace left — apart from garbage lying here and there. What seemed at the beginning to be a walking tour almost deprived of human-made signs, was refigured into a rich semiotic landscape of fascinating intergenerational narratives of Crimean Tatar deportation, return, and ongoing revival (cf. Bock & Stroud, 2018). From the beginning of the tour, Nina adopted the role of guide, which was discernible from her multiple openings and theme suggestions, as well as from her willingness to share her knowledge of the place's history. Starting from ages ago (200 BC), she explained to us when the first Crimean Tatar settlement Aqmeçıt was founded in the region:

Extract 1: Nina's walking tour

Nina	So, *[the first]* settlement of our city like Simferopol was Неаполь Скифский, Scythian Neapolis. It's like *[being]* located in other place… *[Note: A car approaches and interrupts her introduction. After exchanging a couple of words with X, she continues.]*
Nina	So, eh, the Neapolis was the first settlement of the Scythian tribes and located in *[another]* site, but eh…
Ayperi	It's also a great place to visit, 'cause I've never been there.
Nina	I've also never been, but I want to *[go]*.
All three	Yeah.

Nina	So, if you maybe heard about like, eh, the Old City of the old town and it was like, eh, one of the first Crimean Tatar settlement*[s]* before the deportation and before even the Russian invasion in the eighteenth century.
Natalia	Uh-huh.
Nina	So, when, eh, it was *[after the]* deportation and people came back from the Asia here, like they settled some new districts *Хошкельды, Каменка ['Khoshkeldy, Kamenka']* in the beginning of the Simferopol, and also it was *Ак-Мечеть ['Ak-Mechet']*.

Following Povinelli (2011b), a 'routing' through spaces (both discursive and physical spaces) and times (transcending and expanding the limits of present) figured new worlds. The historical introduction suggested by Nina (extract 1) extended the emergence of a figured world to the past of Scythian Neapolis, a time when the first documented trace of human presence in the proximity of today's Simferopol was recorded.

From the start, the culture was not disentangled from the natural landscape. The walking tour in Aqmeçıt, brought to life by the participants, was a method that enabled them to refashion the emergence of a potential alternative world as inter-subjectively experienced. They figured a different world (in a world), being themselves agents, creating the conditions of this 'new' world into existence, and making possible the emergence of certain 'orders of visibility' (cf. Kerfoot & Hyltenstam, 2017a).

Along the way, novel encounters arose and interrupted the tour, from the aforementioned one with a disoriented outsider who interrupted to ask for directions to a 'confectionary' store, to another encounter with young men 'showing off in their father's car', thereby kicking up dust into our eyes. Nevertheless, with the deeply touching words of my participants — brought from the distant past and becoming entangled with the natural scenery and human-made signs engraved into the landscape — our group found itself in spaces of otherwise.

More generally, on such tours, in this changing spectacle of semiosis/text (bodies, buildings, language, nature), we figured our space by routing together (Povinelli, 2011a: 5). We could observe and engage with the immediate environment. But we could also navigate through various scales, across time and spaces (cf. Blommaert & Leppänen, 2015: 121) in our attempt to grasp the constitution of the alternative world that sustains a sense of what is otherwise.

5.2. Car tyres and street names as materialising histories of dispossession

As the tour proceeded, even seemingly banal material artefacts such as a pile of car tyres (image 1), located in the middle of the empty field, could evoke an active sense of connection with the past, from the here and now.

Image 1. Fence made of car tyres to delineate someone's territory. Photo by the author.

Staying on the local level with participants, I tried both to make sense of the coalescent discourses of various scales permeating the reality we experienced, and to concomitantly map the multiple layers of meaning (cf. Hult, 2016: 91). The place unravelled as Crimean Tatar, first in the promise, later when led through the history of the settlement and its material reconstruction. Surprised by the tyres, which were used to delineate a piece of a territory, I inquired why someone would use car tyres:

Extract 2: Nina's walking tour

Natalia	Why do they have wheels?
Nina	I think, it's just like a fence for the future territory and just like thetime, you know, the time solution *[temporary solution]*.
Natalia	Ah, I understand. To show that there will be something, but not now.
Nina	Угу *[Russian 'угу' meaning 'yeah']*, when the Crimean Tatars got back to this place, [it] was called like, ну, самозахват *['nu, samozahvat', translated from Russian 'ehm' meaning land-squatting],* eh, 'cause, eh, they have no, eh, even rights to go back and to have houses, their own houses when they were deported, and they've just took the territories… It was almost like a 30 or 40 years ago, they all build their houses and, eh, it's hard to have a permission to live in there.

Though walking and experiencing together, I could not see what was there. Participants' eyes translated the world into words and made the signs visible and legible to me. With ease, Nina provided a guide on how to read the environment and to discern information about people and their identities, thus creating new orders of legibility (cf. Jones, 2017: 151). The car tyres in this place reminded Nina of the days when Crimean Tatars were denied the right to return and live in Crimea. The car tyres, easily disassembled and universally utilised for various needs, served here as a provisional fence ('a time solution') that demarcated the boundaries of someone's 'future' territory, and signalled for others that the land plot was already occupied. For Nina, as read from these provisional necessity-driven objects (cf. Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009), the fence was a material trace of Crimean Tatar marginalisation pointing back to other scales, i.e. to other forms of 'semiotised space and

time' (cf. Blommaert & Leppänen, 2015: 121), such as the events of Crimean Tatar deportation and return associated with the history of the material deprivation. Pointing back to the lack of legal support in those days, Crimean Tatars dared to violate the 'law' that did not speak in their favor, and contested their dispossession — actively opposing and repairing the injustice of the deportation. The fence as neither completely absent nor present, but a 'temporary' solution, is remarkable as the space of otherwise is a space of negotiation in the process of 'indeterminate oscillation' that vacillates between potentiality and risk (Povinelli, 2011a: 7, 11). The fence permeated by the threat of removal, as 'unallowed', as being emplaced by violation of existent legal frameworks, risks becoming a constant temporality. Thus, it never risks a transition from an alternative remedy to a 'real' and a 'stable' solution.

5.3. Flags as fragile opposition to the past erasure

On another occasion, Ayperi and Nina discuss how geographic places were renamed upon Crimean Tatar displacement in the past, and how the Crimean Tatar flag in the present aims to revert this absence

Extract 3: Nina's walking tour

Nina   After deportation, almost every village that have *[had]* a Crimean Tatar name, like, was renamed, like erasing the history. Even the Simferopol had a different name.

Ayperi   I don't know, I don't like it. It's like a nature of Crimean Tatar…

Nina   It's erasing the history, it was made on purpose, as you can see there are almost new, eh, houses because they were built after deportation, because, like, the most, like, old houses would be near 40, maybe 30 years old… So, as you see, like, our, like, nation, like, just, eh, trying to our, like, nation trying to rebirth right now, they hadn't anything in Asia and they hadn't anything here when they come firstly, but now as you can see there, like, item *[points towards a Crimean Tatar flag on the fence, cf. Image 2].*
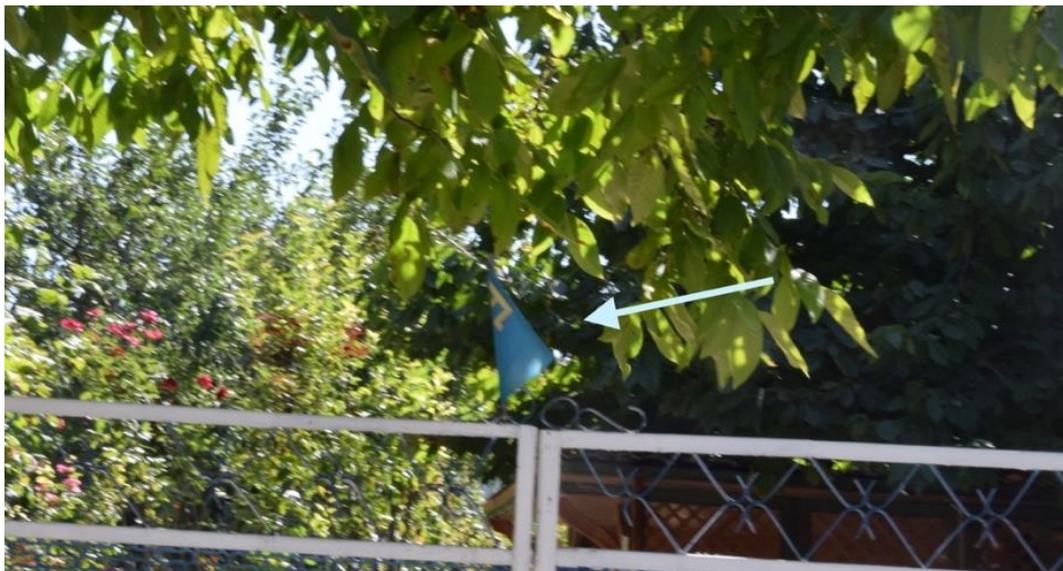

Image 2. Crimean Tatar flag fixed on a private fence. Photo by the author

The themes of deportation and the history of displacement experienced by Crimean Tatars (extract 3), permeated the participants' narratives as the social reality of Aqmeçıt unfolded. The processes of the renaming of Crimean Tatar villages as depriving the places of their Crimean Tatar identity, are intertwined with the erasure of the Crimean Tatar language and people. This erasure, conceptualised as a process of purposeful invisibilisation of a people and/or their activities (Irvine & Gal, 2000: 38), is said to manifest materially, and, in regard to the forceful deportation of Crimean Tatars from their dwelling places, also corporeally.

The materiality of the 'item' — of the Crimean Tatar flag on the fence in the here and now — presupposed the presence of the Crimean Tatar nation, its 'rebirth', its material reconstruction. Pressed into the materiality of non-existence upon return, Crimean Tatars struggled to reimagine their future and exercise it in everyday politics. Now, the district exists, despite the long history of purposeful erasure, and the visibility is articulated materially in the 'built' environment as resemiotised in the names of places, Crimean Tatar national imagery and Crimean Tatar language. Though, similar to the car tyre fence, the hand-held-flag is flimsy and tremulous, easily blown away by strong winds or heavy rains. The fragility inscribed in materialities of the signs translates into the frangible foundation of the Crimean Tatar space, making it 'otherwise'.

5.4. Displaced bodies as remembering histories of pain

If in the previous example, the materiality of place semiosis problematises the past, evoking the discourse of 'national rebirth', in this subsection, the link between bodies as they relate to emplaced semiotic landscapes is further pursued.

Extract 4: Nina's walking tour

Nina	The main Crimean Tatar tradition is to build *[Note: Laughs]*.
Edie	I think it's because when Crimean Tatars returned from Asia, they had nothing, so they started to build their houses.
Natalia	I see.
Nina	And that will, like, rose into a tradition *[Note: Smiles]*.
All three	Yeah.
Nina	Like, almost everyone, they want to do something small.
All three	Yeah.
Nina	Even their house, it turns out to be the huge building. And it's, like, always rebuilding [being rebuilt] *[Note: Smiles]*.
Ayperi	Like Nina said 'it's infinitive' *[infinite]*.
Edie	It still continues.
Natalia	Yeah.
All three *[Note: Laugh]*.	
Natalia	Maybe when they came back they started with smaller houses and now they become bigger and bigger?
Nina	Yeah, yeah, also… It's like, eh, I don't know how to say. It's not tradition, but, like, maybe the rule Crimean Tatar family should have as many childs.
Edie, Ayperi:	Yes.
Ayperi	Children.
Nina	Children, yes.
Edie	To leave something after their death.

Nina	And also [*Note: Strong wind blows*] as many family members as they could carry. But it was like more [than] 10 years ago, 15 years ago, and now we are going to the European system…
Natalia	I see.
Ayperi	…'cause it's like huge, eh, priority of children in other families. Maybe some have…
Edie	Yeah.
Ayperi	…just only one children, only one child, and other family had 12, 15… Our grandmas and grandpas, they always fear [are afraid] that we are small nation, we must to, like, rebuild.
Nina	Spread…
Edie	Develop *[Note: Laughs],* like spread.
Ayperi	Yeah.

To correct the wrongdoings of the past, Crimean Tatars supposedly established a 'tradition' to 'build houses', and instilled a 'rule' to 'multiply' in quantity, with the goal of leaving traces of their own presence. Confronted with and contesting absence, Crimean Tatars built, spread, and developed, both materially and bodily, while envisioning a different future and simultaneously exercising their citizenship. In a direct sense, the 'rebirth of the nation' (extract 4) meant a multiplication and increase of the overall number of Crimean Tatars, who would perform a politics of difference by their mere presence. Crucially, although the 'pressure' of having as many children as possible decreases with later generations, who prefer to deploy a 'Western' perspective on family planning, this idea is still alive and circulating among the participants.

All three participants are excited and willingly share their views, speaking almost in 'unison', finishing one other's sentences, as each participant knows what the other's family believes. The sense of obligation inscribed into bodies that are expected to be useful (give birth, use hands) in order to sustain the nation's well-being in this place is justified through the confrontation with 'nothing' upon return. Though the imperative to multiply decreases with time, the established 'tradition' to build and spread is explained through the fear of repeating the history: becoming insignificant again (cf. Stroud, 2015: 3). Bodies transformed by the removal from the place to which they are believed to belong remember the injustices of history and undertake attempts to transform the future, transforming the landscapes around them.

5.5. Participants feeling out of place

Prior to the tour, only Nina has been to Aqmeçıt, but despite this, Ayperi and Edie seem to know how to navigate the meanings evoked in this place. Although on most occasions, Nina played the guide, Ayperi and Edie frequently complemented her narratives about Crimean Tatar struggles, their traditions, and their ways of life. For all of the participants, the dreadful events of deportation still belong to family legacy. The mutual scope of understandability (cf. Blommaert & Leppänen, 2015: 123) among participants is evoked by similar practices known to exist in Crimean Tatar families: to build houses for several generations and the national mission to repopulate the land — to leave one's own mark of existence, but also to receive recognition.

It is not to say that my participants fully subscribe to these ways of life themselves. Yes, they do recognise them as important and worth struggling for, but it's more complex than that.

Edie doesn't speak much. In our interview, the first thing she mentions is the importance of knowing one's own 'roots', and seeing 'home' not as a place where one is born, but 'where you feel at home'. She argues that Crimea is rightfully considered a homeland by her parents, even though they were not born there. With this position, Edie problematises common sense assumptions about what is understood as 'home'. As she approaches this claim-staking in the light of the events of Crimean Tatar territorial dispossession and their subsequent officially undesirable return to Crimea, Edie's words can be understood as her active stake in rejecting one's 'assigned proper place' which is 'non-place' (cf. Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 22–23) and as an exercise in politics through linguistic citizenship.

Reflecting upon her future, Ayperi finds herself caught in the desire to make things right for her nation, and to embrace the world. She says: 'It's kind of something wrong with me 'cause my grannies and granddads were aching to come back to Crimea and to live here, in their motherland… and I want to leave'. Ayperi feels herself to be in debt to her ancestors who suffered a lot to be able to return to Crimea, their 'historical motherland'. In this sense, her Crimean Tatar social world is stamped with a debt and credit relationship (Povinelli, 2011b), and she approaches her future with a sense of obligations in the present.

Nina, though, is more pragmatic. She says: 'Crimea, of course, is a native place and all this, but I wanted to go abroad, I still want to. It is hard to realise oneself in a small village'. Nina continues: 'And the money you invest into the city are not paid off'. For her, 'it is much easier to realise oneself abroad and earn more, even if you are uneducated'. She is frustrated with the situation and caught in the conditions of the new Crimean reality: 'What to do, I just don't understand at all, because the situation in general... you are not there, nor here. Well, in Russia, no one needs us either. Therefore, of course, everything must be thought; I want to leave, but how to leave… I don't know *[Note: Laughs]* '.

The sense of not fitting in, not being needed in Crimea, despite it being a 'native place', unsettles and forces one to think about alternatives. Being positioned neither here nor there, the spaces Nina finds herself in are intertwined, shifting from Crimea as a 'native place' to the 'small village' of Aqmeçit, and then to the 'city' Simferopol, where it is hard to become somebody. Nina contrasts her being here and not in demand, 'economically coping' as she puts it, to 'going abroad' as a more financially prosperous option, even if it would mean compromising one's own qualifications ('It is much easier to realise oneself abroad and earn more, even if you are uneducated'). Different spaces offer different opportunities. In this constellation, Crimea, Simferopol, and Aqmeçit are native, but wrong places to be. These are places without the future that Nina envisions for herself.

On another occasion, she problematises the use of labels such as 'Crimean Tatar', 'Ukrainian', or 'Russian', opting instead for 'being a person at the first place' (extract 5):

Extract 5: Nina's walking tour

Natalia	You would say you are Crimean Tatar? You are, you have your Russian name, yeah?
Nina	Eh, it's not Russian, it's more international, 'cause, eh, my mother is Crimean Tatar and my father is Ukrainian, so I'm from *[Note: Laughs]* multicultural family. They are divorced, of course…
Natalia	Why 'of course'?
	[Note: All laugh]
Nina	No, I don't know, like, eh, it's… they are divorced now, so, yeah, eh, but I live in a Crimean Tatar family, I was raised in a Crimean Tatar family, and I,

	eh, went to the Crimean Tatar school, but to tell the truth, I don't feel I am only Crimean Tatar, 'cause I can't, like, neglect my *[other]* roots and neglect my other families *[on father's side]* 'cause I also keep in touch with them.
Natalia	I see.
Nina	I don't know, it's difficult. The nationality is not that important. Like… you must be a person at all, at the first place. And, eh, after this, you just can show your cultural education, your cultural status, by having some traditions, having some special features and so on. So, I don't think that is the first place.
Natalia	Yeah.
Nina	Of course, some people think, eh, have another mind on this *[have a different opinion]*. But, as for me, it was like difficult to, I don't know, *[to]* explain to my grandparents, 'cause even if they raised me, grown up me, eh, I can't neglect it.

Nina does not want her complex experience and (family) trajectory to be reduced to a mere label or be misinterpreted. Though she grew up in Crimean Tatar traditions, which she respects and aims to maintain, she also has a different page in her family history. She does not want to and 'cannot neglect' her past. At the same time, she points to the difficulties that account for all of her 'roots', as seen clearly from the need to explain herself to her grandparents (extract 5). Despite the internal conflict, Nina approaches Aqmeçıt and brings its history to life by recollecting and reviving the Crimean Tatar past in the present. She aligns herself for the revival of 'her' nation (extract 3) and opposes its invisibilisation (extracts 3, 7). She oscillates. Her sense of being and feeling like the 'other' relates to spaces we encounter and spaces she inhabits.

5.6. To have proper Crimean Tatar names = to have the right to be

Similar to other Crimean Tatar districts, landscapes of Aqmeçıt are different from more central parts of Simferopol. Here, Crimean Tatar language appears more frequently both in transient hand-made signs and also in more durable and expensive ones, indexing not only the presence of non-Russian speakers, but also a different status of the Crimean Tatar language in semiotic landscape. When walking in Aqmeçıt today, one contemplates the material heterogeneity: newly erected 'castles', where 'the most famous people of the Crimean Tatar nation live' (Nina) appear side by side with dilapidated houses. Symptomatic of this place, which was initially founded by community initiatives, is its poor incorporation of the city's infrastructure. Neglected territorial organisation, the almost absolute absence of paved roads, and poor transport connection all lend themselves to the classification of Aqmeçıt as a non-priority region, one lacking in both investments and state support. As Nina points out:

Extract 6: Nina's walking tour

| Nina | The problem is standing right now, 'cause there is no organisation of the land… I don't know how many houses in this settlement are illegal. Maybe mostly of them, like, have rights *[now]*… but this is the real town and there is the only one 91st bus… I think it's very hard for people. And it's okay if the weather is sunny, windy, but when it rains *[Note: Laughs]*, some of them just hate this place, 'cause there is no road. |
| Natalia | I see. |

Nina   They are go, like, by grass *[walk on unpaved field].* They have no other
              choice.

It seems that years after their return, Crimean Tatars still struggle thrive. It is often difficult to
direct the attention of authorities to local needs, which is why Crimean Tatars are accustomed
to rely on their own resources when it comes to getting things done. Instead of providing
support, the authorities are known to be yet another source of trouble. Evidence of this
interpretation is Nina's interview in which she describes how in one of the Crimean Tatar
districts Lugovoye, 'the management' decided to name the streets after Russian cities:

Extract 7: Nina's interview, translated from Russian

Nina   The question of the village of Lugovoye has become acute. The village was
              given new streets names, with all places connected with Russian cities:
              Astrakhanskaya street, Kostromskaya, Volkovskaya. These are Russian cities
              and people were outraged because well, as they themselves say, we are 90 per
              cent of the residents and we are all Crimean Tatars, and then they were told
              [that if they want to] to rename *[the streets again],* it is necessary to collect 10
              per cent *[of signatures]* of all residents in Simferopol. Well, I don't know I
              think more and more this is incitement, because I don't know, they're bored to
              sit there and they just... add fuel to the fire.
Natalia   Who exactly?
Nina   Well, the government, of course. This is the management, because I do not
              understand why they are doing it. They know perfectly well that this is a
              micro-district of the Crimean Tatars and they *[the Russian street names]* have
              nothing to do with Crimea or... That is, if we have streets in honour of trees,
              some fruits, and so on, well, at least *[these plants]* grow on these streets, but
              Astrakhan does not smell like crap, so I don't know, I think this is all done on
              purpose… Or give something Crimean if you don't want Crimean Tatar, but
              frankly don't spit in the face of the residents... In fact, it seems like 'well, what
              is the name of the street?' But it affects… as we like to say, 'they erase
              history'. Because we no longer have Crimean Tatar streets, and thus there is a
              kind of... a hint, 'what have you forgotten here? You don't have Crimean
              Tatar streets'. The same applies to the names of cities and villages, townships.
              All this had Crimean Tatar names.

By erasing the Crimean Tatar names from a predominantly populated Crimean Tatar village,
authorities are said to show disrespect ('spit in the face of people') and further escalate the
situation among ethnic groups in town ('I don't know they're bored to sit there and they
just... add fuel to the fire'). The indexical meanings (Silverstein, 2003) entailed in Crimean
Tatar names are thus vital for people's wellbeing, as 'the language [which] carries particular
significance for naming people and places… has connections with past, present, and future in
the ontologies and cosmologies of marginalised and mobile people' (Heugh & Stroud, 2018:
10).

Purposeful abjection and humiliation of the Crimean Tatar past, present, and future, is
manifested through assignation of random names at the first stage of the erasure ('If we have
streets in honour of trees, fruits, and so on, well, at least *[these plants]* grow on these
streets'), with this erasure consequently intensified and contested at the second stage ('But

Astrakhan *[the new Russian name given to a street]* does not smell like crap'). For Nina, these processes are vital, as they presume a *progressive invisibilisation* of the Crimean Tatar history, of its past, and future, as, for her, to have proper Crimean Tatar names equals having the right to be in Crimea ('Because we no longer have Crimean Tatar streets, and thus there is a kind of ... a hint, "What have you forgotten here?"'). Nina is visibly moved by the degree of impudence with which the town's decision makers, 'the management', forcefully reinscribe a Russian version of the past into the semiotic landscape. While agentively opposing this erasure in the interview, she performs a politics through linguistic citizenship, as a condemnation of the falsification of the past.

5.7. Street names continuing the struggle

The desire for more visibility of Crimean Tatar through geographic names and street names as materialised performances of difference also comes to the fore during our walking tour:

Image 3. 'Cebbar Akim soqaqnı' street written in Crimean Tatar language, Cyrillic script.
Photo by the author.

Extract 8: Nina's walking tour

Nina	Here is another one [*Note: Points to a street name] [image 3*]. As I remember, he is the poet — poet or writer — but I don't remember clearly.
Natalia	Aha. And do you know who makes these signs?…
Nina	I really don't know, but it's very … I'm proud of them, cause it's very hard to
	get Crimean Tatar names everywhere you want, 'cause… And not just Crimean Tatar, but connected with Crimean Tatar. One of the streets, next

streets, will be named after, eh, Sakharov[3]… He *[undertook]*… many efforts to help Crimean Tatars and also he is one who, like, help*[ed]* to return … one of the famous historical people… I am really proud of the citizens who made, I don't know…

Nina's sense of pride reveals that having a Crimean Tatar street name is something extraordinary and deserves appreciation. All participants are aware of the difficulties one faces when installing Crimean Tatar signs that do not belong 'everywhere you want' (extract 8), affirming the status of Aqmeçıt and Crimean Tatar language as 'otherwise'. Clearly, in the place conceptualised by participants as Crimean Tatar, it is still difficult to make unequivocal decisions around the symbolic meanings of the micro-district. Even after decades since their return, Crimean Tatars continue the struggle to establish themselves as the power centre of the district, once again defining this space in terms of 'otherwise'.

5.8. Signs as contested inversions of the world

Concerned with the lack of visibility and symbolic power of Crimean Tatar, and in light of the history of the district of Lugovoye (extract 8), it is even more surprising that the name 'Aqmeçıt' could survive. Nina believes this is because the residents did not make any arrangements with authorities prior to the installation of the sign. Otherwise, she doubts that they would have been allowed to grant 'an official name of Simferopol' to a newly built Crimean Tatar district.

Image 4. City limits sign at the entrance to Aqmeçıt. Photo by the author.

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[3] A famous Soviet academician Andrei Sakharov was a winner of the Noble Peace Prize for Peace in 1975 and a prominent human rights defender of the repressed people in the Soviet Union. He advocated the return of forcefully deported Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, Meskhetian Turks, Ingush and other groups to their homelands and condemned the Soviet national policy in this regard (cf. Сахаров, 1990: 50, 115).

Extract 9: Nina's walking tour

Nina	Also, this is interesting, the sign, 'cause it's called Aqmeçıt. The district is called Ак-Мечеть ['Ak-Mechet'].
Natalia	I see.
Nina	But Aqmeçıt is original Simferopol's name. So, I think this is just like a[n] irony, like original Simferopol is here, not in the centre. Like here is Crimean Tatar Simferopol Aqmeçıt. So, I think that's why it's Aqmeçıt not Ак-Мечеть ['Ak-Mechet'].

Contrasting Crimean Tatar and Russian name for the district, 'Aqmeçıt' and 'Ak-Mechet', Nina explains that the official name of the place is the Russian 'Ak-Mechet'. In opposition to the official name though, the entrance to the district is marked with a Crimean Tatar name 'Aqmeçıt'. Nina interprets the choice of the name as an 'irony' since the name carries the message of implicit contestation. This is the 'other' historical Aqmeçıt that is evoked in 'here'. This is a historical Crimean Tatar place that reemerges as the only 'real' Simferopol.

The placement of this city limit sign (image 4) in this area, for Nina, demarcated the boundaries of 'fake' Simferopol in the centre and 'real' Aqmeçıt as a Crimean Tatar place. Agentively contesting the official readings of places and their history, Nina makes the point that Aqmeçıt represents the 'original' and only 'real' place, reflecting alternative knowledge.

Image 5. The Crimean Tatar flag on the top of the city limits sign. Photo by the author.

In this assemblage of signs, past worlds transcend time and reappear in the present. The Crimean Tatar flag (image 5), a conventionalised symbol representing the nation, appears in the assemblage with the city limits sign along with the black-and-white sticker depicting the date of deportation '18 Mayis 1944 Biz Unitmadiq!' ('18 May, 1944, We didn't forget'). An explicit representation of the deportation is permeated with the semiotics of pain, as the numbers are pierced with the railroad leading to the exile (image 6).

Image 6. The black-and-white sticker '18 Mayis 1944 Biz Unitmadiq!'. Photo by the author.

The city limits sign and its reading in this localised site were real, but 'yet [a] contested inversion of the world' (Povinelli, 2011a: 7). Nina's interpretation followed from presuppositional meanings of Aqmeçıt leading to (other) orders of indexicality (Blommaert, 2010: 41): Aqmeçıt known as the original name of Simferopol, the town that already existed in the past, which makes it a place with a deep-rooted history. Moreover, it resembled the state prior to the first annexation of Crimea by Russia in 1773 and the era before Aqmeçıt was renamed 'Simferopol' and hence forgotten as a powerful Tatar cultural centre.

In addition, the Crimean Tatar city limits sign could be considered as a materialised performative act of linguistic citizenship exercised by languaging in space (cf. Stroud & Kerfoot, 2020: 17). In this site, historical invisibilities of the forcefully displaced Crimean Tatar ethnic group forcefully displaced become visibilised and even reclaimed by the resemiotisation of place, displacing or subverting the dominant 'order of visibility' (cf. Kerfoot & Hyltenstam, 2017). Historical invisibilities are brought into the present from the past, mediated through multimodal means. With the visibly materialised performance of difference comes the visibility of the whole ethnic group, and of their social and cultural practices.

Nina's active claim-taking of Aqmeçıt as the original Crimean Tatar capital of today's big city is an act of linguistic citizenship, both as a practice and as a meta-practice. On the one hand, she makes the alternative knowledge visible to the outsider, and on the other hand, she comments on the resemiotisation of Crimean Tatar place, as materialised performances of linguistic citizenship. The city limits sign is large and solid, the letters, rusted from the rain. The flag on the top is torn. Material resources and time are implicated in the production of this assemblage: one needs to organise a ladder, to create a design and print the sticker, to buy the flag. These modalities index collective efforts to establish presence, which aims to endure.

6. Conclusion

As defined at the beginning of this paper, to construct spaces of otherwise means to exercise politics through acts of linguistic citizenship that include all forms of semiosis. By implication, in spaces of otherwise one deviates from the presumably 'normal' by being 'different'. The constructions of spaces of otherwise oftentimes require the acting *against* —

against the purposeful erasure of language and people in the past, present, and future; against the hegemonic forms of being and speaking; against the normative understandings of what a place means, and, as shown with the Crimean Tatar history, against forgetting.

This paper aimed to make visible the alternative social projects hidden beneath the everyday Crimean Tatar landscapes by using the audio-recordings and field data from a narrated walking tour led by three young women. A walking tour in a peripheral site in the proximity of todays' Simferopol revealed a rich history of dispossession and displacement. At the same time, these historical acts of material, cultural and linguistic disruption hid a Crimean Tatar space of otherwise – a fragile social project where different voices make claims for alternative forms of belonging.

A semiotic landscapes approach together with linguistic citizenship understood as a multimodal practice enabled a grasp of the Crimean Tatar space of otherwise as an evolving social project. By denying their proper place of 'non-place' and opposing dispossession (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 22), Crimean Tatars have challenged the erasure of their history and presence, and laid the ground in refashioning their future. Car tyres, street names, place names, houses, flags, a city limits sign, and people themselves materially and bodily constituted and geographically mapped spaces of otherwise. As shown in the analysis, multimodal acts of linguistic citizenship – from using car tyres and geographic names as materialising histories of dispossession to claiming the space as one's own through flags and a city limits sign – resemiotised and reconstituted a Crimean Tatar space of otherwise in the semiotic landscape of Aqmeçıt. In this way, different modalities, agents, modes, spaces, and times could be identified and made visible, contributing to our inquiry into the sociology of emergences (Povinelli, 2011a; also Santos, 2014; Kerfoot & Hyltenstam, 2017).

These spaces of otherwise as spaces of memory, of personal and collective histories, inter-subjectively experienced and spatially co-constructed, are political spaces emerging out of opposition, which attempt to turn other-ness into other-wise. These spaces are experienced and sensed, they are physical and discursive. They are produced in sites, signs, settlements, revealed when stepping out, narrating, and strolling around. They are narrated and made alive by participants who simultaneously expand the present through temporalities of the past and future. Spaces of otherwise bear traces of past hardships, anticipating promising futures in the conditions of the unsettling present. Spaces of otherwise retain hope for not yet realised social projects, mediating between potentiality and risks.

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