

# Language (E)scapes: Linguistic Diversity and Integration of South Asian Migrant Women in Barcelona, Spain

## Abstract

To physically live in a space but to remain invisible and inaudible to its surrounding is a peculiar reality for many South Asian women in Spain who usually join their working migrant spouse or other family members after a reunification process as they get transplanted from their usual socio-cultural and linguistic environment to a completely new one. This paper is an attempt to closely understand the complex spaces that they inhabit after their migration. We call those spaces *language (e)scapes*: places of flow, hybridity, and interaction of languages and cultures drawing on Arjun Appadurai's theory of *scapes*. The paper is based on eight in-depth interviews, one focussed group discussion and participant observation carried out as part of the doctoral research in Barcelona in 2018 by the author, a Spanish speaking South Asian woman herself. The study shows that there is a broad spectrum that the subjects experience which is shaped by various factors. It finds that the inability to communicate in (and thus interact with) the already diverse, host society languages along with the traditionally limiting role inside the home, trap some of the subjects into alienating bubbles where they can remain for days, months or years. However the pre-existing language repertoire and their ability to learn new languages or to *translanguage*, *i.e.*, using the repertoire in new ways to communicate determine their migration experience to a large extent. While previous research establishes that the knowledge of local languages help in social integration of adult migrants, this paper fills the gap of an in-depth study of the chosen group: South Asian women in Barcelona.

Key Words: Migration, South Asian Women Diaspora, Linguistic Superdiversity, Identity, Integration.

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Migration and movement have always been part of human life. It has become a subject of systematic academic inquiry giving rise to the research field called migration studies only in the last few decades (the 1980s onwards).<sup>1</sup> No doubt, the academic interest has been propelled by the enormous growth of migration during these decades. The total number of people living outside their country of birth has increased from about 100 million in 1960 to 155 million in 2000 and 214 million in 2010.<sup>2</sup> As per the 2020 World Migration Report, 3.5% of the world population are international migrants.<sup>3</sup> However, the report states that “international migrant population globally has increased in size but remained relatively stable as a proportion of the world’s population.”<sup>4</sup> Stephen Castles et al. state that while growth in migration is relatively stable, what has increased over the past half a century is “the political salience of migration.”<sup>5</sup> Women migrate almost as much as men. 52% of international migrants are male and 48% female.<sup>6</sup> However, their migratory experiences are different than those of men. “Migration is very much a gendered phenomenon; gender norms and expectations, power relations, and unequal rights shape the migration choices and experiences of women and girls as they do men and boys (*sic*).”<sup>7</sup> While in many situations, women migrate as independent agents in search of better work opportunities just like their male counterparts, often they migrate along with or to join their male spouses or other male family members. Migration for family reasons is especially true of South Asian women.<sup>8</sup>

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1. Asya Pisarevskaya, Nathan Levy, Peter Scholten, and Joost Jansen, “Mapping migration studies: An empirical analysis of the coming of age of a research field,” in *Migration Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnz031>

2. Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 7.

3. Marie McAuliffe and Vinod Khadria, *World Migration Report, 2020* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2019), 21.

4. *Ibid.*, 22

5. Castles et al., *Age of Migration*, 1.

6. McAuliffe and Khadria, *World Migration Report*, 22.

7. Tam O’Neil, Anjali Fleury, and Marta Foresti, “Women on the move Migration, gender equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, ODI Briefing Papers Published online, July (2016): 4. <https://www.odi.org/publications/10476-women-move-migration-gender-equality-and-2030-agenda-sustainable-development>

Luis Eduardo Guarnizo states that there are various aspects to migration worth exploring such as the economic, social, and psychological changes produced by transnational movement, mobility, and transnational living of people: “Transnational living refers to a wide panoply of social, cultural, political, and economic cross-border relations that emerge, both wittingly and unwittingly, from migrants' drive to maintain and reproduce their social milieu or origin from afar.”<sup>9</sup>

Studies have explored how migration and integration are closely interconnected to the sending countries and the impact of migration on those left behind.<sup>10</sup> Within the field of migration studies, integration understood as the process of inclusion of immigrants in the receiving or host society, has been of significant interest to researchers and policymakers. Adrian Favell was one of the first to systematically study and propose ‘integration’ as a way of accommodating immigrants in British society in the 1990s.<sup>11</sup> In an article from 2013, he observes how the changing realities of migration and mobility problematize the concept of integration. He criticizes the double standards present in European societies where immigrants are expected to integrate into the concept of a nation, whereas for the non-immigrant population, increasingly the expectation is that they should feel part of a collective supra-national identity beyond the nation (European identity).<sup>12</sup> Integration which is closely associated with identity and sense of belonging are complex concepts that are shaped by several factors. In the present paper I will be looking at the role of knowledge of local

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8. Rashmi Sharma, “Gender and International Migration: The Profile of Female Migrants from India in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 39, no. ¾ March-April (2011): 41, accessed: March 15, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41633793>

9. Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, “The Economic of Transnational Living,” in *The International Migration Review*, vol. 37, no. 3, Transnational Migration: International Perspectives, Fall, (2003): 666-699. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30037753>.

10. A. Di Bartolomeo et al., eds., *Migrant Integration between Homeland and Host Society Volume 2*, (Cham: Springer, 2017), 2. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56370-1\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56370-1_1);

Artjoms Ivlevs, Milena Nikolova and Carol Graham, “Emigration, remittances, and the subjective well-being of those staying behind,” *Journal of Population Economics*, (2019): 113-151. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-018-0718-8>.

11. Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 100.

12. Adrian Favell. “The Changing Face of ‘Integration’ in a Mobile Europe” in *Council for European Studies Newsletter*, June (2013): 3. <http://www.adrianfavell.com/CESweb.pdf>

languages in the integration of immigrants in the host society. The Council of Europe has recognized the importance of language in the integration of migrants and has issued several guidelines and reports on this theme.<sup>13</sup>

### **South Asian Women Migrants in a *superdiverse* and complex space: Barcelona**

The present article deals with female migrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh<sup>14</sup> (henceforth referred to as South Asian Women) in Barcelona, Spain, by focussing on their experience with the local languages of the receiving society in order to understand the relationship between language and integration of immigrants. The paper is based on the ethnographic fieldwork I did in Barcelona as part of my doctoral research in 2018. Through this article, I would attempt to highlight the role that the ability to learn new languages and *translanguaging* plays in the social integration of migrant women from South Asia in Barcelona.<sup>15 16</sup> This article is based on eight semi-structured in-depth interviews that included both open-ended and closed-ended questions, one Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and participant observation. Below is the table of the eight respondents that form the primary sample.

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13. Jean-Claude Beacco, David Little and Chris Hedges, *Linguistic integration of adult migrants Guide to policy development and implementation*, (Council of Europe, Language Policy Unit). <https://rm.coe.int/16802fc1cd>.

14. Number of women from other countries such as Nepal, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka is negligible thus not included in this study.

15. Roughly *translanguaging* means communicating with multiple language and non-linguistic resources studied as a phenomenon of superdiverse space discussed later in the paper.

16. Ofelia Garcia, "Problematizing Linguistic Integration of migrants: the role of translanguaging and language teachers", in *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants Some Lessons from Research*, eds., Jean-Claude Beacco, Hans-Jürgen Krumm, David Little, Philia Thalgott. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 17.

Table 1.1

**Demographic Composition of Sample**

Sr. No	Name (Changed )	Age	Country of Origin	Status in Spain	No. of years in Barcelona	Profession	Independent user of Spanish or Catalan
1	Tripti	53	India	Resident	11	Homemaker	No
2	Jhumoor	23	Bangladesh	Resident	5	Homemaker	No
3	Manu	26	India	Resident	2	Jointly runs Grocery Shop	No
4	Sunita	36	India	Resident	12	Proprietor of a Beauty Salon	Yes
5	Laila	17	Pakistan	Citizen	17	Student	Yes
6	Naaz	25	Pakistan	Resident	12	Voluntary worker, Teacher, and NGO coordinator	Yes
7	Saadifa	27	Pakistan	Resident	2	Homemaker	No
8	Hina	18	Pakistan	Citizen	12	Student	Yes

The FGD was with a group of 12 women of different ages from South Asian backgrounds who together attended a Spanish language class for adults. The participant observation method was used whenever possible during the course of four months in a variety of contexts.<sup>17</sup>

Arjun Appadurai's theory of scapes inspired the term *Language (E)scapes* used in this paper.<sup>18</sup> In his well-known theory, he argues that in the globalized world, cultures are in constant flow and influence each other. My term also resonates with Steven Vertovec's concept of *superdiversity* to talk about the contemporary social reality of Europe, which is "distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small

17. Barbara B. Kawulich, "Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method" in *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* Vol. 6 No. 2 Art 43 May, Online (2005) <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/996>

18. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large-Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 33.

and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants.”<sup>19</sup> Sociolinguists have observed a linguistic *superdiversity* in the various European cities like Barcelona, where people with over a hundred nationalities or ethnic origins live together, as migrants, tourists, refugees, and member state workers.<sup>20</sup>

Appadurai’s ethnoscape is the result of the unprecedented global flow and movement of people. In the same way, a language (e)scape would be the result of the diversity of languages spoken by such people, which is in continuous flux. Further, in these linguistically superdiverse spaces, I will argue that we can observe the use of what Jan Blommaert calls ‘repertoire’ rather than ‘languages’ by the migrant subjects in their day to day life.<sup>21</sup> He argues that while languages are ideologically constructed as a unified, homogenous entity, in complex contemporary superdiverse spaces, people use any resource available to them to communicate: “The collective resources available to anyone at any point in time are a repertoire; repertoires are biographically emerging complexes of indexically ordered, and therefore functionally organized, resources. Repertoires include every resource used in communication – linguistic ones, semiotic ones, socio-cultural ones.”<sup>22</sup>

Barcelona is the capital city of Catalonia, which is a multilingual and devolved but not federal state.<sup>23</sup> The two local languages: Spanish and Catalan exist in a competitive framework.<sup>24</sup> It is precisely the kind of superdiverse and complex context that needs new metaphors and a close ethnographic study to understand the challenges of immigrants who

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19. Steven Vertovec, “Super-diversity and its implications,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 30 No. 6 November (2007):1024.

20. K Arnaut, Jan Blommaert, B Rampton and M Spotti. *Language and Superdiversity* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 22.

21. Jan Blommaert, “Language- The great diversifier” in *Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies*, ed. Steven Vertovec (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 85.

22. Ibid.

23. Ferran Requejo, “Is Spain a Federal Country,” in *50 Shades of Federalism*, n.p.,

<http://50shadesoffederalism.com/case-studies/spain-federal-country/>

24 Gil, Elvira Riera, *Why Languages matter to people. Communication, identity and justice in Western democracies. The case of mixed societies* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya. Institut d’Estudis de l’Autogovern. EA.2, 2016), 225.

live there.<sup>25</sup> The percentages of foreign population in Catalonia and Barcelona are 15.11 % and 20.2% respectively.<sup>26</sup> Among Asians, immigrants from Pakistan are the largest South-Asian community, followed by China and the Philippines. Although the total numbers of South Asians are small compared to immigrants from the Latin American countries or Morocco, the phenomenon is worth studying because of the sudden increase in numbers: the total population of South Asian people multiplied more than ten times within the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> It is important to clarify that this article focuses on low-skilled labour migration. There is a trend of highly skilled workers who move to Spain to work in multinational companies, especially the IT sector, but my present study does not include them.<sup>28</sup>

The current migration pattern is male-dominated. The typical immigrant profile from South Asia is that of single young males who come to work as labourers in sectors such as construction, mining, and agriculture. South Asian women almost always come to Spain through family reunification.<sup>29</sup> Most of the women interviewed for this article are first-generation migrants who joined their husbands after they acquired permanent residency in Spain and applied for family reunification. Since this is only possible after several years of residence in Spain for the male member of the family, by the time the woman comes to Spain, the man will have already established a circle of friends, acquaintances, and neighbours. He will also have at least some knowledge of the local languages. As is typical in their societies back home, these women generally do not seek employment and are financially

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25. Jan Blommaert *Ethnography, Superdiversity and Linguistic Landscape, Chronicles of complexity* (Buffalo, Toronto and Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2013), 14-16.

26. "Evolución de la población total y extranjera" *Idescat*, accessed April 25, 2020. <https://www.idescat.cat/poblacioextranjera/?b=0&lang=es>

27. Nachatter Singh Garha, Juan Galeano and Andreu Domingo Valls, "South Asian Immigration to Spain: Socio-demographic Profile and Territorial Distribution, 2000-2014," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, vol.25, Issue 2. March (2016): 196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0117196816639166>

28. German Gómez Ventura, "Highly skilled Indian migrant population in Spain," in *CARIM-India RR*, (Migration Policy Centre: European University Institute, 2013), 5.

29. Garha et al. "South Asian Immigration," 196.

dependent on their husbands. A report in *El País* paints a grim picture of women who travelled from Pakistan to Barcelona, but *sin salir de casa*, that is, without leaving home.<sup>30</sup> The ethnographic study I conducted provides a nuanced understanding of the reasons why most of the migrant women do not “leave home” and also highlights the exceptions to this pattern.

### **Bubbles in a Language (E)scapes**

Tripti, a middle-aged Bengali woman, has been living in Barcelona for 11 years. Tripti is the only member of her family who is yet not a Spanish national. When asked if she hopes to get citizenship, she expresses that due to her lack of Spanish skills, she has no hope of getting it.<sup>31</sup> Every Sunday, she comes to a small closed space that has the structure of a small shop but acts as the temple for a small community of Bengali *vaishnavs*<sup>32</sup> in the Raval neighbourhood, home to the maximum number of South Asian immigrants in Barcelona. It would be challenging for anyone outside the community to reach the temple on their own unless they know an insider. The temple was being run without the necessary official permission at the time of my study. The women who came one by one to the temple started contributing to the kitchen work. They peeled and chopped fruits and vegetables. An older woman was cooking in a small makeshift kitchen. All the women were wearing South Asian traditional clothes, either *sarees* or *salwar kameez*.<sup>33</sup> At about 6 pm, a South Asian man of about 30-years arrived, who acted as the priest. Jhumoor, one of the women present there, started to arrange the things required for the ceremony. A little later, she was encouraged by other women of the group to have a more significant role in the rituals as they joked about her being the priest, while she seemed to shy away. She sang a prayer song when the priest asked

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30. Charo Nogueira, "De pakistan a Barcelona sin salir de casa," *El País* 17th August 2002, accessed [xxxxxx](https://elpais.com/diario/2002/08/17/opinion/1029535209_850215.html).  
[https://elpais.com/diario/2002/08/17/opinion/1029535209\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/diario/2002/08/17/opinion/1029535209_850215.html).

31. Respondent number 1 in discussion with the author on May 9, 2018.

32. Vaishnavs are followers of *Vaishnavism* which is one of the three main denomination within Hinduism. Vaishnav traditions are centred around Vishnu as the primary deity.

33. Traditional attire for women in India and Bangladesh.



her. Slowly others joined in the *kirtan*.<sup>34</sup> After the rituals were over, the evening ended with a community Bengali dinner, which was cooked and served by the women. The men were served before the women, and everybody sat on the floor to eat the food in the manner typical of community religious festivals among Bengalis in India.

Even though Bengali is my mother tongue, the accent in which many of the women spoke, and the songs they sang were unfamiliar to me. As time passed, the audience started to increase, with men joining later. As is usual in South Asia, the space was segregated by gender. The few children present there spoke in Spanish among themselves. Some of the mothers of children who were at the age of learning to speak were using their broken and accented Spanish with them. One of the mothers informed me that she wanted to make sure that her child does not face any problem in school.<sup>35</sup> In my next visits, I found out that the priest, whom I later interviewed, worked as a waiter in a restaurant. He was parallelly studying religion and training to be a priest or a preacher.

The group dynamics in the temple show that the rules and norms of a society, its customs and habits, and especially the patriarchal aspects remain intact even in a new geographical space. The situation of these migrants and especially women can be described using bubbles as a metaphor. There is an invisible border that every woman carries around her in the new geographical space. Unless she breaks out of this bubble, her migration is partial. She has physically moved from a location in India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh. Still, she continues to inhabit the same psychological and social spaces that she belonged to in her origin country. I am using the term language (e)scapes to denote this bubbled reality of South Asian migrant women in Barcelona.

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34. A *kirtan* is a typical religious ritual where devotees sing songs in chorus, in praise of Krishna.

35. Consent forms and audio-recordings were used for in-depth interviews only. Several conversations were natural and not recorded.

### **Breaking Out of the Bubble or Stepping Out**

Most South Asian women migrants in Barcelona come from rural societies where it is widely accepted that the woman's primary role is taking care of a household. They mostly stay within the domestic space, spending their days cooking, cleaning, feeding the children, and on other household chores. They continue with the same role after migrating. They do step out, for example, to pick and drop the children from school, but it is an extension of their domestic care-giving responsibility. Within the research sample, Tripti, Jhumoor, and Saadifa represent this typical profile. They hardly know the city in which they live. None of them has joined the labour market. They also are the least proficient in the local languages.

In an informal discussion, Jhumoor explained why she thinks women like her do not work. She said that it is because there are not many jobs in Spain as there are no small factories or sweatshops like in Canada or the US. She added that some women do find work in other people's houses or as janitors in hotels or old-age homes. Those who have no other option have to do that kind of work, but most would not like to.<sup>36</sup> Many Latin American women join the care and hospitality sector in Spain. Cultural notions about respectable work influence the choices women make. Working outside the home is not the only indicator of women's empowerment or autonomy. What matters is whether they can access the public space. These women feel alienated, more than anything, due to their lack of interaction with the local people, which they attributed to their lack of knowledge of local languages. Even though they had spent a few months in a language school, they could not speak the local languages confidently. They identify the lack of interaction with Spanish or Catalan speaking people as the main reason for this. All of them want more interaction with the local people. Thus, they are trapped in a vicious cycle of needing the word to interact with the local

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36. I met Jhumoor every Sunday and also a few times a week as she showed interest in learning Spanish from me. Only one structured interview was recorded. Respondent no. 2 in discussion with author, May, 2018, Barcelona.

population but lacking language proficiency due to the lack of such interaction.<sup>37</sup> They want to learn the local languages because they want to be independent. Without knowledge of local languages, they feel infantilized. They do not like feeling vulnerable. Their mobility and capacity to be on their own, be it to go to the doctor or to do the grocery shopping, is drastically restricted unless they speak the local languages. Economic independence is not the main factor here. The feeling of autonomy in day to day social life is.

Since their husbands arrived in Barcelona several years before them, naturally, they have more knowledge of local languages. These men tend to be busy in their work like any other migrant worker. They have little social life outside work. Generally, they build a social circle with their own countrymen within the work setting. However, South Asian women, especially when they are newly arrived, desire to establish relations with local people, and enter into the existing social circles of neighbours, school teachers, nearby shopkeepers and quickly realize that language is essential for it.

When women can go to their children's school and interact with their teachers or visit the doctor or bank on their own, they feel empowered. The respondents stated that they would prefer not to have to wait or depend on their husbands to visit the doctor or child's school. Saadifa, 27, from Pakistan who lives in Poblenou, a mixed neighbourhood with more local population than San Antoni, (where Tripti and Jhumoor live), talks about her experience with Spanish: "I feel like it that someone should talk to me, and if I don't understand, then I wish that they explain what they had said, I feel then I will learn the language. Someone should talk in Spanish with me."<sup>38</sup> Her main concern is how her knowledge of Spanish impacts her interaction with her son's school. She reports that sometimes she feels that the teachers and other school functionaries simply ignore them, but she does not view it as a

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37.Data collected in the questionnaire by the author as part of doctoral research. Thesis to be submitted.

38.Respondent no 7 in conversation with author on May 18, 2018. Original response in Hindustani, translation mine.

racist or anti-immigrant feeling. She says, “they ignore us sometimes, they act as that when they don’t understand us, then what is the use.”<sup>39</sup> One of the women during the focus group discussion held in a Spanish language school expressed her gratitude to the local people, especially other women in the host society, for treating her with respect and giving her confidence. She said “I go to the hospital and say *poco hablo español*, so she says, *no pasa nada*. Even if I speak a little, she says ‘*muy bien*’.”<sup>40</sup>

The 12 respondents who were part of the FGD are all women who are consciously trying to make efforts to learn Spanish and Catalan but talked about the difficulty of acquiring the languages. Responding to these difficulties, South Asian women have come up with their own ingenious and alternatives ways of learning the language. Saadifa explains, “I write on paper, I look up words from mobile, then learn them as and when I can, that is why I am learning also. But I am unable to devote time, because I just don’t have time.”<sup>41</sup> She added that she tries to use Catalan and Spanish terms at home with her children, although primarily they use Urdu or Punjabi at home. So even though the mothers do not know the language, they have the responsibility to teach it to their children. Then again, ensuring that the child knows their mother tongue, origin culture, and religious teachings all fall on the mother’s shoulder as well. But ironically, as reported by respondents of the Focus Group Discussion, as children start growing up, they acquire the local languages, and may use it at home among siblings or cousins, and even with the fathers, but not with mothers. That creates a new complex among them.

### **Carving out their Own Space**

Despite all the contradictory forces at work, there are enterprising South Asian women who have devised ways and carved out a unique space for themselves in the diaspora. Sunita is an example of an enterprising woman. She speaks Spanish fluently. She is the sole proprietor of

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39.Ibid.

40. One of the respondents of the Focus Group Discussion, held by author on May 11, 2018.

41.Respondent no 7 in conversation with author on May 18, 2018.

a beauty and esthetic center in the city of Sabadell, 20 kilometers from Barcelona. She is also a mother and wife. She reported that her clients were people from all nationalities, including Spain, Catalonia, Bolivia, and India. She has acquired not just language skills, but the gestures and behaviors typical of a beauty salon in an economically developed country. She speaks Spanish with a local accent.<sup>42</sup> The name of her aesthetic center reflects her Indian ethnicity, but she asserts that her skills are based on rigorous training in Catalonia. She handles her client's communication, receives calls to give appointments, checking her diary, taking a pause from her ongoing sessions, thus multitasking through the structured interview.

Manu, 26-years-old from Punjab, India, has not yet picked up the language thoroughly. She expressed that she did not find the language very appealing. Therefore, she does not enjoy learning it. But she runs a grocery shop along with her husband in Poblenou. She has picked up the words and phrases required to interact with clients when her husband is not at the shop. She has also devised mechanisms to manage difficult situations. She does not let it show when she does not understand her clients. She is full of confidence, and although her Spanish is accented, her gestures are like that of the local people. There are many women like Manu who interact with their clients from the host society. In Spain, these small supermarkets, *tienda de alimentación*, are colloquially called *Paquis*, because Pakistani nationals run many of them. However, quite a few of these shops are managed by migrants from India and Bangladesh as well, where one finds women at the *caja*, the cashier. The proprietor on paper is generally the man who keeps the accounts and goes to get the stock. If a woman within the family, be it the wife, the daughter, or the mother, is at the *caja*, she is not paid for her service. The participation of many family members allows these shops to stay open for longer hours in comparison to when the local people ran them.<sup>43</sup>

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42. Based on observation during multiple visits by the author during May, 2018, Sabadell.

43. Solé Montserrat Aubia and Josep Rodríguez Roca, "Pakistanies en España: un estudio basado en el colectivo de la ciudad de Barcelona," *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, No. 68 (2004):111-112.

Both Sunita and Manu's day to day interactions have the elements of Jan Blommaert's translanguaging mentioned in this article earlier. When Sunita was pregnant during her early months in Spain, she used to go to a park, sit there and listen to the conversations of old Spanish/Catalan women. They tried to talk, but with no knowledge of each other's language, through gestures and expressions. She also said that now, although she knows Spanish, once in a while, she has interactions with people in Catalan. The interlocutor speaks in Catalan, she understands and responds in Spanish, and this goes on without any issues. When asked to respond to the question "Who are you?" her response reveals a sense of identity that is highly layered and complex:

I cannot say much about this, but I can only say that I try to learn something, every day, as much as I can, I help someone, this is my routine, apart from my business, meeting nice people, looking for nice people, being with them, learning from them, there should be a friends circle but a good one, and then my family, my kids, my family, my husband, these are more important [...] I want to learn more, but the problem is I don't have time now. I return home at 9:30, my children have exams, I pay attention to them, but it is pending for me, I have to do an English speaking course and of Catalan.

When asked what her response is when she is asked *de dónde eres*, "Where are you from?" Sunita said, "I like it a lot that I am Indian. I like it. Honestly, I am speaking from my heart. I feel very proud that I am from India."<sup>44</sup> When told that she seems to be equally comfortable with her origin identity and her integration with her present place of residence and the local society, she added, "I always try that wherever you live, wherever you go, you should adopt the things of that place, the benefit of this is that the people there would also adopt you (sic.) if we think, our culture is not like this, and I am fine the way I am, then you cannot expect

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44. Respondent No. 4 in conversation with the author on May 15, 2018, Sabadell.

from anyone that.”<sup>45</sup> We may deduce from the above conversation that for Sunita being a businesswoman, a mother, a wife, and someone who likes to learn something is her identity. She did not associate the usual markers of identification such as origin country (India), religion (Sikhism), mother tongue (Punjabi), gender (female), or sexuality (heterosexual) to define her identity. Her work, her passion for learning and her role as a wife and mother, is what she claims is most important to her. Languages are tools for her that have helped in her integration, which has enabled her to be successful, but she did not have to discard her origin country/culture/language for that. A woman like Sunita is not trapped in the bubbles of in-communication. Knowledge of local languages allows her to interact and thus understand and also be understood by the local population. In her case, the integration is a mutual process of understanding and acceptance, and language is at the heart of it.

### **Flowing between two worlds**

Three of the respondents, Laila, Naaz, and Hina, came to Barcelona as children when their family was reunited and therefore received at least a part of their school education in Catalonia. They represent the second generation of South Asian women in Spain. They have some knowledge of their home languages or mother tongues as well, be it Hindi/Urdu, Hindko, or Punjabi but Spanish and/or Catalan are their first languages—the languages that they use the most, and in which they are most fluent. Compared to their mothers, they all seem more empowered, independent, and well-integrated in the host society. They are ambitious; they have either already joined or plan to enter the labor market. They seek additional educational qualifications to expand their work opportunities. They have only faint memories of the initial challenges with the language they had if any. Unlike their mothers, language skills are not an issue for them at all.

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45. Ibid.

The language (e)scapes for these three subjects are more complex than the ones discussed so far because these subjects are continuously flowing between at least three languages and cultures, their origin or home language/s, and the two local languages: Spanish and Catalan. Apart from the language and culture of their parents, these younger subjects are impacted by the dynamics between the two local languages.<sup>46</sup> The presence of a strong Catalan nationalist movement escalated to a major constitutional crisis in October 2017.<sup>47</sup> The Spanish State and the Government of Catalonia have remained in conflict ever since. It is a fact that most of the immigrants—such as the parents of our respondents—primarily speak Spanish and either already have Spanish citizenship or aspire to it. As children of immigrant parents in a superdiverse city, they have also interacted and grown up with children from various nationalities who also speak multiple languages at their respective homes.

When asked how they define their identity and how integrated they feel into the host society, most of them had a complex response. None of them feels that they are Catalan or Spanish despite having lived there their whole lives. They tended to identify with their culture of origin through its customs and habits even though the language they are most fluent in are different from the ones that their origin culture speaks. They did not feel discriminated or differentiated by the host society.

An example that illustrates the existing tension between Spanish and Catalan among the respondents and how each of them has a different relationship with the languages is this: Naaz and Hina are sisters but have different views on Catalan independence movement as well as the notion of a common language for people in Barcelona. While Naaz expressed the view that Catalan is the elite language and Spanish is the language of the street, Hina completely disagreed and said Catalan is the language of the *pueblo* [the ordinary people] and

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46. Kathryn Woolard, *Singular and Plural Ideologies of Linguistic Authority in 21st Century Catalonia* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 301.

47. Kathryn Woolard, "Catalan Language, identity and independence," *OUPblog*, January 18, 2018, accessed January 28, 2018. <https://blog.oup.com/2018/01/catalan-language-identity-independence/>



Spanish the historically imposed language.<sup>48</sup> Out of the three, Hina was the most emotionally attached to the Catalan language. She said Catalan is for her *lengua de emoció*, language of emotion, the language in which she likes to hear or say poetry. Hina is a student of Law and Politics and her interview expressed a lot of the ideas of Catalan intellectuals. Naaz, on the other hand, acts as a mediator or a bridge between South Asian women and the host society. She runs an NGO that provides short term assignments to South Asian women who earn by using their traditional skills such as *mehendi* application, decoration, cooking South Asian cuisine, and traditional embroidery.<sup>49</sup> Both Laila and Naaz also work as teachers of Spanish or Catalan to South Asian women under a program sponsored by an organization that promotes intercultural understanding.<sup>50</sup> The differences in their views can be explained by the differences in the context of their work or education.

### **Conclusion**

It is through language that human beings communicate, which enables them to form groups, record knowledge, and pass it on to the next generation. Cultures and civilizations are therefore embedded into languages, and they play a significant role in the formation of group identities. This article has shown that knowledge of local languages is an essential tool for migrant women from South Asia in the diasporic condition. It helps in bringing them out of the limited domestic space and fixed gender roles. It is what opens the doors of opportunities and breaks out of bubbles of confinement and *incommunication*.<sup>51</sup> The socio-economic condition and cultural background of the woman in the country of origin play some role, but what she makes of the new opportunities afforded by migration depends primarily on her

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48. Respondent number 6 and 8 in discussion with author on July 6, 2018, Barcelona.

49. *Mehendi* is a herb based paste used by many communities to make patterns of temporary nature on the palms or feet.

50. The author cannot reveal the name of the organization and the project as she is obliged to conceal the identity of the respondents and due to the uniqueness of the project mentioning it may make it easy to identify them.

51. A term used in Spanish law where one is denied the right to communicate

capability to learn the local languages. The host society members willingness to interact with the migrant is a significant determinant of this capability. Many of the conversations during this study revealed a pang of guilt, a feeling of being a burden—on the immediate earning family member as well as the new country they have come to work to—, and a sense of gratitude for being ‘tolerated.’ Their position of being migrants and financially dependent seem to merge to give them that feeling. Any progressive society should provide channels for replacing the sense of gratitude for being tolerated with a sense of belonging and solidarity among women, the mothers of the future generations of a diverse Catalonia, Spain, Europe, and world.

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