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Spaces of Articulation: Theorising Intersubjective Articulation in Encounters with Refugees in Post-Migrant Societies

Monique Kaulertz

Department of Social Theory and Social Psychology, Ruhr University Bochum
Bochum, Germany

Abstract

The word “articulation” is usually used to describe linguistic and other symbolic forms of meaning making (Schlette & Jung 2005, Jung 2009, Wilczek 2012). The meaning-making aspect of language and action is mostly privileged over the aspect of building relationships with others (Angehrn 2012). However, it is rarely taken into account that acts of articulation are not solitary actions of isolated individuals. They are often the direct result of social cooperation and dialogical communication. The ability to articulate something thus depends strongly on our relationships with others. The article argues for theorising a concept of articulation that takes this dependency and mediatedness into account. It therefore goes beyond an individualistic and monadic understanding of meaning-making and emphasises the aspect of articulations as being social acts. The ethnographic research on articulation on which this article is based analyses the researcher’s encounters with refugees in the asylum system during her time in the field. It asks how the articulations of experiences of suffering and violence can take place in “Spaces of Articulation” beyond a professional therapeutic setting or the asymmetrical context of the asylum hearing and explores principles of solidary communication and cooperation in the everyday life of people in “post-migrant societies” (Foroutan 2021).

Keywords: spaces of articulation, articulation of violence and suffering, intersubjective meaning-making, relations of harm and vulnerability

Introduction

Articulation is an important aspect of contemporary societies when it comes to the experience of collective violence, structural discrimination, political oppression, and other forms of harm that people inflict on each other. The word "articulation" is commonly used to describe linguistic and other symbolic forms of meaning-making (Schlette & Jung, 2005; Jung, 2009; Wilczek, 2012). The meaning-making aspect of language and action is usually privileged over the aspect of building relationships with others (Angehrn, 2012). However, theories of articulation rarely considered that acts of articulation are not solitary actions of isolated individuals. Acts of Articulation are often the direct result of social cooperation and dialogical communication. The ability to articulate thus depends heavily on our (power-laden) relations with others, on frames of grievability and recognition (Butler 2009). This article argues for the theorization of a concept of articulation that takes this dependence and mediatedness into account. It thus moves beyond an individualistic and monadic understanding of meaning-making and emphasizes the aspect of articulations as social acts.

Since therapy is not available to everyone, a crucial question is what spaces of articulation exist outside the clinic for the experience and recognition of suffering and violence. Here, the social aspect plays a significant role. People depend on others – not least when dealing with their experiences. Social support is crucial for expressing, soothing or healing trauma in everyday life (Maercker et al., 2017, van de Ven, 2022, Pohling, 2021). Many people in super-diverse (Vertovec, 2007) post-migration societies (Foroutan, 2021) have experienced forms of violence and are entangled in "collective relations of harm and vulnerability" (Straub, 2014, 2015). Dealing with experiences of suffering and violence is then a social responsibility that needs to be addressed in everyday life - it's a challenge for every individual, especially when there appears to be a competition for attention and recognition (Young & Sullivan, 2016) and when there is a need to come to terms with the consequences of relations of harm and vulnerability.

In my research on "The Articulation of Experiences of Suffering and Violence in Encounters with Refugees", I explore how the articulation of experiences of suffering and violence can take place beyond the professional therapeutic setting or the asymmetrical context of the asylum hearing, and how I as a researcher can engage in power-sensitive and solidary communication and cooperation with refugees in "post-migrant societies" (Foroutan, 2021). I use (auto)ethnographic, participatory and performative methods to explore the possibilities and obstacles of articulating experiences of suffering in interactive situations with refugees and how they are negotiated in the course of these interactions. Can spaces of articulation become co-created in such encounters? From a cultural-psychological perspective (Straub, 2021, p. 25), this is always about "acts of meaning" (Bruner, 1990), i.e. the co-construction of meaning and significance in joint action. This perspective can therefore also be described as pragma-semantic (Weidemann, 2018).

Articulation as a Key Concept in Cultural Psychology

Articulation needs to be methodologically translated in order to explore its potential as a foundational concept, though I would like to approach this here in terms of developing a heuristic. In this section, I will consider the basic assumptions surrounding the term "articulation" because my goal is to explore the potential of the term as a foundational concept of cultural psychology in the sense mentioned above. Therefore, I refer to a philosophical concept of articulation developed

in great detail mainly by the philosopher Matthias Jung (2009) in relation to pragmatism, theories of symbolization such as those of Mead and Peirce, and theories of embodiment. With him, I understand articulation as

[...] mostly occasional, sometimes planned explication of human experience through the performance of symbolic acts in which the implicit-qualitative form of lived experience is transformed into the explicit-semantic form of a concise symbolism. Meaning is created through the processing of the implicit (what is felt, thought, intended, remembered...) by means of symbolic media that allow mental states to be individuated, fixed, and evaluated in contrast. (Jung 2005, p. 105, my translation)

Articulation is understood here as a non-dualistic, experience-related, pragma-semantic, embodied and truly social process of symbolization. It can be understood as an "expressive continuum" (Jung, 2005, p. 131; Schlette & Jung, 2005, p. 15) in which different modes and media of articulation and forms of symbolization - also referred to as "symbolic resources" (Zittoun 2006) or "semiotic resources" (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 3) - are used, which extend beyond verbal expressions. In this sense, articulation is also a multimodal and multimedial practice of sense- and meaning-making (Jung 2005, pp. 126).¹In Jung's understanding, articulation is closely related to human experience (Jung 2005, p. 117). In my view, it makes sense to adopt the term when meaning making refers primarily to existential experience, which, because of its complexity and quality, poses a challenge to articulation. The phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels calls such experiences "pathos" - using a term from Greek philosophy - or "Widerfahrnis". It is what happens to me and affects or concerns me ("pathos") and to which I (or others) must therefore respond ("response") (Waldenfels, 2004). This dual movement and tension between pathos and response is part of the dynamic that motivates articulation.

The enactivist orientation of Matthias Jung's development of the concept of articulation includes a critique of cognitivist conceptions of meaning-making and distinguishes them from some other concepts such as mentalisation or externalisation. In my view, articulation cannot be clearly assigned to an individual or psyche, as often is the focus in psychology, a sign process, as in semiotics, or an interaction unit, as in sociology. Therefore, it can be understood as a mediating term between semiotic mediation (e.g. Valsiner, 2001; Zittoun, 2006, pp. 41) and externalisation (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003; also Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015), which are often conceptualised as being more individual-centric, and interaction or communication (e.g. Döveling & Sommer, 2019), which focus more on the intersubjective dynamics of meaning-making. Contrary to common belief, the term 'articulation' then does not only refer to the process by which mental representations are transferred into objectifications in the outside world². Instead, it refers to the dynamic interplay of meaning-making within the tension field between semiotic elaboration, individual expression, and situated interaction. The scenic aspects of intersubjective meaning-making are therefore emphasised when using the term, including (unconscious) enacted, emotional and bodily dimensions of human encounters and interactions as they happen.

My research focuses specifically on the articulation of experiences of suffering and violence. Violence and suffering should not be thought of only as critical, potentially traumatic events in a person's life to which an individual must respond. Some forms of suffering may be ongoing and

¹ For a distinction between sense and meaning see Vygotsky, 1986, pp. 243.

² See Pfadenhauer & Grenz, 2017 for an explication of 'objectivation'.

not necessarily event-like, such as living in poverty. In this sense, suffering and violence are not necessarily singular or spectacular, but can be continuous, persistent, and commonplace (even if perceived as exceptional or painful) - and not limited to physical, direct violence and aggression (Galtung & Høivik, 1971; Chakkarath & Gudehus, 2023; Dhar, 2023; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgeois, 2004). The concept of social suffering highlights the fact that forms of suffering and violence are interconnected and cannot be seen as existing independently from each other (Kleinman, Das & Lock, 1997). When Straub (2015, p. 146) talks about "relations of harm and vulnerability," he focuses primarily on the 'unresolved' aspects of violence - on the continuing effects of historical or formerly inflicted harm in the psyche of individuals and in human interaction in the present. If the injuries are not processed or dealt with, they can continue to affect us and our relationships across generations, times, and places. I thus refer to a broad concept of suffering and violence, the specific individual manifestations of which I explore in my empirical research.

At the outset, I argued that the relational function of (verbal and written) articulation has been neglected in comparison to its meaning-making function. Brockmeier (2015, pp. 216) makes a similar argument for narratives. However, these functions can only be distinguished analytically. This has been taken into account in various models of communication or language functions, e.g. by Jakobson (1981), or in relation to narratives by Brockmeier (2015). In my work I distinguish between three levels of meaning-making derived from these language models, which are *world-articulation*, *self-articulation*, and *relational* or *phatic articulation*.

The level of *world-articulation* concerns what the articulation refers to, i.e. the content - in my work this means experiences of suffering and their consequences, such as events, historical or political contexts, the material world and discourses. World-articulation examines which contents are articulated and how they relate to the world with its material and immaterial objectifications and actions as it is experienced by an individual. This doesn't mean that what is to be articulated is already prefigured in a person's mind, but that it develops in expressive (inter)action, or, as the saying goes, the path evolves as one goes.

The level of *self-articulation* takes into account the aspect that we are dealing with thinking and feeling individuals with unique perspectives and socio-cultural backgrounds, who articulate experience and engage in meaning-making. The individual experience of something is articulated intentionally (in the phenomenological sense), i.e. individuals position themselves in relation to their experiences, evaluate them, place them in the context of their own biographies. In the process of articulation, they always reveal something about themselves. They seek to be seen, understood, and recognized in a certain way. Thus, despite the focus on interactions, the concept of the experiencing subject should be taken seriously.

The third level I call *relational articulation*, or *phatic articulation*, because articulation with and toward others also involves negotiating one's relationship to these others. The processing of power relations and asymmetries in mutual exchange is also part of this negotiation. This level of joint articulation is therefore taken into account when discussing relational articulation. It concerns how the interacting individuals relate to each other, how they speak or act with each other, and how meaning is jointly produced. This type of negotiation varies according to the quality of the relationship between the participants. Phatic articulation thus recognizes that articulation is an intersubjective and co-constructive process.

Aspect Perception - A Method for Seeing Things Differently

In order to do justice to the diversity of expression and to recognize the different perspectives of the interacting persons, it is necessary to sensitize the ethnographic gaze to the "expressive continuum" of human articulation and the various forms of meaning making. Drawing on insights from cultural psychology, sociology of interaction, relational psychology, and ethnopschoanalysis, I focus my analyses on bodily, emotional, material, temporal, or spatial aspects in order to conceptualize articulations as processes of multimodal, reciprocal, and contextually embedded symbolization. This is taken into account in the framework of "aspect perception," which Wittgenstein (1984, p. 518) described with reference to the hare-duck figure ("H-E-Kopf"): In the well-known picture one can see either a hare or a duck, depending on one's perspective. The expression of the change of aspect is "the expression of a new perception, at the same time as the expression of the unchanged perception" (ibid., p. 522). One of Wittgenstein's questions is under what conditions something can be "seen as" and under what conditions perception shifts. Willem Schinkel (2010) describes a method of aspect perception for violence research as "a way of looking at something with regard to a specific aspect while simultaneously being able to shift the observation again without becoming arbitrary" (Hartmann & Hoebel, 2020, p. 76).

What is particularly interesting here is the moment when perception suddenly shifts, when I am able to see an aspect of something that I had not noticed before. This happens synchronously in situations in the field itself, but also asynchronously or retrospectively in the later analysis (Nadig 1986, pp. 59). It is important to note that the combination of different aspects does not provide a complete picture of the articulation. Rather, this approach prevents excessive monotony or uniformity that could result from the social sciences' desire for explanation, as Hartmann and Hoebel (ibid., p. 59) critically note. What I perceive is inevitably shaped by my own perspectives, possibilities of interpretation, and knowledge background, but also by aspects highlighted by my research partners and by subtle emotional or bodily perceptions. Whether the analysis focuses more on bodily, temporal, or material aspects in interaction scenes thus depends on noticeable features, peculiarities, and irritations (Nadig, 1986, p. 58; Richter et al., 2023; cf. critically Chakkarath, 2006) that emerge in the interactional context and during the analysis. Paying attention to these elements is part of the toolkit of (ethno)psychoanalytic methods (e.g. Nadig 1986, p. 36; Bonz et al., 2017).

According to psychoanalyst Alfred Lorenzer, a shift in perception can occur within or through the use of psychoanalytic methods such as free association and free attention (Lorenzer, 1988). It can also be facilitated by ethnographic strategies of distancing as described by Hirschauer and Amann (1997). The latter represent more of a counter-movement to the immersive techniques of psychoanalysis. The ethnopschoanalyst Maya Nadig, however, warns that it is not enough to rely on the individual perception of the researcher, especially in transcultural research settings, but that contextualization is crucial (Nadig 1986, pp. 55). The inclusion of different comparative horizons (such as different theoretical approaches), as differentiated in relational hermeneutics, supports this process and enables the contextualization of scenes in my singular case studies as socially, culturally, and historically embedded and informed (Straub & Ruppel, 2023).

Stories of Interaction as Method of Analysis and Form of Presentation

During my fieldwork, I developed several friendly research relationships with refugees whom I accompanied for several years. As we stayed in contact over a longer period of time, later articulations referred to earlier ones and became intertwined in the sense of follow-up communication, which can also be called "chains of articulation". That's why I structured our interactions in so-called "stories of interaction" (see also Pfab & Klemm, 2022, p. 83), which acknowledge the continuity and processual nature of interactions through their arrangement. They consist of a series of selected scenes documented in narrative vignettes. Based on my research focus, I primarily examined situations in which the articulation of experiences of violence or suffering played a role. Additionally, I considered and contrasted different modes and media of articulation. This is particularly relevant in interactions with people who speak different languages, have lived in different places, and have experienced very different, sometimes violent, events.

As a consequence, the interactions in the field were characterized not only by linguistic modes but also by non-linguistic and multimodal forms of articulation. When Jung and Schlette speak of articulation as an "expressive continuum," they call for greater attention to this diversity of expression (Schlette & Jung, 2005, p. 15). Various modes of interaction are considered here. One is the use of media in interaction. As today's societies are mediatized, the role of media in face-to-face interactions must be acknowledged, as it significantly shapes them (Hepp et al., 2015). In my research, the inclusion and use of media were frequent components of interactions. I therefore differentiate between *media-mediated*, *media-receptive*, and *media-productive* interaction, taking face-to-face situations as the basic form of interaction (cf. Marx & Schmidt 2019, p. 20).

- In *media-mediated* interaction, in contrast to face-to-face encounters, communication between us would not even be possible without the medium-for instance, when we were in different places and communicated via email or phone.

- *Media-receptive* interaction involves the inclusion of media artifacts such as movies, literature, or music in face-to-face or asynchronous interactions, e.g., when we read the same book at the same time and discuss it occasionally, or when we watch a movie together.

- In *media-producing* interaction, the focus is not on pre-existing media, but rather on the media we create together during our interaction, such as photographs, drawings, texts, or music. The performative aspect of co-production is central to my analysis, but the media themselves as objectifications of articulation processes can also be part of it, since they have their own inherent logic (Bohnsack 2021, p. 180).

For the analysis of articulation situations, I also refer to the modes of interaction differentiated by Alfred Lorenzer (1988) from a psychoanalytic perspective. Lorenzer distinguishes between *unconscious*, *sensory-symbolic*, and *linguistic-symbolic* forms of interaction, which he analyses through what he calls *scenic understanding*. In this differentiation, Lorenzer draws on Susanne K. Langer's (1984) concept of symbolization, which distinguishes between discursive and presentational forms of symbolization and criticizes theories that claim that all articulated symbolism is discursively structured.

- Discursive symbolization refers primarily (but not exclusively) to linguistic expressions that convey and imply meanings through their structure, grammar, syntax, and conventional usage (Langer, 1984, pp. 100, 103).

- Presentational symbolization, on the other hand, refers to forms of symbolization that lack the grammatical structure and fixed referential meanings of discursive language. Instead, they operate

through a "wordless symbolism" that works simultaneously (Langer, 1984, p. 103) and - through its free form - primarily engages the affective domain (ibid., p. 219). For Langer, this includes images, art, and especially music, but also linguistic forms with a presentational impact, such as poetry.

Building on Langer's ideas, Lorenzer emphasizes nonverbal forms of interaction that function through both sensory-symbolic and presentational modes. He illustrates this distinction with Freud's famous yarn spool game (Lorenzer, 1986, p. 54). In Freud's example, a child repeatedly tosses and pulls back a spool of thread, shouting "o-o-o-o" and "there!" each time the spool appears. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this seemingly simple game symbolizes the child's confrontation with separation from the mother. It represents a sensory-symbolic form of interaction, as it does not rely on language but instead functions on a symbolically unconscious level. Combined with language, it illustrates the development of complex symbolization, as Lorenzer (1986, p. 55) says. In this way, it allows relationships or internal conflicts to be articulated and processed performatively. This example underscores that not every act of meaning making has to be conscious or linguistically expressed. Such forms of sensory-symbolic articulation, which occur "beneath" conscious awareness and verbal expression, yet can still convey or articulate latent or unconscious meaning.

Case Study - Spaces of Articulation in media-receptive and media-productive Interaction

I want to present an example that illustrates different modes of articulation of suffering and their scenic understanding with reference to specific aspects, especially the spatial aspect. The following example comes from the story of an interaction with one of my research partners, Prof. Baltazar (a nickname he chose for my research). He is a student from Iran who fled his country to escape state repression and institutional violence and to live his atheist beliefs openly. After the Green Movement in which he took part was violently suppressed (cf. Kazemzadeh 2023), he turned to art and music as his preferred modes of articulation. His application for asylum in Germany was rejected because the authorities did not believe his story. In Germany, I met him through a group of politically active refugees. He took me with him to hear other refugees' stories and invited me to watch movies, listen to songs, and discuss artists he liked. After he finished his apprenticeship, he got married and eventually became a German citizen. We are still friends today, and he remains active in the anti-regime protests of the Iranian diaspora.

I explore the spaces of articulation in two modes, *media-receptive* and *media-productive* interaction. The first mode involves watching films together that Baltazar suggested to me. The second mode examines media production, as we eventually began making music together. As I mentioned at the beginning, I am interested in what kinds of suffering or violence Baltazar wanted to articulate and how this articulation took place in our interactions.

Spaces of Articulation in "Taxi" and "No One Knows About Persian Cats"

Baltazar showed me two films that he particularly liked: *Taxi* (2015) by Jafar Panahi and *No One Knows About Persian Cats* (2009) by Bahman Ghobadi. Both films belong to the genre of Iranian New Wave cinema, which is best known in the West through the works of Abbas Kiarostami (1940-2016) - an Iranian filmmaker who gained international recognition (Moruzzi, 2014, p. 119). The films we watched together were banned by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance

(Ershad). Both filmmakers faced persecution and repression from the Iranian state and were forced to leave the country after years of imprisonment and house arrest (in Panahi's case) or unofficial work due to political pressure (Ghobadi) (Naficy, 2012, p. 341). Accordingly, the films are underground productions made without the official approval of the Iranian state. While Iranian New Wave cinema is internationally renowned - many of its films have won prestigious awards - it remains a more or less subcultural genre in Iran, popular among secular and/or leftist intellectuals. Some of these films, including those mentioned here, circulate unofficially online or are smuggled out of the country to be screened at international film festivals (Salamati, 2019, p. 176).

The aspect of meaning-making I mainly want to discuss concerns the role of certain types of "spaces of articulation" in both films - demonstrating how much people engage in aesthetic expression despite the harsh conditions for critical filmmakers. The necessity of creating alternative spaces for cultural production and artistic expression relates not least to a specific Iranian law that enforces censorship against what is known as "sordid realism" (Khosravi, 2023, p. 7). This means that anything that portrays Iranian life in a negative light, as perceived by the authorities, can be censored by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. As a result, the common concerns, pain, and suffering that Iranian people experience in their daily lives cannot easily be portrayed - otherwise a film will not be allowed to be produced or screened. Whether depicting everyday life on the streets of Tehran, if it contains anything illegal, or human rights activism critical of the government, such depictions are considered problematic and cannot be shown.

In *Taxi*, Panahi himself takes on the role of a taxi driver who picks up various passengers while navigating the streets of Tehran. His attitude seems slightly ironic, yet affectionate. Each encounter is unique, ranging from individuals dealing in DVDs on the black market, to a woman accompanied by her severely injured husband, to two women seeking to visit a holy spring, and even the director's niece. Along with glimpses of the "everyday," the narrative subtly incorporates critiques of the regime. After seeing *Taxi*, Baltazar told me: "*This movie says a lot about Iranian society. You have everything like that in Iran: discussions about religion, culture, politics and human rights. You meet people like that there.*" Depicting ordinary lives and everyday moments of humanity and resistance is exactly what Jafar Panahi does in his film, adapting the documentary style of Iranian New Wave cinema and often breaking the diegetic structure ("fourth wall") that separates the imaginative space of the film from the audience, for example by using the real outside world as a location for filming. As Panahi drives his passengers to their destinations, the taxi itself becomes a moving space of dialogue and articulation.

The taxi as a space of articulation has become a metaphor not only in Panahi's film. His work also contains an intertextual reference to a film by Abbas Kiarostami, *Ten* (2002), in which a taxi is already the setting of the action. Furthermore, this idea of the taxi as a unique space has been taken up and expanded by Iranian artists such as Azadeh Ganjeh, who describes the significance of the taxi as a place of "daily therapy" where sensory experiences can be made and feelings and thoughts can be expressed without being judged (Karimi, 2022, p. 186). Inside the taxi, passengers find a fleeting moment to discuss difficult topics - politics, personal relationships, or daily challenges - or even hold hands with their secret lovers (Karimi, 2022, p. 183).

The other film I mentioned at the beginning, Ghobadi's *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, also contains aspects of space-making. It follows Iranian rock musicians - who are literally

"underground" musicians. Since rock music is prohibited in Iran, private spaces such as bedrooms, living rooms, and-most notably-basements become sites for aesthetic articulation, turning into rehearsal rooms and concert venues. In the films discussed so far, the "creation of space" is therefore also a relevant theme. With de Certeau (1988), taxis or cellars can be described as "places" that become "spaces" through their use.

Bodily and Emotional Expressions of Homesickness

But there was another level of sensory-symbolic, embodied and emotional articulation that took place while we were watching "Taxi". This level was more deeply connected to the city of Tehran, to familiar things, smells, and people-and to the loss of a beloved place. At the time we met, Baltazar often expressed hatred and anger toward "my country, fucking Iran," as he put it-its people, culture, and politics, which he experienced as suffocating. This anger probably served several functions: it may have acted as a protective layer, like a warm blanket that shielded him from the cold feelings of loss and loneliness he experienced in Germany. It may also have helped him justify his existential decision to flee and its consequences. At first, he rarely spoke of Iran in a positive light, so his longing for Tehran remained a latent aspect of his suffering in our interactions.

As we watched the film, we had to sit next to each other with headphones because we needed to be mindful of his roommate's sensitivity to noise. As the movie played, Baltazar gradually sank deeper into the couch, hiding behind a pillow until I could barely see him. At first I thought he was tired, but then I noticed his eyes shimmering moistly as we watched Tehran's streets and people pass by through the front window of Jafar Panahi's taxi. "You miss Tehran?" I finally dared to ask him. He almost shouted at me: "Of course!" I took that as a sign not to ask any more questions at that moment, and to just keep watching with him as he was on the verge of tears and trying to control himself.

In this situation, I not only gained an understanding of the space of articulation that the taxi and the underground spaces metaphorically represented in the film, but I also became aware of a moment of personal loss - a feeling of liminality (cf. for a theory of liminality Stenner, 2017) in Baltazar's experience of flight. It was something he had not admitted to me-perhaps not even to himself-before, but in that moment it was expressed physically and emotionally through watching the movie.

Articulation in Media-Reception

What I wanted to show with this example is that aspects of self-articulation, world-articulation and pathic articulation play a role in the reception of media. One theme articulated in this film at the level of world-articulation is how people navigate sanctions and censorship under a repressive regime, how this oppression causes suffering, and the creative strategies people develop to circumvent and resist these restrictions on expression and artistic freedom. Baltazar wanted to show me these films not only to illustrate why he left Iran, but also to present alternative perspectives on Iranian society - perspectives that go beyond the stereotypical media portrayal of Iran as a religious autocracy dominated by the "mullah regime".

These moments of media reception had an epistemic dimension - they conveyed aesthetic representations of life, everyday suffering, and resistance in Iran that were closely intertwined with Baltazar's own experiences. This was not in the sense of a strict realism, but rather as a means of giving me an impression of everything that would have been suppressed and made taboo by the

cultural policies of the Iranian regime, but probably also made invisible in Western media representations.

The stories in these films were also connected to the experiences he had lived - experiences that he might not have been able to describe or explain to me because they did not consist of singular events, but rather formed the underlying fabric of everyday life in Iran. How could he explain to me what it means when aesthetic and critical articulation is rigidly censored? Instead, he let the film speak for him, conveying knowledge, images, and artistic impressions of the social and political circumstances, as well as the everyday life that he ultimately decided to leave behind. Moreover, by watching these films together, we did imaginatively visit these secret spaces of resistance, therapy, and artistic expression.

His choice of film as a medium of expression was also linked to his understanding of art. In his view, artists had a responsibility to share their insights with others and to create images that mediate between truth and personal perspective-especially in contexts where revealing the truth was forbidden because it touched on "negative" subjects such as pain, grief, sexuality, crime, or politics. Finally, watching these films also allowed him to articulate a sense of alienation and loneliness - feelings he had previously struggled to express. This underscored his own need for a space of articulation. Through media reception, such a translocal space emerged, allowing for aesthetic and emotional experiences as well as epistemic transformations on a multimodal and embodied level - challenging me not only to ask questions, but also to respond.

Making Music together as a Space of Articulation

I would now like to discuss a form of co-creation in which our interaction was not limited to media reception, but extended to media creation-specifically, making music together. For Baltazar left Iran not least because he wanted to create his own spaces of aesthetic and critical articulation, as he told me early on when we first got to know each other. When Baltazar and I met, he told me that he loved to play the electric guitar - an instrument that was considered a "tool of the devil" by the authorities in Iran (Eckerström, 2022; Robertson, 2012, p. 247). As soon as he arrived in Germany, he saved every cent, even skipping meals, to buy a used guitar. He practiced alone and taught himself to play. One day he asked me if I played music. He was looking for someone to discuss his songs with - someone who could give him feedback, play music with him, and help him develop his songs. I told him that I used to be a singer in punk and psychedelic rock bands. When he asked if I wanted to sing his songs, I told him that I couldn't promise anything, but that I would give it a try-provided he was comfortable with me incorporating that experience into my research. He agreed. He referred to this mode of interaction as "sharing," which he preferred over a (in his view) more paternalistic approach of "helping".

4.2.1 A Deep Pain

One of Baltazar's songs was called "A Deep Pain". One day we practiced this song together, trying to develop its melody, rhythm, and sound. We recorded it on his MP3 player and later listened to it again so that I could use the recording for this analysis. The song expressed a haunting experience of difference that had deeply affected Baltazar. The day I accompanied him to his asylum interview, I kept asking him, "Are you okay?" But he didn't know how to answer. He later wrote in a self-reflective text: "How could I explain to Monique this deep and rooted pain of tired people

who don't want to run anymore?" Perhaps his song served as a kind of delayed response. Part of the lyrics were as follows:

A Deep Pain (excerpt)

Verse 1

C7M9 Bm

From my black hair and eastern face

C7M9 Bm

to my mother tongue

C7M9

You judge me

Bm

You despise me

C7M9

by your words

Bm

by your look

C7M9

by your civilized style

Refrain

Em

Look at my shoes

D Bm

They're tired of running and failing

Em

Look into my eyes

D Bm

Can you see the pain?

Verse 2 (with distortion)

C7M9 Bm

[...]

Now I'm right here,

Running after my dreams

But you prefer to forget

All the calamities that came over me

Until you sleep in comfort

Bridge

Em A Bm/A

My land burns in fearsome fire

While you sleep in comfort

Every night I sleep with my nightmare

And you're preparing yourself for the next holiday

The Soundscape as an Unconscious Layer of Meaning

To analyze this song and our music-making process, I listened to our recording again. Beyond the verbal content of the lyrics, there was another level of expression - a level that confronted me with my own unconscious perceptions of "normality".

The day of the rehearsal was a warm summer day. We sat in Baltazar's room with the window wide open. He was quietly plucking the slow, melancholy melody on his guitar. But as I listened to the recording, I was distracted by the background noises on it. Sometimes the sound was overdriven and crackled. On the other hand, I could also hear birds singing in the background and children's voices playing in the street. It was then that I realized the stark contrast between our peaceful surroundings and the suffering, frustration, anger, disappointment, and accusation embedded in the lyrics of the song. The soundscape itself revealed an implicit message. It reminded me of a story Baltazar had told me when he was new in Germany:

B. told me more about H. (the city where his refugee shelter was located). He said that the city was really beautiful, and the nature was fantastic. It was so quiet there that he started to understand more about what was really happening in the world. At first I didn't understand. I asked, 'You mean because there's war in other places, but there's peace?' 'Yes,' he said. This place was so rich, so clean, so quiet. But in other parts of the world - like Syria - people are just trying to survive, hiding so they don't get hit by a bomb. That's all they care about. That's when I really understood," he said. He told me he used to go for walks and read the news on his phone. Everywhere - war and injustice. And there, just silence. (excerpt from the field report)

Iranian musician and music teacher Niknafs (2022) explored the relationship between noise and silence, highlighting the role of noise in comparison to the "clamor" of official Iranian cultural policies. Niknafs explained why it is important to consider music as a form of symbolization in which noise has a place. Noise disrupts the censorship of everything that disturbs a certain kind of order (like the law that prohibits "sordid realism") and that only claims to create peace.

In the case of Iranian rockers, the narrative coherence derived from rock music through sonic and poetic textures and sociocultural sound events becomes an inaudible restorative process that counteracts not only everyday sufferings but, at times, the ostentatious noise of the music education field that leaves little space for noise, distortion, amplified sounds, and overall disagreeable tones that may have the capacity to somatically assuage the noise of trauma within one's body. (Niknafs, 2022, p. 172).

Dealing with (negative) feelings-or emotions in general-plays a central role in listening to music, writing or singing poetic lyrics, and making music against the backdrop of traumatic experiences. The sounds and tones produced between silence and noise, as well as the broader soundscape, offer narrative, affective, and physical ways of articulating experiences of suffering, as Baltazar's reflections and Niknaf's work demonstrate.

Listening to the soundscape of the recording helped shift my "aspect perception" as I realized the role of sound as a marker of inequality, injustice, and structural violence not only in Iran, but also in Germany, as Baltazar had previously mentioned. The quiet and peaceful atmosphere of the recording, the birds singing in the background, became an unsettling element that also pointed to

the unequal distribution of peace in the world as represented by this sound—a peace that seemed readily available and reserved for some, but unattainable for others.

Paying attention to the subtle sounds and soundscapes present in the recording of our rehearsal together revealed a latent level of our interactions. There was a certain discomfort in singing the text, because I also felt addressed by the accusation formulated in it. Wasn't Baltazar also criticizing me for looking the other way, for not wanting to deal with the suffering of others, for wanting to go on vacation? Was it fair to transfer global injustices to the interpersonal level in this way, and to assert such a dichotomous distinction between victims and bystanders? Navigating the tension between the dangers of "tribunalization" (Straub 2014) and recognition through witnessing, an internal conflict of this aesthetic articulation through music unfolds - oscillating between moments of peaceful silence and unsettling noise that subtly permeates the recording.

In the words of George Devereux (2014 [1973]), I seem to have a certain defense against negative feelings, a "researcher's fear of the field" (Lindner, 1981), or a fear of registering the "noise" that resonates on another level in our musical practice. This is not at all unusual, according to Benjamin, because "[e]ach of us has a monstrous side, a side that wants to escape pain and deny it, and a side that identifies with the infliction of pain and with violations of lawfulness" (Benjamin, 2019, p. 59), so "we must rediscover not only the remorse of constantly failing as witnesses, but also the fact that denial is based on an unwillingness to know these horrible things about ourselves, us monstrous humans" (ibid.).

The lyrics convey Baltazar's experience of otherness—both through interpersonal exclusion and nonverbal racism expressed in judgmental gazes. At the same time, the song addresses global inequalities, contrasting the lives of people forced to live through war with those who can live in peace. It criticizes the stigma that comes with being "seen" in a certain way - the gaze that identifies the foreigner as already known (as theorized by Sara Ahmed, 2013). This gaze assigns certain attributes: dark skin, an unfamiliar language, worn-out clothes. The lyrics then urge the listener to look again - to see beyond stereotypes and recognize the subject's exhaustion, pain, and suffering. In doing so, the song itself calls for a shift in "aspect perception"—not just visually, but emotionally. Thus, the song shifts the listener's focus from the gaze to the sound, creating a space where emotions can be appreciated beyond stereotypical perception. The visual regime of judgment is thus confronted by the aural and auditory space of the song.

However, Baltazar is not just a victim seeking compassion. He also accuses those who ignore the unequal distribution of freedom of movement and the consequences of war. Fleeing a war-torn country means entering a new space where one is subjected to the "othering gaze". Meanwhile, others—perhaps even myself?—plan their vacations without ever needing to know about this suffering. In verse two, which is played more noisily, with distortion, the song highlights this epistemic injustice (Medina 2013), which also seems to challenge my own perception of "normality".

The chance of overcoming the dichotomy, which would be reinforced by intellectualization and argumentative defence (Benjamin, 2019, p. 33) would, in her experience, be particularly successful if the focus were not directed towards "group identity narratives" and "the patterns of victimhood, non-recognition and helplessness", but rather "an embodied experience of witnessing, an affective experience of the presence of the other" would be possible, since "felt presence" would offer more space for "being aware of one's own needs and the needs of the other" (ibid., p. 45). In my opinion,

making music offers such a possibility, as it provides an experiential space and allows for a creative exploration of such ambivalent feelings, of suffering, guilt and hope.

Making music thus not only represents a translation from one mode of articulation to another - from an experience of injury that does not lend itself to rational, cognitive explanation - but also enables empathy and understanding through what Niknafs (2022) calls "affective epistemology" or acoustemology, which conceptualizes "sound as a way of knowing" (Feld, 2015, p. 12). Acoustemology asks: "What is knowable, and how does it become known through sound and listening?"(ibid.). Because acoustemology "addresses the relationality of knowledge production, as what John Dewey called contextual and experiential knowing" (ibid.), it focuses not only on the material dimension of sound, but also on its social and relational aspects. Sounds, tones, noises and music are understood as acts of social meaning-making, as modes of action and, above all, as collaborative (co-)productions (ibid., p. 13). This does not only refer to intentionally produced sounds and noises, but also to surrounding noises and the broader sound environment that shape perception, articulation, and interpretation. Lending my voice can be understood in this sense as an invitation to a space of articulation that represents a possibility of embodied and self-reflexive witnessing.

Conclusion - Spaces of articulation

Finally, I would like to summarize the methodological approach in relation to the work of theorizing. On the level of *world-articulation*, epistemic differences have been negotiated and processed. This was achieved through the illustrative integration of films and music into the interaction. The films paint a different picture of the people of Iran than the one often portrayed in the news. We learn about the fates and efforts of individuals to shape their lives, including through artistic means, and to create spaces where uncensored expression is possible. Art becomes a meaningful form of expression, a space of articulation that makes it possible to counter hegemonic narratives or perceptions in Iranian or German society.

On the level of *self-articulation*, the connection to Baltazar's own history and experiences becomes clear not only through the background of his narrative, but also in the expression of his feelings. While watching the film, they are articulated performatively and enactively in a sensual-symbolic form of interaction and challenge me to respond. The same is true of making music, where Baltazar calls for a change of "aspect perception", which describes a movement from a stigmatizing gaze to sound. Articulation is made possible here by expanding the methodological field of inquiry, allowing the expression of emotions, conflicts, differences, and injuries on an expressive continuum.

At the level of *relational* or *pathic articulation*, I am confronted with my own latent resistance to the self-reflection that Baltazar invites. The space of articulation thus becomes a confrontational space for my own defense mechanisms: Can I anticipate his accusation and become a witness to personal suffering, global inequality and power asymmetries that transcend our individual encounter but are played out on an interpersonal level? The mode of music making and the analysis of performative actions allow me to explore the deep layers of our encounters. With my voice, I myself become a medium for processing experiences of difference, albeit in a presentational (rather than discursive) form of articulation that avoids hasty definitions and is open to improvisation and embodied exploration. Witnessing in this sense becomes possible in the mode of a sensual-symbolic "felt presence" (Benjamin, 2019, p. 45).

The method of aspect perception, supported by scenic understanding and the inclusion of comparative horizons, helps to bring latent levels of interaction situations into view and to ask for their meaning. Aspect seeing is both a moment of enabling mutual understanding and a moment of scientific analysis, as it occurs involuntarily but can also be made possible by methodical steps. The presentation of the results in interaction stories, which consist of a series of analyzed interaction scenes in which the articulation of experiences of suffering plays a role in different modes of interaction, shows the interconnectedness and "intertextuality" of the scenes and spaces of articulation with social power relations and relationships across spatial boundaries.

What does this insight to my fieldwork tell us all about spaces of articulation or even a theory of articulation? The concept of spaces of articulation can serve as a theoretical and methodological framework within qualitative research, particularly when investigating the articulation of painful experiences of suffering, oppression, 'othering', and violence. Such spaces ideally function as arenas of meaning-making, negotiation, transformation and recognition, allowing individuals to articulate their experiences along various interrelated dimensions. In particular, the process of meaning-making unfolds across the dimensions of *self-articulation*, *world-articulation*, and *relational* or *pathic articulation*.

Spaces of articulation are first and foremost inherently methodological spaces - sites of research and experience where scholars encounter individuals in the field. Unlike purely analytical or observational research settings, spaces of articulation as spaces of self-reflection necessitate a full person engagement from researchers, requiring them to reflect on their subjective entanglements. As Jessica Benjamin (2019) emphasizes, it is essential to recognize participants as individual subjects with their own desires and needs, rather than merely as objects of one's desires, and to acknowledge interdependencies. It is therefore crucial not to negate tensions, differences, conflicts and irritations among participants, but to acknowledge their reflection as a vital force that can catalyze a shift in aspect perception and understanding.

In qualitative research, particularly in ethnographic and participatory methodologies, these spaces enable interaction beyond detached observation, fostering an interplay and articulatory co-production between researchers and participants. Spaces of articulation as spaces of encounter and pathic articulation allow individuals to shape and redefine the space itself, rather than merely being positioned as subjects of inquiry. This dynamic challenges hierarchical research structures by emphasizing mutual engagement rather than extractive knowledge production.

Michel de Certeau's distinction between place (*lieu*) and space (*espace*) provides a useful framework for understanding spaces of articulation as socially produced and processual. According to de Certeau, a place is defined by its fixed, structured, and institutionalized order, in which meanings and functions are predetermined. In contrast, a space emerges through practices, movements, and interactions-it is fluid, contingent, and shaped by the ways in which people navigate and inhabit it (De Certeau 1988, p. 117). Spaces of articulation in this sense are not static locations, but are actively created through acts of meaning-making and collective practice.

Articulation in this sense is not merely linguistic, but multimodal and multimedial, and can be understood as situated on an expressive continuum. It encompasses discursive, presentative or sensory-symbolic, and performative modes of expression, ranging from verbal narration to bodily gestures, artistic practices, and other symbolic forms of communication. Recognizing the intersubjective and ethical dimensions of articulation thus means ensuring access to diverse forms of expression and fostering an openness to alternative modes of articulating experience.

At the same time, spaces of articulation are situated within broader relations of power. They are not divorced from the historical and political conditions that shape the possibilities and limits of articulation. Articulation is in tension with disarticulation on the other side. While articulation involves recognition, visibility, and meaning-making, disarticulation refers to processes of silencing, invisibilization, and delegitimization. Individuals attempt to articulate experiences of trauma, loss, and marginalization and seek recognition and meaning-making within social relations. This underscores the epistemological importance of spaces that can facilitate witnessing and testimony. Here, an ethical stake of articulation emerges - ensuring that expressions, and narratives are recognized rather than dismissed. To this end, as Maya Nadig (2006, p. 74) emphasizes, the articulated experiences of suffering must be contextualized, because understanding and recognition on an intersubjective level is only possible in the context of an examination of historical or collective "relations of harm and vulnerability" (Straub, 2014, 2015). This also serves to challenge hegemonic narratives and counter the "danger of a single story" (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie).

Articulatory spaces are also transformative spaces. While spaces of articulation are conditioned by existing interactional and institutional asymmetries, they are also arenas of negotiation where these very asymmetries can be addressed, discussed, named, and contested (cf. Zittoun, 2015). They resist the predefined structures of places by allowing for improvisation and experimentation, and thereby they possibly support a reconfiguration of meaning. Such spaces emerge wherever individuals (and communities) engage in the creative use of dialogical, media-based and artistic forms of expression to challenge dominant narratives or articulate alternative perspectives. In doing so, they become politicized spaces as they open up possibilities for reflecting on and reimagining social relations, recognition, epistemic agency, and justice. In this sense, articulation is not simply determined by power structures.

Finally, what psychoanalytic theories such as those of Alfred Lorenzer (1988) or Maya Nadig (1986, 2006) contribute to a theory of articulation is the recognition that articulation is not always explicit or transparent - it often involves latent or unconscious aspects of experience, requiring methodological approaches to bring out hidden dimensions of culturally formed, denotative meaning or individual, connotative sense (cf. Boesch, 1983, pp. 46). Borrowing from Winnicott, potential spaces allow for the exploration of the unspoken and unconscious. In this way, they are not merely theoretical constructs but hypothetical spaces of saying and showing in social situations (Kuhn, 2013, pp. 4). Unlike idealized speech situations that focus solely on rational argumentation, such spaces acknowledge the embodied and affective dimensions of intersubjective articulation and the others' co-constructive role.

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About the author

Monique Kaulertz studied social psychology, social anthropology, philosophy and peace and conflict studies in Bochum and Utrecht. Her research and teaching interests include the articulation of experiences of violence and suffering, articulation theory, cultural psychology, narrative psychology, and critical migration and refugee studies. Monique Kaulertz is currently completing her Ph.D. at the Department of Social Theory and Social Psychology at the Ruhr University Bochum on the topic of 'Articulation of Suffering and Experiences of Violence in Encounters with Refugees'. She is a research assistant at the EVH RWL Bochum and holds a scholarship from the Hans Kilian and Lotte Köhler Center (KKC).

Contact: monique.kaulertz@rub.de

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4549-1379>