

# Linguistic citizenship: language and politics in postnational modernities

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## **Linguistic citizenship**

Language and politics in postnational modernities

A major challenge facing South Africa is that of reconstructing a meaningful and inclusive notion of citizenship in the aftermath of its apartheid past and in the face of narratives of divisiveness that reach back from this past and continue to reverberate in the present. Many of the problems confronting South African social transformation are similar to the rest of the postcolonial world that continues to wrestle with the inherited colonial divide between citizen and subject. In this paper, we explore how engagement with diversity and marginalization is taking place across a range of non-institutional and informal political arenas. Here, we elaborate on an approach towards the linguistic practices of the political everyday in terms of a notion of *linguistic citizenship* and by way of conclusion argue that the contradictions and turmoils of contemporary South Africa require further serious deliberation around alternative notions of citizenship and their semiotics.

**Keywords:** linguistic citizenship, language politics, performance, stand-up comedy, indexicality, chronotope

## **1. Introduction**

A major challenge facing South Africa is that of reconstructing a meaningful and inclusive notion of citizenship in the aftermath of its apartheid past and in the face of narratives of divisiveness that reach back from this past and continue to reverberate in the present – also threatening to dictate the future. Many of the problems confronting South African social transformation are similar to the rest of the postcolonial world that continues to wrestle with the inherited colonial divide between citizen and subject that came packaged with Western and nation-state models of governance (Mamdani 1996, Marais 2011, Terreblanche 2012). In many countries, this is reproduced in authoritarian and centralized forms of decision making that remain deaf to the voices of those most marginalized, giving rise to passive forms of citizenship reinforced by the workings of NGOs and other semi-state organizations, with their armies of technocrats and elites. These often serve more as an extended arm of the State than an organization of interest for the under-privileged. Under these dysfunctional notions of politics, understandings of citizenship are restricted to national, public arenas only, confounding the importance of the personal and everyday. And ignoring or only partially accommodating or coping with diversity and marginalization, including increasingly today, the ramifications of translocal mobilities and shifting patterns of residence in an ever superdiverse and polycentric world (Blommaert and Rampton 2011).

In fact today, engagement with diversity and marginalization is taking place across a range of non-institutional and informal political arenas. Much of what people find themselves caught up with on an everyday basis involves getting on with the

neighbors, handling diversity or difference, and finding a good fit for themselves in what is happening around them - a subtle exercise of the *politics* of the ordinary, in other words. In this context, the South African commentator Eusebius McKaiser tells the story of Sally, a middle-aged white woman who advertised for a flat mate, declaring, when Eusebius phoned to express interest, that she would only share her private accommodation with somebody of the same pigment. McKaiser advances that even though Sally has the *right* to choose whom she wishes to live with in her private space, the particular choice she makes here is not a *moral* choice as it is based on a long history of discriminatory categorization of people on the basis of race. The more interesting point he raises in his entertaining reflection is to what extent the *public* politics of race will ever usher in non-racial society if the *private* lives of citizens remain premised on racial hierarchy and the hegemony of pigment. Here, McKaiser clearly points to the importance of marginal, non-official ‘political’ contexts as crucial to societies in transformation. In fact, a strong case could be made that that the seed and momentum of social change are to be found in the non-institutional spheres of citizen activity. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, 105), with reference to Bourdieu, state “sites of struggle of competing and contradictory representations [with] a potential to change dominant classifications” (cf. Bourdieu 1998), and Besnier (2009) alerts us to how “politics ‘happens’ where one may be led to least expect it – in the nooks and crannies of everyday life, outside of institutionalized contexts” (2009, 11). Because interactions among marginalized, mobile and diverse, often (translocally) relocated, people take place in the context of the local, bars, streets, and other places of everyday encounter, the politics of the ordinary is increasingly a site

where diversity and marginalization are constructed and deconstructed, negotiated and challenged.

The problematics of nation-state models of citizenship in postnational/postcolonial contexts, together with the increasing importance of the politics of the ordinary and everyday, invite reconsideration of what it means to be a citizen. Isin notes how in today's world

new actors articulate claims for justice through new sites that involve multiple and overlapping scales of rights and obligations (...). The manifold acts through which new actors as claimants emerge in new sites and scales are becoming the new objects of investigation. This changes our conception of the political as well as of citizenship. (Isin 2009, 370).

Isin (2009; see also Isin and Nielsen, 2008) argues that “our dominant figure of citizenship has changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (2009, 368) and that we need a “new vocabulary of citizenship” (2009, 368). He notes how the “fields of contestation around which certain issues, stakes, interests etc. assemble” (e.g. sites, such as gender, sexuality, and language), and the “scopes of applicability (so-called ‘scales’) that are appropriate to these fields” (going beyond conventional scopes such as state, nation, to include also sub and supranational groupings) are fluid and dynamic, and are formed through contest and struggle. He introduces the notion of ‘acts of citizenship’ to refer to those “deeds by which actors constitute themselves (and others) as subjects of rights” (2009, 371), or alternatively, as those with “the right to claim rights”. Today, the actors of citizenship are

not necessarily those who hold the status of citizen (as in Isin's conception citizenship is not a status, but an act) and therefore an "instituted subject position". He argues that "the manifold acts through which new actors as (rights) claimants emerge in new sites and scales" forces us "to theorize citizenship as an institution in flux embedded in current social and political struggles that constitute it" (Isin 2009, 368).

In this paper, we elaborate on an approach towards the linguistic practices of the political everyday in terms of a notion of *linguistic citizenship* (Stroud 2001, 2009, Stroud and Heugh 2004). The notion of linguistic citizenship builds on the idea that "language falls firmly within citizenship discourses, and that it is the very medium whereby citizenship is enacted and performed" (2009, 217). Its rationale is the very real awareness that state sanctioned and institutionalized forms for what is considered to be legitimate political discourse may exclude the feelings and complaints of disenfranchised groups and may constrain alternative rhetorical means through which a group may habitually choose to express its voice (Stroud 2009, 208). Just as "social realities...are mediated through more diverse and complex configurations of citizenship" (Stroud 2009, 217) outside of the conventional understandings of citizenship (Isin 2009), so do we find that the expression of such acts are articulated in unconventional, non-institutionalized, uses of language and other semiotic practices. Central to linguistic citizenship is an understanding of the variety of semiotic means through which speakers express agency, voice and participation in an everyday politics of language, and how non-mainstream speakers wrestle control from political institutions of the state by using their language over many modalities and giving new meaning and repurposing to reflect the social and political issues that affect them. Approaching linguistic practices from the vantage point

of linguistic citizenship entails rethinking the relationships of power underlying particular practices and understandings of language(s), such as who may decide what a language is, which speakers are legitimate, etc., and understanding the manifold contexts in which languages do political work. In this sense, linguistic citizenship reframes “semiotic practices of citizenship away from a totalizing sense of language...” and therefore is better “attuned to the implications of multitude of identities, subject positions, and positions of interest” (Stroud 2009, 213). Thus, as a theory of the particular, local and the transgressive (or counter-discursive) in how language is used on a daily basis in political ways, it dovetails well with Isin’s notion of ‘acts of citizenship’, with its emphasis on transgression and the exercise of politics ‘on the margins’.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, we explore in more detail language practices in the everydayness of politics by exploring the semiotics of *performance* as a genre of the political, or a *scale*, in Isin’s terminology. Speaking of the African context generally, Dolby (2006) argues that “people’s everyday engagements with popular culture [...] must be a central component of understanding emergent public spaces and citizenship practices in Africa, present and future” (2006, 34), as it is a site of struggle, a place for the negotiation of race, gender, nation and other identities and for the play of power” (Dolby 2006, 33). We use an analysis of performance as one emergent ‘site’ in an interdiscursive unfolding of how certain topics gain significance and meaning as ‘political’, that is, how they are entextualized, delivered, taken up, deliberated and acted upon – or discarded. We pay special attention to the specific linguistic features through which this is accomplished, and comment on this in terms of how it contributes to an understanding of language in non-institutionalized political uses. The question that is in particular focus for this

discussion is how historical relationships established between different groups during the South African period of apartheid are reproduced as interpretative frameworks in contemporary relationships. We note in this context how everyday (linguistic) practices of citizenship (re)enact the ‘past’ so that it is continually circulated and reinvigorated as a political priority in contemporary South African political debates. We introduce a powerful tool to capture this, namely the Bakhtinian notion of chronotope, which is essentially a way of semiotically packaging linkages between particular places and particular times, on the one hand, with specific types of personae, on the other. We conclude the paper with an explorative discussion of some implications that a notion of linguistic citizenship might carry for the field of critical discourse studies.

## **2. Performing acts of citizenship**

So, where do linguistic acts of citizenship reside on an everyday basis? How is politics animated and citizenship mediated in concrete moments of articulation? Public *performances* share a number of features that make them key sites for studying the everyday practices of citizenship. First of all, one essential part of political discourse is ‘having an opinion’ on issues, aligning oneself with others on debatable and contentious substance, taking a stance and finding a defensible footing, and inserting oneself into the ‘life narrative’ that offers the best fit under the circumstances. Performances such as stand-up comedy rely on capturing personae and style, and creating identifications and alignments with voices (Agha 2007). This offers audience members opportunities to identify with particular identities that they recognize in talk as “...personalised and



individual appropriations of [more general] discourses” (Pietikäinen and Dufva 2006, 220). This in turn allows the ‘interlocutor’ to bring “stylistic projections [...] into complex relationships with social reality” (Coupland 2011a, 154), a key aspect of any political event.

Secondly, performance lays bare ways in which the non-institutionalized politics of the everyday is fundamentally an interdiscursive, emergent and unfolding accomplishment, rather than a bounded event. Echoing Bakhtin, Besnier (2009, 167) notes that

utterances and genres always operate in the context of other utterances and genres: public and private talk, official decrees and talk about them, mediated discourse and everyday discourse, political and off-the-record statements always address one another, leak onto one another, support or contradict each other, and collude with each other or resist each other’s power

This requires that the analyst attend to how voices unfold in time across local moments, how these events become (re)semiotized, and narrated in a chain of mediated semiotic moments across different types of publics. Bakhtin’s notion of chronotope provides a handy tool for such a purpose.

According to Bakhtin, the chronotope denotes the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” (1981, 84) that is, the spatio-temporal properties of the dialogic landscape of texts, practices and social life. Holquist points out that “...chronotopes provide the clock and the map we employ to orient our identity in the

flux of existence” (2009, 10). It is at once “an anaphoric designation” (Holquist 2010, 19) that indexes time-spaces and a vector for the analysis of different types of performances, practices and praxis. It provides us with the coordinates to map out how spatio-temporality congeal in a genre (the rules and principles of which are responsible for the unification of a chronotope) where, “time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible”, and on the other hand, “space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (Bakhtin 1984, 84). Performances are thus the perfect instrument for capturing the interdiscursivity of a political issue, as these typically build into their delivery an engagement with various salient happenings and/or the reportings of such happenings in other genres, recontextualizing this material through various metapragmatic framings for delivery to an audience. Performance builds on recontextualization which provides the metapragmatic framing for the semiotic unfolding of political moments by providing the interactional coherence for an event (Silverstein 1993, 36-37).

An important aspect of the performance in focus in this paper is the carnivalesque chronotope where laughter and heteroglossic double-voicedness, key ingredients of popular cultural performances such as stand-up comedy, are central features. The carnivalesque refers to carnival in the narrow sense but also in the wider sense to ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions and various genres of billingsgate (Bakhtin 1984, 5). In the dialogic reconstruction of Rabelais’ world, Bakhtin suggests that the carnivalesque offers an alternative representation of an otherwise medieval social structure of class dominance and feudalism. Those who were dominated found an outlet in carnivals but felt the milieu of carnivalesque particularly satisfying and a form of

release, because of the humour and comedic performances that elicited laughter. Bakhtin argues that

Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. (Bakhtin 1981, 23)

A related point here, of course, is that performances do not only *mimic* the political processes of the everyday, but comprise salient moments in themselves, as political issues unfold, unravel and develop across different genres, media and publics. Lofland (1998) distinguishes between different ‘zones of encounter (Wood and Landry 2007), “social territories defined by specific relational forms”. Firstly, there is the private sphere which is framed by special relationships with kith and kin, and consort. Secondly, the parochial sphere is a composite of relations that include collaborator as part of associational networks, clubs, and other organizations. Finally, there is the public sphere which is the public domains of the street that is framed by a relative degree of formality and estrangement. The boundaries between these spheres are unstable, especially the parochial sphere, and as such they overlap each other in significant ways. Importantly, performances are key sites for local enactments and depictions of ‘citizenship’ in that they involve ‘audiences’ and thus serve to bridge the private and parochial to the ‘public’ (cf. Wessendorf 2010). Often by the time an issue reaches the agenda of ‘public’ political

arenas, it has been discussed, narrated, expounded upon, etc across a variety of genres, contexts and forms, and arrives well packaged in a set of established chronotopes and indexicals. From the lofty heights of formal politics, it will descend once again into the everyday swirls of ‘political trivia’. It is the intrinsic dialogism of language, the double-voicedness of linguistic performances, which underlies these resemiotizations. As Bakhtin puts it:

internal dialogization can become such a crucial force for creating form only where individual differences and contradictions are enriched by social heteroglossia...where the dialogue of voices arises directly out of a social dialogue of “languages” (1981, 284–285).

This point also speaks to the fact that performances in many respects are potent instruments of everyday politics. First of all, the ostensibly trivial nature of much performance conceals the powerful consequences it may subsequently have when recycled across other, more public and institutionalized, political arenas. Although performance has a license to ridicule, parody and expose without fear of State retribution or revenge, when inserted into on-going political discourses, the content and message of a performance may generate much emotion, anger and contention. And secondly, the close correlation between performance and emotion, where good performances engage emotions of fear, fury, laughter and sadness generates the building blocks of engaged political stance. (cf. Besnier 2009 for a good discussion of similar points with respect to gossip).

### 3. The skit

The performance we discuss here is a stand-up comic performance by Nik Rabinowitz at Mzoli's Meat<sup>2</sup>. Mzoli's Meat, a Tshisa-Nyama or braid meat establishment in the Western Cape township of Gugulethu is an interesting site of politics of the everyday, as it attracts a range of people, racially, socioeconomically, and transnationally into the same space simultaneously – a spectrum of the South African and foreign presence, and thereby a factor of translocal politics. Moreover, it is a popular township restaurant and hub for township tourism.

Nik opens his skit with a clear metapragmatic orienting framework (Bauman 2011, 711), providing clear markers of when he is about to perform a voice by first turning to the audience and providing a meta-reflection or musing on the state of affairs in the news

**Nik:**

- 1 You know
- 2 often when you turn the TV
- 3 on there's like apartheid
- 4 You turn the TV on at 7 o'clock
- 5 you see white people reading the English/Afrikaans news mostly
- 6 You see black South Africans reading the Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho news
- 7 And then you get a stereotype at the end
- 8 you get coloureds on E

- 9 And I thought to myself
- 10 where are the minorities represented
- 11 where are they
- 12 where are the Jews
- 13 the Muslims
- 14 the Indians
- 15 the poor whites
- 16 I wanna see those people on the news
- 17 I do
- 18 I wanna see
- 19 you know what I wanna see
- 20 maybe the anchor's a black South African Xhosa person
- 21 He comes on and says

In the first 20 lines, Nik's point of departure is a critique of monoglossic or monolingual public displays of language in the news forum that partly reinforce the hegemony of standard English/Afrikaans/isiXhosa as media languages of choice. His point of departure is that the official recognition of the 11 official languages of South Africa and the public distribution of their varieties in appropriately exclusive spaces and channels, excludes those identities and voices not indexed or recognized as essential and authentic identities in any of these varieties, namely Jews, Muslims and 'poor' Whites.

In what follows, Nik proceeds to remedy this state of affairs by making visible a variety of marginalized voices. First, he uses subtle linguistic cues to cleverly index a

variety of voices on the margins. Secondly, the audibility and transgressive nature of these diverse and marginal voices is powerfully highlighted in the way Nik collapses and mixes features of the news genre with that of personal genres (of musing or private complaint). This not only offsets and gives ‘relief’ to the voices, making them stand out clearly, but also carries a critique of how the ‘officialization’ of language varieties (here manifested through the ‘constraints of the new genre’) necessarily involves a curbing and non-recognition of other forms of diversity.

A chronotopical analysis provides a useful way of capturing how this skit unfolds with respect to different personae at different spatio-temporal scales. In the analysis below, we will demonstrate how aspects of personhood, subjectivity and depictions of social relations are relative to the spatial-temporal narrative envelope, offering insights into how depictions of political issues or personae vary across time and space (Agha 2007). Importantly, the interpersonal experience of a chronotope and the way in which the personae in time-space are construed derive from the participation frameworks within which they are experienced. Agha tells us that “encounters with chronotopes are encounters with characterological figures (voices) embedded within spatio-temporalized locales within which speech participants establish forms of alignments” (Agha 2007, 331). This means that the social relations, models of subjectivity, and interpersonal relationships established and mediated through the participation framework are crucial to understanding how the characterological voice (persona) is construed and circulated (Agha 2007). Nik proceeds to enregister a variety of (marginal) voices one by one.

The first accent the comedian stylizes is that of a Xhosa speaker. Nik shapes his verbal rendering of a black news anchor around the recent xenophobic attacks that rocked

South African society in 2008, thus locating her in a story to a particular time and place, the township, anno 2008. The whiplash of xenophobia against immigrants from other African countries, such as Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia and Zimbabwe was fueled by the disappointment felt among South Africans with social and economic reform. Since that first outburst, townships across the country continue to be racked by xenophobic violence, brought to life in the distressing footage of the burning Mozambican, Ernesto M cabled across the worlds' news desks.

**Xhosa Voice:**

- 22 Ok
- 23 in the news
- 24 Manene nani manenekazi  
(Gentlemen as well as ladies) (Stylizes voice)
- 25 today we condemn strongly
- 26 these attacks of xenophobia [//enophobia]
- 27 You know it may be a Xhosa word
- 28 but we didn't start this ok
- 29 Ok
- 30 over to Naeema on the weather

The sequence makes explicit reference to how being black and speaking isiXhosa has become indexically fixed in many people's mind to the discourse of xenophobia and



xenophobic violence. The comedian, however, critically engages that perception in his next few lines. Firstly, he crosses into a black voice and exaggerates his delivery of ‘sounding black’ by producing a highly emphatic rendering of the word ‘xenophobia’ with an isiXhosa click (as //enophobia), much to the merriment of the audience who, appreciating that this was something “out of place” (Goldstein 2003, 45), burst into a hearty laughter at this point. Nik then picks upon the metalinguistic attention he has generated around this single feature to vehemently deny any Xhosa involvement in the attacks. He makes reference to a salient phonological feature of isiXhosa, namely the lateral ‘click’ spelled orthographically as ‘x’, and goes on to claim that even though the word ‘xenophobia’ was originally isiXhosa (as evident from the initial ‘click’ in its spelling), this does not mean that the Xhosa people invented violence against foreigners. Here, Nik highlights a popular folk linguistic conception that if you have an indigenous word in a language, the referent must also be indigenous. Nik’s skit here is thus a critical comment on emergent social discourses that sees xenophobia as located in the black South African population. He cleverly plays on speakers’ metalinguistic sensibilities about isiXhosa, although the perception of the click as indexical of Xhosa is a non-isiXhosa speaking perception.

As the performance develops, the black voice gives over to the weather desk where Naeema reads out weather predictions. In an exaggeration of shrillness stereotypically seen as characteristic of Muslim or coloured<sup>3</sup> voices and in an ‘intertextual offset’ to the deeper timbre of the preceding isiXhosa voice, the comedian stylizes the accent of Naeema, mimicking speakers from the Bo-Kaap area, which is one of the historical urban icons of the of Muslim community in Cape Town.

In this segment, the chronotopic framing is a version of an ‘on-the-road-chronotope’ where the persona of the weatherman typically crosses geographical space. This contextualization therefore allows Nik to engage Naeema with her local personal networks as she reports on the weather of each location, again, as with the isiXhosa speaker, conflating two very different genres in the performance. By positioning Naeema as the weather reader, Nik constructs the rhetorical/chronotopic space that allows him to overuse salutations, apologies and other linguistic elements of introduction, encounter and departure typical to South African Arabic, which violates the genre norms of the news, a genre that is strictly monitored and that does not generally allow for slippage between public official and personalized greetings. The comedian’s voicing of a stereotypical Bo-Kaap Muslim persona is accomplished through English, Afrikaans and Arabic lexical items that are entextualized to reflect a typical heteroglossic speech situation that would be associated with a Muslim of Naeema’s character (cf. Silverstein, 1998: 203) belonging to extended and tight-knit Muslim networks.

**Muslim Voice:**

- 31 Salaam malaikom
- 32 ok
- 33 ne
- 34 before I start the weather ne
- 35 I just wana say
- 36 shukra to Abduhl and Fatima

37 for dat very lovely kaart  
38 dat you sent to us  
39 Ok  
40 in da weather  
41 The weather's going to be very nice  
42 over the Western Cape  
43 over the next couple of days inshala  
44 Uh  
45 let me just say Tamaf  
46 sorry to our brothers and sisters in Durban  
47 It's gonna be a very humid  
48 and kak weather over there  
49 But slamat to the South Coast  
50 very hot conditions  
51 may there continue to be no rain  
52 to speak of Algamdulilah

In line 34 the comedian stylizes Naeema's accent in Kaaps (a historically marginalized of Afrikaans) using highly salient feedback forms such as "ne" (or "nuh"), common in the speech of black, white and coloured speakers. Some of the Arabic words Nik uses form part of a religious register that, in the South African context, is usually learnt only in conjunction with Arabic literacy practices, acquired in the Madrassa (Islamic School), where Arabic is taught through rote learning for linguistic and religious socialization of

young Muslims. The forms are again highly salient markers perceived by both Muslims and non-Muslims as emblematic forms, indexical of Cape Town Muslims with little proficiency in Arabic. For instance, the use of “shukran” (meaning: thanks) in line 36 is an honorific reference “to Abduhl and Fatima” to give praise for the “very lovely kaa’t” (line 37) (very lovely card) they sent to her (“sent to us”, line 38). This is also the case for ‘inshala’ in “The weather’s going to be very nice/over the Western Cape/over the next couple of days inshala/” (see lines 41 to 43); and items such as “Tamaf” (line 45); “slamat” (line 49) and “Alhamdulillah” (line 52). The words that we find in the performance of the comedian and that of our parodied persona, Muslim Naeema, is typified as specific to the Western Cape and uniquely distinct from the Durban region. We find a greeting in Arabic qualified for instance by two Muslim names. Even the salutation is in Arabic. All this testifies to the extent to which these forms index the Muslim stereotype, and the frequent greetings and sayings in many of the Arabic utterances illustrate the ‘overshooting’ (Gibson and Bell 2011) of a Muslim accent as a metapragmatic orientating framework (Bauman 2011, 711).

Just as Nik’s choice of rhetorical space for Naeema, the weather desk, permitted the metapragmatic strategy of emblematic salutations, so does the choice of sport desks allow Nik to stylize Sharon as a ‘classical’ white South African Jew. Nik’s choice of stylizing a Jewish voice here plays on the stereotype that Jewish people do not play sports. Nevertheless, sports reporting are typically a factual account of scores and highlights in sports events. Sports are also characterized by toughness and fighting spirit and one of the popular South African sports, rugby, clearly has its fair share of violence. Sports in South Africa are also school and family affairs, where parents engage and invest in their

children's sporting proficiencies. The segment contains all of these features of 'sports chronotope' with Sharon opening by thanking Naeema (in Arabic), as a way of reestablishing the 'news genre':

**Jewish Voice:**

57 Ashukran Naeema  
58 So in sports news  
59 I first wana say  
60 Mazel Tov to the McCarby  
61 you know  
62 the Jewish men's kick boxing team  
63 They defeated the Papa New Guinea u/14 the weekend  
64 Also in rugby news  
65 the Springboks beat Australia by 2 points in Perth  
66 Lovely place  
67 Perth  
68 wonderful  
69 very safe  
70 very nice schools  
71 very nice neighbourhood  
72 you should go have a look  
73 you should

74 But I couldn't watch half the game  
75 I mean  
76 Oi Vey [expressing shock and frustration]  
77 the injuries  
78 I couldn't  
79 I couldn't  
80 I couldn't watch  
81 No  
82 there's no way  
83 my grandson Uriel is playing that game  
84 no  
85 over my dead body  
86 while there's still a hole in my arse  
87 its not happening

Here, Nik indexically references Jewish identity in the use of words such as “Mazel Tov” (see line 60), “Oi Vey” (line 76), and the name “Uriel” (which is a typically Jewish name) (see line 83), executing it all in a high nasal pitched voice. Sharon’s commentary on the sports events of the weekend is a hyperbolic account of the, somewhat doubtful, successes of the Jewish men’s kickboxing team’s (line 62) win over an outlandish and highly ridiculously underage Papua New Guinean team. The rendition brings out laughter in the audience as listeners recognize Nik’s performance of a stereotype where Jewish

people are depicted as prone to loud exaggeration and shrill hyperbole in stories about their personal exploits.

One notable feature of line 65 to 68 is how Nik once again uses geographical location as a springboard for a typical rhetorical stereotype of a Jewish speaker. Introducing by way of subsidiary comment that the Springboks team beat Australia in Perth, the sports commentator goes on to reflect on the qualities of Perth, lines 66 to 73; she notes the many advantages of Perth; it's a lovely place, it's safe, has nice schools and good neighborhoods. Notable here is that Perth in Western Australia is quite likely the largest or the most popular destination for so-called White-flight outside of London, but also, a base in the 1980s for a notorious group of South African Nazis. Typically, Sharon describes Perth in terms of the very qualities that many South African cities are thought to lack, namely safety and schooling.

Furthermore, when the Jewish voice moves over to news of the Springboks defeat of Australia, another stereotypical feature of Jewish speech is entextualized: talkativeness or voluble soliloquies characterized by a ready flow of speech. From lines 68 to 73, we see the Jewish voice erupting into short fragments of gabbiness followed by the odd deictic (line 76) that amplifies even more volubleness. A key feature here is the repetitive personalizations (lines 72 to 73; lines 78 to 80). This is then followed by an emotional evaluation and hyperbolic commentary in the sports commentator's personal asides and expressions of aversion to rough sports (lines 83 to 85). Thus, compared to the Muslim voice, we find that the stereotypical aspects of the Jewish personae, voluble soliloquies and aversion to contact sports enforced by the phrases – “While there's still a hole in my

arse/It's not happening" (lines 86 to 87), convey fastidiousness, wanting to be elsewhere, etc. and not finding company in the local.

Once again, stylization of language varieties and accents create voice by tapping into intertextual connections (Coupland 2011b). In this case, the many narratives are structured around the core of a utopian chronotope that introduces a far-away place, structuring the indexicalization of a white flight candidate, at the same time as it also elicits thoughts of postapartheid disappointment, traditional relationships of diaspora to Australia, the connections of the countries through sport, and the construction of Australia as a country of choice for South Africans to migrate to.

Aside from religious diversity, manifested here in how Nik stereotypically positions Muslims and Jews, the most obvious parameters of difference in South African society revolve around deep and resilient *socioeconomic* divisions. In recent years, the (re)emergence of a poor white community living side by side with their black or coloured brothers and sisters in townships and shanty towns has received high profile coverage in national media, with, among other things, a well-publicized visit to such a community by President Zuma himself. Many of the poor whites are traditionally speakers of Afrikaans. Another crucial dimension of this development, is that it has taken place against the backdrop of attempts by the South African government to fast track the economic upliftment of disadvantaged Blacks, and to correct the historical imbalance of wealth between the black and white population generally, with programs such as black Economic Empowerment (BEE). The debates and attitudes that accompany this state of affairs are cleverly captured in the next voice that Nik performs, namely that of a white Afrikaner aptly named Frikkie on the business desk. The comedian's choice of the



business news desk is perfectly suited to Frikke's complaint. Business news items are all about scales and percentages, rises and falls, and optimism and pessimism about futures, life quality and the like.

**White Afrikaner Voice:**

- 90 Frikkie be like
- 91 Fings are looking bleak
- 92 Petrol went up
- 93 the rand went down
- 94 surprise surprise
- 95 And another moerse big BEEEEEE deal
- 96 where alota rich black guys
- 97 give alota money to alota other rich black guys

Once again, Nik transgresses against genre conventions by letting 'diversity' speak, simultaneously holding up difference while providing a critique of contemporary political affairs and race relations. Entextualizing, in a heavy Afrikaner accented English, the sentiments of discourses of desperation, fear and denialism (McKaiser 2012) thought to be felt by the Afrikaner community, the comedian paints a picture of a poor white in the choice of the name Frikkie, indexical of a lower socioeconomic background. Frikkie is on the business news desk, reading a story that smacks of political irony, saying: "Fings are looking bleak/Petrol went up/the rand went down/surprise, surprise/And another moerse

big BEEEEEE deal/” (see lines 91 to 95). The exaggerated pronunciation of the economic acronym BEE, (Black Economic Empowerment), metapragmatically indicates to the audience members the difficulty some South Africans (mainly white and middle class) have with this program – the elongated enunciation on BEE rather than, what one would have expected, on the adverb ‘moerse’ (massive) underscores the racial nature of the complaint, as does the sarcastically driven ‘surprise, surprise’ (which, of course, Frikkie assumes nobody should be).

In a similar way to the performance of the other accents, the comedian uses lexical and phonological markers widely associated with Afrikaans influenced English to index identities easily recognized by the audience. The exaggerated pronunciation of the noun “Fings”, missing the interdental fricative, for instance, is a recognizable and stereotypical linguistic icon of the Afrikaner English accent, and Afrikanerdom, and many in the audience laughed at this. Frikkie is characterologically set up by the comedian to mediate a representation of an actual social actor in the public sphere. The fact that it is an Afrikaner’s voice at the business desk reinforces prevailing stereotypes of white Afrikaners (and other white English speakers) possessing the country’s wealth and their fear of losing that wealth to another massive Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment deal.

Nik steps outside the news genre momentarily to turn to the audience with a meta-reflection on how the news should end, arguing

98     You can’t leave it that

99     hey

100 you couldn't end the news  
101 on that note  
102 They always have to have that bit  
103 on the end of the news  
104 have you noticed that  
105 Just to leave us feeling  
106 that there's some hope  
107 but I don't know about that segment  
108 they always do stupid things  
109 like they have the Chelsea flower show in London  
110 to make us feel better  
111 I mean who cares about  
112 I wanna see something different  
113 I wanna see a guy  
114 like a real guy  
115 from somewhere here  
116 like on the Cape Flats  
117 or something, saying to the viewers

The final voice the comedian stylizes above is that of a coloured Kaaps Afrikaans speaker, in English, but with abundant code-switching that in itself is iconic of the phenomenon reported on, namely hybridity and crossing. The speaker is reporting on a strange and 'alien' post-apartheid multicultural phenomenon (see for instance, Comaroff and

Comaroff 2012, 100-101) that occurred at a branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in Grassy Park, a coloured location close to Cape Town. Nik parodies:

**Coloured Voice:**

118 Ok people  
119 We are here by da SPCA  
120 in Grassy park  
121 Now a miracle have happened here today  
122 I want you guys to see dis dog over here  
123 You see this dog  
124 this dog have given birth to kittens  
125 Faizel just zoom in  
126 just zoom in to da camera  
127 Faizel zoom that fucking  
128 come closer man  
129 Sorry about dat  
130 Ok  
131 Now behind the left paw of the dog  
132 you can see what is there  
133 it's a kitten  
134 Now that kitten

135 you can see mos that kitten is sucking  
136 on the tet of the dog  
137 Now I know some people is gona say  
138 “what is going on?”  
139 “How did a cat and a dog mos get togeda like dat”  
140 Ander mense gaan se  
141 other people’s going to say  
142 dai’s vekee’t  
143 dis vekee’t”  
144 dis wrong  
145 dis vekiet  
146 Hoe kan n kat soma n hond nai?  
147 That sends out a very positive message  
148 to all South Africans, you know  
149 Maybe one day we can all get together  
150 and nai like cats and dogs  
151 Ivan Jacobs  
152 real news  
153 Grassy park  
154 Thank you  
155 thank you  
156 Whoo!  
157 Faizel kyk hoe blaf daai kat

Performing in a Kaaps accent, the comedian structures his rendering around allusions to the widespread belief among the population at large that (at least certain categories of) Cape Town ‘coloureds’ are preoccupied with body parts (cf. Salo 2004; Jensen 2008; Adhikari 2009)<sup>4</sup>. By locating the news story in the working class area of Grassy Park and using the name “Ivan Jacobs”, a typical ‘coloured’ name (151), the image of a working class voice – and all the discursive practices that go with it, the comedian enregisters social discourses of being coloured through Kaaps. The character Ivan Jacobs reports from the SPCA where a dog has given birth to kittens. Anybody familiar with Cape Flats’ townships would know that streets are *choc a bloc* with dogs going about their business, and that many families have at least one dog, if not more, to warn and protect against housebreaking. Therefore, making the dog the topic of the closing news item, and framing the dog story in a performance of a coloured accent in a coloured community is ‘recognizably indexical’, and was guaranteed to bring laughter and smiles to the audience at Mzoli’s. The report that the dog gave birth to kittens is, of course, a wonderful allusion to the wished for miracle of a mixed race society – coming about on the margins of the township. What is reported on is a multicultural miracle. The oddity here is clear and the comedian comically fills in the frame by allowing the parodied persona to ask his fellow reporter, the camera man Faizel, to zoom in to the oddity (lines 125 to 128). The voice then begins to explain how it is that a dog has given birth to kittens. In an almost documentary conversational style, the coloured voice describes that as we can see the kitten is sucking on the teat of the dog (lines 135 to 136). We perceive here a ridiculing of the notion of hybridity itself.

In all of this, Nik Rabinowitz' performance uses "shifting alignments with multiple voices" (Cole 2010: 2) to bring across the challenges of diversity and their sociopolitical framings. These shifting voices and alignments are embedded in layers of linked, entangled chronotopes, spatial-temporal narratives of South Africa, with its gallery of voices and participant frameworks. Agha notes that chronotopical moments can be "linked to each other through communicative chains into processes, which, through inter-linkage of smaller scale semiotic encounters and participation frameworks, yield larger scale sociohistorical trends", and (re)produce or transform larger scale sociohistorical formations" (2007, 322). The sociopolitical significance of these different chronotopes and their circulation is to set the spotlight on the troubled diversity of South Africa.

#### **4. Discussion**

Throughout the paper, we have been concerned to indicate what linguistic and discourse features carry non-institutional acts of citizenship of the ordinary and everyday. Wee (2013, *ftc*) has noted that "we think about language the way we do in order to fit into a politics of liberalism". Wee's point is well-taken in the sense that much contemporary thinking on the politics of language works within a liberal human rights framework, where voice and agency are thought to reside in the articulation of individual and group interests on Habermasian public arenas of deliberation in (official) languages and varieties deemed as legitimate for the purpose. However, as Isin has made clear, much of what we might like to call 'acts of citizenship' take place in other, alternative and new

sites – often on the margin of mainstream institutions. This requires of us to rethink where the linguistic in everyday encounters, negotiations and representations of diversity thus resides, that is, what might the implications of linguistic citizenship be for the critical analysis of politics in discourse. One clear pointer in this regard is that much of what occupies critical analyses of political discourse is understanding institutional macro-discourses thus sidelining everyday micro-discourses. Furthermore, critical discourse analysis has often privileged the analysis of texts in English (from mainly Western contexts) or some other politically institutionalized or official language, and have seldom considered the full range of relevant semiotic expression (e.g. multimodal, gestural), including multilingual texts – nor the variety of genres – that articulate everyday political. For example, the comedian Nik Rabinowitz uses the opportunities afforded by the genre of the news presentation to introduce a series of chronotopes and related metalinguistic devices to indexically construct stereotypical personae. The metapragmatic work Nik accomplishes is on three different levels: establishing genres and their interrelationships; the construction of chronotopical types; and the (multiple) indexicalization/entextualizations of personae. Nik uses his metapragmatic apparatus in each of these cases to build a gallery of contemporary South African political concerns: the haunting specter of xenophobia, the invisible presence of a large Muslim community, the religious minorities such as the Jews, which, having once sought a haven in South Africa, are now ready to throw in their lot with white flight; the disenfranchised Afrikaner, and the vulgarization of ‘hybridity’ in the rainbow nation.

In the analysis, we have seen how the politics of the everyday is carried by stance and alignment among indexically authenticated personae? It is the small-scale, local, and



rather minimal linguistic elements, often non-referential, connotational, and off-the-cuff remarks that carry significance in the exercise of everyday and ordinary citizenship. These range from how sounds are pronounced ('fings', xenophobia), through stereotypical lexical choices or choice of names (frikkie, 'shukran'), code-mixing (Ivan Jacobs) or pragmatic features of delivery such as parentheticals (Naeema), loquaciousness personal asides, and repetitions (Sharon) to the narrative embeddings and resulting participant frameworks, or chronotopes, and their combinations in which these indexicals are embedded. Nik's performance highlights how the production and consumption of these voices are essentially reliant on the 'metapragmatic awareness' (Mertz and Yoval 2003) of those languages and varieties on behalf of the audience. This strikes home the point recently made by Jørgenson and his associates (2011) that feature analyses are more revealing of linguistic tactics than notions that refer to, or are derivative of, some conception of 'language'. Understanding what these small indexicals and bits of language do, however, requires reference to higher order contextualizations, here analyzable in terms of chronotopes, that provide the spatial and temporal parameters for the successful realizations of the voices. At the same time, embedding the voices in the scaling and spatio-temporality of the chronotope reveals how "intimate events and experiences are intertwined with large-scale processes" (Besnier 2009, 2), an important focus of linguistic citizenship.

In the skit, we see how 'perpetual semiotic reorientations of identity work' (Blommaert 2012, 6) ground voices, not just in one set of spatio-temporally contextualized practices, but in a variety of chronotopes, or narrative framings, that are executed more or less simultaneously. This comes across particularly clearly in how Nik

sculpts his Jewish character in relation to key themes, such as white flight, Utopia, Sports, Family. This simultaneity speaks to a fundamental notion of social organization, such as Giddens (1984) 'structuration' "in which the consequences of interactions link up and shape other interactions across time and space, going beyond the control or knowledge of specific interlocutors".

Each one of the themes in Nik's stand-up performance have been mediatized and presented on a number of arenas prior to being taken up on Nik's comedy scene, which, of course, is part of the reason for why he can ride with them in this context, dealt with in sites of everyday interaction, private discussion among friends, (which tend in South Africa to be racially quite homogenous). These themes are also the stuff of television news media and documentaries, the news genre/register with wide spread appeal. The introduction into a comedy scene such as Mzoli's where the audience is racially diverse but middle class serves to bring them into the ambit of everyday conviviality among diverse groups, where "dialogue, contestation, takes place outside of the private, inserted into wider circuits of citizenship discourse" (Lofland 1998). Heller's notion of "discursive space in the sense of assemblages of interconnected sites (...) traversed by the trajectories of participants and of resources regulated there" would seem to capture this process well. Discursive spaces "ask us to think in linkages and trajectories, of webs, rather than in terms of say, rooted or fixed objects or even levels" (2011, 11), and this is precisely what we find through an analysis of aligned and interacting chronotopes. The performance is thus one moment in a series of events that comprise 'acts of citizenship', as they redefine and reposition people in relation to each other, comprising acts "through

which citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens emerge not as actors already defined but as ways of being with others” (Isin 2009, 383).

Of course, the fact that the politics of the everyday means that forms and thoughts are circulated across different arenas also ties into how the politics of the everyday is part of the *enregistering* of linguistic features, and their subsequent uptake by the audience. The skit provides some of the ‘material’ in the circulation of *enregistering* variants and forms of speaking, where Nik picks up and elaborates on stereotypical indexicalities of the features he uses to characterize his voices. We are confronted here with difficult issues of power, authorship and representation. In one sense, Nik could be said to be peddling innocuous stereotypes that serve to reinforce stigmatizing, oppressive and imposed subjectivities on the ‘marginalized’ groups he depicts. On the other hand, the fact that he frames and amplifies these voices in the transgressive clash of genres brings comic, carnivalesque relief to the depictions and a possible decentering of the stereotype by the audience. Studies on metapragmatic performances demonstrate how contestations over language and language varieties are a salient feature of most interactions, and are indeed a salient aspect of the practice of linguistic citizenship (cf. Stroud 2001).

## **5. Conclusion**

The issues we have discussed here with reference to performance and the politics of the everyday touch on deep and unsolved problematics of representation and redistribution, agency, voice and citizenship layered into a nation-state notion of citizenship. With its attendant paraphernalia of borders, authenticity, ownership, territoriality, loyalty, and,

importantly rights, this sense of citizenship is necessarily excluding, and in need of an Other to be realized (Neocosmos 2006). Following other authors, we have suggested that the contradictions and turmoils of contemporary South Africa demands a far more textured analysis than that offered by glib labels of service-delivery protest or the easy accusation of xenophobic violence (Neocosmos 2006; Mbembe 2001), and require serious deliberation around alternative notions of citizenship. We have argued that such a development carries implications for how we view the political, uses of language.

Blommaert laments the fact

we have been accustomed to see human interaction as organized towards important things: propositional meanings, indexical stances, and identity or subject positions. This restricted our gaze towards single instances of interaction with clearly identifiable participants making clearly identifiable moves with clearly identifiable outcomes. (2012, 10)

He offers this as a critique of prevalent practices of discourse analysis. In this paper, we have suggested that concepts such as indexicality are usefully seen in conjunction with the construction of voices, stances and alignments of speakers, their temporal unfolding (enregisterment), together with layered and temporally entangled chronotopes and narrative structurations provide insights into the practices of everyday acts of (linguistic) citizenship.

## Notes

1. For an analysis of how linguistic citizenship has been used as a tool of political analysis, see the discourse analysis of Mozambican womens' code-switched complaints on the politics of the FRELIMO government (Stroud 2004).

2. Nik Rabinowitz is a white multilingual speaker and stand-up comedian who grew up on a farm in Plumstead, Cape Town, where he was exposed early on to isiXhosa and Afrikaans. Besides isiXhosa and Afrikaans, Rabinowitz also speaks seSotho, isiZulu, Setswana, French, German, Portuguese, and Greek, although with limited proficiency.

3. Coloured is the term designed by the apartheid government in South Africa to designate a racial community not easily boxed in as white or black. It remains in use today – as does the rest race terminology as a way of monitoring the extent of transformation by post-apartheid government for these previously disempowered groups.

4. Cape Coloured Youth culture and the influence that prison culture has on them have blurred certain practices with respect to the anesthetization of the raced body (cf. Roth-Gordon 2009), specifically with respect to the deflection of body parts. There is the generalization that coloured youth remove their incisors because it is a *cool thing to do*. Without the risk of essentialising coloured youth with respect to this practice, or saying it's only a coloured thing, the removal of the incisors is in actual fact part of the

popularization of gang rituals, rites of passage and masculine identity (s) which was appropriated by coloured youth culture in the late 90s.

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