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**Linguistic Citizenship as decolonial pedagogy:
How minoritized language speakers contest
epistemic injustices in EFL education**

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Linguistic Citizenship as Decolonial Pedagogy: How minoritized language speakers contest epistemic injustices in EFL education

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Abstract

In this plenary, I revisit the notion of EFL as a cultural discourse that I developed in previous work by engaging with it from a Southern locus of enunciation. Mindful of how EFL pedagogies can still reproduce hegemonic and exclusionary ideologies, particularly in multilingual contexts dominated by colonial power relations between languages and their speakers; I offer nuanced insights for understanding how EFL can serve as a framework of voice, action, and empowerment. In Israel, for example, EFL has been shown to either grant minoritized language speakers a voice or offer a neo-colonial register compatible with colonial forces. Based on ethnographic studies that I have conducted inside and outside the formal educational system in Israel, I demonstrate how Palestinian Arabic-speakers are employing English in their everyday lives to open new meaning-making spaces for contesting the politics of silencing and crafting new subjectivities of political speakerhood. Engaging with Stroud's notion of Linguistic Citizenship, I show how EFL practices of minoritized speakers in troubled educational contexts are examples of Linguistic Citizenship as a decolonial pedagogy.

عَلَى هَذِهِ الْأَرْضِ مَا يَسْتَجِئُ الْحَيَاةُ

“We have on this land all of that which makes life worth living” (Darwish, 1986)

These are the words of my favorite Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. In times of war, it often seems as if there is no path for hope, peace, or even humanity. Against the backdrop of currently lived despairs, allow me to open my plenary by voicing my solidarity with humanity as inspired by the words of Palestinian academic and literary critic, Edward Said, from more than forty years ago:

The relations between Israelis and Palestinians are so inflamed as to make anything resembling equity and resolution out of the question. *But only for the time being*. The long-run goal is, I think, the same for *every human being*, that politically he or she may be allowed to live free from fear, insecurity, terror, and oppression, free also from the possibility of exercising unequal or unjust domination over others (Said, 1980, p.53; my emphasis).

Speaking epistemically from the Global South, I voice my solidarity with humanity from a complex, yet troubled, positionality marked by being both a Palestinian and an Israeli citizen. My identity might seem to some an impossible way of being, doing, and becoming in a world that is still predominantly subscribed to dichotomous and established exclusions. I often experience such perceived impossibility in having to confront the question: So, are you Palestinian or are you Israeli? While I have been continuously struggling to search for a way beyond binary impasses, I finally found inspiration in confronting my locus of enunciation and in

rediscovering the epistemic and sociopolitical matrices from which I speak as: a Palestinian, Israeli, woman, Speaker of Arabic, Hebrew, and English, but above all as a human being.

Describing the complexity of my positionality is crucial for adequately situating this paper on how minoritized language speakers, such as Palestinian Arabic-speakers in Israel, use English to contest epistemic injustices and decolonize the Self. Let me first make an important clarification. While I fully perceive the oneness of the Palestinian people wherever they are, the focus of this talk is on the Palestinians who remained ‘inside’ Israel after its establishment in 1948 and constitute some 21% of Israel’s population¹. The Palestinian indigenous minority in Israel used to constitute the majority in Palestine before 1948, after which Israeli citizenship was imposed on them (Said, 1980). While Palestinians in the Occupied Territories live under a repressive military occupation, Palestinians inside Israel are discriminated against by a variety of laws which ratify differential treatment in several dimensions (Bishara, 2020). Discrimination is also palpable at both the educational and sociolinguistic levels, as I will discuss in more detail later (Abu Sa’ad, 2006; Awayed-Bishara, 2020; Shohamy, 2006, 2014).

Having clarified this, I contemplate that accepting Edward Said’s view that the impossibility of making “anything resembling equity and resolution” in Israel/Palestine is “only [so] for the time being” – requires an exercise in re-imagining other possible forms of humanity. Drawing on how language plays a role in “refiguring the human”, I will engage with Christopher Stroud’s notion of Linguistic Citizenship in order to examine the implications that *the human refigured* carry for language (Stroud, 2022). Towards this end, I cast the spotlight on how minoritized speakers embrace powerful, colonial languages such as English in order to de-construct established social constructs such as race and ethnicity. Mindful of how the ongoing sociopolitical and cultural inequalities between English and other languages continue to concern the field of Applied Linguistics, I focus here on how English could provide possibilities for resistance and for building new modes of being, belonging, and knowing.

I begin by revisiting the notion of EFL pedagogy as a cultural discourse that I developed in previous work by engaging with it from a Southern locus of enunciation. Gazing from the South enables us to understand how English can offer minoritized speakers a framework of voice, action, and empowerment. To conceptualize the decolonial potential of English, I will engage with recent theorizations of Linguistic Citizenship as a Southern “approach to agency and voice designed to draw attention to the power of the unheard and unattended voice, and one that opens to other discourses of the human” (Stroud et al., 2020, p. 4). Drawing on ethnographic data I collected over the past four years or so, I will demonstrate how Palestinian Arabic-speakers in Israel are employing English in their everyday lives inside and outside their formal education system to open new meaning-making spaces for decolonizing the self. I will wind up by highlighting what *Linguistic Citizenship as decolonial pedagogy* could offer to the field of Applied Linguistics in terms of opening the conceptual, methodological, and semiotic spaces needed for including more Southern voices and advancing epistemic justice.

¹ Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2023.

1. A Southern Gaze into EFL pedagogy as a cultural discourse

The question about the role the English language, EFL education, or other disciplines of English studies could play in an era of ever-intensifying globalization – which continue to perpetuate coloniality, epistemicides, and epistemic racism – has captured a lot of research attention in the past few decades. Whether critiqued through the conceptual lenses of Robert Philipson’s notion of linguistic imperialism introduced in the early 1990’s (Philipson, 1992, 2012), or the more recent calls for decolonizing Applied Linguistics and English language education (e.g., Canagarajah, 2023; De Costa, Ojha, Lee & Montgomery, 2023; Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Penycook & Makoni, 2020), English still contributes heavily to the reproduction of social structures, networks of privilege, and essentialist binaries such as: Native/Nonnative, Western/Nonwestern, Male/Female, dominant/subordinate, to name a few. It is on the basis of these observations that I have underscored the discursive nature of EFL education which involves understanding EFL as a sociopolitical practice, or as something constructed, disseminated, and consumed in society (Awayed-Bishara, 2020). For example, in an overview of how EFL textbooks often reproduce hegemonic discourses that reinforce nationalizing or globalizing agendas, concepts of power and ideology still figure centrally. An analysis of English textbooks in Israel suggests that they utilize discursive devices that reproduce and perpetuate inequality, a lack of fair multicultural representations, and discriminatory values.

While we need to continue the careful examination of how the ideological orientation of EFL discourse might stifle the voices of marginalized populations, understanding EFL discourse as a sociopolitical practice enables us to also focus on meaning making as the site of a power struggle for contesting hegemonic practices. In other words, despite its hegemony as a global language, Santos (2002) reminds us that English could undergo resignification and recontextualization in non-hegemonic locations when it is used between speakers for whom it is not a first language. It is precisely with these non-hegemonic possibilities of English that my scholarship has been recently engaged (Awayed-Bishara, 2021a, b, 2022; Awayed-Bishara, Netz, & Milani, 2022). My main concern is with questioning what minoritized language speakers who are subjected to colonial and oppressive forces do with the English language in order to make themselves heard and seen. To address this question through a decolonial lens, I had to reframe my understanding of EFL pedagogy as cultural discourse by working through my locus of enunciation and drawing on the epistemologies of the South. This concerns, according to Santos, “the production and validation of knowledges anchored in the *experience of resistance* of all those social groups that have systematically suffered injustice, oppression, colonialism, and patriarchy” (2014, p.1; my emphasis). As a Southern “way of thinking through the potential of language”, Linguistic Citizenship offered me theoretical and analytical tools to begin thinking about spaces “where language could be used ‘otherwise’” (Stroud & Williams, 2017, p. 184).

2. LC as a Southern way of thinking through the potential of language

Linguistic Citizenship (LC) was first introduced within a critique of the discourse of rights related to language educational equality in South Africa. It highlights the importance of practices whereby “people use a variety of (self-authored) linguistic (and multimodal) practices to sculpt alternative political and ethical, religious and epistemological subjectivities to what is otherwise

given” (Stroud 2018, p.5). It is important to clarify how the “linguistic” and “citizenship” components of the concept should be interpreted. For one, “linguistic” indicates not only spoken and written codes, but all meaning-making resources, including visibility, the body, and materiality, which are employed by social actors in order to make themselves seen and heard. In the literature that draws upon LC, chants, hip-hop songs, even tattooing are typical examples “of how forms of semiosis are creatively deployed to create a disruptive space for ‘citizen’ engagement for those whose voices are habitually silenced” (Stroud, 2018, p.4; see also Stroud, Peck & Williams, 2019; Stroud & Williams, 2017; Awayed-Bishara, 2023). As for “citizenship”, it should *not* be interpreted within the liberal, Western notion of nation-state citizenship such as the wielding of a passport. Rather, acts of citizenship refer to “those practices, discourses and processes through which speakers strive for agency and voice in new and ‘irregular’ constituencies that [at times] fall outside of, or go beyond, the institutionalized and regimented, liberal, idea of communality/sociality/citizenship” (Stroud et al., 2020, p.7).

Thus, LC comprises semiotic acts by people who are being marginalized. These acts are generative of new political subjectivities related to re-formed collectivities, rather than recognition and adaptation to the status quo in mainstream arenas. In previous work, I have shown that these marginal spaces could be *inside* institutional frameworks, such as schools, more particularly where these institutions are subjected to colonial governmentality and domination (Awayed-Bishara, 2021a,b, 2022; Awayed-Bishara et al., 2022). By stressing the importance of grassroots activity on the ground and the specificity of the context, LC emphasizes cultural and political voice and agency, and not merely language (Rampton, Cooke, & Holmes, 2018). Within conflict zones such as the Israeli-Palestinian one, an important rationale for using LC is that it addresses semiotically the problem of co-habitation across difference (Milani, Awayed-Bishara, Gafter, & Levon, 2022), where questions of ethical responsibility are pivotal, and individual freedom and agency is dependent on engaging with plural others (Todd, 2015).

In what follows, I will present two ethnographic studies that show how LC offers a useful lens for understanding the way minoritized language speakers in colonized educational contexts employ English to make themselves heard and seen both inside and outside their formal schooling system. Let me first provide a brief overview of the educational and sociolinguistic contexts of these studies.

3. The specificity of the context: Educational and sociolinguistic observations

In terms of the education of the Palestinian minority, Israel has always administered and maintained two segregated schooling systems: one for the Jewish (Hebrew-speaking) majority, and another for the Palestinian (Arabic-speaking) minority. These divisions in the education system serve the interests of the dominant Jewish group, while maintaining the marginalization of the Palestinian community (Abu-Sa’ad, 2006; Awayed-Bishara, 2020; Shafir & Peled, 2002; Shohamy, 2006). The specific circumstances of living as an actively marginalized minority are linked to the status of Palestinians as second-class citizens in a country that defines itself first as Jewish, and then as democratic (Smootha, 2002). Israel’s prioritization of its Jewishness over its democratic nature was manifested most substantially in July 2018 when the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, passed the Nation State Law, which defined Israel as the homeland of the Jewish

people alone. The law not only reinforced the second-class status of its Palestinian citizens, but also cancelled the official status of Arabic, the mother tongue of Palestinians, and demoted it into a language with a ‘special’ status.

Israel has always perceived Palestinian national-cultural identity as a threat to the Jewish character of the state (Al-Haj, 2005; Abu-Sa’ad, 2006; Arar, 2012; Peled-Elhanan, 2012; Reches, 2009; Yiftachel, 2006). This is why the Israeli education system serves a dual purpose: for Jews it is a nationalizing apparatus; for Palestinians, a denationalizing one. It does so by promoting Zionist ideology and erasing Palestinian national identity (e.g., Awayed-Bishara, 2015, 2020; Peled-Elhanan, 2012; Podeh, 2005). For example, in 2009 the Ministry of Education decided to remove the concept of ‘al-Nakba’ (which is Arabic for catastrophe²) from the Arabic school curriculum. To ensure the denationalization of Palestinians, fear was instilled within the Palestinian localities through a sophisticated system of surveillance (Rouhana & Sabbagh-Khoury, 2015). Direct surveillance prevailed during the military rule that Israel imposed on the Palestinian community between 1948 and 1966 (Robinson, 2013), while an indirect system of control remains to this day in the form of *colonized education*, which is designed to de-nationalize and particularly to de-Palestinize Arab students (Awayed-Bishara et al., 2022).

For example, in one EFL class described in the study I conducted with colleagues, the teacher mentioned the Arabic word for revolution, *thawra*, in the context of a text arguing that certain educational reforms in the US were ‘revolutionary’. The word *thawra* immediately evoked in the students a sense of belonging to their Palestinian identities as they started to call out the word *falasteen* ‘Palestine’. In response to students’ articulation of perhaps the most ‘un-sayable’ word, *falasteen*, [click] the teacher utilized policing, and even silencing, discursive strategies, until she had completely depoliticized the discussion of *thawra* in class. We argue that this depoliticization was achieved when students finally started to provide ideas about what a “revolution” in school might mean (for a detailed discussion and presentation of data see Awayed-Bishara et., 2022 pp. 9-14).

Being subjected to a colonized form of education has indeed interpellated and contained many Palestinians within the logic of colonial politics; in other words, they accept it. At the same time, it has also driven many others to “require different discourses of cultural opposition” (Karkabi 2018, p. 1182) as I will now show.

4. Study 1: LC inside the formal educational system: Granting the local a voice through English³

In an ethnographic study I conducted in a Palestinian-Arab middle school located in the Galilee in Northern Israel, I analyzed the dialogue journals of ten pre-service EFL teachers in which they documented their EFL teaching experience (Awayed-Bishara, 2021a). My goal was to detect emergent agencies and practices aimed at engaging students with questions of ethical responsibility in oneself and others. Importantly, in EFL classroom contexts, students from

² The war for establishing Israel in 1948 is for Palestinians their Nakba. And the catastrophe did not end in 1948.

³ Details of the full study and data appear in: Awayed-Bishara, Muzna (2021a). Linguistic Citizenship in the EFL classroom: Granting the local a voice through English. *TESOL Quarterly* 55(3): 143-765.

socially marginalized, particularly, non-western communities often experience feelings of alienation when they are asked to engage with knowledge of a global or Western nature which is still dominant in EFL textbooks (Awayed-Bishsra, 2015, 2018, 2020). Cognizant of that risk, I argue that in troubled or conflict-ridden educational contexts, English might offer a framework of voice that enhances agency and opens a space for contesting, rather than reproducing linguistic, cultural, and political hegemonies and invisibilities.

Drawing upon LC, which focuses on what people do with and around language so as to situate themselves agentively (Stroud, 2015), I analyze the dynamics surrounding the way Palestinian EFL teachers respond to exclusionary ideological practices in EFL textbooks and how they employ English to foster dialogicity through the use of Freire's notion of problem-posing methods. A problem-posing approach to education recognizes that knowledge is discursively constructed through dialogue between teacher and students (Freire, 1970). Let me now present data analysis of the dialogue journal, of Haneen, who identifies as a "Palestinian Arab citizen of Israel", and as a Muslim woman with hijab.

4.1 Responding to exclusionary ideologies in EFL textbooks

In her first entry, Haneen comments on the unequal naming practices in EFL textbooks and goes on to say that they may hamper the process of learning English:

Since I started teaching in schools, I tried to make the materials and the lessons closer to the students' world and to make English less weird to them, especially because most of the characters' names in EFL schoolbooks aren't familiar to the students and most of the time, the students aren't able to read them. So I see the student's face getting red when they come across these names, which makes them refuse to read the next time I ask them. (Haneen, dialogue journal, 1; in Awayed-Bishsara, 2021a, p.10)

Following the description of the red faces and the refusals, which in effect refers to the feelings of alienation Arab students experience when coming across unfamiliar content in EFL textbooks, Haneen offers a more inclusive strategy in this excerpt which she wrote following a lesson she taught about Rosa Parks, the African American activist in the civil rights movement during the Montgomery bus boycott incident.

4.2 Fostering dialogicity and problem-posing methods

But using names like Bilal ibn Rabah in one of the lessons, which was about Rosa Parks, makes the whole process of teaching about people from other remote cultures less stressful, even for the students sitting in the back who suddenly show some interest in the lesson. This way of bringing the student's background knowledge or validating their experience and culture makes him/her feel safer. Not marginalizing their thoughts and experiences makes him/her ready and willing to know who Rosa Parks is and learn about the black-American conflict on the other side of the globe. In other words, they won't feel inferior. (Haneen, dialogue journal, 2; in Awayed-Bishsara, 2021a, p.12)

Ibn Rabah is one of the most illustrious names in Islamic history, an enslaved Black man who converted to Islam. Despite being tortured and forced to relinquish the new faith, ibn Rabah remained faithful to the new religion, compelling the Holy Prophet to send one of his loyal men to free him. In short, Bilal's story symbolizes Islam's respect for human equality, antiracism, and social equity. Using a familiar name enabled students to explore not only the agonies Black people have faced throughout U.S. history but also what people from the students' own familiar "culture" or "religion" faced throughout Islamic history.

Conversely, the authorized text itself, titled "Challenges", downplays the historical role the African American struggle for racial equality plays in resisting racism and segregation laws. This is discursively achieved by means of first stating that "they [African Americans] wanted to change the unfair laws" and then transforming Rosa Parks from a central figure who resisted racism to someone who simply "faced a challenge" (Daon, 2015, p. 148; cited in Awayed-Bishara, 2021a). Yet, Haneen's agentive choice of ibn Rabah's story enabled students to construct their knowledge of segregation laws as racist rather than "unfair," as the text states. Haneen also uses problem-posing methods to engage them in a dialogical practice of self-critique:

[When] I taught about Rosa Parks, I started my lesson asking students: "How do you call dark-skinned people who work in your village?" (There are many Sudanese in some Arab villages who work and people sadly refer to them as 'abeed) [Arabic for slaves].) So, I start by focusing on their way of thinking, then talking about Rosa Parks, and eventually coming back to their own culture where they have to discuss the story of Bilal ibn Rabah, whose message is that it's totally inappropriate to discriminate against human beings based on their skin color. (Haneen, dialogue journal, 3; in Awayed-Bishsara, 2021a, p.13)

Haneen first localizes the topic introduced in the textbook so her students construct their own knowledge of it. She then uses a problem-posing approach to reposition her students in relation to the text:

At the end of the lesson, when I presented how prophet Muhammad assigned Bilal the role of calling people to prayer from a Mosque [thus turning him into the first muezzin, as it is called in Arabic], I asked students: "Why do you think prophet Muhammad gave him this job? He is, after all, an 'abd (slave)? You yourselves called Sudanese in A [the name of their village] as such." I received embarrassed facial expressions! At this moment, I felt so happy because I met the goal of my lesson. Students stated that now they understand that it is totally bad to call people "slaves." My goal behind using Bilal's story is to help students appreciate their own culture in an attempt to say that not only white people think of human rights but we also value human rights in our culture. Most people don't know that and see themselves as inferior and treat people badly, whereas they only need to open their eyes and not let this whitewashing dominate. (Haneen, dialogue journal, 4; in Awayed-Bishsara, 2021a, p.14)

Through the use of "they" (white people) and "we" (Haneen, her students, and their community), Haneen co-constructs with her students a critical stance whereby they resist hegemonic ideologies of white supremacy that seem to still dominate many local and global contexts.

Receiving “embarrassed facial expressions” suggests that Haneen responds to her students’ acceptance of ideologies of racial stratification through reestablishing the bond her students have with their own community in an appreciative and self-fulfilling manner (spelled out as “we also value human rights in our culture”).

It is to these situations, where marginalized groups use English to reject their own subordination and recognize their ethical responsibility in the way they engage with local and global others, that the notion of LC might help “comprise an empowering politics of language for agency and change” (Stroud, 2018, p.6). This study shows how English enables minoritized learners to contest epistemic injustices in EFL educational materials and policies.

In the following study, I will show how Palestinian youth who are subjected to the denationalization of their community use English *outside* the formal education system to resist denationalizing discourses and create a new sense of collective agency and voice.

5. Study 2: LC outside the formal education system: Decolonizing the Self through English

The case study I now present is based on theorizations from a recent linguistic ethnographic study in which I offered a new sociolinguistic conceptualization of *Sumud Pedagogy as Linguistic Citizenship* (Awayed-Bishara, 2023). Sumud is the Arabic word for steadfastness, and a key concept in intellectual debates about the strategies Palestinians develop under colonial conditions (e.g., Tawil-Souri, 2009; Meari, 2014; Rijke & van Teeffelen, 2014; Ryan, 2015; Shehadeh, 2015; Fassetta et al. 2020). While many studies have used sumud as a concept that captures the everyday adaptive strategies of Palestinians inside the occupied territories or refugee camps, sumud pedagogy focuses on how Palestinians, particularly Palestinian youth inside Israel, cultivate and exercise their agency to resist and negotiate the institutional erasure of their identity. My theorizing of Sumud Pedagogy as Linguistic Citizenship is based on a sociolinguistic analysis of decolonial modes of expression among Palestinian youth within Israel. Considering how the Israeli education system denationalizes the Palestinian community through the technologies of colonized education, I have shown that sumud pedagogy captures how young people cultivate Palestinian political models outside of the formal educational system and open new possibilities for political organizing and expression, defying the colonial administration of their education.

Findings from this study also show that young Palestinians in Israel express sumud in a number of ways. First, they *teach themselves* how to build a relationship with what they perceive as a colonized space. Second, in response to colonial attempts to instill fear, and silence nationalist voices, they *learn to unlearn colonial fear*. These acts of sumud by young Palestinians, which are practiced outside and against the formal and oppressive educational system in various cultural arenas such as hip hop or informal youth activism, have been shown to enable those youth to insert voices into educational processes and structures that otherwise alienate.

Based on these findings I have offered sumud pedagogy as a new localized framing of LC which may inspire other decolonial processes. The core of sumud pedagogy is that it opens the

possibilities for acting towards redefining the self by reclaiming space and learning to unlearn colonial fear. What I now propose is an additional level for theorizing sumud pedagogy as LC through examining the role English plays in decolonial processes. Towards this end, I present excerpts from interviews with two members of a Palestinian youth movement based in the city of Haifa: Sama (she, her) and Adi (he, his), who were in their early twenties at the time of the interviews, and both granted me permission to use their first names. They both identify as Palestinians. During the interviews, Sama and Adi referred to posters that were designed for an art exhibition which the youth movement had installed in Haifa⁴. I will present these posters as background to the interview excerpts but will not do a detailed multimodal analysis of them at this stage.

In the following analysis I suggest that Palestinian youth in Israel are *retooling English* as a medium for resisting imposed gender, national, and multilingual subjectivities; and reimagining forms of co-habitation in the space of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

5.1 Resisting imposed gender, national and multilingual subjectivities through English

In describing the different struggles in which they are involved as a Palestinian youth movement, Sama gives an account of the art exhibition, which was called Mahalli, Arabic for “My Place” and defined (in English) as “An Independent Public Exhibition”:



Poster no. 1

MAHALLI
An Independent Public
Exhibition.

Mahalli is my place and my
home.
I fit in at times, while parts of me
dissolve in others.
I am my place, and my place is I.
Can we exist without one
another?

**The question remains, who are
you? And what is your place?**

English text of poster no.1

Sama explains the idea behind installing an independent public exhibition and the reason for choosing English alongside Arabic as the languages of the exhibition and the printed posters:

⁴ Posters are available at the Haifa Youth Movement’s Facebook account at <https://www.facebook.com/ShababHaifa/>. Photos of poster displayed in this paper are used with permission from the Haifa Youth Movement.

Sama: The idea for the exhibition is that I don't have to go to a place to see local art, and there are many artists in Haifa whose work I really like. This includes visual arts/ music/ fashion design. Haifa is actually an art hub. ... We installed an independent local exhibition that included the work of 11 male and female artists, 6 workshops, and two opening and closing ceremonies. In the following months, a local magazine that included all details about the project was published. It's all on the website in English and Arabic.

[...] The decision not to include Hebrew was a political saying. Using English was what we wanted to do in the first place. And English [was used] not only to reach the world, but also because a lot of tourists visited the exhibition and also Jews. That's why English makes the reach of the idea easier.

My theorization of sumud pedagogy as LC points to the need to understand the Palestinian struggle as an intersectional resistance to oppression which is mobilized by a multiplicity of voices that bring in important gendered, cultural, and generational differences (Awayed-Bishara, 2023). The choice to install a local independent art exhibition in Haifa and that of using English alongside Arabic must be understood in relation to the cultural, sociopolitical, and multilingual context of Haifa and the broader Israeli-Palestinian dynamics. Haifa is Israel's third largest city, with a mix of Jewish and Palestinian Arab residents. It is often regarded as the only option available to young Palestinians from villages and small towns who seek an urban Palestinian lifestyle (Karkabi, 2018). This urbanization process resulted in increasing numbers of Palestinian civic organizations, university graduates, and professionals leading to the city's accelerated cultural revival (Eqieq, 2019) and to imagining Haifa, in Nadeem Karkabi's (2018) words, as *the Palestinian cultural capital in Israel*.

Sama's reference to Haifa as "an art hub" best illustrates the imagining of Haifa as "the Palestinian cultural capital in Israel". Moreover, the emphasis on making the exhibition an "independent" space for negotiating existential questions about the place of the self in this space illustrates what Jaworski and Thurlow (2010, p. 6) call "making space, locating self". The conscious choice for choosing English and not Hebrew to construct this "independent" space is imbricated within the realization of Palestinian selfhood, as it is perceived by those youth. Framing the refusal to use Hebrew as a "political statement" articulates an understanding of the coloniality of Hebrew and the cultural modes of oppression that Hebrew stands for as the dominant and only official language of the Jewish nation state. It is precisely to oppose these forms of oppression that the need to construct an "independent" space comes. This understanding becomes clearer in the way Sama reports how the Jewish-Israeli visitors to the exhibition reacted to the absence of Hebrew:

Sama: There was a minimum of 10 Jewish participants in the opening ceremony, and they all criticized the fact that the captions were written in Arabic and English only (not Hebrew). These were radical left-wing people.

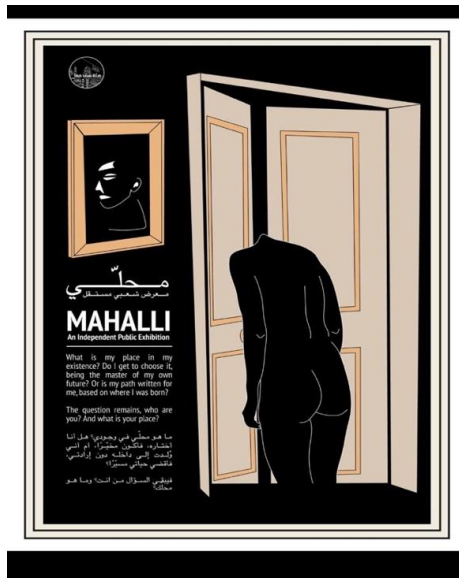
Sama reports how all the Jewish-Israelis who visited the exhibition criticized the absence of Hebrew. Indicating that these were "radical left-wing people" suggests that she expects them to be more accepting of the Palestinian struggle for liberation than other Jewish groups. Here, the

choice of English is part and parcel of the intersectional Palestinian struggle which is directed against the coloniality of Hebrew. The visibility of English alongside Arabic in the linguistic landscape of the exhibition operates, then, *against* Hebrew and what it stands for. Sociolinguistics scholarship reminds us to consider the linguistic landscape as a vibrant site of identity formation, resistance, and contestation. Meshazi and Oostendorp (2024) also encourage us to look at the multilingual practices of minoritized language speakers (e.g., using English and refusing Hebrew) as being actual “forms of resistance when people negotiate intersecting forms of belonging in relation to their multilingualism” (p.11). Using English in the exhibition functions as another axis of resistance in the discursive processes of locating the self in an “independent” space. In other words, refusing Hebrew on the basis of its coloniality intersects with resisting other identity categories that disenfranchise the Palestinian self from many directions, as is spelled out in the first poster: “I fit in at times while parts of me dissolve in others”, and in visually presenting in the following poster parts of the body *inside* (a regimented space in the form of a closed room) and leaving the rest of the body *outside* in the open space (the independent space):



Poster no. 2

The following poster displays the continuous engagement with ontological questions related to finding one’s place in an independent space:



Poster no. 3

What is my place
in my existence?
Do I get to choose
it, being the master
of my own future?
Or is my path
written for me,
based on where I
was born?

**The question
remains, who are
you? And what is
your place?**

English text of poster no. 3

Adi and Sama provide clear guidance on the intersecting identity categories that need to be negotiated in the discursive process of making an independent space:

Adi: ... the idea of the exhibition was so deep. All the existential questions of who you are and your existence. All the existential questions about one's place. How am I connected and what do I believe in or not?... Let's open everything.

Sama: [continuing Adi's idea] ...on the gender, religion, nation and family levels. Apparently, these existential conflicts will not be resolved any time soon. While we are critical of these issues [gender, religion...], we all hope that things are going to change, on the social level. All the [art] works [presented in the exhibition] criticized stereotypes and social norms. The need to belong to something, on the family and friends' level... How to belong to something and how to become a part of something. On how complicated it is to be Palestinian, and how the Palestinian identity is comprised.

In line with how I opened this paper on the complexity of my locus of enunciation, Sama also marks the question of the complexity of Palestinian identity as a central component in the striving for belonging and liberation of the self. Her question also resonates with a posthumous conversation Mahmoud Darwish had with Edward Said:

What about identity? I asked.

He said: Self-defense...

Identity is the child of birth, but at the end, it's self-invention, and not an inheritance of the past. I am multiple... Within me an ever new exterior (Darwish, 2005 cited in Butler, 2012, p. 218).⁵

⁵ See also what Darwish writes in "Contrapuntal": <http://mondediplo.com/2005/01/15said>

In contrast to the way institutional identities and subjectivities are imposed on people, the ontological engagement of young Palestinians with questions of identity and existence inspires the realization that even though “existential conflicts will not be resolved any time soon” the continuous search for alternatives must never stop because as Sama so eloquently puts it: “we all hope that things are going to change”. The existential questions raised reinforce how Palestinian youth are using self-teaching as a strategy to work through their locus of enunciation as Palestinians in Israel. At the same time, in order to “make the reach of our idea easier” as Sama says, English is needed as a language of empowerment through which we make our voices heard so that people learn “how complicated it is to be Palestinian”.

The quest to use English in the process of decolonizing the self and building an alternative independent space could be captured through the lenses of sumud pedagogy which enables an application of LC as a decolonial pedagogy. LC offers a counter-hegemonic model that addresses the coloniality of the English language and “the question of engaging local and contemporary voices in struggle; and *a construct of ‘language’ that goes beyond its conventional coloniality*” (Stroud & Kerfoot, 2020, p. 11; my emphasis). This suggests that LC can help us in repurposing English, emphasizing, hence, its usefulness not just on the Global South. Sumud pedagogy is one very important instance of this.

6. Concluding remarks: Reimagining forms of co-habitation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflicted space

To conclude, I would like to draw the attention to the ethical insights we might gain from LC as decolonial pedagogy particularly if we are sincere about our decolonial commitment to contest epistemic injustices. Inspired by Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta (2024), the lesson that I learned from the courageous acts of sumud by young Palestinians, whether in-service EFL teachers or youth activists outside the formal education system, is that the decolonial struggle is actually *a knowledge struggle*. This understanding compels us to *augment* our locus of enunciation by shifting the “locus of knowledge production” (p. 13). Stroud and Kerfoot (2020) remind us that the knowledge that emerges out of acts of LC “is what directly mobilizes speakers into a ‘community’ with the potential for increasingly sophisticated and far-reaching claims to historical redress and its material consequences” (p.11). I now illustrate how I have internalized the lesson.

In continuing the line of thoughts that I have drawn in my paper, starting from Mahmoud Darwish’s insistence that “We have on this land all of that which makes life worth living” (1986); moving to Edward Said’s belief that the impossibility of making “anything resembling equity and resolution” in Israel/Palestine is “only [so] for the time being” (1980); contemplating that we need an exercise in re-imagining other possible forms of humanity; and ethnographically engaging with the acts of LC of inspirational young Palestinian women. I now shift the locus of knowledge production to Adi, so that it is he who articulates the final words of this paper:

Adi: When we build a space which speaks Arabic and calls attention to the Palestinian existence, that does not negate any individual who is willing to participate with us. When you have clearly stated principles and ideas and you offer a discourse, and a certain way [to act], then obviously you are trying to build a local project for everyone, so they are able to search for themselves, and have an opportunity to speak about their identity and all the contradictions they face within themselves. So, there is no problem with a Jewish person sharing this space with us. It is also something that I was personally criticized for: The question of whether I have a problem with working with Israeli-Jews [as a student] in the university, to which I answer “No, I don’t have a problem with this”. ... I don’t accept people based only on how they were raised or born. If they are willing to overcome the constraints that come with this [how one is raised] and stand by our side, then I do accept them. We are struggling not merely because we are Palestinians. On the contrary, we are oppressed because we are Palestinians. Our ‘Palestinianess’ is more of a liberation tool than a blinded national belonging. My nationality when the real time comes, I mean liberation day, will not matter to me that much. Today, it’s meaningful because it is a liberation tool. At the end of the day, I am more powerful with him [sic.; the Israeli-Jewish] by my side.

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