

Diverse Belongings: An Improvisational Inquiry Into Newcomer Worlds,  
Worldings, and the Literacies of Belonging

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## Abstract

In an era of unprecedented global forced displacement, this artistic, multimodal dissertation explores experiences of belonging with a group of four adult newcomers to Canada. Using a post-qualitative approach, the study couples the theoretical concepts of worlding and wonder with the work of Borderlands poets — non-western authors who write from the margins — to explore the creative texts created by the bi- and multilingual English learners from a decolonial stance. The study's setting, during the Covid-19 pandemic, was an online translanguaging space, in which the participants' linguistic, artistic, and multimodal repertoires were leveraged in meaning-making and artmaking, including drawings, paintings, digital photography, video and dual language poetry. Poetic transcripts were generated to re-present the participants' resettlement stories. The findings reveal how affective and resonant *worldings* emerged through the serial immersion in experiences of belonging, not-belonging, and deeply felt liminal spaces between-belongings. *Unworlding* stories exposed disturbing examples of the participants' loss of voice, of silencing in dominant English spaces, even among newcomers with English language proficiency. This inquiry seeks to contest dominant forms of academic knowledge and expand creative approaches within the post-qualitative paradigm to open new avenues for creative inquiry in language, literacy, and arts-based research.

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## CHAPTER ONE: TO BEGIN

Dad, in five minutes we will leave. Everyone is getting in the boat now.

Dad we're getting in.

The brief text message, written by 22-year-old Hadiya Rzgar Hussein, holds the tension and drama of an unfolding moment in time; within minutes, its sender would be lost in the icy waters between France and Britain, on the so-called “death route” across the English Channel (“Channel Migrants’ Tragedy,” 2021). Yet, the message lives on, lingering in a dis/embodyed virtual space, still resonating with intensity, in unsettling urgency, anticipation, and anxiety. Its sender, one of several Kurdish-Iraqi youths, was among the 27 people who died in the early hours of November 24, 2021, in the worst mass migrant drowning in the English Channel on record. The poignant text still moves me months after the accident. It illuminates the precarity of life for those on the move, displaced by war and conflict. It also illuminates, in the tragic loss of life, how literacy itself is alive; it is situated but spans borders, temporal but timeless, material, and imaginative. It is also deeply personal, entwined with relationships and affect. Literacy is “in and of the world” (Pahl et al., 2020, p. 1), a world that so often forces people from their homes, when home is no longer home:

no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well  
your neighbours running faster than you.

(Shire, 2013, p. xi)

With the memory of the Channel drownings still fresh in our minds, we hear of hundreds more asylum seekers - Syrians, Yazidis, Iraqis, Yemenis - stranded in the freezing cold at Belarus-Poland border. Trapped between borders, without clean water, food, medical aid, unable to apply for asylum in the European Union, and facing brutality from police and border guards on both sides. One refugee tells a reporter, "Believe me, it's not a good feeling when you see your daughter caught between life and death" (Williams, 2022). They are ensnared in a violent no-man's-land, between nations, a kind of hell on earth.

Hell is no longer a religious belief  
or a fantasy,  
but something as real as houses and stones and trees.

(Arendt, 1943, p. 265)

In September of 2015, the full horror of the Syrian civil war was brought home to Canadians, communicated through a shocking image: a photograph of toddler Alan Kurdi, whose body washed up on a beach in Turkey. That photo affected me deeply, and still haunts me. Within Alan's lifeless form, I see the contours of my own two daughters as babies, sleeping soundly, peacefully, in their cribs in our home in Canada.

you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land.

(Shire, 2013 p. xi)

Then Afghanistan. Now Ukraine. If one does not belong at home, where does one find belonging? This is a question that refuses to leave me. I wonder whether the adult students in my settlement English class who are refugees and immigrants with permanent resident status — and



who have managed to find their way to Canada, have found a sense of belonging in their new homeland?

Belonging, a rather ambiguous concept, can be personal, social, and political, and it can be created through community and affinity groups, religious, and cultural practices (Wright, 2015). But what does belonging feel like? The terms integration, social inclusion, and adaptation are well defined in the literature, yet the definition of belonging remains vague and undertheorized (Antonsich, 2010; Wright, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011), and the feeling of belonging, and how it works as an emotional attachment, are rarely explored (Wright, 2015). Belonging is most often described in affective terms, as a feeling or a sense, thus theories of affect offer a suitable lens to investigate belonging. Drawing on affect and working in partnership with a small group of newcomers to Canada, this improvisational inquiry seeks to shed light on the ways in which belonging and not-belonging are felt, sensed, and lived by people with refugee backgrounds in Canada.

Experimentation and inquiry through the arts can uncover unfolding moments in which we become aesthetically attuned to what is felt, thought, and embodied (Blaikie, 2020; O'Donoghue, 2018). This study experiments with posthumanist and post qualitative inquiry, grounded in a relational ontology that highlights the interconnections of and between humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans; I explore literacies that are affective, vital, and embedded in peoples' everyday lives. The participants and I work in a fluid translanguaging space that enables people to deploy their full linguistic, artistic, and multimodal repertoires to explore the ways in which belongings unfold in worlds. The arts are used creatively and provocatively to foreground the voices of non-western "Borderlands" authors — those who live and work from

the margins, outside the dominant (white, western) culture – to challenge conventional academic norms and forms of knowledge.

Poetic representations are utilized throughout this document because poetry is evocative, emotive, and embodied; it is a special language, particularly suited to moments that are special, strange, and mysterious “when bits and pieces suddenly coalesce” (Richardson, 1998, p. 451); it speaks to what it is to be human. My work weaves various forms of poetry with affect theory, and Maggie MacLure’s (2013a, 2013b, 2013c) lens of wonder, with the concept of worlding following Blaikie (2020, 2021), Stewart (2010, 2012, 2017, 2019), and Ehret (2018a, 2018b) to explore how belongings and not-belongings are constituted through human and more-than-human agents, in unpredictable, rhizomatic processes of worlding and unworlding. I think alongside several refugee writers, Borderlands poets (after Borderlands theorist and artist Gloria Anzaldúa), including British-Somali poet Warsan Shire, Kurdish-Iranian writer Behrouz Boochani, Polish author Adam Zagajewski, and political philosopher Hannah Arendt (a Jewish refugee from Poland during the Second World War). Their perspectives and creativity call me to see and feel the world in new and different ways. Working from a decolonial stance, I purposefully deploy Borderlands poetry to amplify the unique insights and authority of Borderlands writers, and to push the boundaries of what is accepted as legitimate scholarship by the academy. My study seeks to expand artistic inquiry within the post-qualitative paradigm, leading to new avenues for creative inquiry in translanguaging spaces, and new directions for language and literacy research with affect, opening up possibilities for thinking and feeling around issues of justice and belonging.

My work is situated at a critical time and place: We are witnessing the world’s largest movement of refugees, set against an era of global resurgent nationalism and xenophobia, and

spreading economic and social inequality within and between societies (Halse, 2018). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates global forced displacement surpassed 80 million people in 2020 (Global Trends, 2022). Canada has been described as the world leader in the resettlement of refugees, welcoming one million refugees to the country since 1980 (Refugees in Canada, 2022). Canada takes pride in providing a haven for refugees who manage to get here, those searching for a new homeland and a new place of belonging. Certainly, living in safety and security are of paramount importance to refugees upon arrival, but thereafter, most seek a meaningful relationship with their new homeland: from the emotional attachment of feeling at home, to the politics of belonging through the formal structures of citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Do those seeking a new home and the feeling of belonging find it here?

### **Situating Myself in the Study**

In many ways, my maternal and paternal grandparents' immigrant stories echo my students' experiences of fleeing forms of oppression, facing anti-immigrant slurs, struggling to learn a new language, and make a home in an unfamiliar culture. My mother's family, all labourers, arrived with the first wave of Polish coal miners in Nova Scotia, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Education was not a priority, especially for young women. My mother received a Grade 8 education before she was pulled from school to work in the home. Around the same time, my father's family fled persecution because of his political activism in Poland. They arrived in the United States before settling in a Polish enclave in rural Ontario. My grandfather died unexpectedly during the Depression, plunging the family into uncertainty, poverty, and hunger; the emotional and embodied scars etched by those years of struggle never left my father.

I can connect my feminist, working class lens, my sensitivity to refugee and immigrant issues, and my commitment to social justice teaching, to my family's immigrant, working class

roots. As an English language teacher in a settlement language program, I used to hold myself up as an example of the “model immigrant” success story, underpinned by the myth of meritocracy. I would tell my students: *Work hard, learn English, and you will succeed. Just look at our family, look at me!* During my doctoral studies, my encounters with Indigenous and postcolonial scholarship — those who think and write from non-western perspectives to examine the continuing impacts of colonization — deepened my understanding of my white privilege and the role of the English language in perpetuating the harms of colonization. I realized my portrayal of family history was not only simplistic, but it was also highly problematic. My parents decided to anglicize our hard-to-pronounce Polish name to spare us from the anti-immigrant sentiment and cruel humour they endured; my English name and whiteness obscure my immigrant heritage while allowing me to reveal my cultural connections whenever I choose. My acceptance within the dominant culture is tied to my middle-classness, my unaccented fluency in standard English, and to white colonial privilege. To be white is to be viewed as an insider, to be granted the benefits of belonging (Di Angelo, 2018). As a white, cisgendered, middle-class woman, I feel a sense of inclusion and belonging within a multitude of social, cultural, academic, political, and economic spaces.

And yet, I have experienced the feeling of not-belonging and the curious feeling of being between-belongings in workplace and family settings. As a teacher working with newcomers, I sometimes feel I am a stranger in my own classroom, whenever there is a sudden, unexplained emotional outburst, a lengthy uncomfortable silence, or an instance of tension that I cannot name or describe. I feel out-of-place, in the midst of diversity, among languages, cultures, and ways of knowing that are unknown and undecipherable to me. Such moments of discomfort feel

important, like *something* (Stewart, 2007): something that holds my attention and hints at what these moments may hold.

The feeling of being an outsider at school extends outside my classroom as well, because of my opposition to my employer's mandated assessment regime, which is grounded in English-only language ideologies that narrowly define newcomer learners with deficit perspectives and have potential to harm those who have experienced trauma and loss (Burgess, 2021). I am not alone in my frustration with the Portfolio-based Language Assessment (PBLA) protocol. Researchers studying the implementation of PBLA have documented dramatic increases in teacher workload outside of classroom hours (Abdulhamid & Fox 2020; Mohammadian, 2016; Ripley, 2018), heightened stress and attrition, coupled with insensitivity on the part of administrators to the challenges and needs of practitioners (Desyatova, 2018, 2020). In my workplace, my colleagues appear to have grudgingly accepted PBLA; I remain resistant, and so I find myself labelled a "trouble-maker" for being outspoken. In taking an activist stance to support my students, I welcome the trouble. This is what American civil rights activists like John Lewis (2005) have called *good trouble, necessary trouble*.

I encountered the sensation of being between belongings a few years ago when my family travelled to Poland, "the old country," for a week-long holiday. I loved the museums, the beauty of the architecture, the smells and tastes of familiar foods, and the lovely sound of the language, carrying the warmth and memories of childhood family gatherings. At the same time, I felt a powerful sense of loss: language, culture, family, and history – all out of reach. A dis/embodyed fracture: the sharp dissonance of feeling, at once, at home, but so far away from home. My research explores the complex and nuanced ways belongings and not-belongings unfold, and the felt and sensed connections and dis/connections to place, space, culture, and to language, people,

and the self. My aim is to work in partnership, to step back, quiet my voice, and make space for the voices, thoughts, and bodies of those who are so often unseen and unheard, to create spaces of belonging where we can walk alongside each other, in shared becomings, in difference, and in solidarity.

### **Entering Into the Study**

This study, what I term an improvisational inquiry, took place within a Zoom online meeting platform in the spring and summer of 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Researching, learning, and being together in a virtual space during the early months of a global pandemic vividly brought together the surreal elements and everyday realities of a posthuman world. In real and online spaces, we, as human subjects were decentered, our lives upended and controlled by an unseen virus. As a result, most human contact outside the home shifted to virtual platforms; a new reality for working, studying, and socializing. Our literacy practices, already dominated by digital display screens and mobile devices, became further mediated by technology. For this study, the research site evolved into a surprising, spontaneous, and complex space that was multilayered and overlapping, with real spaces and virtual settings, entwined with multimodal texts and multilingual interactions, and a colourful, “kaleidoscoping effect of space and time” (Davies, 2014, p.86). We found ourselves within an entanglement of human and uncontrollable, unpredictable non-human participants, including the coronavirus and its mutations, and digital technology and its unruly demons. The complexity of these spaces, our interactions, and our emergent understandings of these spaces and interactions, present possibilities for further transdisciplinary research, involving the fields of language, literacy, affect, the arts, and technology in education.

## Overview of the Chapters

This document is organized into six chapters. Following the introduction, I present a review of the literature, storying my journey in teaching and research through encounters with theory. Through this process of reflecting on theory and practice, and theory, I re-story my praxis and myself. The third chapter offers my theoretical framework. I locate my work within critical posthumanism and draw on theories of worlding, wonder, and Borderlands thinking for my analytical lens, and I theorize belonging and not-belonging as worlding processes in newcomer lives. Chapter 4 provides an overview of my research design, which I term an improvisational inquiry, an artistic, post qualitative design that incorporates writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) and art-based methods responding to emergent themes and questions in participant conversations within an online translanguaging space (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Wei, 2011). In this virtual setting, bilingual and multilingual speakers were invited to use their full linguistic repertoires, in creative collaboration and in building a space of belonging. In Chapter 5, I present the findings and discussion of the study, juxtaposing participant voices in the form of poetic transcripts (Görlich, 2016, 2019, 2020; Ratković, 2013), with found poems (Prendergast, 2009) generated from academic texts, and the poetry and theorizing of Borderlands scholars and artists whose work is generated from the margins (hooks, 1989; Smith, 2012) and Borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987; Keating, 2009). In presenting the poems, I ask for understanding when the reader discovers instances in which the document does not strictly conform to APA 7 standards: I have used italics to present some of the poems and vignettes, and to emphasize key words and phrases. I have used additional spacing in and around the poetic transcripts for impact, and to convey a speaker's pause, sighs, or silence. I have also used unconventional citation practices in some instances, taking artistic liberty to create a cleaner canvas, so to speak, so that

the reader's attention stays with the meanings, evocations, and reverberations of the story in the poem or vignette.

I conclude this dissertation with a reflection on the complexities of belonging as worlding and unworlding, the liminal spaces between belongings, the power of creativity in newcomer reworldings, and the possibilities for the literacies of belonging, for co-constructing and communicating our collective becomings and belongings, our "*comingtogethers*" (Ehret, 2018a, p. 56) in an imperfect and unfinished world.

By sending our voices, visuals, and visions outward into the world,

we alter the walls and make them a framework

for new windows and doors.

We transform the *posos*, apertures, *barrancas*, *abismos*

that we are forced to speak from.

Only then

can we make a home out of the cracks.

(Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009, p. 135)



## CHAPTER TWO: JOURNEYING WITH THEORY

This chapter presents my review of the literature as the story of my teaching and research praxis, charting my encounters with theory from my master's studies to my dissertation research, alongside my teaching experiences working with newcomers in an adult English language settlement program. I describe how theory has spoken to my teaching and research in various contexts and across time. I aim for my writing to be invitational, drawing readers into contemplating these ideas as storying narrative and theory, to reveal that I have engaged with, understood, and responded to the body of knowledge that guides my research (Ridley, 2012, p.3). This is also a worlding composition (Blaikie, 2020, 2021; Stewart, 2010, 2016, 2019) told through classroom and research vignettes, visual images, and poetry excerpts, to capture and represent my journey and my learnings with and through theory, as a social justice educator and new researcher, working in solidarity with newcomers to Canada.

I take an unconventional approach to exploring the literature that informs my study. Scholars such as Boote and Beile (2005) argue that a traditional review of the literature is “the best avenue” for acquiring and demonstrating knowledge of the literature in one’s field (p.4). I agree it is one way, but not the *only* way. My dissertation is not limited to one field; in fact, my work challenges the assumption that there is such a thing as a single field with identifiable, contained boundaries. While this dissertation is about literacy, it is not only about literacy. My field encompasses affect, posthumanism, worlding, translanguaging, the Borderlands, and the arts. My writing draws on — and tethers together — these fields of study. Like posthumanism, my field is porous and entangled. The literature I employ is discussed in this chapter and it is also threaded throughout the document. My dissertation demonstrates the ways in which these fields are permeable, interrelated, and transdisciplinary. I argue that as we move fluidly through,

between, and across each field, mobilizing the unique tools and insights found within these fields, we are in fact, translanguaging; we are engaging in new forms of inquiry, and in the creation of new meanings, and new possibilities.

My scholarship draws on emerging, innovative approaches in qualitative research that are arts-based and poetic. Here, poetry and artworks are recognized as legitimate forms of scholarship. I take inspiration from Indigenous scholar Peter Cole (2002) and queer activist John Guiney Yallop (2008). Cole and Guiney Yallop do not provide a traditional review of the literature of a specific field in their dissertations; in fact, their work contains no literature review of any kind. Their writing contests the expectations and assumptions that underpin the traditional dissertation, rooted in positivist, hegemonic structures that support quantitative research and the dominance of the Global North in the academy. Boote and Beile (2005) celebrate the writing of a conventional literature review as a means of “inculcating the norms and practices of academic culture” (p. 13). Following Cole and Guiney Yallop, my work challenges such hegemonic thinking by foregrounding the voices of the Global South, non-western ways of knowing, and by imagining other ways of doing research. Elizabeth St. Pierre (2021b) tells doctoral students to trust in creativity and experimentation, telling us we have a right and responsibility to “invent and create new approaches to inquiry to address the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 7). That is precisely what I have done in this chapter.

I begin this worlding composition by describing my encounters with the theory, people and things tangled up with the literature that have troubled, informed, and sparked my understandings of what it means to teach and research in solidarity, working alongside those who often find themselves constructed as *Other*, marginalized by race, religion, language, accent, and immigration status. Blaikie (2020, 2021) and Stewart (2010, 2016, 2019) theorize *worlding as*

*method* to explore individual experiences as they collide with affect, thoughts, and ideas, as worlds and worldings that unfold across bodies, time, and spaces. Worlding as method is “ontological, epistemological, active, ongoing and entangled with particular moments, experiences and enactments of being, becoming, belonging” (Blaikie, 2020, p. 334).

The aim of my review of the literature from my expansive field is to critically reflect on my praxis and take theoretical responsibility: to confront and embrace my responsibility to act, think, and do knowledge differently (Pillow, 2019), in ways that do not inflict harm on non-dominant communities or reinscribe colonial discourses. I describe my engagements with language and literacy theories, as well as theories of affect in literacy studies, critical posthumanism, and attuning to the world with more than theory: through the poetry, creative writing, and the arts. On this winding journey, I have often found myself caught up in the weeds, in the brambles, trying to find my way as I think and feel my way, struggling to make sense and make a path. In the following section, I discuss multiliteracies, affect, emotion, embodiment, translanguaging, and belonging, and how they are interlaced with the margins and Borderlands.

### **Multiliteracies**

In 2008, I was invited to help develop and co-teach a new English language program for young adult newcomers, aged 18-25, using multiliteracies theory (New London Group, 1996). I saw this invitation as an opportunity to learn, experiment with curriculum, and grow as an educator, to teach English differently, creatively, and transgressively (hooks, 1994), in ways that might push back against neoliberal practices that dominate the field of ‘second’ language acquisition. I quickly discovered that in working with older youth, the English language classroom became an exciting and oftentimes confusing place, an entanglement of bodies,

languages, cultures, and technology, jostling and bumping up against each other in affectively charged spaces.

*Watching my students, young adult English learners, fill their break-time on their cell phones, in texting conversations with friends and family, nearby, across time zones, around the globe, I marvel at their innovative languaging practices. Some incorporate numerical symbols into their texts to represent first language alphabet or phonology, many create hybridized forms of English and home language. Everyone embeds emojis (a Japanese invention) and English acronyms - BRB, g2g, LOL - into their texts (Burgess, 2014). I am on the frontlines, observing new forms of literacy emerge through the everyday practices of the learners inside my classroom.*

My encounters with young adult newcomers highlighted the ways in which literacy is lived, the ways in which people move “through and within literacy all the time” (Pahl et al., 2020, p. 1).

Multiliteracies theory (New London Group, 1996) views literacy as a dynamic social and cultural practice: as multiple, multimodal, interactive, and in flux, developing and responding to the complex changes in the world around us. My English language program, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), operates in an environment that remains entrenched in structuralist thinking, despite shifts in the field of applied linguistics. This shift recognizes the reality that multilingualism is not unique or unusual, but a common linguistic phenomenon around the globe (Blommaert, 2010). However, settlement English programs in Canada are anchored in an understanding of language as a “pure,” fixed code that can be contained by a set of borders within a nation-state (Garcia & Wei, 2014). For most of my career, I had worked uncritically within this structuralist paradigm. When presented with the chance to learn and apply the critical social theories I was introduced to in the so-called multiliteracies manifesto, I jumped

at the opportunity to put theory into practice, and to put social justice at the heart of my praxis. Multiliteracies offered newcomer learners, as new citizens, a form of artistic expression, a creative way to question what is equitable and just, and to feel they have a stake in their community (Holloway, 2014).

*We began our program with three digital video cameras, three desktop computers with editing software, and an impressive collection of costumes pilfered from my kids' old dress-up box and local second-hand shops. The students learned about camera angles, how to capture audio, use light, and edit footage. We developed a critical literacy curriculum to explore issues such as gender and racial stereotyping in media. We incorporated popular English language children's stories, like the Paper Bag Princess (Munsch, 1980) into our project work. The learners discussed and re-wrote the story to playfully upend gender roles in their own cultures (Burgess, 2020b).*

### Figure 1

*Princess Maha Comic Strip (Burgess, 2020b).*



A multiliteracies approach calls for collaboration, imagination, and critical thinking, while drawing from students' home languages, cultures, and life-worlds, employing new technologies to provide learners opportunities to find their own voices, to become "designers of their social futures" (NLG, 1996, p. 64). The multiliteracies framework evolved from the New Literacy Studies (NLS) movement, which focuses on everyday literacy practices and literacy events across sites and spaces, within everyday contexts, in school environments and lived experiences (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984); NLS scholars have documented the ways in which literacy emerges in and through engagements as varied as poetry and storytelling in rural communities, mosque readings from the Quran, and shopping lists as literacy artifacts. Literacy is viewed as material, entwined in assemblages with other elements, of people, tools, non-humans (Kuby & Rowsell, 2017), forming relations and movements that connect to the past through affective intensities in the present that carry forward as potentials into futures (Ehret, 2018a). Scholarship in this field considers the in-the-moment realities of literacy learnings, as well as literacy's possibilities — what it could be (Pahl, 2019), and it demands an ethical engagement that includes the nonhuman in questions of who matters and what counts in educational research (Kuby & Rowsell, 2017).

Multiliteracies theory further reconsiders literacy in the context of globalization, the rapid growth of digital technologies, mass migration, and linguistic and cultural diversity. Its authors reframe literacy as multimodal, moving the focus away from practices centered mainly on one mode – the written word – to the ways in which people enact literacy by deploying multiple modes as they create texts (Rowsell & Burgess, 2017). By taking up a variety of modes to represent the audio, visual, gestural, spatial, and tactile dimensions of communication (alongside traditional literacy forms), learners remake and redesign their social worlds. According to the

New London Group (1996): “We cannot remake the world through schooling, but we can instantiate a vision through pedagogy that creates in microcosm a transformed set of relationships and possibilities for social futures, a vision that is lived in schools” (p. 64). I hoped to bring this progressive vision to life through engaging multiliteracies projects that would be academically motivating and culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and tapped into learners’ proficiency with digital devices and interest in new technology.

In this innovative classroom, learners discussed, brainstormed, drew storyboards, and wrote scripts. They made news reports and commercials, created digital comic strips and dual language posters. And at the end of each year, teachers and learners collaborated on a culminating project, a short documentary that explored newcomer youths’ lived experiences with a particular social issue: forms of discrimination faced by women who wear a hijab; grueling dead-end jobs taken up by newcomers; and transnational youth struggling with feelings of rootlessness. While the student-teacher co-productions were technically imperfect and unpolished, I found them breathtaking. The students were courageous in sharing their stories and in their desire to shine a light on little-known issues. The goals of multiliteracies theory and pedagogy were being brought to fruition through collaborative multimodal projects; the voices of marginalized students were being amplified through their creative, critical literacy and digital literacy engagements. It was deeply rewarding, but at the same time, confounding; the learners often seemed ambivalent about the project work. Sometimes, it seemed there was little enthusiasm to complete multimedia projects, big and small.

*As I look around the room, I notice less than half the class is engaged in our documentary work. The remaining learners have their backs turned. Some are finishing a writing assignment. A few have departed for an appointment downtown, a part-time job,*

*a long cigarette break, a walk-about in the hallways, anything, it seems, to avoid our project. I ask the solitary learners if anyone would like to edit the opening segment of the documentary. No volunteers. Would someone like to design the poster to advertise our community screening? Nobody. Would anyone like to write the invitation letter to the upcoming screening? Silence (Burgess, 2014, p. 17).*

During my decade of working with young adult newcomers, this scene played out time and again, and without a clear explanation for what appeared to be learner indifference, uneven investment, perhaps even resistance, toward our multiliteracies projects. This perplexing issue became the focus of my master's degree research.

Critiques of multiliteracies by literacy scholars have generally centered on the popularity of the design element; interest in multimodality seems to have overtaken the pedagogy's social justice objectives. Collier and Rowsell (2014) state the multiliteracies concept of design tends to eclipse the concept of pedagogy, which was intended to incorporate cultural and linguistic diversity. Rogers and Trigos-Carrillo (2017) argue issues of power and injustice have been overshadowed by the focus on multiliteracies design, resulting in the valorization of individuals' voice and agency, rather than attending to the significant structural inequities that affect marginalized learners. Campano et al. (2020) suggest the practice of "deconstructing" and demystifying texts may fulfil critical literacy and multiliteracies objectives, the individual reader's analyses may still be used for assessment for institutional and ideological purposes. Even though a curriculum may be "culturally relevant," students may feel alienated because they are still experiencing "schooling as usual" (Campano et al., 2020, p. 140). It appears this study may address learner ambivalence in my multiliteracies practice, or at least some part of it. Still, I



feel there is something missing, something more that eludes me and my understanding of the students I work with. Campano and colleagues have pointed to emerging scholarship grounded in non-dominant, activist, artistic, and intellectual traditions, as a path to alternative ways of doing education and educational research. This is a path I have followed in my dissertation work.

I stopped teaching the youth class in 2018, and although I no longer work with this group, I find myself thinking with fondness about my encounters with the interesting, unpredictable, and worldly-wise young adults in my teaching space; the feeling of not knowing what was happening, or what I was missing, still lingers in my thoughts. While completing my doctoral studies coursework, my encounters with postcolonial and Indigenous scholarship, Borderlands thinkers, and affect theorists, have brought a new direction to my work, new thinking about my students, and new disruptions to my understandings of my praxis, my first language, and myself.

### **Turning to Affect**

My introduction to theories of affect has dramatically shifted my thinking about my teaching and research experiences with young adult newcomers, especially those emotional eruptions that seemed to arise out of nowhere, inexplicable moments of tension and silence, and the students' lack of enthusiasm for multiliteracies pedagogy. There were also wonderful moments of warmth and connection, and fleeting, unnamed instances when something would happen, a sudden shift in the atmosphere, sensed, felt, but hard to define. As educators we often find ourselves confronting felt intensities, forces that surface, but are "beyond our grasp and yet flood us with their importance" (Ehret & Leander, 2019, p. 2). Thinking with affect does not mean analyzing feeling with the goal of knowing, understanding, or mastering; thinking with affect provides a fluid path to move with those felt intensities, "as a way of feeling and knowing

*with their movements and force*” (ibid): a dramatically different way to think about teaching and researching.

During my doctoral work, I decided to revisit my multiliteracies dilemma with an autoethnographic study (Burgess, 2020b), spurred by my early encounters with the turn to affect in the field of literacy. Specifically, I was drawn to the work of Leander and Boldt (2013), who have challenged the “text-centric” and “discourse-centric” (p. 31) perspectives of multiliteracies, arguing this approach fails to consider the significance of movement, feeling, and sensation in meaning making. Leander and Boldt invite researchers and educators to attend to the ways in which literacies unfold in captivating, unexpected moments, entwined in material and semiotic assemblages. Working with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of *emergence*, Leander and Boldt (2013) explore the in-the-moment movements of a ten-year-old boy and his out-of-school literacy engagements over the course of a single day. They describe how literacy is embedded in the energetic, imaginative literacy activities of a child, who brings textual worlds to life through his body and imagination, in spontaneous actions and interactions that originate in texts. This form of imaginative play can be viewed as “living its life in the ongoing present,” forming relations and connections across signs, objects, and bodies in often unanticipated ways; such activity is created by the “ongoing flow of affective intensities that are different from the rational control of meanings and forms” (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 36). By attending to the non-textual features of literacy, we see how literacy is unbounded:

Unless as researchers we begin travelling  
in the unbounded circles that literacy travels in,  
we will miss literacy’s ability to participate in unruly ways  
because we only see its proprieties

(Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 42).

The notion of literacy as “unruly,” travelling in “unbounded circles” resonates with my multiliteracies classroom experiences. I am drawn to the hidden and affective dimensions of language and literacy (Leander & Ehret, 2019; Ehret, 2018a, 2018b; Leander & Boldt, 2013), how its energy, vitality, and dynamism are bound up in thoughts, emotions, materials, and flows, in places and spaces (Pahl et al., 2020, p.1).

The affective dimensions of literacy compel me to pay closer attention to what may be beneath the ripples of emotion, the unseen undercurrents, the warmth of a smile, the hesitation in a voice, or instances of impenetrable silence. These are moments that stand out and shimmer with importance (MacLure 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c); they connect us and sometimes confuse us. Most days, these relational moments in our classrooms get lost or obscured by the heavy demands of curriculum, assessment, and paperwork. When we fail to attend to these happenings that touch us, remain with us, and feel significant, what exactly are we missing?

The work of Leander and Bolt (2013) has led me to reframe learning as always in process and emerging, and to embrace “difference, surprise and unfolding that follow along paths that are not rational or linear or obviously critical or political” (pp. 43-44). My efforts to think with affect theory and difference have pushed me to re-think my relationship with the learners in my multiliteracies classroom:

*I no longer feel myself a stranger, an outsider, in spaces with newcomers who are, in so many ways, unknowable. Through a Deleuzo-Guattarian lens, I see myself enmeshed in a lively language learning assemblage, of “wild” undecipherable elements that are resistant to interpretation and analysis: transcultural bodies, objects, affective flows of histories, cultures, languages, silences, alliances and divergencies, conjoined in richly*

*textured movements, all in relation. I see ambiguity and uncertainty as a way of life in this classroom assemblage, evoking sensational experiences that may well be disorienting (Burgess, 2020a, pp. 11-12).*

This introduction to working with uncertainty, and what is unknown and unknowable, has led me to further investigate the theoretical paradigms that foreground the importance of emotion, affect, and embodiment, and the ways in which feelings, bodies, objects, and environments are entangled with language and literacy practices.

### **Language, Literacy and Affect**

Researchers across the humanities and social sciences have, in recent years, turned to affect (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010), with lines of inquiry variously titled posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013), new materialism (Bennett, 2010), and process philosophy (Manning & Massumi, 2014; Massumi, 2011). Although differently named, affect theory leads researchers to reconsider how they come to know and describe the phenomena they study, and to consider the ethical implications of affective encounters with bodies that matter, or “mattering bodies” (Leander & Ehret, 2019, p. 9). As literacy scholars are discovering, the affective turn holds untapped potential for exploring emotional and affective intensities and atmospheres that saturate classrooms (and the spaces beyond), that move us in unexpected ways, and prompt us to consider other ways of doing language and literacy.

My dissertation research is situated in a posthumanist paradigm, which aims to decenter the human subject and abandon humanist worldviews in favour of more holistic ways of knowing (Blaikie, Daigle, & Vasseur, 2020). In other words, posthumanism broadens our perspective so that we may think about how we, as humans, are fully entangled with our environments. We begin to see how people, things, ideas, and the ecologies within us and around

us are inseparable; they interconnect and interact in often unpredictable ways. I will explore critical posthumanism, along with affect theory's concepts of worlding and wonder, in more detail in my Theoretical Framework, in Chapter 3.

### **Affect vs Emotion**

What is affect, what is emotion, and what is the difference? There is no single, generalizable theory of affect; the multiple iterations of theories of affect are “as diverse and singularly delineated as their own highly particular encounters with bodies, affects, worlds” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, pp. 3-4). Some affect theorists draw a distinction between affect and emotion, as do Seigworth and Gregg (2010, p.1), who use the term affect to describe those visceral forces that exist beneath, alongside, and outside conscious knowing. Many affect theorists in literacy studies draw on the work of French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, who describe *affect* as the body's capacity to affect and to be affected, whereas the term *emotion* has been conceptualized as identifying the meaning we attribute to affect (Boldt, Lewis, & Leander, 2015). Echoing Gregg and Seigworth (2010), process theorist Brian Massumi (2002) draws on philosophers Baruch Spinoza, Alfred North Whitehead, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, to place emotion as secondary to affect, describing it as the conscious naming of experience, thus making emotion a personal quality. Cultural political theorist Sara Ahmed (2015) has challenged the apparent dichotomy between emotion and affect, arguing bodily sensations and emotions are not experienced as distinct, and therefore cannot be separated and appraised. Ahmed (2015) has theorized emotions as “crucial to the very constitution of the physical and the social as objects” so that emotions “allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects” (p. 10). Emotions can spread, moving through the movement or circulation of objects.

## Cultural-Political Theory of Emotion

Sara Ahmed situates her cultural-politics approach to the study of emotions at the intersection of feminist, queer, and race studies; her focus is on how emotions are implicated in the circulations of power. Ahmed (2015) argues emotions are mediated by bodies, objects, and signs; emotions move and cohere in an ‘emotional economy’ that can generate alliances and differences that are felt in and on the body:

Focusing on emotions as mediated rather than immediate reminds us that knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world. (p. 171)

As Ahmed (2015) explains, the *doing* of emotions “is bound up with the sticky relation between signs and bodies: emotions work by working through signs and on bodies to materialise the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds” (p. 191). Emotions adhere to ideas, activities, policies, and they become saturated – sticky – with affect. This stickiness illustrates how “emotions ‘matter’ for politics; emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds” (p. 12). In her exploration of ignoble, ambivalent, “ugly feelings,” Sianne Ngai (2005) describes emotions as “unusually knotted or condensed ‘interpretations of predicaments’” (p. 3); in other words, emotions are signs that illuminate different registers of a problem that may be political or ideological. Literacy scholars Lewis and Tierney (2013), like Ahmed, are concerned with how emotions are politicized and how they may be mobilized for action in education settings. Lewis and Tierney’s (2013) study of an urban secondary school Language Arts classroom examines the ways in which learners drew upon their own racialized identities and lived experience to produce passionate critical responses to a text – controversial

photo – which led to a responsive transformation of signs, including the photograph, language, and the sign of race (Boldt, Lewis & Leander, 2015, p. 434). My dissertation study reveals the *sticky relations* between signs and bodies, and how the participants deployed their own emotions to transform signs, such as hijabs, passports, and identity cards, and inform our understandings of belonging and not-belonging.

Sara Ahmed's (2000, 2010, 2015) writing reverberates with my teaching and research experiences in many ways, particularly when she explores the figure of the stranger in the dominant culture, or the "melancholic migrant" who fails to show sufficient gratitude and appreciation for being accepted into an immigrant-receiving nation. The stranger is commonly understood as someone we do not recognize, but Ahmed (2000) argues we recognize some people *as* strangers, that some bodies are understood to be strangers, as bodies that are 'out of place.' In other words, the stranger has a place by being out-of-place-at-home, in the dominant culture. This experience of being out-of-place-at-home is often echoed by my transnational, multilingual students, and research participants, as they describe affective experiences of *unworlding*, or not-belonging, in places and spaces in Canada and the world.

### **Theories of Affect, the Body, and Embodiment**

In my poetic inquiry on newcomer youth experiences of belonging (Burgess, 2021) and this dissertation study, I apply the metaphor of the *rhizome* to the concept of worlding as belonging; I argue newcomer processes of belonging do not follow a uniform, linear progression but are rhizomatic, emerging in unpredictable and idiosyncratic movements, directions, and flows. French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the rhizome to describe the complexities of language, and the tangling up of people and objects, ecologies, affect, emotions,

and sense, in meaning making. Originating in botany, the rhizome denotes a horizontal subterranean plant stem that sends off roots and shoots in all directions. As an evolving philosophical concept, the rhizome is considered non-hierarchical, heterogenous, and decentered, provoking divergent thinking, and offering new connections and multiplicities. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose rhizomes engender *lines of flight*, opening possibilities for escape, transformation, and liberation from forces of oppression.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also argue humans do not exist in isolation, rather within a lively *assemblage*, an enmeshing of bodies, words, and things. In Deleuzian thinking, language is conceptualized as one element in an assemblage, which is constituted by “states of things, various combinations of bodies, hodgepodes ... utterances, modes of expression, and whole regimes of signs” (Deleuze, 2007, p. 177). The assemblage can be applied to conceptions of voice and text. Deleuze (2004) suggests our voices are not simply utterances emanating from individuals, emerging from an already-constituted subject, rather one’s voice emerges from a constellation of voices in a collective assemblage. If learners’ voices are not separate and individual, but exist within an entanglement with agency distributed among all the elements in the assemblage, what does this mean for the ways we teach and assess language? What does it mean for our understanding of language itself?

Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) theorizing about assemblages and rhizomes also directs us to attend to how matter plays a part in meaning making. To consider language as an assemblage means viewing all the semiotic resources at play, interacting, “generating different forms of synergy for meaning making” (Canagarajah, 2018, p.4), leading to the production of meanings and knowledge. Deleuze (2004) also names a mysterious, “wild” element in language, which he identifies as *sense*. Maggie MacLure (2013b) describes sense as intangible, resonating in the



body and brain with a kind of “event-ness” and “surface effect” (p. 662). According to Deleuze (2004), sense extends beyond propositional meaning – it resists representation – working as a kind of “mobius strip” between language and the world; it appears to have two sides but forms a single surface (p. 23). Sense is an unruly element; it is about resistance and perplexity (MacLure, 2013b). This conception of sense – as resisting representation and explanation – unsettles my previous understandings of what I had termed student resistance to my multiliteracies pedagogy; by refusing to surrender meanings, sense, the unruly element in my language learning classroom, allows me to view my students and my teaching practice through a new lens. The disrupting force of sense challenges me to work within a space of uncertainty and not-knowing. Sense transports me to the realm of the virtual, of potentialities, and becomings (Deleuze, 2004). These encounters with Deleuzian thinking about entanglements, rhizomes, language, and sense, present me with possibilities for other ways of knowing each other and the world, beyond language. The affective dimensions of literacy call on us to:

feel the world,  
to take affective intensities seriously  
to engage with the surplus  
with the unspoken and powerfully unknown.

(Leander & Ehret, 2019, p. 3)

Leander and Ehret (2019) speak to my teaching and research praxis with newcomers, and the unshakable, paradoxical feeling of being unsettled yet at home, in encounters with “the unspoken and powerfully unknown” (p.3). I feel the need to state that I am aware my embrace of Deleuzian notions of affect involving theories of the body and embodiment and Sara Ahmed’s (2015) cultural-politics approach might be perceived as theoretically incongruous. However, I

find both lenses useful and overlapping at times, interacting in relationship to the context in which they are experienced (Benesch, 2012). Like Benesch, I find these differing perspectives on affect and emotion to be complementary, especially when foregrounding issues of power in the study of literacy and language.

### **Thinking-feeling With Theory**

Literacy scholar Christian Ehret (2018a, 2018b) argues affect, sensation, and relationality, are fundamental to the qualities of meaning and meaning making. Ehret (2018b) explains how knowing and feeling emerged in his research with children in hospitals:

Knowing and feeling affective dimensions of literacies as they emerge through the moment, as they did through moments with Ella, require speculative propositions that lure us into grasping relational transformations as they happen. (p. 566)

I find Ehret's non-representational, ficto-critical writing compelling, as he describes his in-the-moment movements and learning alongside participants. Both Ehret and his young participants think and feel with literacy. His openness about confronting his own vulnerabilities in the research setting serves as a guide and inspiration for me, as a novice researcher and writer who often feels overwhelmed and "in the weeds." Ehret shows how to think and feel with theory – with participants – to understand literacy as deeply affective, relational, and vitally alive.

My learners' varied literacy practices illuminate how literacy is compelling, complex, and multi-dimensional; it is multimodal, cross-modal, imaginative, and spontaneous. Most importantly, literacy is fundamentally relational and lived, "informed by the ways, beliefs, experiences, and ontologies of individual lives" (Pahl et al., 2020, p. 4). How literacy is lived becomes apparent in my learners' translanguaging and artistic practices, through their dual language poems, photographs, artwork, and digital posters, as a means of exploring and sharing

their personal journeys, interior lives, and desires (Burgess, 2021). This knowing-feeling-thinking view of literacy (Ehret, 2018a, 2018b) emerges through relationships and experiences.

As a language and literacy teacher/researcher, my work aligns with the perspectives of literacy scholars who frame literacy as lived (Pahl et al., 2020), imbued with vitality (Boldt, 2021), as emergent, embodied, and material (Kuby & Rowsell, 2017), unfolding in worldings (Ehret, 2018a; Tanner et al., 2021), in assemblages entangled with bodies, histories, feelings, and ideas (Ehret & Hollet, 2014; Rowsell & Shillitoe, 2019; Wargo, 2015), and emplaced and in motion without regard for linear time or bounded space (Compton-Lilly, 2011; Hackett, 2014; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Lewis & Tierney, 2013). Attending to the enigmatic and unpredictable flows and intensities of affect and its entanglements in literacy settings may lead us to new questions and new tools for exploring those questions and developing new theories.

### **Translanguaging: Language, Affect, and Art**

Encounters with another theory launched another shift in my teaching and research praxis. In 2020, I was invited to be a co-researcher with my (then) supervisor Dr. Jennifer Rowsell on a Niagara area project. Our study explored the multimodal and multilingual literacy practices of adult newcomers as we experimented with translanguaging in the research setting. We offered participants the opportunity to answer interview questions in home languages and deploy their first language in any manner they chose during our workshops. *Translanguaging*, as the prefix “trans” suggests, is the act of languaging: the fluid movement between languages that goes beyond notions of code-switching or translation. Languaging – or translanguaging – involves transcending “named” languages, such as English, French, or Mandarin, as individuals leverage their linguistic, multimodal, and other communicative resources from a single, flexible communicative repertoire (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Translanguaging is considered theoretical,

pedagogical, and political (Vogel & Garcia, 2017); it is empowering in its ability to make visible and audible the voices of learners who may otherwise be silenced by monolingual Standard English education practices.

During our Niagara study, I watched two participants, both Spanish speakers, collaborate on a digital book, *Canada is like back home*; they completed this project speaking Spanish while composing their text in English. They shared ideas, selected colours and illustrations, wrote the text, made corrections and edits, moving seamlessly within the dynamic space between and across languages and modes. The participants' digital book told the story of a picnic at the home of one of the authors, and an unexpected emotional moment, stemming from the view of Lake Ontario. This affectively charged moment spread rhizomatically through the gathering, generating an embodied response that was still felt by the storybook authors months later (Burgess, 2020a).

The affective ripples of the story touched me as I read their book, and perhaps you may feel the charge, as you become caught up in the text. From the participants' digital storybook and the enduring moments described within it, we may experience “vibrant matter”, the power of an object to touch us and move us, the “curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, produce effects dramatic and subtle” (Bennett, 2010, p. 6), in a collective text-body-language affective assemblage.

## **Figure 2**

*Excerpt from “Canada is like back home.” Used with permission.*

My house on the Lake  
Ontario, and my friend  
was a little bit emotion  
because her grandmother  
back home have the same  
view.



Literacy events, such as the moment described in a digital text, draw the reader’s attention to the presence of transcultural flows that involve language, culture, imagination, and materiality – those curious things that can move us and spark affective intensities that reverberate across time, bodies, text, and space, with lasting resonances for readers, listeners, and writers alike.

In another encounter from the Niagara study, I spoke with a Syrian participant about her collage, which she had titled, “The Story of Sumaya in Canada.” At the center of the collage was an image of a woman in profile, eyes closed, caressing her face (taken from an advertisement). I asked Sumaya to tell me about her artwork:

She tilted her head back, closed her eyes, and mirroring the action of the woman in her artwork, Sumaya’s hands stroked her cheeks over and over, and she said: “No stress, no stress, no stress.” (Burgess & Rowsell, 2020, p. 14)

This singular moment shines in my memory; I was taken by the softness of Sumaya’s voice, emerging with the felt force of emotion and unspoken histories entangled with her whispered

words. Such literacy happenings call on us to inquire into these important *somethings*: momentary fragments, ephemeral literacy events which we may not fully understand, but nevertheless feel like something that has weight and importance. By holding space in relationality, difference, and not-knowing, we may be able to communicate – beyond language – our compassion and care.

Following our Niagara study and those moving research encounters, I began to attend more closely to the presence of affect in my classroom. I also began to use translanguaging more purposefully, combining translanguaging with art activities. Working with the arts is inherently performative, whether one is drawing, painting, singing, or acting. Language is also understood to be performative, as language and meanings emerge in and through activity; in translanguaging practices, bi- and multilinguals perform in multimodal ways (Garcia, 2017). The marrying of translanguaging and the arts is an obvious way to imaginatively deploy learners' impressive creative and semiotic meaning making resources.

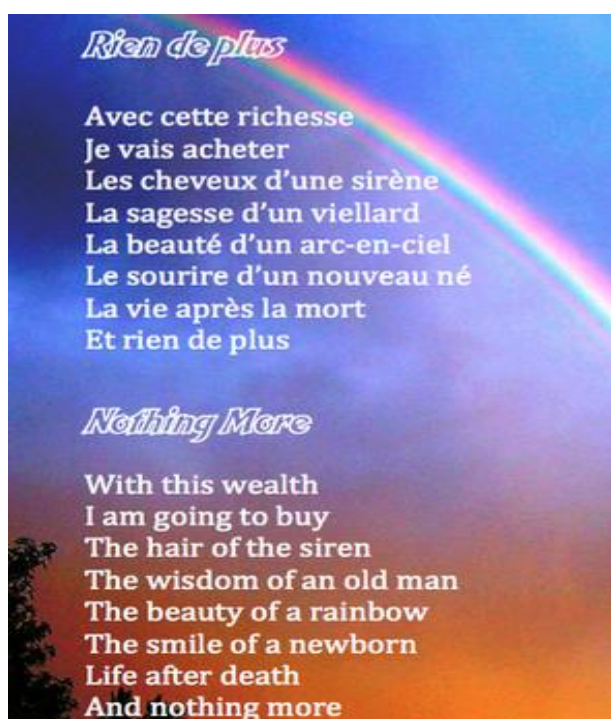
My initial effort to acquaint my students with translanguaging and poetry turned into one of the most memorable days of my teaching career. I watched in awe as my students worked together in mixed language groups to translate a Spanish poem, *Nada más* (Nothing More), by Argentinian writer activist Maria Elena Walsh. They worked boisterously but intentionally, moving across languages using their cellphones, drawing small illustrations, calling across the room to check understandings with friends, ensuring everyone in the group understood the text. I then asked the learners to use the original poem as inspiration to write their own dual language poem, in English and their first language, and illustrate their writing in a digital poster. The energy in our classroom *translanguaging space* - a space for *doing* translanguaging and created *through* translanguaging (Wei, 2011) - was palpable. It became an affective space of acceptance,

belonging, emotional and intellectual investment, and agency, in which students responded in spontaneous moments of action, interaction, creativity, and criticality (Burgess, 2021).

Reading my learners' dual language poems, I was dazzled; their words contained passionate pleas for the end of war, the desire for a family home, the embrace of a loved one, and reflections on the beauty of life. It was a day that was surprising, unexpected, and emotional. I recently completed a poetic inquiry about our classroom poetic encounters on that day (Burgess, 2021), to explore the fascinating intersection of translanguaging, art, and affect, and what has stayed with me from that remarkable day: the warm afterglow of wonder.

### Figure 3

*James's Rien de plus/Nada más Poem (Burgess, 2021).*



Three years later, when I talked to James about his dual-language poem (see Figure 3) for my poetic inquiry, he explained: “These things remind me of how life can be beautiful ... We often see the toughness of life, but we don’t see what we should be grateful of, like the reason we

are living” (Burgess, 2021, p. 262). James’s writing and poster demonstrate his ability to synthesize his fluid bilingualism and fluid multimodality (Bradley et al, 2018), as well as his capacity to synaesthetically leverage his impressive communicative and creative literacy resources – linguistic, cultural, technological, and affective – in the production of new understandings and new meanings (Burgess, 2021).

Yet when I re-read James’s poetic reflection on the beauty of life, what is most striking is what was missing, what was left unsaid. When I asked if he now felt “Canadian,” he replied in a quiet, measured voice: “*Not. At. All*” (Burgess, 2021, p. 263). The impact of those three carefully chosen words hit me, shocked me, left me reeling. James described feelings of exclusion, feeling alone and profoundly out of place at the college, at his part-time job, and in Canada. A warm, friendly student who was surrounded by friends in our English class, he now found himself dis/placed, without peers in his college program, feeling the presence of racism and xenophobia in everyday spaces. James’s unspoken, affective, embodied experiences of not-belonging were troubling for me; I could not let go of his story or its impact on me. Maggie MacLure (2013a) has encouraged us to pay attention to those disquieting moments in our classrooms, research encounters, and in our data. We should focus on that discomfort – not to search for meaning or purpose – but to attend to those affective and relational moments for where they may lead. From my poetic inquiry, my participants’ stories of belonging and not belonging were surprising, captivating, and at times, deeply disturbing, and through their insistence, became the focus of my dissertation.

### **Theorizing Belonging**

Most of us want to belong, to feel acceptance, a sense of kinship, bonds of family, community, and place; we certainly know when we do not belong. Belonging is a feeling, a



sense, a set of practices; it is simultaneously personal, societal, emotional, and political (Wright, 2015). Belonging emerges at the intersections of these trajectories, and is mediated by personal experience, affiliations, and relations of power (Ahmed, 2015). Forms of belonging are deeply affective: produced in an entanglement of affects, emotions, people, things, places, and spaces. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) propose, “With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself – webbed in relations – until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter” (p. 3). And it is affect — its atmospheres, intensities, and reverberations — that draws attention to a body’s “affectual doings and undoings ... in encounters with forces and passages of intensity that bare out, while occasionally leaving bare, the singularly and impersonal – even sub-personal and pre-personal – folds of belonging (or non-belonging) to a world” (p. 3). My dissertation inquiry takes a deeper look at how belongings and not-belongings are constituted through “affectual doings and undoings”, in worldings and unworldings.

### **Tracing Belonging in the Literature**

The concept of belonging and theorizing about belonging have become a focus of scholarship over the past two decades and crossing several disciplines, encompassing education, migration studies, political science, gender studies, sociology, human geography, education, philosophy, and cultural studies (Halse, 2018). While the terms integration, social inclusion, and adaptation are well defined in the literature, the definition of belonging is less clear and undertheorized (Antonsich, 2010; Wright, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011). The experience of belonging is most often evoked using affective terms therefore, theories of affect provide a compatible and congruent lens for this inquiry.

Women scholars of colour and feminist scholars have been at the forefront of explorations of belonging. Gender and cultural studies scholar Elspeth Probyn (1996) has argued

that in the exploration of social relations, it is more desirable to focus on belonging rather than identity. Probyn suggests belonging is more dynamic, capturing movement and change, whereas identity suggests fixed, unshifting conceptions of self. Belonging, as noted by Borderlands artist and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), cannot be contained or confined by hard boundaries. For example, Anzaldúa (1987) invokes her multiple, intersectional belongings in different ways and in different situations; she identifies as a Latina of mixed-race heritage, while at other times, she is a radical feminist poet, Indigenous artist, and in other contexts, she is a disability rights activist. Anzaldúa (1987) theorizes the liminal spaces of belonging, between borders – between belongings – as *Nepantla*, an Indigenous Nahuatl word for an in-between state. Anzaldúa calls *Nepantla* a bewildering transitional space:

an uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity ... to be disoriented in space is the 'normal way of being' for us mestizas living in the borderlands. (Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009, p. 180)

Anzaldúa's description of in-between spaces resonates with theories of (im)materiality (Burnett, 2015; Burnett et al., 2014), and newcomer experiences of worldings and belongings.

Black feminist theorist bell hooks (2009) describes belonging as a "culture of place," in which the dynamics of racial politics, class, and history, are entwined in spatial placemaking, and are central to her understanding of herself and her feeling of belonging in her home state of Kentucky. hooks (1990) uses the term "homeplace" to represent an affective and embodied space of belonging produced in the private sphere. For African American women, homeplace transcends the domestic and becomes a crucial political space for confronting issues of racism,

dehumanization, and sharing Black feminist thinking and visions. hooks (1990) frames homeplace as a site of resistance:

Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts in spite of poverty, hardship, and depravation, where we could restore ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world. (p. 384)

Gender and ethnic studies scholar Nira Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011) explores the politics of belonging through a lens of emancipatory feminism, intersectionality, and citizenship, explaining, “situated gaze, situated knowledge and situated imagination ... construct how we see the world in different ways” (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 4). She argues for a feminist ethic of care that constructs “an alternative model of political and social relationship to the neo-liberal discourse of self-interest” (p. 45). Her focus is not in determining where (or if) boundaries of belonging should be erected, but rather on the ways in which people relate to each other.

### **Theorizing Not-belonging**

In any discussion of belonging, there is the need to understand the experience of exclusion, isolation, alienation, displacement, uprootedness, and marginalization: in other words, not-belonging. There are multiple ways we may experience not-belonging: in local and global settings, in social, economic, discursive, material spheres, in ways that are formal and informal (Antonsich, 2010). “Unbelonging,” according to Halse (2018) can be an intentional act of resistance to the idea, position, or experience of belonging, such as rejecting the beliefs and practices of a racist organization, or in renouncing one’s faith. Blaikie (2021) suggests belonging and not-belonging speak to our capacities and potential to engage with others, moving from one mode of being to another: “Our feelings and senses of not/un/belonging shift as we engage in and

through materiality, aesthetics, culture, history,” (p. 37) spaces and places. Sara Ahmed (2000) suggests the multicultural nation needs strangers to create a space of belonging, to frame its identity, in order to exist: “You know who you are only by knowing who you are not” (p. 100). By employing the concept of “assimilable difference” (p. 133), the nation defines those whose difference is unassimilable, in other words, those who belong — and those who do not belong. Not-belonging is imposed, for example, when the state rejects a refugee’s asylum application. The question of state-citizenship is one of the most important contemporary political concerns of belonging and not belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Wright (2015) concludes belonging is unavoidably implicated in the production and reproduction of exclusion and racism.

Affect and emotions “exist on and through borders, through sites of contact ... and are critical in the construction, performance and policing of borders” (Wright, 2015, p.8). Wright offers the concept of belonging-as-emotion to highlight the sense of belonging with others, as feeling in common, through connectivity and attachment, or stickiness (Ahmed, 2015). Everyday emotions and affects generate interactivity and engagement between subjects, objects, environments, and through worldings, in which “our liminal needs and desires to be, become, and belong” may surface (Blaikie, 2020, p. 344). In posthumanist terms, belonging as *co-becoming*, based on care and respect across difference, emerges through entanglements of place, human and non-human bodies, practices, histories, affect, and emotions (Wright, 2015). We co-construct belongings with the places, people, things, and becomings that co-constitute it. I propose not-belonging emerges through disconnections and disentanglements, a decomposition of “the material, the semiotic, and the temporal” (Stewart, 2012), a deep rupture to one’s known worlds.

### Thinking and Feeling from the Margins

this english language was forced onto my nation in residential school  
 and other places      our languages were and are not “official”  
 have you ever seen a five year old girl with a pin (inserted) through her tongue  
 for speaking her language      permission resides in me as languaged  
    to use this imposed english as I must otherwise      it will use me at its discretion.  
(Cole, 2002, p. 449)

I am simultaneously awestruck and devastated after reading Indigenous scholar Peter Cole’s (2002) stunning poetic dissertation. In the reading, re-reading, and sitting with Cole’s words, I find myself confronting my first language and my work as an English teacher, struggling to understand its history and how it has been weaponized against First Peoples around the globe. How do I reconcile this reality with my love of the language that holds the beauty, complexity, and provocations of writers such as Shakespeare, Brontë, Woolf, Atwood, Thomas King, Toni Morrison, and Chimamanda Adichie?

Through Cole, I see English as the colonizer’s “tool of conquest”; his writing is political and subversive, challenging the structures and norms of the academy, western epistemologies, and “what counts as legitimate discourse within a sanctioned institution of post-knowing” (p. 450). Through his transgressive use of space between words, and his clever word-play (read/red), Cole stories and reworlds himself in and through language:

I am the written    the language    the read.  
(Cole, 2002, p. 450)

Cole’s words echo those of poet Adrienne Rich (1986): “this is the oppressor’s language, yet I need it to talk to you” (para 2). The English language, for me, is home. For those outside the

dominant culture, Standard English is a site of violence, a territory that limits and defines; a weapon to silence and censor (hooks, 1994, p. 172). My struggle with English - my first language, the heart of my profession, the dominant language of colonization, Eurocentric and academic thought had begun.

Indigenous scholar Sandy Grande (2017) points out critical theory in education scholarship is fundamentally at odds with Indigenous concerns. For Indigenous scholars, the issues of sovereignty and self-determination are the central questions of education whereas critical theorists view education issues through a lens of democracy and equality. Grande (2017) rejects Ladson-Billings's (1995) conception of culturally relevant pedagogy (which is central to my practice with newcomers), arguing the aim of most minoritized groups is inclusion in the democratic imaginary, "while the goal for American Indian scholars and educators is to disrupt and impede absorption into that democracy and continue the struggle to remain distinctive, tribal and sovereign peoples" (p.235). Scholars Tuck and Yang (2012) have also unsettled my settler social justice framework, while unsettling settlers and settler colonialism. The authors maintain progressive educators, like me, become complicit in the erasure of Indigenous populations through the maintenance and reproduction of white privilege and power, by homogenizing marginalized groups' experiences of oppression as colonization, while failing to address Indigenous sovereignty and rights. In unflinching terms, Tuck and Yang (2012) ask us to:

consider how the pursuit of critical consciousness, the pursuit of social justice through a critical enlightenment, can also be settler moves to innocence - diversions, distractions, which relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility, and conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege" (p. 21).

Tuck and Yang (2012) also state unequivocally: “until stolen land is relinquished, critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts settler colonialism” (p.18). Through the challenges posed by Indigenous theorists, I have been forced to confront my own “moves to innocence”; I now see myself as a white settler with power and privilege, a settler teacher of English, the language of the colonizer, to newcomers – new settlers – and I see my complicity in the ongoing project of settler colonization in this country, the continued re-settling of non-Indigenous people on Indigenous lands, and the continued domination of the English language to the exclusion of all others, in educational settings, and in the institutions of power.

Encounters with Indigenous scholars have sparked my desire to decolonize my mind, and my teaching and research practice. Miq'maw scholar Marie Battiste (2002) suggests the way forward is not to simply reduce the distance between “Eurocentric thinking and Aboriginal ways of knowing but engaging decolonized minds and hearts” (p. 22). I take seriously the challenge to decolonize my mind and heart. My learning about Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, not with the goal of appropriation, has opened my eyes to the presence of other non-western ontologies and epistemologies in my classroom, and in this multicultural society, on contested land. Thinking back to my struggles with my learners and multiliteracies theory and pedagogy, as I consider other ways of being, knowing, and doing, I now understand there must also be other ways of learning. And if there are other ways of learning, it is imperative for educators who are committed to justice to seek other ways of teaching, and other ways of being together in classrooms, in relationality, ethics, and allyship, by affectively attuning to the dis/integrations, disruptions, and the disquieting moments that arise when working with learners who may be in the midst of trauma.

i want to go home but home is the mouth of a shark  
 home is the barrel of the gun  
 and no one would leave home  
 unless home chased you to the shore.

(Shire, 2013, p. xi)

*I remember frequently feeling irritated by Ali, a 19-year-old student, who rarely showed up for class, and when he did, he spent the day chatting in Arabic with a classmate. The low drone of his voice was a constant distraction. I'm not sure I ever saw a completed assignment from him. One day, I asked him for the answer to a question from a reading activity, which I knew he hadn't done. He looked at me with weary eyes, sighed, then said, "I just want to go home." Ali had no home to return to; it was obliterated in the Syrian war. The unsettling moments of that encounter have haunted me ever since, and I still wonder: What did that young man learn from my teaching? And what did he teach me?*

I cannot say what Ali learned from me, but he taught me that, for many refugee learners, my classroom is not primarily a space for learning English. It is foremost a place to find safety, solace, and connection with peers: a homeplace (hooks, 1990) in which to share the thick bonds of home language, community, and the lived experience of trauma, loss, and displacement — and a teacher who understands this.

In the following chapter presenting my theoretical framework, I describe how I work with the writing of nondominant authors. I have sought out scholars and poets who write from the edges and margins for their perspectives on everyday life and literacies, their critique of colonizing discourses, and their creativity in speaking back to power. They speak to me as well.



My task as a researcher is to engage in creative production, and to “hear the world and make sure that it can speak back” (Thrift, 2008, p. 18). The creative and critical voices of my participants and authors from the Global South throw light on the affective, embodied, liminal, and political dimensions of belonging and not-belonging in the world.

This chapter has presented a worlding composition of my journey with theory and in doing so, it maps the emergence of the decolonized stance I bring to my teaching and research praxis. I have taken theoretical responsibility by confronting and embracing my responsibility to act, think, and do knowledge differently (Pillow, 2019), in ways that are responsive, relational, and respectful to my students and research participants. This unfinished process of learning and unlearning has also been informed by creative experimentation with the arts, reflection on my actions and omissions, and the interrogation of my whiteness and privilege, and the power imbalances that often result from unearned privilege. My stance grounds my commitment to work in solidarity and alliance with my students and research participants; it is an ontological orientation that welcomes and is open to learning from difference, discomfort, not knowing, and a desire to hold space in those instances we find unknowable, unsettling, and irreconcilable.

Alliances that acknowledge the presence of power and inequity comprehend there is no such thing as common ground. Anzaldúa (2009) points out, as individuals and groups, “we all stand on different plots” (as cited in Keating, p. 149). In other words: “We-Are-(All)-In-This-Together-But-We-Are-Not-One-And-The-Same” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 43). With a shared commitment to creating just spaces for belonging and with the understanding that we may hold differences that seem insurmountable and irreconcilable (Ahmed, 2015, p. 39), we may discover ways in which we can live, learn, and work alongside each other, in difference and respect, in affective spaces that blur boundaries, and create possibilities for the not yet, the new, the next.

The margin is a site of creativity and power

Where we move in solidarity to erase the category of colonised/coloniser.

Marginality as a site of resistance.

Enter that space.

Let us meet there.

Enter that space.

We greet you as liberators.

(hooks, 1989, p. 22)

### CHAPTER THREE: THE FRAMEWORK

Situated within a critical posthumanist paradigm (Braidotti, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020), the theoretical framework for this study combines Borderlands thinking and poetry with theories of wonder (MacLure, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) and worlding, building on the work of Fiona Blaikie (2020, 2021), Kathleen Stewart (2010, 2012, 2017, 2019), and literacy scholar Christian Ehret (2018a, 2018b). This chapter extends my engagements with theory in my teaching and research praxis (as presented in the previous chapter) to construct the theoretical framework for this research study. I theorize newcomer experiences of belonging as indeterminate, rhizomatic processes of worlding, unworlding, and reworlding, along with the porous spaces between worlds. An analytic lens of worlding, wonder, and Borderlands thinking provides a platform for feeling and moving with participant worlds and worldings, in unfolding moments, intensities, and the energies that pulse through these engagements. Attuning to surprising and disruptive moments of wonder, and attending to worldings, allows me “to stretch out a scene, hold up a world’s jelling, and register change” (Berlant & Stewart, 2019, p. 117), and evoke its impacts on bodies of all kinds, in particular, on newcomer bodies that are racialized, accented, and minoritized.

Within the broader social science research community, the material turn has invited scholars to think about the ways in which people and things are tangled, enmeshed, and in creation (Kuby & Rowsell, 2017). In the field of literacy studies, posthumanist thinking focuses on decentering the human as “the origin of all knowing and being and the sole actor of agency. Instead, agency is seen as a togetherness, an in-between force and a flow with humans, nonhumans, and more-than-humans” (Kuby, 2019, p. 129). Scholarship that is rooted in a relational view of the world demands that we reject research practices that are rooted in

conventional humanist practices and seek out innovative approaches to inquiry that center on the relationships and entanglements of humans and non-humans (Kuby, 2017). In the following section, I describe how my artistic inquiry embraces the challenges posed by posthumanist perspectives, to view research as experimentation and invention, and open to what is unfolding in the moment, in the middle of things, in the unknown.

### **Posthumanism**

The ‘post’ in posthumanism does not signal ‘*after the human*,’ but is meant to signal a decentering of the human subject (Kuby, 2017). Posthumanism is a theoretical approach that offers new ways of thinking about humans, not as distinct, exceptional individuals, but as beings with permeable boundaries (Blaikie et al., 2020), connected to all beings and entities within our environment. Theories of posthumanism emerged as a critique of European Humanism, and Eurocentric assumptions about “Man,” more specifically, the white European male being at the center of creation, “the allegedly universal measure of all things” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 32).

Posthuman theorist Rosi Braidotti (2019) calls on us to consider the nature of humanity and what constitutes a subject. Her aim is not to reject the human subject outright, but rather to locate the human in balance with the rest of the world, in relation, and in immanence, in the unpredictable and inventive flows of life that are not governed by rules, regulations, and systems of laws (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). As Indigenous and non-western post-colonial scholars have stressed, this way of being/doing/knowing in the world is not novel or new (see Bhattacharya, 2021; Tuck, 2014). Grounded in a relational ontology, posthumanism proposes humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans are always already entangled with each other “in becoming, in making, in creating realities,” relationships, and literacies (Kuby & Rowsell, 2017, pp. 285-8). A more-than-human ontology calls us to consider how meaning is generated *among* subjects:

Meaning generated among bodies.

Between bodies. Togetherness of bodies.

Bodies as human, nonhuman, and more than human

linguistic bodies, cultural bodies, racial bodies, gendered bodies.

(Kuby, 2019, p. 135)

In literacy and language learning settings, a posthumanist orientation allows us to broaden our perspective on newcomer encounters and engagements with the English language, material objects, and the culture of the dominant language; to consider how we, as humans, are entangled in our environments: in space, place, time, within cultures, languages, material and affective worlds, and worldviews. Through a posthumanist lens, we are able to view space, artifacts, and other non-human resources as active participants in the language assemblage (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2017). Posthumanism leads us to consider sound as a part of a sonic world (Wargo, 2017); sound and the absence of sound become elements moving and acting in the language assemblage. It may then be possible to attend to sounds, noise, and silence differently, to what may be present but unheard in the surrounding ecology, affecting newcomers in everyday spaces.

If we think about language and literacy from a relational and rhizomatic perspective as “unruly” (Leander & Boldt, 2013), emergent, and unbounded (Kuby, 2019), our analysis should also focus on what is happening in-the-moment, in processes of becoming, in the actions and intra-actions of people and materials, movements, and surprises, without any expectation or demand for a textual end-product. Researching with a relational ontology calls on us to think differently, to consider “methodologies without methodology” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015), to view research as “wild and untamed” (Kuby, 2019, p.135). To move beyond traditional humanist qualitative methods, St. Pierre (2011, 2017, 2019, 2021a, 2021b) proposes a shift to post

qualitative inquiry, and letting go of labels, categories, and pre-set designs, to embrace experimentation and innovation. What might my research look like and feel like in a posthumanist world? How are data produced? How will I write up transcripts and (re)present my participants' stories (Kuby, 2019)? And how will I attend to ethics and justice, especially when working with a vulnerable population?

Literacy scholars are among those drawing attention to the role of social justice in a posthumanist paradigm (Kuby & Rowsell, 2017), asking how posthumanism can respond to the persistence of social inequalities, asymmetries of power, and ongoing dehumanizing colonial violence. Zembylas (2018) states:

When certain people have never been treated as humans – as a result of ongoing colonial practices – posthuman approaches advocating a move away from humanism might be seen as an alibi for further denial of humanity to these same people. (p. 255)

While posthumanism seeks to decenter the human subject, my goal in working with critical posthumanism is to recenter human subjects who have been framed as less-than-human through processes of unworlding and not-belonging. Critical posthumanism can work to highlight the presence and impact of power in the research setting, the research paradigm, and wider worlds. It attempts to explore the question of what it means to be human under the conditions of technoscience, advanced capitalism, the climate crisis (Herbrechter, 2018) and forced displacement.

Rosi Braidotti's (2008, 2017, 2020) vision for action is grounded in affirmative ethics, which repositions "the other" in relation to the self, in which ethical relationships are not restricted to the boundaries of the human, but open up to inter-relations between humans, non-humans, posthuman, and inhuman forces (Braidotti, 2008, pp. 5-6). Affirmative ethics is

centered on forging communal solutions to these pressing issues by confronting uncomfortable truths, extracting wisdom and knowledge from the “reworking of pain,” and mobilizing the potential of all living organisms “—humans and non-humans—to generate multiple and yet unexplored interconnections” (Braidotti, 2020, p. 468), and new ways of belonging in diversity and difference. Braidotti emphasizes although we are not one and the same, we share a deep sense of belonging to a common world, and we share the capacity of becoming “posthuman caring hearts” (p. 469).

I find critical posthumanism productive in shifting the focus away from the human subject in the language assemblage to highlight the workings of other entities within the ecology and how they may be implicated in the production of inequities and not-belongings. However, I find critical posthumanism alone does not fully attend to issues of disempowerment and inequity; here, the theoretical perspectives of Borderlands artists and thinkers, Black feminist, postcolonial, and critical race scholars are most insightful for exploring the complexities and dynamics of newcomer spaces. Following Dernikos and colleagues (2020) and Pillow (2019), I take theoretical responsibility, acknowledging my limitations as a teacher/researcher who identifies as a white settler. I take responsibility for my efforts — and my failures— to recognize my complicity with colonizing discourses in my thinking and writing, despite my efforts to dismantle these discourses in my work. And I commit to continuing the learning necessary to further develop my decolonial stance and relational praxis.

In the following section, I present my study’s theoretical framework, a lens that entwines theories of worlding, wonder, and Borderlands thinking, set within a critical posthuman paradigm, to foreground issues of affect, embodiment, and the always already present

movements of power, in the material-sensory somethings (Stewart, 2011) that come into view and make up newcomer worlds and belongings.

### **Borderlands**

The metaphor of the margin, the border, and Borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987) has been deployed for understanding oppression, inequity, and power imbalances, and for describing those individuals, like newcomers, who live outside the mainstream in spatial, socio-cultural, political, and cultural terms (Smith, 2012). Scholars of colour, including Black feminist, Latinx, postcolonial, and Indigenous writers have employed the metaphorical margin in social theories of marginalization, resistance, and possibility. Anzaldúa (1987) uses the term borderlands to indicate the geopolitical space on either side of the Texas/Mexico border, while Borderlands denotes metaphorical hybrid spaces in which languages, cultures, and identities intersect in “intensely painful yet also potentially transformational spaces where opposites converge, conflict, and transform” (p. 319): a space of creation, artistry, and activism.

Theorist bell hooks (1989) describes marginality as both a position and place of resistance for oppressed, exploited, and colonized peoples, borne of lived experience. hooks asserts the margin is a key location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words, but also in “habits of being and the way one lives”; it offers a “radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (hooks, 1989, p. 20). Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) contests the notion of the margins through a Maori lens of *rangatiratanga*, self-determination and sovereignty. Maori do not perceive themselves as a minority group existing in the margins, rather, “Aotearoa, New Zealand is ‘our space’, all of it” (Smith, 2012, p. 321). Smith argues for the need to reclaim those spaces that are taken for granted as being “possessed by the West,” spaces that are geographical and political,



and intellectual, theoretical, and imaginative. Through the ideas of Anzaldúa, hooks, and Tuhiwai Smith, there is radical possibility in “choosing the margins,” as a site of struggle, resistance, and belonging, rather than a desolate space from which to escape.

My students are refugees and landed immigrants living in marginalized spaces, outside the dominant (English-speaking) culture, often in poverty, isolation, and precarity. But the Borderlands are not abject, downtrodden tracts. They are lively, colourful spaces with strong families, vibrant social, ethnic, and religious communities, providing a home and homeplace (hooks, 1990), sustaining unique cultures and identities, and sites for reimagining and recreating worlds, for politics, and decolonization (Smith, 2012). These dynamic worlds, with their affective resonances and spaces of belonging, can be glimpsed through newcomers’ artistic creations, such as James’s translanguaging poem poster (Figure 3) and the “Canada is like back home” digital storybook (Burgess & Rowsell, 2020).

The goal of scholars who research from the edges, whether Indigenous, postcolonial, or critical race theorists, is to draw attention to white privilege and power, and to describe the ways in which racism permeates societies, systematically including and excluding individuals and groups in racialized ways (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Borderlands artists do the same work — they expose other worlds in imaginative and evocative ways. They capture and hold my attention with the felt force of their writing and imagery.

Anzaldúa’s powerful conception of “white noise” (Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009, p. 133) explores how minoritized bodies encounter Standard English, not only the cognitive and physiological struggles to produce the language, but also the affective and embodied experience of distancing by white bodies “who don’t want to hear” (including institutional bodies) (p. 133), thereby excluding those who are not considered “native” English speakers. Latinx critical race

scholars Flores and Rosa (2015) also investigate encounters with language and whiteness in their theory of raciolinguistic ideologies. Flores and Rosa focus on the ideological position of the white listener (not the individual human subject), who perceives “non-native” speakers through deficit perspectives, always positioning the English learner as inferior, thereby reproducing, and reinscribing hierarchies of race and language in dominant English settings.

Living in contested spaces has the potential to create an alternative third space between marginalized cultures and dominant social systems. Kris Gutierrez (2008) uses a third space perspective to frame collective, safe settings in which diverse learners interrupt deficit perspectives, share their stories, dreams, and cultural knowledge, in an educational environment that supports and extends students’ communicative repertoires, as they redefine their sense of self, and “the world as it could be” (p. 158). I entwine affect, posthumanism, and critical race theories to consider the impact of standard English on non-white newcomer bodies, and I employ Gutierrez’s (2008) collective third space theory to describe the space generated by and through our collaborative practices in an online research setting.

The insights that emerge from my encounters with students and the creative work of Borderlands artists and poets draw me to attune more closely to the worlds around me, to see, hear, and feel in different, more expansive ways. For example, the writing of Kurdish-Iranian journalist and poet Behrouz Boochani (2018) captures the horror and despair of everyday life as a prisoner in an Australian refugee detention facility. Boochani draws attention to the sonic, its agency and power to affect, and the ways in which a single sound can awaken us, inhabit us, and take us from the emotional to the political, from human to inhuman, and more-than-human landscapes:

*I hear a faint moaning sound, the sound of painful moaning.*

*The intensity and fear in the sound completely stop me in my tracks.*

*The sound of hopelessness.*

*A nightmare about the nights, about loneliness.*

*The sound of moaning floating over the ocean*

*wading through the jungle that lies beyond the fences*

*The sound of moaning drags itself along with other sounds*

*a sound without rebound against the darkness of the night.*

*The sound of moaning,*

*then it disappears out into the universe.*

(Boochani, 2018, p. 246)

The multiple unworldings that newcomers live through are unknown and unknowable terrain for me, and yet, I feel the need to know, to try to understand that which I may never know. I find a sense of familiarity in the writing of Polish poet and essayist Adam Zagajewski. His family was displaced from their home in the Polish city of Lvov when, under the Soviet postwar policy, it became the Ukrainian city, Lviv (Zagajewski, 2003). When I visited Poland, the home of my maternal and paternal grandparents, I encountered a strange, liminal feeling, not unlike Zagajewski, of being home but not home, connected yet dis/connected from homeland. Zagajewski's poetry captures the incomprehensibility of places in which beauty and suffering co-exist, where feelings of joy and hope constitute acts of defiance, in a world that is terribly broken.

Try to praise the mutilated world.

Remember June's long days,

and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.

The nettles that methodically overgrow  
 the abandoned homesteads of exiles.  
 You've seen the refugees going nowhere,  
 you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.  
 Praise the mutilated world  
 and the gentle light that strays and vanishes  
 and returns.

(Zagajewski, 2003, p. 60)

I have become more attentive to my students' silences, the disruptions, and unspoken worldings through the affective writing of those who open us up to life lived in the margins, and the circulations of power in those spaces: "The moment when a feeling enters the body it is political. This touch is political" (Rich, 1983, p. 535). Borderlands poetry is deeply moving and political; when it is introduced in the English dominant classroom or academic writing, it becomes an act of resistance, a rising up against systems of power. As poet Adrienne Rich (1983) observes: "Every group that lives under the naming and image-making power of a dominant culture experiences this mental colonization and needs an art which can resist it" (p. 529). This inquiry is artistic act of resistance, a rising up against the dominance of western ways of knowing in our classrooms and the academy.

Thinking and feeling with the poetry adds a more evocative dimension to my inquiry by enfolding the perspectives of those who live and write from the edges, non-dominant spaces, between worlds – postcolonial worlds — and whose writing and artistry evoke the affective and embodied experiences of life in the margins, and other ways of being in and knowing the world. Borderlands authors call our attention to the sensed and felt circulations of power, and the

affective, more-than-human, and less-than-human experiences of belonging and not-belonging for refugees and immigrants in Canada and around the globe.

### **Worlding**

Worlding captures and leaves traces of lived moments, memories, images, shadows, hopes, and sensations (Blaikie, 2021), of people labouring in the precarity of their situations, noticing:

what crystallizes  
and how things ricochet and rebound  
in a social-natural-aesthetic ecology of compositions  
and threshold of expressivity.

(Stewart, 2017, p. 194)

Extending my understandings of affect theory, my theoretical framework builds on Blaikie's (2020, 2021), Stewart's (2010, 2012, 2017, 2019) and Ehret's (2018a, 2018b) evocative descriptions of worldings as storying, as the affective nature of the world, emerging in a compositional present, through the entwining of affect, the senses, and matter. Worldings may materialize through the serial immersion in a small world that previously escaped our attention, in "lived circuits of action and reaction" that coalesce in an attunement to the world's "texture and shine" (Stewart, 2010, pp. 339-41). We may suddenly discover we are "entangled in the worlds in which we move" (Blaikie, 2020, p. 333). The term *worlding* is attributed to Heidegger (1962) to describe the world's "dynamic presencing," in which the world is not an object nor is it an entity; "in its worldings, the world makes itself felt through a series of events" (Tanner et al., 2021, p. 240). Belonging opens up the possibilities for exploring how worldings and unworldings

unfold, how people make their place in multiple worlds, and what it means to exist, to be human in an inequitable world that is in flux, through constant and creative negotiations, in uncertainty and emergence, in becomings, co-constructed with and through the world's becomings.

Kathleen Stewart (2017) notes the turn to affect signals a turn away from representation, structure, and evaluation, and instead offers an ethnographic method of mattering that takes into account those things that critical thinking may miss: "The bodies, lines of things on the move...why it matters that attention sometimes slows to a halt to wait for something to take shape" (p. 196). Stewart's (2017) work is infused with Deleuzian thinking which, she suggests, "keeps good company" with feminist thought, cultural studies, and critical race theory, which are also woven into my theoretical framework.

Blaikie (2021) proposes worlding as layered, enmeshed, and interconnected, always being and becoming attuned in granular and entangled ways to situated, ephemeral moments: "Worlding is momentary completeness and perfection that unravels into something else" (p. 36). In arts-based scholarship, worldings unfold through our material, immaterial, and creative entanglements, for example, when writing narrative vignettes and creative non-fiction, or ficto-criticism (Stewart 2014). Through our writing, engaging our thoughts, feelings, ideas, and practices, we are storying ourselves and worlding ourselves, and we re-world our participants; their stories become "multiple micro worldings contextualized by particular material and affective conditions in place at particular moments in time" (Blaikie, 2021, p. 41). Data are re-worlded as scholars reimagine, recreate, and represent participant stories through a lens of personal bias and praxis. The reader also becomes caught up in this unfolding worlding; as they

read and respond, readers are recreating and re-worlding the ideas, narratives, and images in the text, situated in their own lives and their own worlds.

Ehret (2018a) describes temporal worldings as “the temporal textures produced in and across singular *comingtogethers*” (p.56), in which stories gather as forces of felt connection that move between past and present, “with stories of past connecting experiences, experienced as connecting presents” (p. 59), as past felt intensities spill over into present moments.

I define newcomer worldings as processes that occur in indeterminate ways, in non-linear, rhizomatic movements and assemblages, as “*comingtogethers* of multiple social immediacies” (Ehret, 2018a, p. 55), arising in the labour of living (Stewart, 2010), in affective instances of inclusion, exclusion, and dis/integration – in the sense of self, of being, becoming, and belonging-in-the-world. Unworldings are experienced as a profoundly disorienting dissonance, a chasm between the known and the new, in palpable and material exclusions, of not-belonging, feeling out of place, outside the world, and estranged from the self. Newcomer unworldings take place in disparate scenes and sensations that are pulled into a tangle of indeterminate trajectories and disjunctures (Stewart, 2007, p. 5), dis/connections, and dis/placements. Bodies out of time, out-of-place-at-home (Ahmed, 2000), the sensation of free falling.

Sometimes, newcomers may find themselves suspended between worlds, in an (im)material (Burnett, 2015; Burnett et al., 2014) space, where the lines between material and immaterial things – much loved objects, spaces, and places, and their affective resonances — blur, creating a lived, sensory experience, a feeling of the soul being transported to one’s homeland through music or the smell and taste of familiar foods. The experience may be planned or unexpected, and may provoke a soulful, spiritual feeling of peace and calmness, or the anguish

of longing for lost loved ones and a lost homeland — or both at the same time. The (im)material creates a liminal space of complex, layered belongings, not-belongings and between belongings, that transcend everyday worlds.

Rhizomatic processes of reworlding are reflected in participant engagements in reworlding or *worldmaking* (Goodman, 1978; O’Donohue, 2018, O’Donohue & Berard, 2014; Stornaiuolo, 2015; Tanner et al., 2021). Newcomers may reimagine other ways of being and belonging in the world through the arts, by reworking and remaking their existing worlds into something new and meaningful, creating “affective imaginaries” or felt, aspirational worlds, (Nichols & Coleman, 2021). Reworlding stories confirm or disrupt our understandings of the way newcomers see the world, and their ways of being and belonging in less-than-perfect worlds that still hold the promise of something yet to come.

### **Wonder**

I have found power in Maggie MacLure’s (2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) theoretical framing of wonder to interrogate and curate my participants’ stories of belonging and not-belonging, their artworks, and our group conversations. MacLure (2013c) defines wonder as curiosity which is attuned to the vibrant “excess that always exceeds capture by structure and representation” (p. 229), that may point toward something new and unexpected. She calls on researchers to pay attention to those fragments in our data that excite, surprise, confuse, and make us uncomfortable, defying interpretation or understanding: those data stories that glimmer and *glow*. Wonder invites us to experiment with that which will not let go of us, in which something “not-yet-articulated seems to take off and take over” (MacLure, 2013b, p. 661). And wonder allows us to attune more closely to the affective components of data stories that prompt our thought and generate sensations that resonate in the body and the brain: “frissons of



excitement, energy, laughter, silliness” (MacLure, 2010, p. 282). Kathleen Stewart (2011) calls for an attunement to what may be hardly noticeable but still registers as minute “enigmas and oblique events and background noises that might be barely sensed and yet are compelling” (p. 445).

As a theoretical concept, wonder is material, relational, and virtual (MacLure, 2013c); it may be situated in a material object, a segment of text, or an immaterial idea, and at the same time, it is “in” us, the individual who is affected. In MacLure’s words: “When I feel wonder, I have chosen something that has chosen me, and it is that mutual ‘affection’ that constitutes ‘us’ as data and researcher” (2013c, p. 229). MacLure (2013a) also suggests that wonder highlights ethical and methodological concerns in research, since wonder necessarily disrupts the boundaries of power and knowledge that allow researchers to maintain the “enigma of their own self-certainty by rendering others legible. Wonder is a liminal experience that confounds the boundaries of inside and outside, active and passive, knowing and feeling, and even of animate and inanimate” (p. 181). Wonder is affective and sensational, and it is also political. Isabelle Stengers (2011) points to untapped potentials embedded in those moments when something unsettles and unnerves us, and captures our attention:

to be interested by something that has the character of an event, since it gives to that something a power it does not generally possess: the power to cause us to think, feel, and wonder, the power to have us wondering how practically to relate to it, how to pose relevant questions about it. (p. 374)

Wonder, as an analytical tool, a method of inquiry, is political, provocative, and generative; it prompts us to ask questions and hints at the importance of things still undiscovered and unknown. Through an affective and critical lens, wonder becomes an entanglement in the

movements of intensity and desire that connect bodies, both human and non-human, including bodies of knowledge in varying assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; MacLure, 2013c), and wonder is enmeshed with bodies and forms of power. Wonder is also entangled with bodies of art in our creative research space. When working with wonder, I attune as it moves in and through my participants' stories and spaces, and through me. In the uncertainty and unpredictability of my research setting – my research assemblage — I take up its invitation to feel and think, pose questions, and move toward the new and the unknown.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

As a researcher who takes social justice seriously, my dissertation study is my answer to the post qualitative call to construct new approaches to inquiry (St. Pierre, 1997) through the creation of an experimental, polyvocal text that embraces difference. By centering poetry and theories grounded in non-western artistic, activist, and intellectual traditions, I am making a conscious effort to recognize knowledge from outside the academic gaze of the privileged, white, Global North, to expand what counts as legitimate sources and forms of knowledge (Bhattacharya, 2019).

By locating my study with/in margins and Borderlands, my inquiry attempts to be methodologically and culturally congruent; as a white settler scholar working to decolonize my praxis, I stand in solidarity with Borderlands artists, scholars, participants, and communities. I respect the diversity and complexity of non-white, non-western ontological and epistemological orientations, and honour the linguistically and culturally diverse people with whom I work. Researching and writing within a critical posthumanist paradigm, with an analytic lens that braids Borderlands thinking with affect theory, my inquiry seeks to explore issues of justice and power in newcomer worlds and worldings, to generate more expansive forms of knowledge, and

new ways of being together in spaces of belonging, in thinking, feeling, and moving with creative possibilities.

*Throw away the abstraction,  
the academic learning,  
the rules, the map, and compass.  
Feel your way without blinders.  
Write with your eyes like painters,  
write with your ears like musicians,  
with your feet like dancers.  
Write with your tongues of fire.*

(Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009, pp. 34-5)

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY WITHOUT METHOD

I present my improvisational inquiry (Mazzei, 2021) in this chapter; I used arts-based methods to explore newcomer worldings and belongings through a post qualitative methodology that had no pre-set methods, and unfolded in a space of openness, creativity, diversity, ethics, and relationality. This chapter is presented in narrative form, as a storying of researching-in-the-moment with a decolonial stance and enacting a responsive, relational research praxis. I describe affective encounters and unexpected moments that guided the research process as a series of unscripted methodological events (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015) in an online setting, a virtual translanguaging space (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Wei, 2011). I worked with a diverse group of participants that included five adult women and one man, from the Middle East, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe; all had refugee backgrounds.

This was immersion in unpredictability and uncertainty, while working with the affordances and challenges of digital technology during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Our emergent, in-the-moment process held surprising learnings and generative outcomes. I present the data through a critical posthuman lens to view data not as an inert and distinct set of objects ready to be collected and analyzed (MacLure, 2013b, 2013c), but as lively, alive, and entangled in the research assemblage (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015, 2018), in which forms of power are always present and circulating. My analysis of the data couples Jackson and Mazzei's (2013) thinking with theory and thinking with more than theory; in other words, thinking and feeling in attunement to the world through the creative work of Borderlands authors and artists. Bringing critical theory, such as critical race theories, into critical posthumanist and experimental post qualitative inquiry draws attention to the presence and effect of power in the research setting, the research paradigm, and in the wider world. I add a further critical, decolonial, and affective

dimension to my analysis by attuning to the writing of Borderlands thinkers and poets, adding a felt and sensed dimension to my analysis that foregrounds feeling as well as thinking with theory. I also interrogate some of the claims of the post qualitative research literature as I reflect on the challenges of working with post qualitative conceptual thinking. My inquiry is an improvisation in literacy research and is therefore unfinished and imperfect, but still alive and unfolding; this work explores the complexities and contradictions of newcomer belongings and reflects my present and evolving understandings of myself as a new researcher, working creatively to highlight issues of justice in newcomer worlds. Elizabeth St. Pierre (2017, p. 29) reminds us that we begin in the middle of things, understanding that “we are always already entangled in inquiry, that there is no beginning”.

### **Beginning in the Middle ...of a Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic enveloped the world in the spring of 2020 with stay-at-home orders, lockdowns, border closures, rising death tolls, and widening inequalities and precarity for disadvantaged groups, especially refugee and immigrant communities (Martiniello & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Waves of fear, uncertainty, vulnerability, hopelessness, and boredom; I was caught up in this strange brew of overlapping and divergent emotions as I selfishly grappled with my own despair. I had just received Research Ethics Board (REB) clearance to begin this study (Brock University File 19-259, February 28, 2020; and Mohawk College File 20-010, March 12, 2020). One day after receiving multi-site clearance, a lockdown was announced at my workplace, a community college, abruptly halting my plans to recruit a small group of adult English learners for a series of in-school art workshops to explore their search for belonging within Canada’s celebrated multicultural mosaic. Now what?

My teaching colleagues and I were forced to pivot in mid-March and quickly adjust to remote education. After a few weeks of scrambling to adapt my teaching practice to an online environment, I began to wonder if it might be possible to do the same with my research project. Could art workshops with language learners in a virtual setting actually work? If post qualitative inquiry means improvising, experimenting with “what might be thought and done” (St. Pierre, 2021a), this would certainly qualify. After consulting with my supervisor, Dr. Blaikie, I applied for REB approvals to re-locate my data collection to a videoconferencing platform. Brock University granted an REB Modification for online data collection (File 19-259) on April 7, 2020, and I received a Mohawk College Certificate of Amendment (File 20-010) on April 8, 2020. Dr. Blaikie and I also discussed how to protect participant privacy and maintain the security of the data and content while working online. My preference was the Zoom for Education platform, which claims compliance with US Family Educational Rights and Privacy (FERPA) legislation, safeguarding student privacy. In consultation with Brock REB manager Lori Walker and Associate Vice President, Research, Dr. Michelle McGinn (F. Blaikie, L. Walker and M. McGinn, personal communications, April 21, 2020), we agreed the best way to ensure participant confidentiality and data security was to save the video recordings of meetings to my personal computer (rather than using Zoom’s cloud platform to store and retrieve data). In addition, my letter of consent to participants explicitly stated that participant privacy could not be completely ensured in a virtual setting; however, the risks would be comparable to using popular social media platforms. I was prepared to move forward with REB modifications in hand, and some useful tools for navigating an unpredictable virtual environment.

In the midst of uncertainty, uncontrollability, and what *might be*, I was ready to begin again, in the middle.

### **Improvisational Inquiry: Making It Up While Shuttling Toward the Unknown**

We call ourselves out: in the middle, in the milieu.

We read theory with improvisation in our bodies,  
bodies wired to practices, to repetitions, to already implications.

These pages before us connect,  
stories within them spark our imaginations:  
that sticky story, the feeling of that quote, an image that will not shake.

We read theory, we retell, we move with it.

We are like improvisers  
we become, we travel to know, and we resist our desires to know already.

(Tanner et al., 2021, p. 240)

To think and do posthumanist and post qualitative research is “not to know in advance” (Mazzei, 2021, p. 198). It means to eschew methodology and method, and instead, encounter the way concepts produce thought, through improvisational moves, like playing music without a score, acting without a script, or letting a work of art unfold on the canvas. In this chapter, I map my own messy and wonder-filled experiment without a methodological script, an improvisational inquiry with inspiration from St. Pierre (2011, 2019, 2021a, b); Mazzei (2017; 2021); Koro-Ljungberg (2015); Østern et al. (2021); and Tanner et al. (2021). We are all improvisers, travelling to know in the unknown.

Post qualitative inquiry, like posthumanism, demands a reorientation to how we see the world coming to be in lively, interconnected relationships between humans, non-humans, and more-than humans. Such forms of inquiry resist the binaries that are pervasive in education research: student/teacher, mind/body, subject/object. If we acknowledge that, as researchers (and

human subjects), we are unable to stand outside the objects we research (our participants), then we must reimagine new relations that resist dualisms (Kuby, 2019). By embracing Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of the assemblage as a way of re-conceptualizing and analyzing social complexity, we can turn our attention to fluidity, multiplicities, and the ways in which humans and non-humans are always in movement, changing, and becoming together (Kuby, 2019).

My experiment with post qualitative inquiry finds guidance in Deleuze and Guattari's immanent approach (1987), focusing not on *what is*, but what is *not yet* (St. Pierre, 2019). It seeks to experiment and "create new forms of thought and life" (St. Pierre, 2021a, p. 163), which might not be easily recognizable within existing "structures of intelligibility" (St. Pierre, 2021b, p. 6). In refusing research agendas, pre-scripted methods, and methodologies, spontaneity and improvisation are key. St. Pierre (2021b) advocates "making it up as you go"; she holds up Foucault as an example of another researcher who does not subscribe to a particular methodology but finds or invents tools as the work unfolds. St. Pierre argues, if Foucault made it up as he went along, and it worked for him, it might work for us as well.

Methodologies without a pre-determined roadmap are emergent, fluid, responsive, and relational (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015), and non-representational (Thrift, 2008), open to different modes of thought, in constant becoming. My study does not aim to represent reality but rather to engage with it, to use the arts to amplify the voices of newcomers within a multivocal assemblage, in a more-than-human world. Within an artistic/ performative paradigm, the focus of the inquiry shifts from what the research phenomenon 'is' to what it 'does' (Østern et al., 2021). There is also a shift from being to becoming. This is an onto-epistemological shift, which challenges new researchers (like me) to consider the ways in which ontology and epistemology are entwined, and how all the elements in the inquiry are relational, not separated into categories



or codes. Materiality, discursivity, and sociality are viewed as entangled, continuously performing one another (Østern et al., 2021).

Mazzei (2021) uses the term improvisational inquiry to describe what is “happening in the middle of things, in the threshold, as theoretical concepts and data constitute one another” (p. 198), in spontaneous, fluid, affect-laden spaces. Improvisational inquiry takes place in movements and sets of research moments, in what Koro-Ljungberg (2015) calls methodological events, which are “unpredictable gatherings of analytical, theoretical and interpretive momentums” (p. 17). Methodology emerges in moments of flux, in dense and intense spaces which are often complicated and messy. An improvisational approach is emergent, challenging uncritical understandings of methodologies and methods as fixed, objective, controllable research tools. Improvisation, whether in the theatre, classroom, or research setting, is in-the-moment and emergent: participants “co-compose a world that was never there before and will never be there again” (Tanner et al., 2021, p. 248). Using the arts in research produces a generative space for movement, artistic freedom, experimentation, and inclusion, where learning and knowing are always unfolding and becoming (Østern et al., 2021). Following Koro-Ljungberg (2015), Tanner et al., (2021), and Østern and colleagues (2021), the following perspectives on research are enfolded in my inquiry:

- Working with the arts is inherently performative, whether one is drawing, painting, singing, acting, dancing, or writing poetry. Language is performative as well: languages and meanings emerge in and through activity, in translanguaging processes, whereby bi-and multilingual speakers perform in multiple, multimodal ways (Garcia, 2017). Coupling the arts and home languages to imaginatively shape and re-shape semiotic resources within and across multiple

modes — linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial arrangements — can be considered interdisciplinary performative inquiry.

- Experimenting with the arts, language, and translanguaging in human and more-than-human movements, within a dynamic assemblage of people and objects, cultures, technologies, imagination, and affective flows, constitutes innovative inquiry that embraces creative exploration, improvisation, and performativity. Indeed, for all the participants, this is individual and collective performative inquiry into the self and multiple worlds (Burgess, 2021).

-There are no errors in improvisational inquiry; it is alive with the potentials that emerge and erupt through spontaneity. In a theatre setting, improvisers take part in the process of making sense, and in “the magic of feeling and wondering” (Tanner et al., 2021, p. 238). Such spontaneous movements are unpredictable, uncontrollable, and may be unsettling, but there is often a difficult-to-name *affective presence*: the surge of immediacy, vibrancy, and vitality at play in each gathering (Boldt, 2021; Tanner et al., 2021). Tanner and colleagues also ground their theatre classroom practices in the assemblage thinking of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who describe ensembles as temporary assemblages constituted by lines, in which heterogenous elements come together through dynamic processes of movement and difference creation. Working with improv invites an awareness of movements, connections, and entanglements, and calls for attentive listening and an attunement to the subjectivities of the participants, their emotions, their stories, and the atmospheric, and embodied energies accruing in the moment (Tanner et al., 2021). One may stumble, or become confused in an unfolding inquiry, but as Tanner and colleagues suggest, there are no mistakes in improv; there are only “gifts” that create new possibilities (p. 249).

Most importantly, my emergent approach, centered in my efforts to enact a responsive and ethical praxis, is about relationality, mobilizing our differing ontologies and epistemologies and shared humanity (Campbell & Pahl, 2018), as we find ourselves in a wider ecology of people, things, and affects, being open to the possibility of being changed by each other. It is about creating an ethos, a way of being together, in an open, welcoming space for experimentation, through shared storytelling with arts and translanguaging, in a trauma-informed culture of care. A translanguaging space (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Wei, 2011) is not only for *doing* translanguaging (using the full range of one's multilingual and multimodal resources), but it is also a space created *through* translanguaging. It is an affective space of belonging: of acceptance, emotional investment, and agency. In "spontaneous moments" (Wei, 2011, p. 13) of action, reflection, and engagement, participants may foster new ways of interacting with each other, and responding with creativity, criticality, and sensitivity to the human and non-human forces and structures in their worlds.

Because newly arrived immigrants and refugees may be living with different forms of trauma, I believe it is vital to create a safe space by infusing trauma-informed practices into all aspects of the research project. Fallot and Harris's (2009) principles for a culture of care incorporate flexibility in decision-making, emotional safety, and empowerment through collaboration and choice. Attention to emotional safety is intended to ensure that all emotions and intensities that surface in research settings are respected by participants. I understand from my teaching experience that it is not possible to guarantee a "safe space" that is free from disruptive moments and painful memories; educators cannot fully anticipate how one participant's story might trigger another participant's traumatic memories. We must work with that uncertainty and uncontrollability and do our best to create trauma-sensitive and respectful

teaching and research spaces. To attend to participant safety and empowerment, all participants were free to make decisions about all their engagements throughout the collaboration. Their input was sought regarding the direction of the research project, and they had freedom to direct their own participation through their selection artwork and art medium (materials and supplies), and in taking part in group and individual conversations, including the option to not participate in any aspect of the project, and request mental health support if necessary.

The creation of a safe, sensitive space for sharing stories is rooted in an ethic of care and witnessing. Dutro's practice of critical witnessing (Dutro & Bien, 2014; Dutro, 2013, 2017) involves building trust to allow participants to bring the full spectrum of their lives into the research setting. Stories of joy, sorrow, connection, trauma, or loss, are recognized, honoured, and witnessed in ways that encircle the storyteller with support, with an eye to the presence and circulations of power in research encounters and everyday life. Critical witnessing is also what Braidotti (2008) calls "compassionate witnessing", taking place "in a mode of empathetic co-presence" (p. 19). I laid the groundwork for enacting critical witnessing at our first meeting by following Falot and Harris's (2009) trauma-informed practices to ensure the participants understood that our research process would be guided by the participants' interests and choices, and their level of participation at each meeting, including the option to withdraw from the study at any time. My professional development also includes a Mental Health Basic First Aid Certificate (2018) and training through the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's (2019) Immigrant and Refugee Mental Health online course. I also discussed my desire to create a respectful setting for the sharing of stories and emotions and to create a welcoming translanguaging space where participants could feel free to use the full range of their communicative repertoires in their artmaking and during our meetings. While collecting data, I

tried to situate my questions in the present and future; any discussion of past events or stories of trauma arose voluntarily from the participants. When challenging stories were presented and some clarification was needed, I proceeded with caution giving participants the choice of whether to continue or not, depending on their level of comfort.

During our meetings, there were several spontaneous moments of critical witnessing, for example, when Lebanese refugee Maria revealed her highly emotional response to the sight of a “*khebayzeh*” (Arabic for “geranium”) in a Canadian store. The other participants sympathetically engaged in translanguaging *khebayzeh* in their first languages: *shamdaneh*, *agosliya*, *koubayzeh*. Extending the affective moment, Sara offered her unique emotional attachment to the geranium; in Syria, Sara’s mother cooks parts of the geranium, which Sara has always disliked. Now in Canada, Sara eats the plant as a gesture of love and longing for her mother and homeland. In a space of critical witnessing and care, we were enfolded in Maria’s and Sara’s complex sensed and felt entanglements with a flower, its sight, smell, and taste, and the deep bonds of family and home country.

As I contemplate the findings of this study, I believe those surprising moments of witnessing, in which we listened to each other with openness, care, and responsiveness, led to the emergence of a safe space of belonging. Acts of witnessing with an enlarged sense of interconnectedness between ourselves and others, including non-human others, give rise to an “ecology of belonging” (Braidotti, 2008, p. 6), in an ethics of affirmation, in which we consider our moral imperative to be responsible to, and for each other, and all others.

In sum, this unfolding inquiry intended to be a fluid, relational space for innovation and experimentation. It aimed to foster a safe and dynamic multilingual and multicultural space for participants to be open to different ways of being and feeling together, attending deeply to each

other's affective experiences of belonging and not-belonging, in worlds and worldings. We threw ourselves into the “affectively intense work of shuttling toward the unknown as collectively composed worlds come into being” (Tanner et al., 2021, p.238), in orderly, and at times, disorderly chaos, building an ethic of empathy and care.

Methodologies without methodologies

rest in fluid spaces

occupy contested lands

challenge me, us, data, perspectives, theories, frames

positionings, knowledges, truths,

to co-exist

to be present in a single moment, in orderly chaos.

(Koro-Ljungberg, 2015, p. 86)

### **Research Question**

My post qualitative exploration was guided by one overarching question: What is your experience of belonging in Canada? This single question enabled a space to move, adapt, and evolve within an unfolding inquiry. I did not adhere to a list of specific questions or their constructions, which allowed me the freedom to attune to and move with affective moments and unfolding events in the research setting, through a spontaneous, responsive, and open-ended mode of engagement, a necessary way of being and doing post qualitative inquiry.

Elizabeth St. Pierre (2019) insists that “(o)ne begins post qualitative inquiry with a concrete encounter with the real, not with a research question” (p. 10). This research was inspired by my classroom encounters with the real: in the global flows of human displacement and mass migration, and the complex issues entwined with belonging and not-belonging in home

countries, new homelands, and in an increasingly xenophobic world. I wanted to understand the complexities of belonging and not-belonging, to explore the under-theorized concept of refugee belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Wright, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011), and more specifically, the entanglements of affect, the senses, and matter, in the lived experience of belonging as worlding.

This country takes pride in providing a haven for refugees who manage to get here, those searching for a new homeland, a new place of belonging. The aim of Canada's refugee policy is to welcome and integrate newcomers into Canadian society by providing essential services, including free language classes, and income support (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019). Living in safety and security are of paramount importance to refugees upon arrival, but thereafter, most seek a meaningful relationship with their new homeland: the emotional attachment of feeling *at home*, to the politics of belonging through the formal structures of citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Do those seeking a sense of belonging, (indeed, multiple forms of belonging), discover it here? My exploration was driven by a single question and purpose: to trouble something in the hopes of making it better (St. Pierre, 2011). This study seeks to trouble our assumptions of Canada as a welcoming multicultural nation, a space of acceptance and belonging, in the hopes of making it better.

Looking back on our work, I can now see that the original research question was framed with a human-centric perspective, seeking to understand belonging with assumptions focused on the human at the center of the exploration. Over the course of this study, as my research evolved, my relationship to my guiding question also evolved, challenging me to think in different, non-binary, rhizomatic ways, to be open to unresolved endings and the emergence of new questions, different concepts, and new directions to guide my teaching and future research.

### **Unsettling the Setting**

Our research setting was thrown together unexpectedly because of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. My original proposal called for the research setting to be at a community college in southern Ontario, with participants drawn from the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) adult settlement English program. The original plan called for five to ten group meetings, co-planned with participants, in a conventional classroom during the school's Common Hour, a weekly meeting time for students to participate in voluntary extra-curricular social activities, such as conversation circles, photography, crafts, and computer skills workshops. The Common Hour would have been an ideal setting for recruitment and research, given that participants would have been on site and between classes, free from the typical after-school pressures of employment, childcare, and family obligations.

As our research relocated to a virtual Zoom setting, the participants and I found ourselves in the midst of a posthuman world, in which the humanist subject had been abruptly decentered and made vulnerable by a deadly coronavirus; our lives were now governed by powerful non-human forces. Our movements were constricted by this unseen virus and government-mandated lockdowns. Our school, work, and social lives (and our research meetings) were suddenly thrust into an online environment, in which we grappled with the fickle temperament of digital technology. Sometimes, during our virtual meetings, I felt I was at the mercy of an other-worldly Other, operating with a will of its own, oftentimes disrupting our ability to connect to our devices, WIFI signals, and to each other. At other times, the entangled power and presence of the virus and technology went unnoticed in our emergent online world, sweeping us up in imperceptible currents, and opening a space to share thoughts and experiences, listen deeply, and make connections across languages, cultures, artifacts, and artwork, across the permeable



borders of our technological devices, in a strange yet familiar human-non-human world. As co-participants in a research assemblage, we experienced the ways in which agency becomes distributed among a multiplicity of elements, including technology, each other, texts, data, and the affective intensities and flows in our group (Strom et al., 2018). And in this fluid, multi-layered space, we co-constructed a safe place for gathering, translanguaging, critical witnessing, and artistic exploration, in which difficult and hopeful stories were shared, and knowledge, becomings, and belongings were co-composed while living in and through a post-human-moment-in-time.

### **Participants**

A group of six adult newcomers (five females and one male) worked with me on this research project. Recruitment took place in early May 2020. I planned to work with seven to 10 adult newcomers who had been in Canada for five years (or less) and were current or recent students in the LINC settlement language program in a medium-sized city in southern Ontario. The participants were to reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity within the local community, and a balance of male, female, and gender variant individuals. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I used online recruitment strategies exclusively; I emailed my colleagues at the college, asking them to recommend potential participants; I posted an invitation to participate on the college's LINC Facebook page, and I contacted several former students through email and social media to invite them and any interested friends to join the study. As a result, 10 students agreed to attend a Zoom introductory meeting to hear me present the research project and ask questions. I also planned to provide the group with an informal art experience to familiarize them with the types of activities we might engage in during our sessions. Seven students attended the introductory meeting, after which six individuals committed to continuing with the project.

Based on attendance and participation at our meetings, I decided to focus my writing on four of the six participants. The three women and one man were from Western Asia and the Middle East, all are culturally and linguistically diverse, and three of four are multilingual. Half of the participants came to Canada as government or privately sponsored refugees; all have complicated histories and refugee experience as a result of their ethnicity, religion, political beliefs, involvement in dissent, or displacement through war or conflict in their home countries. All the participants' names are pseudonyms (chosen by each participant), to protect their privacy and confidentiality. The names of post-secondary institutions in this study are also fictionalized. The following is a description of each participant:

### ***Maria***

Maria is a 47-year-old professional from Lebanon. She came to Canada as a government-sponsored refugee, a single mother and her children. While she was an unreserved and eloquent participant in our meetings, Maria was extremely private about personal life and never addressed her reasons for leaving Lebanon. Maria speaks Arabic, her first language, and French. She began English language studies in the LINC program as a developing bi/multilingual (Canadian Language Benchmark 5). Maria hopes to be able to work in a legal setting in Canada.

### ***Kian***

Kian is 37 years old and from Iran. He came to Canada within the past five years to attend a science program at a southern Ontario university. Kian left his homeland to pursue graduate studies; this was a way to escape the repressive religious strictures of Iran's Islamic government. Kian was accompanied to Canada by family. Kian speaks Farsi and Turkish. He decided to improve his conversational English in the LINC program's CLB 7/8 class (for

developing-advanced bi/multilinguals). Kian has abandoned his hopes for a career in academia and is planning to pursue studies in a college diploma program.

### *Elif*

Elif is 24 years of age and has been in Canada for more than a year. She is a Syrian refugee, but her first language is Turkish. Her family is part of an ethnic minority in Syria; they came to Canada as government-sponsored refugees after spending several years in Turkey. Elif began studies in the settlement English program as a developing bi/multilingual, CLB level 5. She transferred to an adult secondary school program to obtain a Canadian high school diploma as a pathway to post-secondary studies. Elif's goal is to attend medical school in Canada.

### *Sara*

Sara is a 45-year-old refugee and Arabic-speaker from Syria. Sara worked for a humanitarian organization in her homeland. After she was targeted by government forces for her activism, Sara and her family fled to a refugee camp in the Middle East before arriving in this country. She is a full-time English student, an emergent bilingual (CLB 2), and hopes to work in the communications field in Canada. Sara provided a sample of her unpublished writing to me for inclusion in this study. With her permission, I have created poetic transcripts from translated excerpts of her work in the Findings chapter of this document.

The LINC program's multimedia instructor, Matt, was present for each meeting, providing invaluable support as we navigated the challenges of working with Zoom. Matt helped to get everyone connected at the beginning of each session, he provided solutions when audio problems arose, and was available to assist participants with their photography and digital artworks. Although he was invited to be a participant in our discussions, he chose to focus on technical support.

## Positionality

As a researcher in post qualitative inquiry, I became participant, facilitator, and co-composer of scenes that emerged in and through our research encounters (Tanner et al., 2021), a critical body capable of reflecting on the research, and “an affected researcher-body who needs their own sensuous body to engage, analyze, and understand” (Østern et al., 2021, p. 12). However, research relationships are also enmeshed with power, and inherently involve the negotiation of power and privilege (Gerrard, Rudolph, & Sripakash, 2017). Here, I acknowledge my privilege as a white, settler, cis-gender woman, teacher, and new researcher, with immigrant, working class roots. I interrogate my positionality and the ways in which it is entangled with bodies, affects, and undefined ebbs and flows in the research assemblage.

I am a doctoral student and English teacher; as a result, I bring a specialist knowledge of standard English and academic literacies to my classroom and research setting; these are forms of knowledge and power that are unavailable to most English learners. The manifestations of my white privilege translate to a significant power imbalance when researching alongside participants, racialized newcomers with insecure immigration status, who are struggling to navigate unfamiliar linguistic and cultural landscapes, as they face racism and xenophobia in their daily lives. I am aware there may also be unseen and unspoken tensions among the diverse participants in teaching and research settings. The entwining and overlapping of politics, religion, gender, culture, ethnicity, and historical enmities can generate a potent mix of people and things, circulating and sometimes colliding, in an ecology of difference. These tensions may be known to the participants but operate beyond the white researcher’s awareness and epistemology. There may be other forces at play in diverse settings that create dynamics and asymmetries of power beyond my ontological and epistemological frameworks, outside my

perception. Additionally, my efforts to enact a trauma-informed and equitable praxis may unwittingly contribute to the silencing of the newcomers in research spaces. These blind spots reveal the limitations to my research arising from my positionality. For this, I take responsibility, and commit to growing my understandings of the complexities and impacts of racism, oppression, and colonization.

Through the critical interrogation of my whiteness, and whiteness within the academy, I have come to understand that most qualitative research is generated in the Global North, and most of the scholars working within these spaces are white, therefore knowledge produced within these spaces cannot be completely devoid of whiteness. As Kakali Bhattacharya (2021) observes, scholarship that claims to be located outside the boundaries of conventional research, including post-qualitative perspectives, are still entangled with sociocultural, institutional, and geographical privileges. The theories I utilize in my dissertation work, including affect theories and posthumanism, reflect a privileged form of whiteness, which may be oppressive, alienating, or simply irrelevant to scholars of colour, and scholars from the Global South. How can researchers and the academy bridge the colonial divide to create more inclusive and expansive forms of scholarship that honour and make space for all onto-epistemologies?

Postcolonial scholar Wanda Pillow (2019) poses another deeply unsettling question that goes straight to my heart: “What does it mean to think with theory one does not look like” (p. 126)? How can I, as a white scholar, ethically take up the work of scholars of colour? What and where is my place? Black feminist theorist bell hooks (1989) illustrates how appropriation unfolds when well-intended progressive white scholars occupy the space of non-dominant scholars, and dis/place, co-opt, and erase, marginalized voices in their research:

I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer (p. 22).

I feel the sting of bell hooks's words in my work, in my gathering and re-telling of participants' *testimonios*, their stories of struggle, pain, and loss. How do I make an ethical space for their voices to be heard without making their stories my own, as author, authority, colonizer, re-writing, re-presenting my participants as I "write myself anew"?

Yet, there are scholars from the margins and Borderlands who are open to white scholars working in Borderlands spaces. Indigenous Maori author Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) recognizes those white researchers who are committed to justice and "work for, with, and alongside communities who occupy the margins of society" (p. 325). Borderlands theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) finds grounds for solidarity in diversity and asymmetries of power, stating "we – white black straight queer female male – are connected and interdependent. We are each accountable for what is happening down the street, south of the border or across the sea" (as cited in Keating, 2009, pp. 72-3). Anzaldúa's demand for accountability resonates with me, and my desire to understand across difference while working with difference.

Amplifying the work of Borderlands authors is one way I can further the cause of justice. I take theoretic responsibility by acknowledging my blind spots, my epistemic ignorance (Medina, 2013), and the theoretical oppressions and arrogance that determine how we know, what we know, and who is authorized as knowing (Medina, 2013; Pillow, 2019). By engaging

with difference, through different histories, ontologies, and epistemologies, attending to material, sonic, social, cultural affects, and effects (Pillow, 2019), we may witness how individuals exist in worlds that often let them know they do not belong, and we may also witness forms of belonging we never knew existed.

### **Emergent Method**

Improvisation — whether on a theatre stage or in a jazz musician’s performance – arises in spontaneous movements and creative freedom. In reality, improvisation often begins with planning and practice: with the use of a text, a musical score, or the technical studies sketched in advance of putting paint to canvas. Although post qualitative inquiry is understood to evolve in-the-moment, without preconceived practices, my study grew out of a great deal of preparation, wonderings, and imaginings. While I was writing my research proposal in the winter of 2019, I led an informal, week-long pilot of my topic with my LINC students. We explored their experiences of belonging through literature, poetry writing, and working with photography. This classroom project provided me with an introduction to some of the issues of newcomer belonging beyond the theoretical: as lived and felt experiences at the local and global levels, providing a glimpse of the possibilities and potentials, and as it happened, a false sense of preparedness for what was to come in the research setting.

### **Data Collection**

Following REB approvals, the participants and I met for six weekly sessions, lasting from one hour to 90 minutes. In advance of our introductory meeting, I contacted each participant to drop off a bag of art supplies, which included anti-bacterial wipes, in keeping with COVID-19 safety precautions.

### **Figure 4**

*Art Supplies Delivered to Participants.*



During the first meeting, I shared details of the research project with the participants. In addition to outlining their involvement in the planning of the meetings and choice of art activities, I briefly introduced the issue of power in our research setting. I talked about my knowledge of academic English, Canadian culture, and research projects — knowledge that provides an unequal and unfair advantage to me. This part of the conversation was essentially one-sided, possibly because talking about power in English settings may have been a new and uncomfortable topic for many. The participants were open and attentive but did not articulate any concerns or reservations. I suggested we could make the research endeavour more equitable through translanguaging: The participants were invited to use their home languages and cultural knowledge whenever and however they wished. (As stated, they would also have the power to control their participation, by taking part in or abstaining from any activities, according to their comfort level.) Establishing a translanguaging space (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Wei, 2011) does not address all of power imbalances in the research project, however I believe it creates a more



welcoming and comfortable space for participants to express themselves, receive linguistic and emotional support from their colleagues, and take the lead in the research setting by making decisions, and moving the conversation in a direction they desire.

I also reminded participants that upon their request, they would be provided with access to a mental health professional. I planned a few ice breakers as improvisational *offers* to enliven our introductory meeting, allow prospective participants to get to know each other, and have some fun. Offers can be spoken, embodied, or non-verbal utterances that promote interaction (Tanner et al., 2021, p. 250). First, I invited each person to select one photo from their cell phone, hold it up to their computer camera, and describe the photo to the group. (I detail the outcome of this activity in my Findings chapter.)

For the second activity, participants were invited to reach into their bag of art supplies for the drawing pad and markers. I asked them to do a bridge drawing (Darewych, 2014), an open-ended art activity in which participants use their imaginations to draw a bridge “from someplace to someplace,” a real or imagined location, adding as much or as little detail as they wished. My hope in planning these first activities was to begin to foster an innovative and trusting space for sharing stories, home languages, and using art for creative self-expression and self-reflection, providing language learners with a dynamic alternative beyond the limitations of language (Burgess & Rowsell, 2020). The act of creating art can serve to “focus attention, cultivate thought, and invite participants to record, document, and critically reflect” on the nature of the spaces, places, and events in their lives (O’Donoghue, 2021, p. 24). The arts may also generate energy and attunement to the moment in spontaneous unfoldings.

Over the next five weeks, a productive routine and rhythm evolved within our meetings. I took notes during the conversations, and highlighted, for the participants, the issues that seemed

to generate the most interest. The participants then chose an issue they wished to pursue artistically on their own time for the next meeting. They forwarded their work (photos, dual language writing, paintings, or drawings) via email. I began subsequent meetings with a PowerPoint display of the gathered artworks, and each participant was invited to talk about their work. The unfolding discussions led to the emergence of the next issue for exploration at the following meeting.

At our second meeting, I asked for everyone to write down their personal definition of belonging, in home languages and English, using the coloured markers and pads of paper I had provided for each participant (see Figure 4). From this conversation, we decided to focus on *moments of belonging* as our next topic, along with a photograph or drawing to illustrate a particular moment or scene. The sharing of experiences of belonging at our third session led participants to reveal moments of not-belonging, and their encounters with barriers to belonging. All the participants agreed that the English language was the most challenging obstacle they faced in Canada; we decided to explore *English as a barrier to belonging* at the fourth meeting, and to create a piece of writing, such as a dual language poem or paragraph, to illustrate feelings and experiences. This proved to be an emotionally charged topic, with painful stories of exclusion and dislocation from place and self, along with moments of quiet connection. For our fifth meeting, participants offered to share material objects that sparked feelings of belonging; we heard about favourite pieces of clothing and jewelry, food and drink, and cultural routines that involved music. One participant waved her Permanent Resident card in front of her camera as she explained how the card evoked a feeling of belonging to Canada, and the promise of protection in a hostile world. Out of their stories came surprising and powerful instances of gendered and sonic belongings — affective worlds, worldings, and unworldings emerged

through a plastic identity card, the sound of a voice, or the absence of a voice. For our final meeting, the participants produced works of art including photos, paintings, a video, and a digital collage, to illustrate their desires and visions of future belongings. As I explain in my Findings chapter, although we agreed on a specific topic for each session, the most compelling stories arose in unexpected moments, along unplanned lines of flight, leaving lasting impressions and a surfeit of feelings and memories.

As Koro-Ljungberg (2015) proposes, “Methodology is created and enacted through different dense and intense spaces that methodology encounters or interacts with—these moments are created when research is complicated and messy” (p. 17). This study was my immersion in unscripted methodological encounters with unsettling and enduring resonances, enmeshed in movements and flows. The research phenomenon seemed to pull us, the researcher, and participants, along through pain, joy, despair, moments of flow, grief, and relief (Østern, et al., 2021) in spontaneous, dance-like moves. We – the improvisers, artwork, our energy, ideas, our Zoom platform, home computers, digital devices — were all shifting, gliding, occasionally bumping, in rhythm, and in time. Our virtual world, at once vitreous screen and an immaterial space, allowed us to fluidly enter into each other’s worlds, across the temporal and spatial, encountering the material and the affective, with our feet planted in the here and now, our bodies caught up in layers of screens, people and places, inside a kind of a “glass cabinet ...being at once within and ‘looking out’” (Davies, 2014, p. 73). We were *in* something that felt familiar and known, yet entirely new and different. Strange, exciting, evolving, and unpredictable.

### **Analysing Data**

This unfolding study of newcomer experiences of worlding and belonging used innovative methods that emerged in moments and activities inside and outside the research

setting. The data generated through our research encounters include but are not limited to participant artworks – drawings, paintings, dual language poetry, digital photography, and collage, and the poetic transcripts created from the transcriptions of six videotaped group meetings and five individual conversations, as well as researcher field notes and research journaling. Thinking of the intertwined nature of the research assemblage, as people, objects, affects, technology, and a pandemic became imbricated, it is possible to view the data, not as passive and stable, but as dynamic, active, unruly, and untamed by analysis, as an event in which “data, theories, writing, thinking, research, researchers, participants, past, future, present, and body-mind-material are entangled and inseparable” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 479). As MacLure (2013b) explains, the idea of data as entangled renders the notion of data collection problematic because it suggests data are not an “inert and indifferent mass,” waiting to be collected and coded (p. 660). Seeing data as lively, alive, fluid, and indivisible, requires analytic methods that pay attention not to what data *are*, but to what data *do* (Østern, et al., 2021).

My analytical approach coupled Jackson and Mazzei’s (2013) method of thinking with theory with an attunement with the world; this attunement extends the analytic work of “reading and co-reading” — of reading theory alongside other texts — to reading, thinking, and feeling, with the Borderlands and the margins, to read the world (Freire & Macedo, 2005), and situate the research in the present, in a complex, troubled world that is “mutilated” (Zagajewski, 2003), but still beautiful. Jackson and Mazzei’s (2013) practice of thinking with theory involves putting philosophical concepts to work by “disrupting the theory/data binary” to show how theory and data constitute one another, by working with the analytical questions that emerge in the middle of analysis, in the threshold, when “plugging in” concepts (p. 725). Thinking with theory unsettles, poses problems, and opens up thought in the pursuit of something new. My practice

employed “thinking with whatever we are reading at the moment” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 725); for me, this involved reading affect theory with the creative work of Borderlands authors (as described in Chapter 2), including postcolonial and critical race theorists who choose to work in the margins (hooks, 1989 ; Smith, 2012) to attune to the world and create a more expansive and disruptive critical lens. My analytical approach intentionally places the work of Borderlands thinkers alongside the philosophical voices of “dead white French men” (Bhattacharya, 2021), such as Deleuze and Guattari, to decenter those colonial and privileged voices that still dominate the academy; my purpose is to respect and honour all the voices that speak to my work, to give space, and legitimacy to those with alternative knowledges and ways of being that may unsettle and move the academy in productive new directions.

In my analytic practice of thinking with theory and attuning to the world braids Maggie MacLure’s (2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) lens of wonder, and new materialist posthumanist thinking about worlding (Blaikie, 2020, 2021; Stewart, 2010, 2012, 2017, 2019), with critical race and literacy theories (Gutierrez, 2008; Rosa & Flores, 2015), postcolonial perspectives (Bhattacharya, 2021; Dernikos et al., 2020; Medina, 2013; Zembylas, 2018) and the work of Borderlands artists, to give texture, resonance, and embodied understandings of the affective, more-than-human – and less-than-human— experiences of belonging and not-belonging for refugees and immigrants in Canada and around the globe.

I read and co-read the Borderland thinkers alongside MacLure, Blaikie, and Stewart, critical theorists, and the transcript poems, artworks, field notes, found poems, and journal entries, with an attunement to my felt responses; all were entangled in my process and my thinking, sensing, and feeling in improvisational research. I argue the process of attuning to the world with Borderland artists and plugging in (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) with critical and affect

theories is form of translanguaging across more than the linguistic field; this expansive view of translanguaging describes synaesthetic, fluid, cross-modal movements with, between, and beyond languages, cultures, affective flows, and the multiple meanings and modes embedded in poetry and artwork. These translanguaging movements activated my analysis and put it to work performatively with the participants' data stories and our virtual setting; this in turn generated data as performative, with the potential to generate new forms of knowledge. In this research, the data, participants, researcher, our vibrant spaces, and our improvisational process, all perform with one another; we are entwined in constant, movements of becoming (Østern et al., 2021, p. 7). The product of my inquiry, this experiential reading, is also an emergent, performative, and improvisational text-body-assemblage. As the text, images, voices, and affective intensities, envelop the reader, the text-body-assemblage continues to move in rhizomatic ways, creating something new, unfolding, unfinished, and generative, in the world.

### **Writing as Inquiry**

My writing of ficto-criticism, found poems, and poetic transcripts in this experiential reading is rooted in Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) assertion that writing is an empirical field of inquiry; "writing *is* thinking, writing *is* analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery" (p. 967). Like Richardson and St. Pierre, my data collection extends to and surfaces in my writing, in the way the data refuse to leave me, inhabiting my thoughts and body. Stories that shocked continue to reverberate, surprises, and hauntings lodged in the data still linger. Writing as a method of analysis is rhizomatic work, in which "accidental and fortuitous connections" are made, ideas and theories emerge through the thinking that happens while writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 970). Our writing carries us to the unknown, to the new, and unexpected.

Artistic explorations, including the practice of writing, can reveal instances in which we become aesthetically aware of what is lived, thought, felt, and embodied, (Blaikie, 2020; O'Donoghue, 2018). My study entwines ficto-criticism, poetic inquiry, found poetry, Borderlands poems, and participant artworks an experimental, multimodal, and multilingual text-body-assemblage. I take up Blaikie's (2020, 2021), Stewart's (2007) and Ehret's (2018a, 2018b) style of ficto-critical writing, blending affect theory and "worldly composition," to reflect and explore newcomer worlds. Stewart (2017) explains that affect adds a form of affirmative critique to analysis:

an affirmative critique that registers surprise at what and how things happen. It waits to see as things unfold in a moment, notes points of contact, recognizes the weight or smell of an atmosphere, or traces the spread of intensities across subjects, objects, institutions, laws, materialities, and species. (p. 195)

Arts-based methods such as writing poetic transcripts, found poems, and ficto-criticism, generate openings for aesthetic collaborations that entwine theory and data (Blaikie, 2020) with experience (Tanner et al., 2021), and creativity in innovative methodologies. The participants' stories – their *testimonios* and artworks - reveal the feelings, sensations, and affective dimensions of belonging, and dis/connections to place, space, culture, language, people, and the self. My work re-presents participant stories as poetic renditions of transcripts (Görlich, 2016, 2019, 2020; Ratković, 2013; Richardson, 2002) to foreground the affective and emotional dimensions, and the discoveries and disruptions of refugee lives composed and lived.

I incorporate a ficto-critical account of my reflexive, affective, embodied responses to their stories and the singular moments that emerged in our research encounters. In ficto-criticism, my autoethnographic voice engages in the process of "thinking-feeling" (Stewart, 2011), in self-

composition, in worlding and wonder, reflecting on shared moments and spaces traversed alongside the participants, and the co-constructed belongings within and outside the research setting. In Stewart's (2007) words, "Things happen. The self moves to react, often pulling itself someplace it didn't exactly intend to go" (p. 79). I, too, have found myself in unintended spaces, with unexpected reactions, without a foothold, or a compass, feeling lost and vulnerable; this is where the work of improvisation, of inquiry and discovery, begins. This writing conveys my writerly attempt to enfold the analytical, the personal, and the fictional, with the critical and creative (Stewart, 2019), following lines of thought and feeling in an emergent, compositional worlding.

My writing as a form of inquiry also takes up the creation of "found poems" (Prendergast, 2009) by reworking scholarly texts and the writings of Borderlands authors into poetic forms. When writing found poetry, poetic transcripts, and ficto-criticism, analysis is trained on the effort to describe "the iterations, durations, and modes of being taking place" (Stewart, 2017, p. 197). Here, the transcript poems, participant artwork, found poems, and ficto-critical writing are all are enfolded into an artistic inquiry that creates openings for intensities, imaginings, and potentials for presenting the world differently (O'Donoghue, 2018).

To create poetic renditions of the participants' transcripts, I combined the methods used by Görlich (2016, 2019, 2020), Ratković (2013) and Richardson (2002), with MacLure's (2013a) process of "slow intensity coding," which rejects the traditional work of coding, of searching for order, patterns, and categories in the data, in favour of letting something different and singular emerge in the space of analysis. I applied MacLure's (2013a) slow intensity method by first transcribing each weekly meeting after it concluded and by generating the transcriptions by hand,



without the use of software. This way, participant stories and emergent issues and ideas were top of mind going into the following meeting. I worked slowly to generate transcripts from the six group meetings and five individual participant conversations. Once all the transcriptions were completed, I began to carefully read, re-read, and *feel* the transcripts for the presence of affect, attuning to “the bodily, asignifying, disrupting, and connecting intensities” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 170), and noting how I was affected by the text. Using this slow intensity method, I read the transcripts carefully, to “listen” attentively to unfolding narratives, language use, context, and moments of significance; “I watched for what was said, how it was said, and what remained unsaid but signaled between the lines” (Ratković, 2013, p. 107). I highlighted the most compelling sections of each text and set them aside to develop into transcript poems. Görlich, (2020) believes this approach to developing poetic transcripts provokes a productive shift toward methods that “capture the subjective and affective aspects of human life” (p. 182), a shift away from methods that measure.

When developing individual poems, I began by removing extraneous information from the text while retaining key words and phrases (Görlich, 2016, 2019, 2020; Ratković, 2013), carefully distilling each text down to the heart of each participant’s story. I focused on descriptions of emotional encounters, senses, and feelings that arose from the way in which events, images, words, and worlds combined (Burgess, 2021). And I attended to problematic data that are resistant to meaning, the “irruptions into data” of embodied events outside the capture of coding and language — of laughter, tears, sighs, and silences – not for coding or categorizing, but to allow bodily intensities, affects, and phenomena that may feel disruptive and unsettling to “surge up into thought and decision-making” (MacLure, 2013a, p. 172). Slow intensity coding demands an immersion and entanglement in the minutiae of the data (p. 174), and attention to the

things that conventional coding misses: “movement, difference, singularity, emergence, and the entanglements of matter and language” (p. 171). It involves an ethical refusal to make quick judgements, and is both active and passive, actively *making sense* while making room for things unnamed and undefined that are already present in the text and can be *felt*; this, according to MacLure, is wonder.

After numerous readings and distillations of each developing transcript poem, I occasionally added literary devices such as alliteration, repetition, rhythm, sequence, and spacing (Görlich, 2016, 2019, 2020; Ratković, 2013) to evoke the participants’ emotional and critical experiences, and epiphanies, so that the reader might experience and feel them. As Richardson (2002) notes, “Even if the prosodic mind resists, the body responds to poetry. It is felt” (p. 4). In the final phase of this writing, I invited participants to collaborate on the transcript poems by adding to, editing, or offering comments on the documents, and by verifying that the poems accurately reflected their thoughts, emotions, and captured their way of saying things (Glesne, 1997, p. 205). This way, poetic writing is a form of inquiry that holds the possibility of doing social research differently, in doing what traditional research cannot: It “gives us a lifeline into methods for transforming field notes and personal notes into poetry that moves us” (Richardson, 2002, p. 13).

Following participant input and approval, the poetic transcripts and participant artworks were organized by themes that emerged through the writing process: Worlding, Unworlding, Between Worlds, and Reworlding. Thinking with theory and attuning to the world, the transcript poems and participant artworks were then woven with Borderlands poetry, critical theories, and worlding concepts, attending to my felt and sensed responses to the scenes being lived in and through participant stories, to moments of troubling, points of surprise, shock, and wonder. This

analysis aims to evoke the states of being taking place, in an affirmative critique that “traces the spread of intensities across subjects, objects, institutions, laws, materialities, and species” (Stewart, 2017, pp. 195-7), and brings worlds and worldings into view.

### **Analysing the Artwork**

“We hunger for a way to articulate who we are and what we mean” (Morrison, 2020, pp. 60 - 62). Art is a healing salve, a mode of reflection, a means to capture a moment in time, find beauty in life, or illuminate a political movement. Toni Morrison calls on us to join with the artist who “encourages reflection, stokes the imagination ... putting her/his own life on the line ... to do the work of a world worthy of life” (p. 62). My creative inquiry takes up Toni Morrison’s call to stand with the artist, to “do the work of a world worthy of life,” using the arts to explore the complexities of refugee life in un/welcoming worlds. Post qualitative inquiry invites researchers to consider how data form assemblages of diverse elements that are unstable, in constant movement, dynamically reconfiguring, doing and being (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). Our research space invited experimentation with language and the arts in “critical making” (Albers et al., 2019, p. 51); participants explored their lived experiences and welcomed the presence of affect and circulating emotions (Lewis, 2020; Lewis & Tierney, 2013) to creatively respond to our unfolding conversations, critical issues in their lives, and the world around them.

To analyze the participants’ artworks, I employed MacLure’s (2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) lens of wonder to reflect on and curate the participants’ creations alongside the visual methods framework of Albers and colleagues (Albers et al., 2012, 2019), to consider the ways in which image, language, experience, matter, and critical literacy entwined with space, place, intensity, and affect, to evoke belonging, not-belonging, and the liminal spaces of belonging in

the participants' lives. Using the arts as an experimental method makes productive use of emotions in research (Richardson, 2002), as we attune to encounters with data that surprise or confuse us, and become sticky with affect (Ahmed, 2015). Thinking and feeling with affect, wonder, and Borderlands artistry to analyze participant artworks has moved me to "find what is strange" (Albers et al., 2019), what is wonderful, what haunts me, and provokes questions that may have no easy answers, but demand attention, nonetheless. I find myself at the center of my interpretive lens. Through my experiences, actions, and reactions, I am engaging in worlding, and in the process of thinking, feeling, and writing, I am reworlded through my study.

This study's artistic inquiry has opened up to new ways of working with data, working productively with intensities, entanglements, discomfort, and uncertainty, and a more expansive perspective on arts-driven translanguaging. In the words of Maggie MacLure, (2013c), this work takes us to "the threshold of knowing, from which something unexpected might issue" (p. 181). My inquiry has produced an experiential reading (Blaikie 2020, 2021; Stewart, 2008) of newcomer becomings and belongings: an artistic multilingual, polyvocal assemblage, which invites the reader to become immersed in complex worlds, to participate in an emergent, unfolding worlding.

### **Interrogating Improvisational Inquiry**

In this section, I take a critical look at my experience with post qualitative inquiry, and explore issues of validity, ethics, and the limits as well as the potentials of this paradigm, and I grapple with in uncomfortable questions that surfaced during my research and writing. Putting this improvisational inquiry into practice felt like wading into unknown waters, in constant uncertainty, not knowing what might happen from one moment to the next. No recipe, no process, no control: always the potential for chaos. As it turned out, my study contained equal

parts conventional methodology and post qualitative experimentation, with chaos and the *not yet*. As a doctoral student, I was required to assemble a coherent dissertation proposal that closely hewed to the predetermined format of conventional qualitative research. My prospective participants required a clearly stated plan in order to give their consent to take part in the study. While Mazzei (2017) has described post qualitative inquiry as “improvisational,” what remains unsaid is that musicians and actors who work with improvisational methods usually begin with a great deal of planning and practice. And I did the same. While in many respects, this study mirrors a conventional qualitative research project, it still felt like chaos – exciting, generative dis/order.

COVID-19 dramatically altered everyone’s day-to-day lives, but it also presented the opportunity to experiment with arts-based research in a virtual setting. This inquiry pushed the boundaries on multiple fronts: online research; artistic inquiry with adult language learners; creating a virtual translanguaging space for research. Once we got started, every meeting began in disarray, grappling with technological challenges: *Kian is here but has no audio - call my phone and I’ll put him on speaker - Too much static – Did everyone see the video? No? We can’t hear the music - Maria can’t connect to the meeting – she’s still trying to connect – Kian just got kicked out. Exit the meeting and try clicking on the link again.*

We persevered. After the initial disruptions, within minutes, each meeting transformed into a vibrant space of lived affects, a collective and community that was “at once intensely present and enigmatic” (Stewart, 2011, p. 447). It felt trauma-sensitive, respectful, attentive, multilingual, spontaneous, and creative, open to something —anything — coming into existence. Many times, I stammered and stumbled, not knowing how to respond to the intensities in the moment, not knowing what to do next. On those occasions when I struggled with my emotions,

such as when I tried to describe the loss of my family's home language and culture, I felt vulnerable and exposed, completely adrift from my competent teacher/researcher identity (Ehret, 2018a). Perhaps it is when we are caught up in those disorienting, deeply affective currents of vulnerability and not-knowing, that we strengthen our relational bonds with our learners and participants. We are all improvisers, co-learners, and co-participants in our shared endeavour, collectively "shuttling towards the unknown" (Tanner et al., 2021). And sometimes out of chaos comes a bit of magic.

### **But Is It Good?**

In this section, I take up the questions of research validity, trustworthiness, and ethics that "haunt" the social sciences (St. Pierre, 2021b) in relation to this inquiry. To consider questions of validity and trustworthiness, and address the limitations of this study, I feel the need first, to acknowledge that my learning is unfinished, and my knowledge remains incomplete, therefore my analyses and perspectives will always be partial (Collier, 2019). My work focuses on a small number of participants, and therefore does not present a wide evidence base for the generalization of newcomer experiences of belonging (and this was never the intention). I do not explore how belonging and not-belonging play out in different schools, different communities, or a wide variety of contexts. However, my work does recognize the need for further research to explore newcomer worlds and worldings, and it proposes further experimentation with dynamic research methodologies, taking up critical theory alongside posthumanism, to surface hidden stories and hidden literacies, and foreground the presence and effects of power in innovative research, and in our schools and communities.

Elizabeth St. Pierre (2021b) argues post qualitative inquiry has links to the humanities and its standards of excellence reflect those of art, literature, history, and philosophy, so that

generalizations about “goodness” are not possible. She asked, “What makes a poem good? What makes a painting good?” (p. 7). Østern and colleagues (2021, p. 12) have also pointed out trustworthiness and rigour are historically rooted in positivist notions of stability, order, and representation, which are not congruent with arts-based research. This inquiry does not attempt to get the research or design correct; the focus is on affective movements in a singular space and the interconnections between people, things, and worlds. It engaged the participants in creative and critical making (Albers et al., 2019) in an online setting, using art as an additional language (Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009) that connects bodies and understandings beyond language. It illuminates the complex, affective dimensions of newcomer worlds, disrupts narrow understandings of “English-as-a-second language,” and invites us to consider what belonging might look like in ethical, decolonized, more-than-human worlds.

The post qualitative paradigm advocates a refusal of method and methodology (St. Pierre, 2017), rejecting formal, pre-existing methods in favour of responding to what is happening in the present. I recognize that in my study, data collection unfolded according to my hopes and my research plan (a program requirement). We met for the anticipated number of sessions, with the participants deciding when to end; the sessions generally lasted around 90 minutes; the participants interacted, shared stories, and created artworks, as requested. The study appears to have followed a pre-set plan however, I believe it fulfills the post qualitative call to be innovative and experimental. I did not prepare questions or activities in advance, so our research space often felt disorganized, and I was frequently uncertain of what to say or do next. Within those moments, something new and unexpected arose, including new understandings of the complexities of newcomer belongings. From this, a poetic experiential reading emerged,

illuminating affective worlds, instances of wonder, and the material and immaterial spaces between worlds, in a worlding composition.

### **Is It Overstated?**

Beginning with the understanding that literacy research is a “utopian enterprise” (Pahl et al, 2020, p. 167), I am mindful of over-stating claims of this inquiry. Collier (2019) pointed out, co-research and collaboration, in which participants and researcher work “in partnership,” often bring varying levels of participant interest and investment in the different elements of the study. In my work, the central issue of belonging was meaningful to each participant, but it is unlikely each had the same degree of investment in the research project that I brought to this endeavour. Working alongside the participants, we shared in affectively charged moments of storytelling, and in discoveries that were both personal and collective; in this sense, it was an equal and meaningful enterprise in collaborative inquiry. While the participants and I were equal partners in decision-making about which issues to pursue, it would be overstating the claim to suggest the research was truly collaborative at every stage of the process. The participants were invited to collaborate on the editing of their transcript poems. All participants approved the transcripts, but only one provided comments and minor revisions to the text. It would not be accurate to suggest all the stages of the research project were carried out in partnership with the participants, thus I cannot claim this research project was a fully collaborative endeavour.

### **Decentering The Researcher?**

Educational scholars who have critiqued posthumanisms and the posthumanist inquiry (see Dernikos et al., 2020) call for attention to the limits as well as the potentials of this paradigm. Post qualitative scholars assert it is not possible for investigators to be objective, distanced inquirers, because they are one element amongst the other human and more-than-



human entities in the research assemblage, making use of their sensing, feeling, thinking body to engage, understand and analyze (Østern et al., 2021). However, the paradigm's interest in the researcher's entanglements may inadvertently sideline the voices of the participants, while paradoxically re-centering the principal investigator (Gerard, Rudolph, & Sripakash, 2017). I am concerned that this re-centering may be evident in my work; I am the primary instrument of this research project; as facilitator of our meetings, I found myself at the helm of our research space. I was the person most often posing questions, soliciting comments, summarizing our conversations, and offering suggestions for directions and next steps. I have constructed, re-storied, and reworlded my participants in my writing. I have braided my own affective responses to the participants' stories, artworks, indeed, throughout the entire research endeavour. Although my intent was to foreground the voices of my participants, as the researcher and the writer of this dissertation, I am unavoidably at the center of this inquiry.

Gerard and colleagues (2017) also question the use of affect theory as an analytical tool, asking: "Has affect and intuition entirely replaced method in post qualitative inquiry?" (p. 26). I do not believe a lens of affect alone in post qualitative inquiry can sufficiently highlight issues of power and injustice for marginalized and minoritized communities; there is a place for critical theory in posthumanist and post qualitative inquiry (Dernikos et al., 2020), and there is also a need to recognize the legitimacy non-western voices and creative forms of theorizing, such as poetry, as an activist move toward decolonizing the academy. By ignoring or dismissing the presence of power and colonizing discourses in research, Bhattacharya (2021) said we "ignore the epistemic violence inherent in western, colonizing, knowledge making structures" (p. 182); and we perpetuate the colonizing effects of research on marginalized and minoritized communities. There is great potential in the post qualitative paradigm to disrupt and

problematize what counts as valuable and valid research (Gerard et al., 2017). Those of us who are interested in exploring the possibilities of posthumanist and post qualitative inquiry must work to find more potent ways to think, feel, and act ethically, to more fully attend to social inequalities, and decolonizing moves, to address the effects of power within research spaces and our social worlds.

### **Is It Ethical?**

I struggle with this question as I consider the power dynamics of working with refugees, and whether my posthumanist and post qualitative inquiry lives up to its claims of being inherently relational and ethical. I have attempted to create a research praxis that is ethical, trauma-sensitive, and responsive to newcomers. I received ethics approval for my study from the Research Ethics Boards (REB) of my university and college workplace, demonstrating that I had teaching experience and training to anticipate and mitigate concerns of working with this vulnerable population. This study is ethical in the eyes of the academy, but is it?

Critical posthumanist and post qualitative approaches are rooted in relational ontologies, which assert we come to know through our being in the world, through non-hierarchical relationships between and among humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans; ethical relationships are embedded in the ways we are interconnected (Kuby, 2019). We therefore have the ability and responsibility to respond respectfully to others in our entanglements and assemblages.

My approach to my research was contingent, situational, and relational, especially when put to work in the project of troubling our understandings of belonging, and “troubling something in the hopes of making it better” (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 2). Braidotti (2008) suggests ethics has to do with “creative becomings,” the creation of alternative social relations and other

possible worlds (p. 4). Indeed, my intent was to create an “ecology of belonging” (Braidotti, 2008) in our research assemblage, a welcoming space for experimentation, through shared storytelling through translanguaging and the arts, in a trauma-sensitive culture of care. Yet, I wonder whether our assumptions about non-hierarchical (therefore ethical) relationships in posthumanist and post qualitative research may be illusory, given the realities of power relationships in research settings?

As Kuby (2017) observes, our research practices are never neutral; the philosophical, paradigmatic, and theoretical perspectives of the researcher are at the center of the research endeavour, and influence what unfolds in the setting, what questions get asked, how data are analyzed, how transcripts (and transcript poems) are generated, and in how the study is written up. Although I may be a progressive scholar attempting to work with a decolonized stance, my white settler lens unavoidably colours my work. Does my restorying of participants’ experiences co-opt and displace their voices? Ultimately, in re-presenting participant stories, I inevitably become the author, the authority, and the colonizer (hooks, 1989, p.22).

Sara Ahmed (2000) forces me to further interrogate my understanding of myself as a researcher who works with newcomers, or what she calls a “professional stranger” (p. 60), like the ethnographer who studies “the other,” turning *strangerness* into a profession, a technique for the appropriation and accumulation of knowledge. Ahmed states it is through our participants that we come to know; we know only through the transformation of their being into knowledge. She suggests the claim of relationality in new methodologies (such as post qualitative inquiry) reworks the construction of the stranger by presenting intimacy or friendship as a research method. Claims of democratizing the research setting through collaborative methods or decentering the researcher in the research assemblage, invoke a “fantasy of being-together-as-

strangers” in an attempt to overcome “the relations of force and authorization embedded in the desire to know (more) about strangers” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 64). How then do I approach participants who are refugees or emergent bilinguals and maintain ethical relationships grounded in respect and integrity?

My answer is we need to be honest with ourselves and our participants about our purposes, our relationships, and the layers of power that persist, despite our methodological maneuverings. When working with newcomers, the asymmetries of power in language hierarchies, cultural knowledge, and research settings cannot be denied or easily bridged. Hierarchies may be unwanted and unseen in research assemblages, nevertheless they are always present. There is no way to level playing field, but we can acknowledge the presence of power and talk about how we might find ways to address the imbalances that will always be there. I believe the use of translanguaging, where applicable, can create a more equitable research space, so that the researcher who does not share the language(s) of the participants becomes “the stranger,” and is placed in a position of not knowing. By sitting in the discomfort of not knowing, the researcher enacts a decolonizing stance that displaces the primacy of the English language and dethrones the researcher as an “all-knowing” figure (Ahmed, 2000), while demonstrating respect for her bi- and multilingual participants, their onto-epistemologies, and an openness to difference. Being open to difference means being aware of “the possibility of strangers knowing differently to how they are known” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 74). And it is our task as researchers committed to justice to draw attention to forms of power that are concealed by assumptions that “we can transform the ‘being’ of strangers into knowledge” (p. 74). We may not be able to fully “know” the stranger, and there is no ethical way to appropriate other ways of

knowing. Our task is finding ways to work alongside difference, in spaces of not-knowing in openness, relationality, and honesty.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

That sticky story,  
the feeling of that quote, an image that will not shake.

We read theory  
we retell, we move with it.

We are like improvisers  
we become, we travel to know.

(Tanner, et al., 2021, p. 240)

This chapter presented my arts-based approach to researching within the post qualitative paradigm to explore refugee experiences of belonging and not-belonging, using an analytic lens to think with theory and attune to the world through poetry, and non-western thinkers. Blending worlding and wonder with Borderlands artists allowed me to attend to social inequalities in Borderland spaces more fully, and humanize posthuman inquiry (Dernikos et al., 2020). My analysis also brought a decolonial lens to post qualitative educational inquiry, challenging the continued domination of colonial discourses within literacy studies, while highlighting potentials for doing research differently, working with alternative knowledges in relationality and solidarity, to foreground the non-western ways of being, knowing, and belonging, in human, less-than-human, and more-than-human worlds.

## CHAPTER FIVE: A COMPOSITIONAL WORLDING

This chapter presents an experiential reading (Blaikie 2020, 2021; Stewart, 2008) of newcomer worlds and worldings, through the voices of four adults who are recent refugees and immigrants to Canada. An experiential reading is an immersion in ideas, images, and narratives (Blaikie, 2021, 2020; Stewart 2008); it draws from creative nonfiction, using data stories entwined with literary techniques and visual images, that taken together, create a “thickening of ‘data,’ of life lived with others” (Ehret, 2018a, p. 58): researcher, participants, reader, and the world, entangled in an improvisational inquiry. It is a compositional worlding which brings the reader into the felt and sensed worlds evoked by newcomer stories and artworks; these affective and embodied texts are the counter-stories of people whose experiences are not often heard or told (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) as *testimonios* (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lee, et al., 2021) that recenter newcomer voices, revealing the complexities, struggles, and personal discoveries within the search for belonging to Canada, the self, and the world. I invite the reader to become a participant in the co-creation of this experiential reading by becoming entangled in the felt, sensed, and imagined worlds and worldings of the storytellers, their experiences of belonging, framed in ephemeral, uncertain, and unpredictable processes of worlding, unworlding, and reworlding.

My work re-presents the four participants’ stories as poetic transcripts (Görlich 2016, 2019, 2020; Ratković, 2013) to foreground the affective and emotional dimensions of lives lived. I also present “found poems” (Prendergast, 2009) created from the writing of academic authors and Borderlands artists; all are woven through an artistic inquiry that makes room for the unexpected and “holds the promise of presenting the world differently” (O’Donohue, 2018, p. 523). I build on Blaikie’s (2020, 2021) and Stewart’s (2010, 2012, 2017, 2019) rich descriptions

of worldings that emerge in a compositional present, through the entwining of affect, the senses, and matter. I define newcomer worldings, unworldings and reworldings as processes that occur in indeterminate and unforeseen ways, rhizomatic movements and assemblages, as “*comingtogethers* of multiple social immediacies” (Ehret, 2018, p. 55), arising in the labour of living (Stewart, 2010), in affective instances of inclusion, exclusion, and dis/integration; in the sense of self, of being, becoming, and belonging-in-the-world.

This experimental writing braids together multiple storytelling elements placed in conversation with each other and the reader, creating a multi-voiced assemblage that links theory and experience in a worlding composition (Blaikie 2020; Stewart, 2010). My writing follows Blaikie’s (2020) visual essay format, weaving non-representational writing, research, art, and theory, generated through a process of thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) and thinking with more than theory by attuning to the world through the scholarly and creative work of Borderland artists and critical theorists. Thinking with theory and attuning to the world offers an ephemeral yet powerful space for troubling assumptions, enacting a decolonial stance and praxis, and thinking the new.

The sections of this chapter are organized in a thematic presentation, in which I think through constructs and then move into storying. I discuss the participants’ narratives in relation to the themes that emerged in our conversations. We move between the participant voices and my autoethnographic voice engaged in the process of “thinking-feeling” (Ehret, 2018a; Stewart, 2011) through the shared events and spaces I inhabited alongside my participants. I use three asterisks (\*\*\*) to signpost jumps from narration to theorizing, and movement from one moment to another (Tanner et al., 2021). This chapter offers a creative reworking of the research meetings as transcript poems, data-stories, and image-texts as entangled worldings, to highlight the

emotive and affective elements of the lived and felt experiences of newcomer worldings and belongings. This work does not “find magical closure or even seek it” (Stewart, 2007, p. 5), but rather, proposes a form of cultural and political critique that tracks lived impacts and rogue vitalities (Stewart, 2005, p.1,028) in newcomer individual and collective experiences. My inquiry seeks to stimulate further connections between theory and experience (Tanner et al., 2021), and more experimentation with creative methodologies that offer openings to stories from the margins, and deeper explorations of the literacies of belonging. My findings and discussion follow, as we begin not at the beginning, but in the middle of things.

### **Entering Worlds and Worldings**

I enter into the research setting feeling a mix of excitement and anxiety, willing my novice researcher body to exude calmness and openness as I greet the participants, Elif, Maria, Kian and Sara, hoping to attune to the unique knowledges and shared humanity in collaborative inquiry (Campbell & Pahl, 2018) in a more-than-human setting. Technology and the coronavirus are our now constant companions, influencing our interactions in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, forcing the group to meet safely online and build relationality by connecting through sharing stories on multiple levels, across modes, spaces, and screens, and through affective encounters. Can I wish away my nervousness so that I can be fully present with my participants, and move with affect, with the entanglements, intensities, and surprises, that will, no doubt, arise in our encounters?

It does not take long; my fragile equilibrium begins to disintegrate within the first moments of our introductory meeting. I feel the power of a story, a storyteller, and the unexpected, in an affective surge that moves up my spine, and through the people and objects in



our Zoom space: a surge that lights up and disrupts the early rhythms of this new collective worlding. All of a sudden, we are in the middle of *something*.

Sara is introducing herself to the group with an image from her cell phone. The others are not aware of her history, but I am. Sara was involved in anti-government activities as a Syrian humanitarian worker, which led to her acceptance as a government-sponsored refugee in Canada. Sara spent several months at an inhospitable refugee camp in Southwestern Asia before arriving in this country. Her first experience of Canada was at a central Ontario shelter for newly arrived refugees. She and her family were then relocated to another city in Ontario. She is trying to make sense of this new life, new worlds, in which the strangeness of the English language and Canadian culture occupy her days, and images of war and death in her homeland dominate her nights. I cannot comprehend what her life is like. And in this moment, I am struggling to understand what I am seeing in her photo, and where she is taking all of us with it.

Sara: This picture.

Did you see it?

### Figure 5

*Zoom Screen Capture of Sara's Refugee Camp Photo. Used with permission.*



The audio buzzes and buzzes. Sara is holding her phone up for everyone on the Zoom call. I feel myself smiling. Everyone is straining to see. Maria's hands are folded in front of her face, covering her mouth and nose; I cannot read her eyes. Sara is laughing.

The image is blurry, but I can make out the walls of a small white room with clothes hanging on a line stretched across the space.

**Sara:** This picture when I live 3 months Karih camp. (pseudonym)

It's crazy.

The weather its very hot,

lot of problems,

everybody was angry.

But when we leave this camp,

when I move to Canada, you know,

I move from the hell.

It's like heaven now.

Sara laughs again.

I feel a jolt of panic as Sara's words and laughter ricochet in my head. My eyes dart from the unsettling image of a refugee camp tent to the puzzled faces of the participants. The static from somewhere in our Zoom space provides a steady sonic backdrop, distracting, droning in my ears. This ice-breaker activity has dissolved from images of family picnics and waterfront strolls into something else—a charged atmosphere in which Sara seems to be exercising her capacity to affect and to be affected (Stewart, 2010). There is an unnerving energy in the moment, an electricity, an unravelling. Is everyone feeling it? I feel unmoored, as though my body has been drawn through digital devices, time, and places, from my desktop computer into the stark reality

of a refugee camp. It feels like we are “in” something, in my home office, and with each other, an other-worldly sensation of simultaneously being together, apart, and someplace else. It feels as though we are inside a ‘glass cabinet’: “being at once, within and ‘looking out’, but also materially rooted without while ‘looking in’” (Davies, 2014, p. 73). In this human-non-human space with illegible boundaries, technology seems to be a more-than-human living presence, with intelligence and its own motivations (Boochani, 2018), taking pleasure in creating disarray and disruption.

I struggle to say something.

So, it was like heaven ... to leave? I’m stammering.

Ya, she says, and laughs again.

Sara’s laughter sends another surge of anxiety through me. This moment is alive with importance, confusion, and curiosity. For Sara, the refugee camp was a living hell of relentless heat, people fighting, seething with anger. Sara’s experience of a Middle Eastern refugee camp echoes Kurdish-Iranian poet Behrouz Bouchani’s life in an Australian prison camp for asylum seekers; they are places of brutality, constant struggle, and casual violence, seemingly designed to inflict suffering —like hell:

*A confrontation of bodies,  
of human flesh  
friction from their breathing.  
Breath that smells like the sea,  
smells like the deadly journey.*

(Bouchani, 2018, p. 121)

Canada is heaven, says Sara. And I wonder: is it? Tangled in my discomfort, fumbling, and self-consciousness, are my “habituated teacher identity” and “entrenched teacher fears” (Ehret, 2018a, p. 64), my desire to be a successful teacher/researcher, and the self-imposed pressure to stay on course (Lewis and Tierney, 2013) with the introductory activity, rather than following the perturbing undertow in the sound of Sara’s laughter and in her story. As my mind turns inside the intensities of escapes-from-the-hell-of-war-in-Syria-and- a refugee-camp-to-heaven-in-Canada, what emerges, surprisingly, is Sara’s ebullience. There is an insistence, an urgency in her voice, and joyfulness, as she asserts her story, her cell phone image, herself, into the mix and movement of people and things in our research setting. It feels like an expression of something difficult to describe — a vitalness — coursing with energy and aliveness (Boldt, 2021). And it feels like something that cannot be interpreted or easily explained, perhaps “something at the limits of language” (Stewart, 2008, p. 76), in the throwing together of unruly, disparate things in an electric encounter.

Sara’s unsettling introduction creates a sense-event (MacLure 2013b), a literacy event that is emergent, embodied, unbound by time and space (Leander & Boldt, 2013) that demands attunement to its movements, rippling outward, to what lies ahead, what is still to come. It is a beginning, in the midst of a worlding composition, that is filled with gestures, images, impacts, sensory events, languages and cultures, lived histories, flows of emotion and affect, and pulses of energy, propelling us forward with a momentum and direction that is unmarked, unknown, but filled with possibilities.

Our group is culturally and linguistically diverse; we are creating a translanguaging space in which everyone is invited to bring their linguistic, cultural, and creative repertoires into the research setting to use as resources in meaning-making (Garcia & Wei, 2014) and community

building. What soon becomes clear is that all have complicated histories and uneasy belongings which do not neatly fit into immigration categories that flatten complex stories under simplified headings: “immigrant,” “refugee,” “asylum seeker,” “international student”. All have refugee experiences of fleeing conflict, violence, religious repression, and human rights abuses. Kian and his wife have left behind an authoritarian regime in Iran to pursue a life in academia in Canada. Elif is a Syrian refugee but ethnically Turkish, making her family outsiders in their homeland and the rest of the world. Maria is silent about the events that led to her sudden departure from Lebanon, alone, with her children. Sara’s humanitarian work in Syria made her a government target. We begin our journey, joined in a willingness to share our lives and histories, feeling our way, and walking together as a mode of inquiry (Pahl et al., 2020).

\*\*\*

Julianne: Hello, dzin dobre, bonjour. Welcome!

Let me introduce myself. I’m Julianne.

I was born in Canada, but my grandparents came from Poland.

Polish is my parents’ home language; but it is not mine.

I can only say a few words in Polish and I know a bit of French from my school days.

I have lived in Canada my whole life.

I invite my participants to do their own introductions, and then pick up their art pads, a pencil or marker, for an informal introductory activity. My aim is to use art to do language and literacy research differently, experimentally (St. Pierre, 2019), to open a space for other ways of knowing and doing, using art as a language for sharing our stories. Art – and talking about our art — offers us a mode to rearticulate thoughts and ideas across sign systems, across languages and

cultures, to think metaphorically and symbolically, “a way to see ourselves and the world differently” (Albers et al., 2012, p. 188). Art as an affect moves us and moves with us, to capture and witness powerful feelings that words may not be able to adequately express. Through the creation of art and dialogue, we may discover the ways in which materialities, spaces, places, affects, thoughts, and relationships become agentic (Blaikie, 2021), connected, generative, and political.

Borrowing an activity from social work practice (Darewych 2014), I invite everyone to draw a bridge from someplace to someplace; the bridge can be real or imaginative, with as much detail as they would like. I tell them to feel free to put themselves in their drawing or on their bridge. As I take up my paper, pencil, and blank thoughts, the first thing that comes to mind is Monet’s famous bridge at Giverny and the pond with water lilies — I don’t know why! I am having a bit of fun as I sketch, moving lightly with the flow of graphite on the page, creating my rendition of this iconic painting, and then I insert myself into the scene in a canoe, making an awkward mess of it. The whole thing looks unsightly to me. Still, I am amused by my effort, as I discretely toss my drawing into the bin next to my desk, and Maria volunteers to show her work.

Maria: Hello, Marhabah.

My name is Maria. I’m Lebanese Arabic woman.

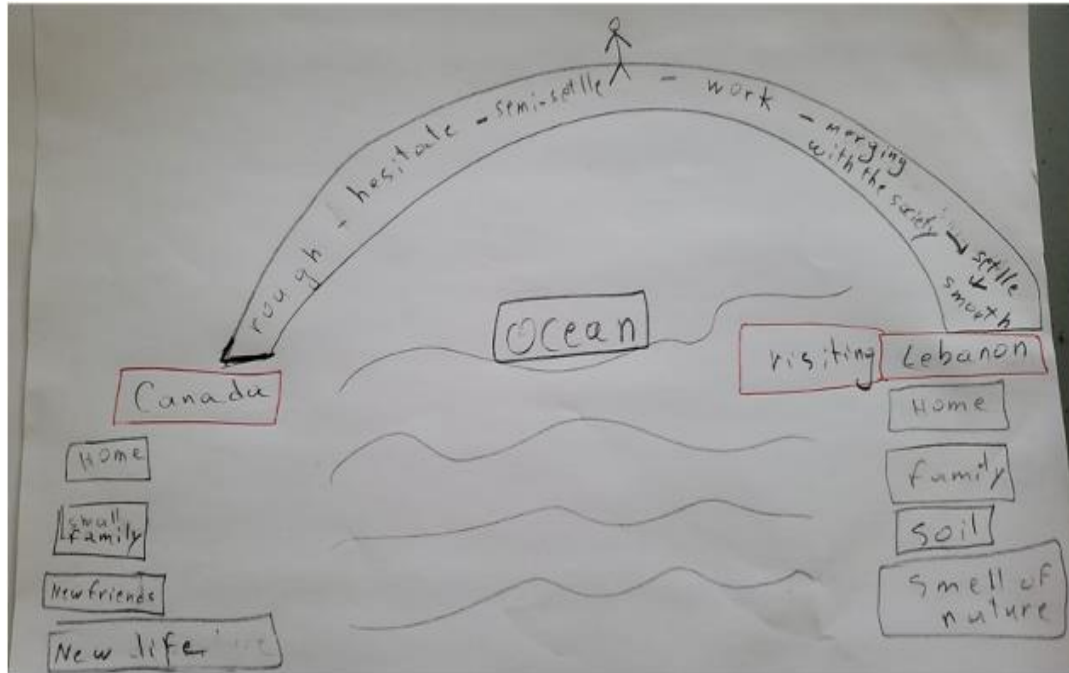
I have been in Canada since 2018.

I speak now English. I can speak French and my home language, Arabic.

I have three kids. Hello everybody.

## **Figure 6**

*Maria’s Bridge Drawing. Used with permission.*



Yes, this is here (*pointing to the left*), Canada: my home, my small family,  
my new friends,  
new life.

And here (*pointing*) missing my home, my family,  
the soul of my country,  
the smell of our nature  
there in Lebanon.

Julianne: The bridge goes to Canada, but I see an arrow going the other way back to your  
country.

Maria: This arrow means for me this is the point  
when I can feel myself settled.  
I'm okay here.  
On strong ground.

There's no fight between me and myself.

Kian: Hello, salam. I'm Kian, from Iran.

My mother taught me Turkish

but our nationality language is Farsi.

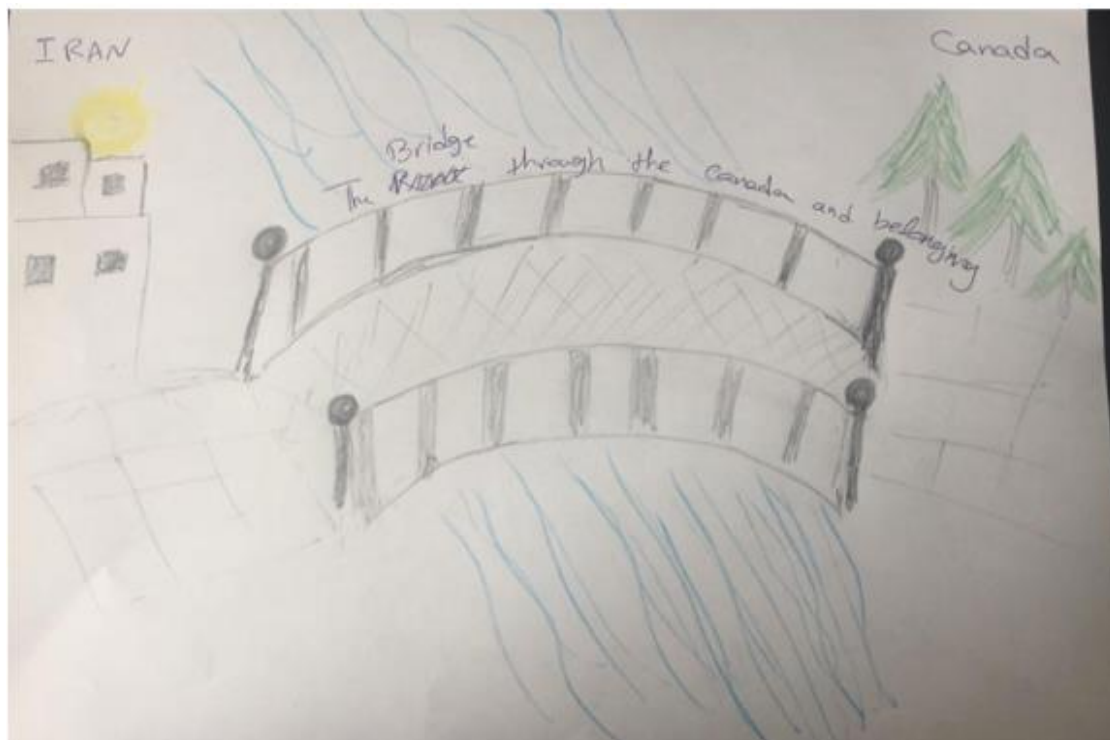
I came to Canada in 2016

and I was a PhD student,

a visiting student, at Southwest University (pseudonym)

### Figure 7

*Kian's Bridge Drawing. Used with permission.*



The interesting thing is my feeling is pretty close to Maria.

Actually, we just draw the same picture!

This bridge is the route and the ways



and all things we went through to come to Canada.

This part is my country and my memory, my family, everything.

*Emotional.*

Everything is here.

And that part is Canada.

I'm trying to pass through this bridge,

and as you can see there's some slope.

You can have some difficulty

when you first step on the bridge.

After passing through the middle of the bridge

we can find a feeling: belongingness to Canada.

Curved bridges illustrate their journeys and dreams of belonging, structures spanning oceans, countries, linking built, and sensory worlds: the clean white angular shapes outlining a Persian cityscape, green Canadian forests, the smell of nature and the soil of Maria's home in Lebanon. I see their smiles; their enthusiasm is infectious and wafts over me, animating our conversation. As we talk about the bridge drawings, I sense our coming together as an artistic assemblage: in the enfolding of people, places, and things that exist separately, but are here now, entwined, in relation, including our coloured pencils, pads of paper, cultures and languages, memories, struggles, and aspirations. We are joined in a project of exploration and creation, in co-creating something new, which, as Ingold (2014) suggests, is "the search for something that is unknown in advance" (p. 70.)

Sara: Hello salam aleykum. My name is Sara. I am from Syria.

I still student English language. Hi everybody.

**Figure 8**

*Sara's Bridge Drawing. Used with permission.*



This me. This the past: homeland and also the past. This the future.

Here the sea.

And, you know, that's rope I tried to pass.

Julianne: Your bridge doesn't have sides. It looks like a stick.

Sara: Like somebody walk ... rope, rope.

Julianne: A tightrope!

Sara: Ya ya ya.

Julianne: Oh my gosh! That's amazing. And what's in your bags?

Sara: Everything. My memory, my bad health, what I think.

It's everything I have.

Problems.

Memory.

And this past.

Julianne: Tell me about the waves.

Sara: It's like problem,

it's like wall.

I have to (*hits fist against palm*)

I have to broke this wall.

Like language, work,

many many many

things here different.

I have to learn many things

belong this place

So, this wave

it's mean that.

Julianne: And you're here on the bridge?

Sara: I stay in the first steps.

When we go out from Syria,

we dream something, you know.

But when we arrive to Canada,

we can't make this dream.

Really.

And so we back  
 to delete our dreams  
 and make another one.

I am struck by the force of Sara's drawing, the intensities unleashed by the images on the page. Sara walks a tightrope, leaving behind her family and homeland, moving toward Canada, carrying her belongings – her fears, her past, her pain — with waves roiling beneath her, the overwhelming challenges of her new life, threatening to consume her. I become acutely aware of my limited experience as researcher in my conversation with Sara; I am surprised by the sound of surprise in my voice: A tightrope! Oh my gosh! The sound of Sara's fist hitting her hand, her desire to break the walls, the barriers she is encountering as a recently arrived refugee. I try to stay in the moment, to “surf” the flow of affect, the intensity of the event in which I am caught up, in order to arrive somewhere else (MacLure, 2013b, p. 662).

I muddle through.

Elif:            My name is Elif.  
                   I'm from Syria too.  
                   My first language is Turkish,  
                   not Arabic.  
                   So I can speak two languages.  
                   I have been in Canada for 17 months.

**Figure 9**

*Elif's Bridge Painting. Used with permission.*



Julianne: Your painting is beautiful. It looks and feels Asian. I see the writing at the bottom.

Is it Korean?

Elif: It's Korean. We watch a Korean drama in Turkish TV channel.

I think 12 years I am still watching!

I'm really interested in Korean culture.

Julianne: What does it say?

Elif: It says, "*One day I will see you.*"

I have, like, missing person – my friends – so I write this.

I had a lot of friends in high school, elementary school.

And now,

I'm really a little bit afraid to make new friends

because I don't trust people anymore.

The bridge is not real.

It is my imagination, my new path.

And I am in the middle

maybe the beginning,

because now I'm still learning English here.

I choose a rainy day

because I like rain.

And I'm not sure where I should begin

so that's why I choose the grey colour.

The mountains are new people

who I have met,

or I will meet in the future.

I hope that I will go straight

in this bridge,

in my path,

and nothing will destroy my dreams again.

Elif's complex transnational, bicultural identity, her belongings in multiple worlds, and her desires, are vividly captured in the soft colours and unexpected contours of her Asian-inspired painting: an imaginary bridge leading to an unknown future, grey mountains representing new, unmet friends, pink blossoms, and Korean script that cryptically contain her longing for

friendship and connection. Worldings in an eloquent, compositional present (Blaikie, 2020, 2021; Stewart, 2010, 2012, 2017, 2019); Elif’s artistic assemblage illuminates the unheard story of a university student-artist-displaced Syrian-ethnically-Turkish-admirer of Korean culture-literate in four linguistic codes-stateless-out-of-place-out-of-friends-out-of-self in Canada.

I ask the group if anything — images, comments, ideas, feelings from our first meeting and bridge drawing activity — has “stuck” with them, leaving an emotional residue (Anzaldúa, 1987), a stickiness through contact between bodies, objects, signs, and accumulations (Ahmed, 2015) of affective value.

Maria speaks for the group:

Maria: Each one of us has his own or her own bridge

his own dream, his *nostalgie*.

This is a mix of things:

dreams and *nostalgie*,

back and the future.

The bridge is a connection between the future and the past. Bridges that are real, imagined, desired, and unexpected. Bridges to belongings, bridges to subjectivities. Storytelling and art emerge in a state of discovery (Albers et al., 2019), in the mixture of participants, materials, languages, and processes, in the affective flows and unknown meanings that pulse through human and non-human contact zones (Stewart, 2008). Through our first encounters with each other, we are finding our way in this strange space of porous boundaries, in which we are “inside” and “outside” at the same time, together online, yet separated by complex lives and multiple worlds.

And I am suddenly aware of the smallness of my life, and my unencumbered encounters with the world. Although there are stories of displacement and dislocation in my family history, my lived experience is anchored in uninterrogated belongings within a world of western colonization and white privilege. I sense the outline of the boundary between “the researcher and the researched,” the distinction between myself and other, and the pull of unsettling questions for which I do not yet have answers (MacLure, 2018, pp. 6-7): Where am I in this encounter with these diverse participants? How can I be accountable to them, and to myself, in this unfolding worlding?

a matter of strange connection

Simultaneously Out There

in the world

and Inside

the body, across the boundary

between person and world.

(MacLure, 2013c, p. 181)

### **Belonging-in-the-World**

In resettlement, in acclimatizing to new ways of being and belonging in a new place, in the composition of a new worlding, one moves around with the sense that the world is, at once, “intensely present and enigmatic” (Stewart, 2011, p. 447). There is always the literal registering of forms and forces that bring you into the situation, that surprise, confound, alarm, haunt, or offer solace – or whatever (pp. 451-2). Living in or living through things incites careful attunement to *something* coming into existence.

### **Figure 10**





wearing plain leather shoes.

In minutes

the sting

so cold

so painful.

(Al Hourani, 2019)

The sensory labour of worlding (Stewart 2010) as a newcomer to Canada; labouring to fall into the rhythm and tempo of changing seasons and their sensory impacts: the smell of damp earth after a spring rain, the rustle of burnt gold and red autumn leaves under foot, the delight of the first snowfall, the sharp bite of winter's deep freeze on unaccustomed flesh.

The raw materials for a compositional grounding, a re-start.

### Figure 11

*Sample Canadian Permanent Resident Card: Government of Canada*



*Note:* A sample image of a Canadian Government-issued Permanent Resident card (2016) is used here to protect Sara's privacy.

Sara: When I use this (Permanent Resident card)

I *feel* something.

I have something can protect me.

I feel like *human* here.

When I enter from Syria to Jordan

the police Jordan

they put us under the sun for 4 hour

and check our physiology. We have to take off our clothes.

Like prisoners.

And same also the police Turkish, same.

He put me outside.

Angry,

ask about everything:

*Why you come here? How you are come here?*

I was so so fear

I feel like I'm an *animal*.

A Lebanese translator so helpful.

She told me: You are all right, but the police not good.

He want to fun with you - and your fear.

Now I have Permanent Resident card, I am half-Canadian.

When I travel,

Turkish police, he never trap me like last time.

The felt force (Hollett, 2021) emanating from Sara’s story, its affective excess hits viscerally, like a punch to the gut, stopping my breath. My mind cannot work thorough the incomprehensibilities surrounding Sara’s experience at the hands of immigration police in Jordan and Turkey: being tortured, traumatized, dehumanized, made to feel like an animal. Abuses of state power simply for a security officer’s amusement, to “have fun with your fear.” Because Sara is Syrian. Muslim. A woman. The felt-force of not-belonging in the world, both inside and outside one’s homeland, in airports, refugee camps, under the sun. I am moved by the transformative power that emerges through the materiality and emotional heft of a plastic identification card, a Permanent Resident of Canada card, that makes Sara “feel something”: dignity and humanity.

I hear determination and strength resonate in Sara’s voice as she exerts her own affective force, mobilizing the emotions circulating in the spaces between bodies, minds, texts, and objects, and layered with languaging, embodiment, and complex histories (Lewis 2020, p. 231). Sara disrupts the essentialized narrative of refugees as helpless victims in need of rescuing. In an empowered stance, a “worlding expression of a becoming self across place, space and time” (Blaikie, 2020, p. 330), Sara declares herself “half-Canadian,” and with her PR card in hand, she cements her belonging to Canada and her place in the world, vowing she will never be “trapped” again.

I am also struck by the force of the intervention, the witnessing and caring of another woman at the scene, in the midst of Sara’s ordeal: the Lebanese translator who comforts her and explains to Sara, you are all right - the immigration officer is the problem. The translator’s actions of critical witnessing are an enactment of compassion and the shared experience of “the tenderness and fragility of human life” (Dutro, 2017, p. 333). Sara’s story, her *testimonio* of

trauma, carries impacts and resonances: the pushing back at power – gendered power - a counterforce that gathers and “spits at the world” (Stewart, 2011, p. 1023), and the affecting presence and care of a stranger, all leaving lasting, visceral traces in their wake.

Kian: In Canada, there was a lot of things interesting for me

but one remarkable one was

walking down the street, we can hear women laugh.

I can hear they are laughing loud.

And they are talking loud.

I can say that I was speechless!

It’s actually a sign of freedom for women here.

My wife, when she heard that sound,

I can really see the bright on her face

her eyes.

When we are talking about our daughter,

she said

this is the country,

the women should be grown.

I am taken away by the wonder of a sonic worlding proliferating in Kian’s story, in the peals of women’s laughter, and female voices shouting, arguing, talking loudly, sharing in each other’s presence, a presence that is visible and audible. A “sign of freedom” for Kian which, ironically, leaves him awestruck, silent, in his quiet embrace of feminism and equity. Kian and his wife have left behind an authoritarian regime in Iran, one that works to erase women’s bodies and

voices. In Canada, the sounds of women punctuate the air, moving through, and affecting bodies, sounding out the right to be and belong in the world: signaling a homeplace (hooks, 1990) in this country, a site of empowerment and belonging, a worlding for Kian, his wife, and their baby daughter.

Maria:           Without saying a name, someone who scare me  
he has opportunity to come to Canada.

I met with him.

He felt *helpless*. I felt *powerful*!

He mentioned that!

He mentioned that here,

he *can't* do

what he *can* do

in his home country.

And what about me?

*Fear* when I met him in my home country.

But here

I felt really calm,

peaceful,

and safe.

Because I knew that there's around me

a community, the law.

They support the women,  
especially when they are in a weak situation.

In my country, no. It's a masculine society.

Maybe the words can't help me now  
to express how I felt.

After that meeting,

I was *so happy*

*so satisfied*

that I am here.

The feeling of being satisfied.

You are protected person here.

*You can't buy this kind of feeling!*

Maria's face is glowing.

Moments of singularity: being in something together, something exciting, inspiring, affecting (Ehret, 2018a). We follow the affects in Maria's story, the deeply felt, embodied sense of her own power as she confronts threatening patriarchal power. Here in Canada, Maria feels supported and strong; she is no longer fearful: "he can't do/ what he can do/ in his home country." Elation surfaces and radiates through bodies and spaces, resonating in Kian's discovery of freedom for himself, his wife and child, in the sounds of women's voices and laughter, in Maria's unbridled happiness and satisfaction: "You can't buy this kind of feeling," and in Sara's

sense of self and strength embedded in her Canadian permanent resident card; no one will “trap” her again.

Worldings, belongings, and empowerment, emerging in and through gender, materiality, and relationality. The “phonic materiality” of the sounds of a gendered compositional worlding is a materiality “redeployed to critique injustice” (Crawley, 2009, p. 199). Together, we are witnessing the presence of something rare and remarkable, even if imperfect and impermanent: the lived — and shared — experience of justice. In the ongoing present, the stories told by Sara, Kian, Elif, and Maria, their embodied, lived affects (Stewart 2017), and forms of knowledge, speak in a multiplicity of modes. Enfolded into the everyday sounds and struggles of living life as a newcomer emerge new understandings of what it means to be a woman, with a place and presence in the world, with power and a voice: feeling what it means to be human and feeling a sense of connection and belongingness to something larger than oneself.

\*\*\*

“Worlding is momentary completeness that is always unravelling into something else” (Blaikie, 2021, p. 58); the stories of transformation told by Sara, Kian, and Maria shift the common narrative of the displaced refugee away from popular stories of desperation, suffering and vulnerability (or a potential threat), to an affirmative account, one that promotes “an ecology of belonging” (Braidotti, 2008, p. 4), an alternative way of being, in shared connections that are complex and sometimes contradictory, in ethical relationships that are not contained by the boundaries of the human, non-human, and inhuman. This, according to Braidotti, generates “the freedom to affirm one’s essence as joy, through encounters and minglings with other bodies, entities, beings and forces” (p. 26), in an ethics of relation, an ethics of affirmation.



## Unworlding

Newcomer unworldings arise through the sudden immersion in worlds unfamiliar and incomprehensible, through the forces of dis/location and dis/placement from the world. Unworldings unfold in the unravelling of the self and the known, in ruptures, repetitions, and dis/integrations, in lived stories of not-belonging in the world. A fissure opens up in the world you were in, and swallows the thing whole (Stewart, 2012); in repetitions and refrains, precarity takes form as a composition, an *unworlding* composition, in the undoing of the material, the semiotic, and the temporal. Kathleen Stewart describes the night her father died, a severe ice storm snapping sturdy trees in the surrounding forest all night long. Her world and the natural world rupturing, paradoxically, in dissonance and in unison. The alarming, sharp “death snapping” reverberated sonically, materially, spatially, and temporally, like the sound of gunfire and explosions in the neighbourhood, in the bodies of local Vietnam veterans.

In her post-World War II essay, “We Refugees,” German-born Jewish political philosopher Hannah Arendt detailed the profound fracture to her world, in living through the loss of language and self-expression, the loss of loved ones in Polish ghettos and concentration camps, and the loss of self and place in the world:

Hell is no longer a religious belief

or a fantasy,

but something as real as

houses and stones and trees.

Nobody wants to know that contemporary history

has created a new kind of human being:

the kind put in concentration camps

by their foes  
 and internment camps  
 by their friends.

(Arendt, 1943, p. 265)

There are horrifying echoes of history in journalist-poet Behrouz Bouchani's unworlding experience. Seeking freedom from political persecution in Iran, he finds himself imprisoned at an internment camp for refugees on Manus Island, Australia:

*Being so hungry, completely starving, one loses sight.*

*My eyes are two violet orbs with swollen veins*

*my vision is opaque*

*I can see only black.*

*I visualize my whole body as a skeleton*

*my being embodied as bone,*

*a skeleton left wandering*

*taking feeble steps.*

(Boochani, 2018, p. 199)

Caught within the movements, echoes, and horrors of a widening gap, a deep rupture in one's known world, precarity's forms (Stewart, 2012) are compositional and decompositional, magnetizing attachments and detachments, tempos, materialities, and states of being (p. 524), of not-belonging. Politics ensnares bodies, spaces, and struggles. Bodies in darkness, in the abyss, marked by the accumulation of shocks of living in and between the fractures of dis/connection.

Unworldings emerge in the disorienting awareness that the world and self are at odds, one is out-of-place, out of step with the world: not-belonging in the world. Newcomer bodies fall

untethered, in compositional *unworldings*, attuned to how things are falling apart, in layers of sensory impact, in forces and accumulations of assaults, blows, traumas: in living through dissonance and dis/placement, and a slide into dis/integration and erasure.

People slip out of the story they're living in

in moments of

interiority

rupture

and disappearance.

(Stewart, 2013, p. 4)

Maria: I wasn't planning to leave my country.

It was suddenly,

And I left.

When I came here

I know no one.

Alone with three kids.

Fear. Worry. Responsibilities.

My kids look to me,

I am the one who should protect them.

And I wasn't good enough to do that.

I'm a lawyer – it's not easy for me to become like *a child*.

I was a child

to *speak*.

To *ask*.

I was lost.

New place, new people, new language.

I couldn't see the beauty of Canada.

I thought everything will remain

*dark*

*and*

*black.*

Fear. Worry. Alone. Lost in a new world of new people, new places, new language. In blackness. Maria is composing a register of lived affects (Stewart, 2017) things in a state of emergence and instability, in a social-aesthetic-material-political unworlding: like a flickering apparition, a flash of colour, or a force that lands roughly on bodies, a hard shard landed in a thigh muscle (p. 197), immobilized in darkness, without language, support, or solace. No foothold, no way out.

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Sara offers me a sample of her writing under her pen name, Al Hourani, a description of her arrival and first days in Canada. We translated it into English, and with her permission, I reworked it into a poetic representation. It is an unsettling reflection on “the lived problematics of a present” (Stewart, 2017, p. 194), of dis/placement, dis/connection, dis/integration. For Sara and Elif, refugee resettlement in Canada is not experienced as a place of newness and wonder, a space of belonging, or a world of potentialities, but rather, a descent into an unworlding, with refrains of painful black nights, and blacker days: bodies that are trapped, suspended in a liminal state of here-but-not-here/there-but-not-there.

Sara: All the glassware is broken  
completely or partially.

Whenever I cut vegetables, I cut my fingers.

My mind drifts, my blood flows.

The pain is dead, the sedatives are working.

The night becomes terrifying.

I fear it

as I fear the Assad militias.

(Al Hourani, 2019)

Elif: My village called Jaqa.

Our village in freedom soldiers' hand

and the other village is ISIS.

And they fought.

After a few bomb, we escaped.

Some my friends are against Assad regime.

I'm not against

or with his system.

Assad or freedom soldier

both of them are killing people

innocent people

innocent children.

Raping women.

Selling women.

They say Assad is bad.

Assad is worse than the other.

But I don't believe.

I lost my dreams in Syria.

Everything is destroyed.

No one speaks.

Lines of force in the “shock of something unreal because it is too real” (Stewart, 2005, p. 1,019).

My world collides with worlds that are inconceivable, unfathomable, too real. I am tangled in discomfort in the presence of Elif and Sara, seeing war etched into the seams and creases of their faces, a looming presence in their eyes. Sara's terror of the Assad militias hangs in disquieting contrast to Elif's description of freedom fighters committing the same atrocities as the Assad forces: “Home is the mouth of a shark” (Shire, 2013, p. xi). In the struggle to make a life, to fight for justice and a place to call home, the ground keeps shifting, the temporal, material, and corporeal – the body and self – no longer recognizable, pitched by the force of things snapping into place (Stewart, 2010, p. 349). And what is left of homeplaces (hooks, 1990), possibilities, and dreams, assemblages of affect, sensation, and matter?

Kian: I came to Canada in 2016.

I was a graduate student at Southwestern University (pseudonym)  
in science.

Now

I just started a new course

In Erie College (pseudonym):

an insurance salesperson.

Sara:           When I go by the bus,  
                  When I say *Hi!* or *Thank you!*  
                  the bus driver,  
                  he never answer about me.

                  There are, on the bus, different people.  
                  Indian people or African people.  
                  He speak with them.  
                  But with me,  
                          no.  
                  Maybe the problem with him  
                  is about my hijab.

                  All the day, you know,  
                  I feel I'm not good.  
                          I feel  
                          maybe  
                          this country not for me.

Elif:           When I left my country  
                  I was fleeing to Turkey.  
                  I stayed there six years.  
                  And even though I know language,  
                  *different* culture.

*Different* people.

You feel, like,

*Out.*

You are in the new place,

you feel

*Out.*

And now we came to Canada.

And.

We.

*... sigh ...*

There is a promise – or threat – of losing oneself in the flow of things, being caught up in things, slipping out of the story you’re living in (Stewart, 2013). Kian’s lost dreams of a career in academia in Iran and in Canada; Elif’s discovery of being “out” – incomprehensibly pushed to the margins of her second home in Turkey, even though she was living in her first language and home culture. This unworlding was followed by another dis/placement, not-belonging in Canada. A similar refrain for Sara, caught somewhere between belonging and not-belonging through encounters with a racist bus driver in what is supposed to be a land that welcomes and supports refugees.

Trying to answer the difficult questions of life: *Why am I lost? Why am I bewildered? Why am I silent? Why don’t I answer?* (Boochani, 2018, pp. 131-2). Unworlding refrains, in which losing yourself in ruptures and dis/integration becomes a dull, empty drifting that you cannot seem to pull yourself out of (Stewart, 2008, p. 88). For Bouchani, refugee unworldings unfold in blackness, without hope or dreams.





shells, rockets,  
 snipers, and cannons.  
 All of it.

I stood there, taking pictures.

And did not die. But I am afraid to kill myself.

I am a coward.

(Al Hourani, 2019)

Unworlding processes take place on moving sand, in broken glassware, in prolific forms and forces of exclusion and estrangement, in relentless shocks of being “out,” in blackness, trauma and recurrent nightmares, in living outside the world, not-belonging.

Life takes place in the inhuman gestures of demons  
 and angels,  
 in the rage of racists,  
 in the endurance  
 of the unbelievably injured.

(Stewart, 2017, p. 194)

The participants’ unworlding stories — of not belonging— are deeply distressing. Haunting. Hearing these stories is something I have never experienced before, not in my classroom, not in conversations with colleagues or friends who have refugee backgrounds. In all my time teaching, why was I not aware of these disturbing unworlding experiences? Were they hidden from those of us who move comfortably in the mainstream, on the periphery of newcomer worlds, in education spaces - or are we not listening? I feel that, in spite of my efforts, I have not been fully

attuned to the intangible, ephemeral aspects of life, of affect and embodiment (Pahl et al., 2020). Not fully hearing or sensing how people are ensnared by unseen forces lodged in the environment, in systems of power, in the English language. Felt forces take hold and take over conditions, landscapes, dreams, and lived sensory moments (Stewart, 2011, p.445), producing a deep fracture in a compositional worlding, of worlds de/composing and dis/integrating, and people slipping out of the story they are living in.

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Kian:           The highest wall  
                    between belonging and newcomers in Canada  
                    is the language barrier.

Elif:   Feeling like a newborn baby  
          Can't talk with people  
          Because of their language  
          Leaves learning to time  
          *Yeni doğmuş bir bebek gibi hissetme*  
          *İnsanlarla konuşamaz*  
          *Dillerinden dolayı*  
          *O öğrenmeyi zamana bırakır.*

Helpless as a newborn baby, held captive by the capriciousness of time. Heads nod in understanding and lived experience. Elif's words resonate deeply with everyone.

Sara:           You want to say everything, but you can't say.  
                    You feel you lost your voice.

It feel like I'm not useful.

The accrual of losses: loss of place, voice, purpose, identity, sanity. In the midst of these casualties, I feel my own loss: my family's home language, of community, people and places, the erasure of histories. I am left with frayed threads of connection: disembodied names, fragments of phrases, nonsense songs of childhood, a pattern on a scarf, the welcoming smell of freshly baked bread. I grasp at the sounds of my family's home language, a language that seems to consist of "consonants alone, of rustles, whispers, and dry leaves" (Zagajewski, 2003, p. 54): sounds that are so familiar to me, but bereft of meaning, words that are comfortable yet strange. This is my peculiar feeling of belonging outside belonging and between belongings. I share my poem with the group:

Julianne:      The Polish language sounds  
                   just like *the-shimmer-of-sunlight-on-church-spires*,  
                   and tastes like my grandmother's freshly baked babka,  
                   warm and sweet  
                   infusing the air.  
                   I crave words on my tongue  
                   but my mouth is empty  
                   my throat closed.  
                   I choke on words that are not there.

Maria: We have this in Arabic:

                  You suffocate by words in your throat: *takhtaniq bialkalimat*  
                   You can't express.

Stuck here.

Thoughts, ideas, and words blocked, stuck.

Feeling trapped. Suffocating. Panic rising.

*takhtaniq bialkalimat.*

Kian: I worked in delivery

for a restaurant in Toronto.

And when I started work the chef-owner said:

*Why you don't talk with us?*

*Why you are so silent?*

And I couldn't even say

*I can talk.*

But I'm *shy* to talk.

I'm *scared* to talk.

Elif: I was talkative

when I was in my country.

Now I am afraid to make friends

because of my loss.

Sara: The bus driver - not one person - *many* bus driver.

Yesterday I go to mall.

I go back by bus. And same problem.

Different driver

but same problem:

*“Okay thank you!”*

and nothing.

I feel

maybe this country not for me.

I ask about that, I speak with myself.

Maybe

this country not for me.

Words and thoughts swirl in the charged air, in lived circuits of action and reaction (Stewart, 2010). My mind is stuck; I cannot seem to reconcile the scene of Sara holding her Permanent Resident card in the air, proudly identifying herself as “half-Canadian,” feeling the power of belonging to Canada, in the world. Now, in the country that has claimed her as “one of us,” Sara experiences the recurring force of silent exclusion in encounters with Islamophobic bus drivers. How does one live through surges and circuits of belonging and not-belonging at the same time? How does one find a path through contradictions, repetitions of casual violence in everyday encounters of racism, of not-belonging?

Kian: One of my friends, she came from Afghanistan

and was hungry

about seven days.

She couldn’t eat anything

because she couldn’t speak English.

She had money.

She couldn't buy anything

because she couldn't speak English.

She was crying in the street.

I sit in stunned silence, my mind and stomach turning over and around incomprehensible unworlding entanglements with English: the balling up and unravelling of states of attending to what might be happening, the sheer buzzing of atmospheric fill, an attunement to possibilities opening up — not necessarily good ones (Stewart, 2011, p. 449). Stories of falling into fissures, ruptures in the spaces and silences in language, and losing oneself in the abyss.

Maria reads her paragraph in Arabic and then in English:

Maria: I felt myself

like a deaf-mute person

Uncapable, embarrassed,

Tied with shackles.

Suffocating with words,

my mother language

blow in my mind

unable to come out from my mouth.

Living the big battle

between my mind and my tongue.

I lost my own shadow on the ground.

My identity:  
 a disqualified person in the other's eye  
 and  
 between me  
 and  
 myself.

Emotions surface.

I search for words to console Maria. When I begin to speak, I am alarmed to hear my voice breaking. Words caught, suffocating in my throat:

*takhtaniq bialkalimat.*

It is Kian's soft voice that emerges through the quiet, in a powerful, compassionate act of witnessing.

Kian:                    I want to say  
                               how beautiful Maria writes.  
                               She should be a writer.

Life takes place in unimaginable experiences, in cracks and gaps of unworldings, in singular moments that shimmer with tension and affect, in Sara's disturbing encounters with bus drivers, in Kian's fear and silence in his workplace, in his friend's harrowing experience of starvation on a Canadian street, and in Maria's pain-filled loss of her shadow — her Self — in the embodied forces and spaces of not-belonging. The singularity of emergent phenomena take shape as a composition of materialities and movements (Stewart, 2012), of atmospheres and incongruities in motion, and in de/composition.



### **Translanguaging: Silent Worlds**

I find these unworlding encounters with English — in the home, the workplace, on the bus, in the community – disorienting, disrupting my understandings about my teaching practice, and my understandings of how Canadian culture, this country’s lauded multicultural policies, including the federal government’s settlement language programs, play out in the daily lives of newcomers. The participants describe a sense of not-belonging in Canada, in embodied, affective, and dehumanizing encounters with racism, isolation, helplessness, fear, and even starvation, in deeply felt experiences of disconnection, silencing, and erasure. Their stories sharply contest popular understandings of Canada as a welcoming home for newcomers, a society that embraces cultural and linguistic diversity, rather than assimilation into the mainstream.

As an English teacher, I am startled and troubled to see that most of the participants arrived in Canada with knowledge of English, with developing fluency. In fact, Kian could be considered a fluent multilingual, given his ability to complete a PhD at a Canadian university. Yet, all the participants said they struggled to use their languaging/translanguaging skills, their knowledge of English, in everyday situations. Translanguaging describes the dynamic, fluid practices of people who are bilingual or multilingual, as they activate the different features of their linguistic repertoires to efficiently communicate with the different communities with which they come into contact, “without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (national or state) languages” (Otheguy, Garcia & Reid, 2015, p. 281). However, Kian, Maria, Sara, and Elif are seemingly unable to deploy the complex linguistic tools in their communicative repertoires in various English language settings. These experiences seem to challenge the claims of translanguaging theory as empowering and

transformative for minoritized speakers, such as newcomers. For example, Garcia (2017) states translanguaging practices give agency and legitimacy to the bilingual speaker; the act of translanguaging is liberatory and creates a space for learner voices and a more just education (Kleyn & Garcia, 2019). Mazzaferro (2018) describes translanguaging in the everyday as transgressive, collaborative, and political, in “individual moments of action of resistance, mediation, and collaboration, which open up new possibilities for human agency, subjectivities and (re)negotiation of speakers’ identities, ideologies, and repertoires, in ways that may have consequences for the social order” (p. 7). While Garcia (2017) believes national languages have had and continue to have real and material effects on people, in forms of exclusion for minoritized groups in the dominant society’s economic, social, and political life, the experiences of Kian, Maria, Sara, and Elif suggest the embodied and affective encounters with the dominant language and the systems of power lodged in standard English are worthy of deeper exploration to understand the multiple ways in which minoritized speakers are pushed to the margins.

Employing a materialist posthumanist lens to explore language learners’ encounters with English helps broaden our perspectives to consider how we, as humans, are entangled in our environments; we are able to view space, artifacts, and other non-human resources as active participants in the language assemblage (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2017). If we consider sound, or the absence of sound, as elements moving and acting in the language assemblage, is it possible then, to listen to the noise and silence, to hear what may be there, circulating in the ecology, affecting newcomers in everyday spaces?

In listening differently, it may also be possible to see differently, from different angles. Dwelling in these unworlding stories provokes thoughts, questions, and a search for other ways of seeing, in the words that others have written (MacLure, 2013c). I find resonances in



by white noise,  
distance —

and the distancing by others who don't want to hear.

We are besieged by  
*a silence*  
*that*  
*hollows us.*

(Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009, p. 133)

*A silence that hollows us.* Those words pulsate through shared stories of struggle, the *testimonios*, of Elif, Maria, Sara, and Kian, of unworldings, falling into the abyss, whether speaking (accented) English or in silence. Through entanglements with white noise, Anzaldúa says minoritized bodies become “inhabited” — colonized — by standard English, and English language environments, by normative whiteness, not only through the cognitive and physical act of producing English, but also through experiences of *distancing*: in the gap between languages and cultures, and the physical and affective distancing of those who do not want to hear or be near them, including the structural barriers to advancement and belonging erected against newcomers, through standardized language exams in schools, citizenship requirements, and onerous licensing qualifications for internationally trained professionals.

Anzaldúa's decolonial theorizing of white noise echoes the writing of several scholars of colour, such as Franz Fanon's (2008) *Black Skin, White Masks* and Toni Morrison's (1992) conception of the *white gaze*, the debilitating psychological experience of being watched and judged through a white Eurocentric lens, a lens of otherness. Latinx scholars Flores and Rosa (2015) extend the concept of the *white gaze* to include not only the “eyes” of whiteness but also

its “mouth” and “ears” (p.150). They suggest the white gaze circulates and adheres to both the speaking subject and the listening subject. (The authors stress that their use of the terms “listening and speaking subjects” is not meant to be read as a reference to biographical individuals, but rather they should be viewed as ideological positions.)

Flores and Rosa (2015) critique progressive teaching practices, whether translanguaging or culturally sustaining pedagogies, for their exclusive focus on the *speaking subject*, which rests on the assumption that individuals have the ability to control the production and perception of their language use. This narrow perspective ignores what Flores and Rosa call the *raciolinguistic ideologies* that the *white listening subject* uses to position English learner as *Other*. Regardless of how well the accented speaker produces standard English, the white listener continues to perceive the newcomer’s language use in racialized ways — “*through the ears of whiteness*” — from a deficit perspective — as inferior. Because the language is spoken by racialized bodies, those bodies are heard as illegitimate: this practice reproduces hierarchies of race and language.

The unworlding stories of Maria, Elif, Sara and Kian, draw attention to the ways in which whiteness circulates through environments, through sound and silence, attaching to bodies, colonizing racialized and newcomer bodies, in dehumanizing ways. Their *testimonios* are a “political act of remembering” (Saavedra, 2011, p. 267), of reconnecting language(s) with the body, and lived sociopolitical and historical realities, reconnecting the word and the world. If power and inequity circulate affectively through our classrooms and communities, then we, as educators, have an obligation to listen differently and to disrupt linguistic and racial hierarchies that reproduce white noise and the harm it does to newcomers, racialized, and minoritized students. These stories make visible newcomer unworldings and not-belongings experiences of dis/placement, pain, and silent struggle. Attuning to their stories allows us to take up the call of

critical posthumanities to confront the inhuman, and to renew our common understanding of what it means to be human (Braidotti, 2019, p. 81), in our commitment to more just and equitable worlds.

### **Between Worlds: (Im)Material Belongings**

Newcomer worldings and belongings may evolve unpredictably, ephemerally, in practices, in personal and social routines, such as styling one's hijab, finding specific spices to flavour a traditional dish, listening to a favourite musician, going to school, and making new friends, finding employment, or enjoying a weekend soccer game with friends. Worldings and unworldings are rhizomatic happenings that may unfold concurrently, and in contradiction, in the way Sara endures the silence of a racist bus driver as she heads to an English class and community she enjoys; in Elif's experience of displacement – of feeling “out” — not-belonging in Syria, Turkey, or Canada; in Maria's sense of being alone, afraid, trapped in darkness. These everyday unworldings may provoke a sense of ambivalence, of interrogated belongings in Canada, and the world.

Sometimes, Sara, Kian, Elif, and Maria find themselves in a space between worlds, a liminal space of the (im)material (Burnett et al., 2014; Burnett, 2015), in which the borders between much loved material objects and the affective intensities elicited in their presence dissolve, creating a transcendent multi-sensory experience, a spiritual feeling of being carried to one's homeland, or conversely, to a painful space in which the accumulation of losses is acutely felt. Sometimes, these feelings of belonging/not-belonging are experienced simultaneously, in the complex entwining of affect and emotion that may be, at once, contradictory, transitory, illusory, and wrenching, or surprising and exhilarating.

*A borderland  
is a vague  
and undetermined place  
created by the emotional residue  
of an unnatural boundary  
in a constant state of transition.*

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25)

Maria: I was with my friend in her car  
and I don't know why I told her:  
*You know my friend. I feel that I'm start belong to this place.*  
I start having this feeling in my heart  
to Canada.  
You know, those things come to you without planning.  
How to say that?  
Like spark in your brain,  
in your soul.  
You can't plan to do it,  
to feel it.  
It's spark.

Sara: At the shelter  
my husband wakes up early  
to go to the kitchen

to listen to  
 Fairuz with a cup of coffee.

Each morning, this routine  
 coffee and Fairuz.

He finds friendship with an Iraqi man.

Each morning, in the kitchen  
 coffee and Fairuz.

Friendship  
 brought together  
 by a cup of coffee and an exquisite voice.

(Al Hourani, 2019)

I marvel at the multiple sensations and connections: What is the source of Maria’s spark, that sudden feeling of belonging? Sara describes numerous overlapping sensory experiences in her text: Her husband Samir’s morning routine elicits a “synaesthetic web” of sounds, sights, and tastes that make scenes and objects resonate (Stewart, 2007, p. 21) and move across time and space, in affective encounters. Samir enjoys coffee while listening to Egyptian singer Fairuz, a routine transported from his home in Syria to the temporary shelter for newly arrived refugees in Canada. He connects with an Iraqi man who also understands “coffee and Fairuz”, in performed belongings.

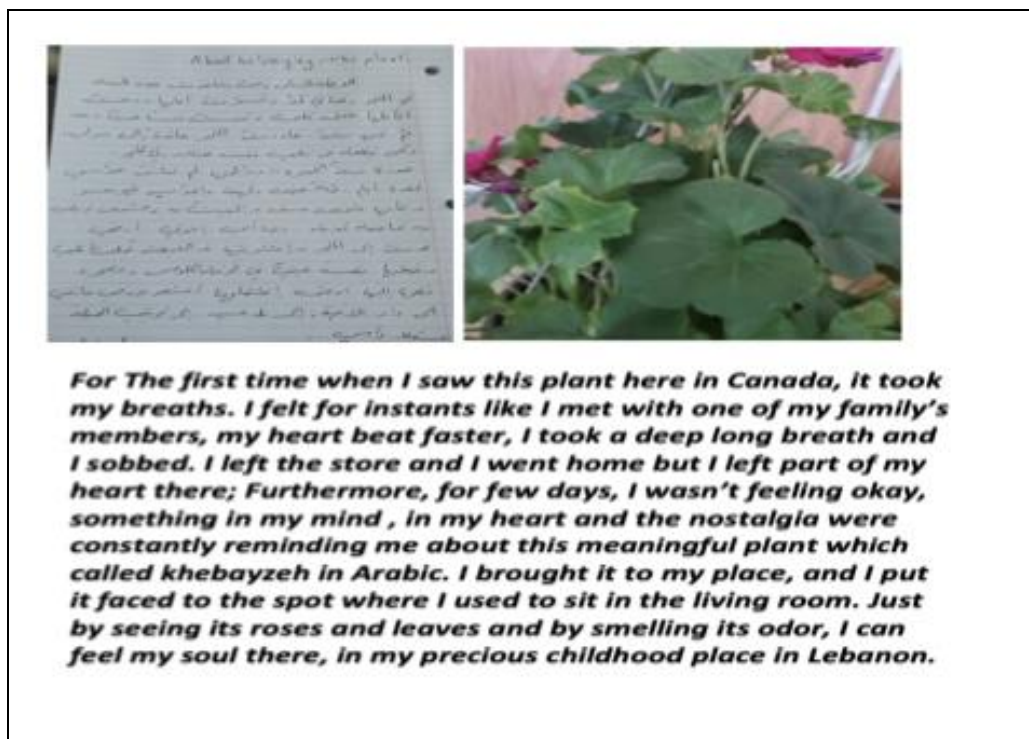
The familiar sensory mix of smell, taste, and sound — coffee and Fairuz’s voice — take both men away from the shelter, their present reality of disruption, and pain of separation from



family, friends, and all that is familiar, of being outside and between belongings and worlds. Layers of connection and dis/connection, layers of affect, embodied sensation, in layered spaces and places: connected to a lost homeland in a new homeland, connected by the loss of families and new friendships, connected in the comforting sensations of belonging emerging through the affective, embodied worlding ritual of “coffee and Fairuz.”

### Figure 12

*Maria's Arabic and English Texts, and Digital Photo. Used with permission.*



Maria: The first time when I saw this plant here in Canada,  
it took my breaths.  
I felt like I met with one of my family's members.  
My heart beat faster.  
I took a deep long breath  
And I sobbed.

I left the store and I went home  
 but I left part of my heart there.

For few days, I wasn't feeling okay.

Something in my mind,  
 in my heart.

The nostalgia  
 constantly reminding me about this meaningful plant,  
*khebayzeh*.

I brought it to my place.  
 Just by seeing its roses and leaves  
 And by smelling its odor,  
 I can feel my soul there,  
 in my precious childhood place  
 in Lebanon.

Kian: Ah, geranium. We have it.  
 We say "*shamdaneh*". In English, "candle pot".

Sara: In Syrian, *koubayzeh*.  
 In my country, the old people, they are cooking and eating.  
 When my mom cook this  
 I never eat it.

In Canada  
 when I find, I eat it  
 because I feel same my country.

Maria: Belonging, for me, there's two things:  
 the feeling aspect and the material aspect.  
 The feeling aspect: try to create a new memory.  
 And the material aspect: the new street, the new place.  
 That's what I mean by material things.  
 Where you have many layer of things  
 or events in a new country.  
 It's the mixed feelings.

This is the way you start create the feeling of belonging.

It takes time.

Maria's *khebayzeh* pulls me into a vivid space of words, images, and surges of affective intensities. She says, "I took a deep long breath and I sobbed." I feel her shock at the sight of a geranium, for me, such an ordinary and familiar flower, but for Maria, a "beloved family member." This plant sparks an unexpected, intense, embodied response: her heart quickens, she struggles to breathe, tears erupt. Maria's feelings reverberate across days, in time and space, not only for Maria, but for me as well. Interwoven with the telling and re-telling of her story, entangled with her images, languages, texts, affects and emotions, in the liminal spaces that enfold the mind and body, past and present, there and here, all in relation to the material plant,

and immaterial feelings – the shock of discovery, the flood of childhood memories, and nostalgia for home, are unleashed in waves of emotion. The sight, smell, and textures of a geranium in bloom become an (im)material blending (Burnett, 2015; Burnett et al., 2014), a relational bridge, merging the tangible and intangible, dissolving spaces between people, countries, and things, allowing souls, senses, and self, to move across time and space, culture, memory, and affect, fluidly, seamlessly, and simultaneously, in an other-worldly space of belonging.

### Figure 13

*Kian's Screen Capture of Homayoun Shajarian's Album, "My Iran":*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSySYT4KOLs>



Kian: The album's name is "*Iran aman/ My Iran*".  
 Homayoun, one of my favourite musicians in Iran.  
 But nowadays because of the political situation,  
 unfortunately, he couldn't sing anymore.

Kian tells us that he often listens to English music while driving to purposefully kindle a sense of belonging to this country through the words and melodies of western songs. Then, I see

something in his face change as he plays the music of his favourite Iranian singer, Homayoun, over Zoom using his phone. Kian's eyes are closed, he is immersed in the music, but technology intervenes; the rest of us cannot hear anything. A moment of dissonance. We are invited in, but we cannot share in this sonic encounter that is so clearly important and moving for Kian. I gaze at the album cover, the image of Homayoun caught in still life, and Kian's face framed on my computer screen, each like a painting, a static state, resonant with intensities, layered in sensory, material, immaterial, and temporal unfoldings and worldings (Stewart, 2007, p.19).

Sometimes just getting out of this situation

I just take my wife and my daughter,

we just go outside the city,

the countryside,

visiting some rural place and farms.

I like that.

Driving this kind of road is beautiful.

When I'm listening to Persian music,

it adds some soul,

this feeling.

I'm understanding every word, every feeling

and the taste is stronger.

It takes your soul there

your soul flying

to your country.

A new feeling in Canada:

mix two feelings together.

Being in this beautiful country and

have this other sense of belonging from other country

making it more colourful

and more texture.

Felt, sensory, and synaesthetic, cross-modal movements blur boundaries between sights, sounds, and textures, and affect, reveal belonging as “magical,” a soulful experience that transcends the emotional, corporeal, material, temporal, and spatial.

Maria explains the felt-force of Kian’s story, a compositional worlding, that emerges between worlds and materialities. She suggests his experience is common to all newcomers.

Maria: Kian said, “it takes my soul there”.

Every newcomer

we have this battle

between *the mind* -

the fact that we are here,

and *our soul, our heart*.

Sometime,

your homeland music

somehow can *detach you*:

you feel your soul in your country

but physically you are here.

Yes.

Music can do some *magic things* in our mind.

Sara: It's special feeling when we listen to music, Arabic music,  
we feel we are in our country.

It's make me feel more strong.

But sometime, I feel sad.

This mix of feeling:

mixture and struggle inside you.

My body survived from the Assad regime

but my soul,

no.

Now if I want make joke, I feeling this guilty.

How can I laugh?

Maybe my mom, my sister, they are cry now.

If I want eat something,

I like it, I enjoy this;

I don't feeling happy because my family,

they can't eat.

You carry this feeling all the time.

It's not easy.

But you have to continue.

And.

It's life.

Sara's words hit me with a devastating force, taking my breath away. Her words invade and infect my thoughts (MacLure, 2018) long after our meeting: "My body survived from the Assad regime, but my soul, no." Sara escaped the terror of the Syrian military, and now her everyday in Canada has become an ongoing ordeal of dis/placement and not-belonging, evocations of past, present, and loss, in sensational and affective entanglements. Sara's everyday activities — listening to her favourite music, eating delicious food, and enjoying a good joke — provoke an untenable mix of pleasure and pain, a constant blurring of emotions, senses, and experiences, bound up in the struggle to find one's soul, one's peace of mind, one's place in the world, in (im)material worldings and unworldings. For Sara, this is her new life.

Elif:           We make black tea.

                  When I was in Syria,

                  after lunch meal,

                  we make black tea.

                          My whole family,

                          we drank black tea under the trees in our house.

                  Now in Canada,

                  also I do it

                  to forget my nightmare.



After civil war  
 I felt like I am in nightmare  
 And I can't wake up.

Nobody understands  
 because they don't know what you lived, and what you experienced.  
 I feel like nightmare sometimes.  
 And I can't wake up.

As Elif begins to speak, her voice is soft. I watch people's eyes and I can see that everyone is listening with care. Again, I sense an emergent bond between the participants; they share a mutual understanding of the night, its many shades, sounds, impressions, and colours — a kind of night I have never known.

*This creature is engaged in an inseparable friendship with the night.*

*The silence and peacefulness of the night*

*has become a paradox.*

*This creature knows full well the language of the night.*

*This creature has full knowledge about the dark.*

*This creature has a full understanding of terror.*

(Boochani, 2018, p. 254)

The sound of static slowly seeps back into our space, like a heavy mist, obscuring Elif's words. The illusion of transparency afforded by my computer screen (Williams, 2014) is shattered by the noise; technology reminds us of its unruly and generative presence, its ability to empower and to disrupt. As I fight the noise to hear Elif, I find my hearing is heightened. A path opens; I can follow the sound of her voice, and feel the devastation in her words. Worlds and lives can be

shocked, struck with so much force, that they devolve in a permanent state of dis/placement and alarm (Stewart, 2011, p. 452). For Elif, each sip of tea contains the sweetness of home, family, and belonging, and simultaneously, the bitter taste of the loss of home, family, and belonging. Elif finds herself somewhere in between, in “the space between two bodies of water, the space between two worlds ... where you are not this or that, but where you are changing” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 237). A space of transition, holding something unknown, perhaps promise and potential, perhaps something else, in unfolding worldings and unworldings.

Maria:           Material objects are like medicine for us:

    A ring.

    A rug.

    Rock.

    Any kind of stone.

    Music.

    Even the smell fresh grass, recently cut,

        it remind you.

        And we feel the same feelings.

Those things are like medicine pills for us.

Sometimes we took those pills

    to calm down.

    Sometimes

    it make us crazy;

    we cry.

I am feeling the extraordinary power of ordinary things: the beloved *khebayzeh*, the soulful music of home, the comfort of coffee, the dis/comfort of black tea, the incomprehensible experience of pain enfolded into the simple pleasures of food, music, and laughter. In unworlding encounters and their stories, materiality, affect, sensation, memory, place, time, space, language, and text, are layered in multiple, complex relationships, provoking complex responses.

The flow of the material and immaterial through newcomer worldings creates a dynamic zone of (im)materiality, where encounters between people and things produce immaterial effects that entwine the spatial, temporal, and cultural with senses, affect, and emotions, all overlapping and blurring into a felt, embodied experience, a unique site of belonging. Here “the material constantly conjures the immaterial which in turn relies on material experience for its salience” (Burnett et al., 2014, p. 93). It is a space imbued with the affective, the personal, and the political, layered, and braided into the (im)material (Burnett, 2015). Through (im)material conjuring, an individual may feel themselves transported to another time, place, or space, at the sight of a beloved object, the smell of a favourite food, or the sound of the music of one’s homeland.

In the enfolding of the material and immaterial, space is produced on a moment-by-moment basis, through participant discourses, in relationships mediated by technology, in multimodal and multilingual interactions between people and things (Davies, 2014), in interactions between material things (texts, flowers, food, computer screens, cell phones), and intangible things (immaterial ideas, emotions, affect, and concepts), as well as the senses (hearing, taste, touch, sight, and smell). Through our shared experiences, our group explored the vibrant, messy, multiple spaces and relationships between the material and

immaterial (Burnett et al., 2014) that entangle languages and literacies, cultures, histories, human and non-human relationships, and move rhizomatically through time, place, and space, flows of power, sensation, and affect, to generate idiosyncratic, transformative liminal spaces of belonging and between-belongings in newcomer (im)material worlds.

In (im)material worlds, porous boundaries and assumed boundaries are disrupted by the interconnectedness of the material and the immaterial, and the relationships between people, things, times, and places (Burnett, 2015). Here, Bennett's (2010) notion of the vibrancy and vitality of matter comes to life; we see the "thing-power" of material objects, and their ability to 'do' things to and with people and their environments. Linguistic barriers dissolve as individuals, their texts, and their worlds, move fluidly, creatively, and disruptively, with and across languages and meanings (whether intended or unknown), and through various modes, through creative translanguaging movements using digital devices, rhetorical devices (in dialogue, poetry, and prose), hand-drawn and digital images, sound, gesture, and emotion.

Languages and literacy events are emplaced, connected to a specific place, and yet they are affective assemblages in motion, travelling to and from homelands without respect for the temporal or spatial, boundaries, or borders, (Compton-Lilly, 2011; Ehret & Hollett, 2014; Hackett, 2014; Leander & Boldt, 2013). The participants' texts and discourses foreground the material and affective dimensions of human experience, including how our own embodiment is "inextricably entwined" within meaning-making (Davies, 2014, p. 74) in human-non-human spaces. Tracing the outlines and movements within fluid hybrid spaces of newcomer worldings and worlds, the (im)material becomes kaleidoscopic (Davies, 2014), exposing the ways in which time, space, the local and global, then and next, the discursive, and felt, are imbricated, and

blurred, in living through worldings, unworldings, in the sensory, felt, and embodied, spaces of belonging, not-belonging, and between-belonging.

We can conceptualize the participants' oral, written, and visual texts as complex border crossings (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 28) that operate through the entanglement of language, materiality, and culture. Material objects, whether personal artifacts, new technologies, events, or spaces are interconnected with the global and local, culture, tradition, and social life. Artifacts are infused with meanings; they carry traces of history and emotion as they move transculturally across home spaces, educational, and digital spaces (Burgess & Rowsell, 2020; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). The meanings lodged within an artifact may be cultural, political, collective, or idiosyncratic; they are reflexively co-constructed with its beholder (Burkette, 2016); everything is entangled. Taking a posthumanist perspective, people, ideas, and things interact in our environments, so that space, artifacts, and other non-human resources should be viewed "not so much as acted upon, but rather as part of the action" (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2017, p.445), in assemblages of bodies, and all sorts of things, including various modes of expression. Language, and the production of language, is also wrapped up in materiality and immateriality.

Language is fundamentally "in and of the body; always issuing from the body; being impeded by the body; affecting other bodies" (MacLure, 2013b, p. 663). As language emanates from the materiality of the body, it becomes immaterial and ideational through the incorporeality of thought (p. 658). At the same time, language is collective, social, and impersonal, and pre-exists us as individual subjects, so while language may seem to be produced by a unitary speaking subject, Deleuzian thought asserts our voices emerge from a "collective assemblage of enunciation," a constellation of voices, which may or may not be in accordance (MacLure, 2013b, p. 660; Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). We can see that materialities, language, and ideas are

interconnected and inseparable; they emerge within and through the weaving of social, spatial, and material networks (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2017), through assemblages of language and bodies (MacLure 2013b), and transcultural flows of emotion and affect (Burgess and Rowsell, 2020). Thus, the texts produced by the participants can be considered multilingual, multimodal, multifaceted assemblages, produced within a complex ecology that interweaves the languages and thoughts of interactants, cultural artifacts, and the embodied, and material resources that agentively shape their communication (Canagarajah, 2018). As Canagarajah proposes, the writer does not generate the text, “the world generates the text” (p. 17).

Meaning making, then, becomes a transformative site for exploring worlds, worldings, unworldings, and the self: building bridges between worlds, in a process of performative self-discovery (Burgess, 2021). The (im)material entwines Sara’s story of the sensory experiences of “coffee and Fairuz”: a familiar routine that evokes a sense of belonging and unfolds in the aroma and taste of strong coffee and hearing the familiar sounds of a much-loved voice, in the sharing of material comforts and emotional warmth of new friendship, in one’s first language, in currents that cross time and space, past and present, politics, and place, from home country to new uncertain homeland, and the unsettled in-between places of refugee camps and government shelters.

Through affect’s entanglements with Maria’s geranium, the plant sparks a visceral, affective response, a set of labours, as she experiences a surge of emotions and memories: her heart beats faster; she has difficulty breathing. Her world in Canada is turned upside down. The liminal space of the (im)material (Burnett, 2015; Burnett et al., 2014) is generated at the intersection of the material, and the embodied and immaterial responses to the material flower. The sight, smell, texture, and affective intensities created by a geranium — and the multiple,

multilingual texts relating the story of Maria's experience produce an (im)material layering and blending (Burnett, 2015; Burnett et al., 2014), diffusing boundaries between people, places, and things, allowing souls, senses, and the self to move across time and space, memory, and affect, to a transcendent space of belonging. Maria explains this form of belonging as a mixture of two things: the "feeling aspect" and the "material aspect".

In telling his story, Kian's face registers the pleasures of home in the pleasure of Hamayoun's voice (like the voice of Fairuz for Sara and her husband). Kian says he understands every word – unlike English music, which he listens to in an attempt to build his attachment to Canadian culture. In hearing Hamayoun's music, Kian's experience combines and crosses multiple sensations, in a complex affective assemblage: "every feeling ... the taste is stronger; it takes your soul there, flying to your country." The sonic, the synaesthetic, cross-modal movements, blending with affect, intensifies into a spiritual encounter for Kian, in the feeling of being carried to his homeland, to a space of belonging, feeling simultaneously inside/outside Canada: (im)material, sonic, spatial, and temporal worldings entwined. Here, literacy is both emplaced and in motion, beyond the bounds of linear time and contained space (Compton-Lilly, 2011; Hackett, 2014; Leander & Boldt, 2013). However, the act of listening is more than an act of seeking comfort in the spaces of not-belonging; the political is also enmeshed in Kian's attachment to Homayoun's music. Kian points out the singer's voice has been silenced in Iran by the politics of home, in state-sponsored exclusion. Listening to Homayoun's music is redeployed to critique injustice (Crawley, 2009); listening becomes an act of resistance, just as Kian's enjoyment of the sounds of women laughing and talking signals his embrace of feminism, and his stance against the repressive, misogynist policies of Iran's political leadership. The

(im)material is a complex space of belonging between homelands, and it is also a political space, in which Kian allies himself with those who embrace not-belonging to the regime in his homeland.

The scene of Kian listening to his favourite music – which might appear to be an ordinary, everyday activity — now glimmers and draws attention to its affective resonances, as well as the political undercurrents of “violence, inequality, and social insanity folded into the open disguise of ordinary things” (Stewart, 2007, p. 19), always present and circulating beneath the surface of the ordinary. The sonic is an (im)material emblem for defiance, empowerment, and complicated belongings found within these stories from the margins, in not-belongings, between belongings, and transcendent belongings in human-non-human worlds. The (im)material cuts across and blurs the spatial and temporal, lived histories, emotions, and lines of power. It is a space that contests the notion of porous boundaries, which assumes the existence of boundaries and its placement; in (im)material spaces, “boundaries may be present, absent, moved, and immutable over short periods of time” (Davies, 2014, p. 85), as participants, their artifacts interact, and the soulful affective intensities generated in those engagements become interwoven within newcomer worlds and worldings, layered with the ontological, affective, embodied, and dis/embodied.

As Maria suggests, (im)material worlds are like medicine, with magical and paradoxical powers that can elicit comfort or pain, or both, simultaneously. The experience of the (im)material is evocatively captured in Elif’s family ritual of drinking black tea, recalling the pleasure of a united family and the pain of that family’s displacement in the world. Similarly, Sara experiences pain of loss in the everyday sensations and pleasures of music, food, and humour. The (im)material is magical, medicinal, powerful, and painful.



The (im)material illuminates how the material and immaterial spark each other in different ways (Burnett et al., 2014), generating new lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), in agentive, transformative, co-constructed more-than-human belongings. Chicana feminist poet Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) calls liminal belonging spaces, *Nepantla*, an Indigenous Mexican Nahuatl word meaning “in-between space.” She says for those living in *Nepantla*, within and among multiple worlds, it is normal to feel disoriented: “to experience bouts of dissociation of identity, identity breakdowns and buildups; it is the sane way of coping with the accelerated pace of this complex, interdependent, and multicultural planet” (Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009, p. 180). In living in and through painful unworldings, they develop a “perspective from the cracks” (Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009, p. 322) that may be harnessed to invent holistic, relational tactics and theories that enable them to reframe and transform their more-than-human worlds, assemblages of people, objects, affects, and relations of power, in which they are entangled. The (im)material is a space of worlding, agency, and transformation; the co-creation of (im)material texts, relationships, identities, and spaces, constitutes practices that are generative, political, and ideological (Rowell & Burgess, 2014), as individuals such as Kian, Maria, Elif and Sara use the (im)material to contest the often-overwhelming power imbalances that are implicated in their experiences of silence, erasure, and dis/integration, in everyday unworldings and not-belongings.

*Soy un amasmiento,*

I am an act of kneading

of uniting and joining

that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light

but also

a creature that questions the definitions of  
 light and dark  
 and gives them new meanings.

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 103)

### **Reworlding**

If we view *unworlding* as an ongoing agentic struggle for belonging-in-the-world, a *reworlding*, then, becomes an imperfect, unpredictable process of reimagining and remaking the world, and one's place in it (Stornaiuolo, 2015); reworlding is a new way of being in the world, a new *becoming with* and belonging in a human-non-human assemblage (Haraway, 2016). As I restory my participants' experiences, I restory and reworld myself, immersed in what is new, emerging, and becoming.

Reworldings weave the present moment and the yet-to-come, braiding imagination, language, culture, nature, histories, time, space and place, subjects, and objects, in and through worlds and worldings. The process of *reworlding* moves rhizomatically, between (im)material states, entanglements, and dis/entanglements. Philosopher Denise Riley (2019) invokes a literary allusion to describe her gradual move from living "outside the flow of time" (p. 75) as a result of her son's untimely death, to a slow re-entry into the world:

you stop, you repeat, you continue, you repeat  
 differently.

A version of Beckett's 'I can't go on, I'll go on'.

Or 'something is taking its course'.

But a variant: something is being carried on.

(Riley, 2019, p. 75)

In newcomer reworldings, something is carried on, in creative and critical engagements, as fragments of old worlds, present worlds, liminal, and envisioned worlds are reshaped into the not-yet. As Stewart (2010, p. 340) suggests, there is no telling what will come of it, or where it will take those who are attuned to its movements.

Something unfolds in the act of reimagining and reclaiming a fractured world, and one's place in it. I invite our group to take up the agentive work of reworlding through worldmaking (Goodman, 1978; O'Donoghue, 2018; O'Donoghue & Berard, 2014; Stornaiuolo, 2015; Tanner et al., 2021), in creating "affective imaginaries" or felt, aspirational worlds (Nichols & Coleman, 2021) by re-purposing the detritus of shattered worlds and re-fashioning the gifts and knowledge borne of inhabiting multiple worlds, geographical, metaphorical, spiritual, cultural, political, and personal. We are also engaged in the co-construction of shared worlds (Stornaiuolo, 2015) and shared belongings, finding new and vital ways of being and becoming with, and belonging in more-than-human worlds.

Maria:            We came to Canada like a broken puzzle  
                          and we start to re-build this puzzle.  
  
                          It's about memory, about places, about people, about connection.  
  
                          When you have this puzzle done,  
                          you feel secure, you are settled.  
  
                          This is when you feel you belong to the place.  
  
                          To feel the peace  
                          you should push yourself, work on yourself.  
  
                          When you bring your all parts here,  
                          not the just material things,

your soul, those feelings, experiences, those memory.

Adapt those here,

to settle.

The government that accept you.

Polite people, respectful people here.

To be accepted here, it's very important.

The base is strong here.

You should push yourself,

work on yourself.

Maria's broken puzzle assemblage is a world-making metaphor: re-assembling the pieces of a life lived in and through worldings and unworldings, in and between the margins and cracks of hollowed out spaces. Working on oneself and one's world, my mind jumps to Gloria Anzaldúa's thoughts on the transformative power of being "worked on" in Borderland spaces:

Living on borders and in margins,

keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity

is like trying to swim in a new element.

There is an exhilaration

in being a participant in the further evolution

of humankind,

in being "worked" on.

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19)

An ongoing becoming of worlds is written in whatever is emerging in circulations, vibrations, and intensities that comprise experience and states of matter (Stewart, 2013b). Sara addresses

Maria's belief that, by working on yourself, you will create a sense of belonging to Canada.

Sara's counter-story re-frames her encounters with the racist bus driver who makes her feel that she does not belong in Canada. Mobilizing her outrage, she asserts her right to belong to this country and demands a collective response from Canadians.

Sara:                   And also, it depend about another part,  
                              not just from me,  
                              from another people in Canada.  
  
                              If they accept me,  
                              like the bus driver.

                              He have to act,  
                              to make me feel Canadian,  
                              born in this country.

                              I have to be part of this country  
                              because we lost the past life.

                              We can't back.

Sara's call for a form of belonging grounded in collective responsibility - a transformative reworlding composition.

\*\*\*

I am in awe of Sara in this moment, as she speaks out and speaks back, challenging Maria's perspective of belonging as an individual project of working on oneself to adapt,

conform, and gain acceptance by the dominant white culture. Maria's view echoes the popular narrative heard throughout English language classrooms and through the neoliberal ideological construct of meritocracy: work hard and you shall be successful. Here, Sara mobilizes her emotions (Lewis, 2020; Lewis & Tierney 2013), her dehumanizing experiences of not-belonging, to powerfully recast her definition of belonging: a critical response to the white supremacist, practiced silence of the local bus driver, and the casual erasure of Sara as a Muslim woman. She stakes her ground as a vocal, critically engaged newcomer to this country. Sara articulates a conception of national belonging that is predicated on Canadians enacting the promise of multiculturalism and this country's humanitarian policy of accepting displaced people from around the world, through actions that, as Sara says, "make me feel I'm Canadian, born in this country." Sara redistributes responsibility for belonging among the country's inhabitants: an equitable, transformative movement, emotion in action, mediated by signs and bodies, "bodies racialized and reiterated through histories of practice ... moving, feeling, and witnessing" (Lewis, 2020, p. 277), generating something new and unexpected: a demand for co-constructed belonging, grounded in respect for the lived experiences of newcomers, in relationality, and care.

Atmospheres circulate, shift, and gather force (Stewart, 2011); Maria reminds us of the felt-force (Hollet, 2021) of her unworlding entanglements and of her arrival in Canada, an unsettling affective assemblage of dis/placement-shock-fear-loneliness-despair-hopelessness. How does one find one's way out of the blackness to reimagine, reconnect, and reworld oneself?

Maria:           When I came here, I was shocked.

                      I was scared.

                      I was struggling.

No.

I wasn't surprised.

Things was,

I can say, *black in my eyes.*

Darkness, blackness, greyness – worlds devoid of colour and hope.

*Hopeless visions worse than monsoon winds*

*blow away our dreams in the night ....*

*everything blended into the colour black.*

(Boochani, 2018, p. 215/260)

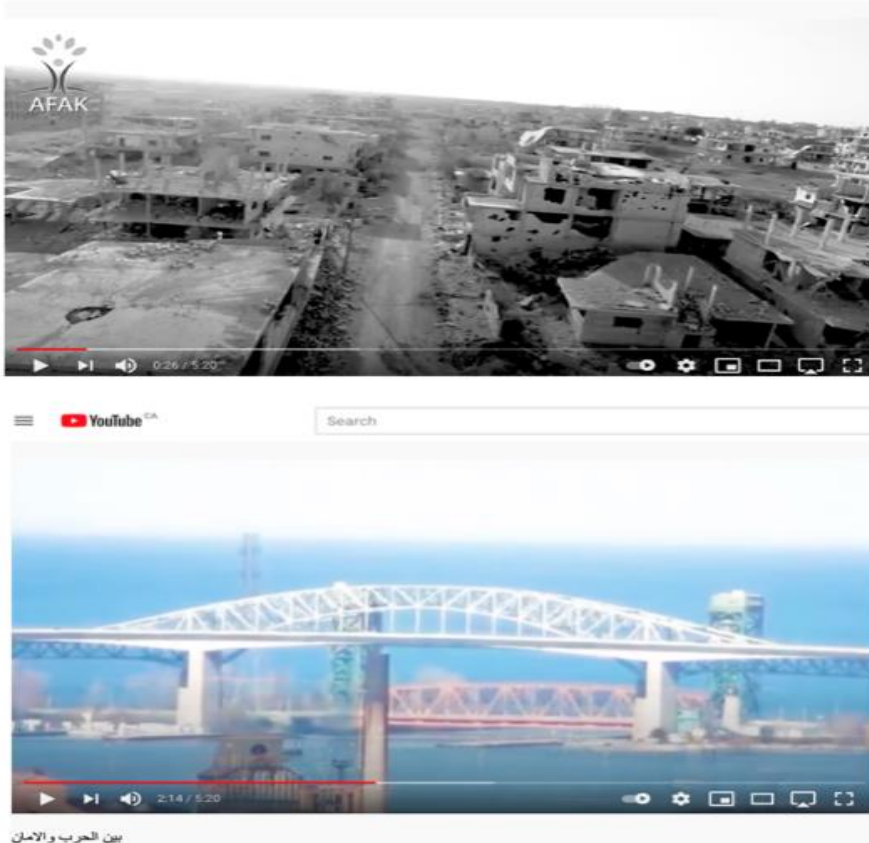
**Figure 14**

*Black and White photograph of Kian and His Daughter. Used with permission.*









Sara: The first part from this video is my area.

I live there all my life there.

Now you see what happen in my area

the people still live there.

No water.

Nothing there.

No life there.

No life.

The people see their life like this – black.

Yellow and black.  
 Nothing happen there,  
 just bad thing there  
 everything is bad there.

In Canada,  
 the colour is different  
 and still not clear for me.  
 A lot of colour from life,  
 from beautiful view.

But it's still not clear for me.

Things spark and jump into relation — but remain unglued (Stewart, 2013b). In Sara's video we are plunged into an immense, ghostly landscape, endless scenes of rubble, marked with the blackened remains of trees. The shock of suddenly seeing motion in the rubble, realizing those moving specks are alive: people living, incomprehensibly, among and inside those ruins. Scenes underscored by the musical lament of the Arabic instrument, the oud.

My eyes are now pierced by bright light, like blinding sunshine on a spring morning. I recognize the bridge over the local harbour, normally dull grey, now brilliant, shining like silver, surreal and slightly out of focus, against an impossibly blue sky. The sound of the oud now penetrating my city, my world. The effect is unsettling. Unfolding to the sound of the oud, familiar landscapes become strange, discordant, in-and-out-of-focus, in-and-out-of-place, in a corporeal/incorporeal capacity (Stewart, 2013b). Why am I so disturbed by this prismatic wave of visual/sonic dissonance?

I try to let go of my discomfort to follow the sounds, images, affects, and atmospheres, and gradually I find I am moving with sense of wonder, experiencing my world through elevated senses, different ears and different eyes, marveling at how luminescent, same-yet-different, everything seems. My world and I are transformed.

Then Kian's voice, once again, breaks the spell. He plunges us back into the barren, dystopian reality of Sara's homeland.

Kian:                    I want to add something.  
                               Sara,  
                               I wish peace in your country.

*Hushed murmurs of agreement.*

Something more is happening here.

In attuning to the singularity of moments, where “bodies, in relation to each other, affect a feeling that their shared experience is something more than it is” (Ehret, 2018a, p. 57), it feels as though something urgent and consequential is emerging alongside the storytelling, thoughtful silences, moments of laughter, and wiping of tears.

There is a feeling of aliveness in our being together, a vitalness, a “liveness that exceeds representation” (p. 57). It feels like we are in this thing together, in a space touched by glimmers of care (Garcia et al., 2021), in a common desire for peace and peace-at-heart, in acts of critical witnessing in compassion, and care (Braidotti, 2008; Dutro, 2013; Dutro & Bien, 2014). A space of belonging in a fractured word.

## **Figure 16**

*Elif's Imagined Belonging, Watercolour on Paper. Used with permission.*



Elif:           The little house is mine.

I painted the house close to the sea  
because sea belongs to freedom and peace for me.

The two birds are maybe my future husband  
and my kid. I think the nature can give you feeling of belonging to a place.

I like the sunset.

It reminds me when I was in my back country.

When the sun goes down, that means the new day will began  
with new and fresh hopes and dreams.

                  The purple belongs to love,  
                  because I love the orchid plants,  
                  the purple orchid belongs to the love, they say.

The white colour is new beginning for me – new page in your life.

And I don't like the yellow

because yellow means sickness,

so that I just put a little bit white and yellow.

Questions are running in our hands:

*Will I own or have a house in Canada?*

*Will I be successful in Canada?*

*Will I be achieve my dreams?*

So I paint one house

with four trees

in the beautiful scene.

Elif's painting, a scene of envisioned belonging, is a self-portrait, a still life in motion; it captures "the liveness of inanimate objects," of trees, house, sunset, water, and the sensory beauty, held in an intimate scene charged with the textures of paint and desire (Stewart, 2007). Elif's artwork is lovely, the colours of her sunset are vivid, yet there is something unsettling in this natural and affective landscape that draws my attention: "haunting data" that will not let go of me (MacLure, 2018, p. 5). In Elif's sunset, the yellow of sickness is prominent. It occupies more space across the canvas than the barely visible trace of white, slivers of hope for new beginnings, "a new page in your life." Sickness and hope are blended, sorrow and desire blur, suspended in the air, in discordant hues.

**Figure 17**

*Maria's digital collage. Used with permission.*



Maria: We are people who were pulled from their soil.

We are like trees, which come with their roots,  
to be planted in another place.

It's not easy.

This is my root in the new soil, in the new land.

And as you see the red colour on the root,  
this the blood. That mean the tree is alive.

The soil doesn't cover the whole roots.

It's at the beginning.

It's new here.

Vulnerable to anything. Yes.

It's mature enough,

but still trying to bloom to live again.

For me, how I imagine my belonging to Canada:

Seeing my older son graduate from college or university.

Seeing my twins in high school.

Having a work, my diploma, home, volunteering.

This is a way to merge with the Canadian society.

Feeling the acceptance, plus our effort.

We try to merge, to feel

the real belonging to this place.

Kian: As you see, the size of her tree is different:

you are not as high as the other.

You should be more stronger, more powerful

to grow as high as others

to see the sky.

Maria's art is very beautiful

and kind of conclusion for me.

It's kind of great illustration of belonging.

Tracing glimmers of care through the actions, spaces, and materials that produced them (Garcia et al., 2021, p. 338), in Kian's words of appreciation for Maria's aspirational collage. He feels himself moved by and reflected in the affective layers of her artwork, through spaces of belonging that entwine the material, immaterial, and the political: family, homeland, and career, with roots anchored in homeland and Canada, in the natural world, in a space of equity. Kian suggests Maria's art is a beautiful way to conclude the final meeting of our group. Maria's digital collage captures the dreams and desires of our world-making endeavour, in the co-creation of becoming and belonging, in relationality and care.

Elif: My definition for belonging is *connection*,  
to connect with people is important.

You have to feel respect and adopt in that place.

Maybe

after I buy a house

I will feel belonging to Canada.

Maybe

living in peace.

I'm afraid going in crowded place,

I'm afraid to hear fireworks like bomb.



Maybe  
 after I overcome these fears  
 I feel belonging.

Sara: It's not easy to live,  
 to start from zero.

*Below zero.*

You try to make something,  
 make hope,  
 but it's like wall.

You can't do it.

I can't now.

I can't.

Maybe

I will find belonging in Canada here.

A long way.

First step.

Our virtual space glimmers and glows (MacLure, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) with intensity, as bodies move and are moved through words, actions, and materials, in this multi-layered setting; glimmers of care (Garcia et al., 2021) are enacted in the cracks, shocks, and unexpected flows of affect: in words of comfort, in the way we listen intently, in the critical witnessing (Dutro & Bien, 2014; Dutro, 2013, 2017) of injustice, pain, and despair, that surface in stories, as well as the joys and aspirations held within our collective imagination (Nichols & Coleman, 2021), and

nurtured through our shared wisdom. In our space of belonging, we are forging attachments in a fractured world, moving, and creating movements through the critical and creative work of reworlding through creative world-making.

Lingering in the art, lingering in the poetry, in the visual, linguistic, dramatic, prismatic; in more-than-human worlds made by re-working the light and dark, the scars and mutilations of existing worlds (Zagajewski, 2003). Worlds emerge in the gaps and crevasses, in the movements and motions of relations, scenes, and emergences (Stewart, 2007), through the slender rays of hope that fade in and out of sight, refracted through the immutable presence of sorrow and loss – these are raw materials of world-making.

Through their world-making endeavours, we glimpse of the complexities of refugee lives and worlds, entangled within the colours, gradations, and layers of belonging, not-belonging, and between-belonging. Elif's painting of her envisioned world is a portrait of an imagined family that blends a vibrant sunset tinged with sadness, sickness, and a sliver of hope that is there-but-not-there. Her uncertainty and ambivalence are reflected in her sentiments; maybe, after living in peace and overcoming her fears, "maybe I (will) feel belonging."

Sara's video, entitled "Between War and Safety," allows us to see and feel the lived and liminal spaces of her worlds through her eyes, as she transports us through the stark ruins of a devastated homeland, to the surreal, saturated colours that contain the promise of Canada. The scenes in this section of her video are intentionally out of focus, and with the sonic undercurrent of the music of the Arabic oud, viewers feel a sensory disruption to the way we experience our everyday world in Canada. We see, through her eyes, a future that may be bright, but is still hazy, unsettled, and imperfect. Her imagined world echoes the complicated affective, social, and political in-between spaces she inhabits – in precarity and racism —somewhere between

belonging and not-belonging to Canada and the world. Like Elif, Sara's world-making video expresses her uneasy relationship with hope and belonging in this country. As Sara observes, belonging is still "a long way" away. Kian's deliberately crafted black and white photo portrays the desire for extended family and friends alongside his family in the spaces of Canada. Like Elif, Kian pointedly draws attention to the lack of colour in his life, the lack of Canadian friends who should be standing nearby, bringing the vibrancy and texture of felt belongings to his world. Kian's aspirational world is conditional on shared belongings. The participants' reworlding compositions are refracted by unmade connections and unformed relationships, in a state of becoming still in search of co-created belongings.

In Maria's lushly coloured, more-than-human self-portrait, we see an arborescent feminine figure in a forest setting, in a joyful stance, reaching for the sky, while her vulnerable red roots are firmly embedded in Canadian soil. We encounter this digital collage – a rich, multi-layered (im)material text (Burnett et al., 2014) in our virtual meeting space; the text entwines the material and natural world into her embodied form, surrounded by her aspirational imaginings. Maria's collage speaks of multiple felt and desired belongings to people, places, spaces, and the natural world. The vibrancy of the scene, Maria's creative expression of vitality (Boldt, 2021), and the rippling of its affective resonances, in Kian's words, creates, "a great illustration of belonging."

Worldmaking for newcomers becomes a critical attunement to their entanglements with the structures of power circulating in their lives (Albers et al., 2019). Refugees find new ways to master uncertain futures:

We use all sorts of magical tricks

to conjure up the spirits of the future.  
 We leave the earth with all its uncertainties behind  
 And cast our eyes up to the sky.  
 Sometimes we rely on the lines of our hand  
 or the signs of our handwriting;  
 we learn less about political events  
 but more about our own dear selves.

(Arendt, 1943, p. 266)

Worldmaking is also a creative attunement “of the senses, of labours, and imaginaries, to potential ways of living in or living through things” (Stewart, 2011, p. 452). Creativity may well be a key source of sustenance for those caught in the margins, in unworlding spaces. Behrouz Boochani (2018) believes there is a life-giving force in art-making that sustains refugees and enables them to endure enormous suffering, a force that provides “an unprecedented creative capacity” for resistance and survival. He suggests those who harness their creativity in music and art are able to “trace the outlines of hope ... beyond the prison fences and beehives we live in” (p. 128). World-making takes place in a state of discovery, in the dynamic relationship between and among bodies, materials, and artistic processes (Albers et al., 2019; Ingold, 2014). As Kathleen Stewart (2013a, p. 6) states, “The hand that draws a picture of its scene also draws itself into its corporeality ... It is an autobiographical record of a discovery of an event ... a wobbly emergence of alteredness” (p. 6). It is a realization, a coming to know in the labour of living, a worlding-in-progress. Artworks created in the corners, the edges, and margins may be forged from the fragments of worlds and unworldings, but they are still coloured with dreams and desire:

Even when our bodies have been battered by life,  
these artistic ‘languages’ spoken from the body,  
by the body,  
are still laden with aspirations,  
are still coded in hope.

(Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009, p. 135)

As I reflect on the participants’ compositional worldings, I find myself inhabited by stories that are utterly new and disruptive to me after all my years in the classroom, stories that pull at me, haunt me, and fill me with wonder (MacLure, 2013a), stories generated in contact with human bodies, discursive bodies, artistic bodies, text-bodies, and bodies of thought; bodies that affect one another and generate intensities (Stewart, 2007). I cannot seem to let go of the stories of pain, trauma, and loss; each time I turn my focus toward signs of hope and hopefulness, I am drawn back into places of darkness and discomfort. Perhaps there is more to learn by lingering in the discomfort that arises when we are confronted with the suffering of others, when we contend with Ahmed’s (2015) question: “How am I affected by pain when I am faced by another’s pain” (p. 29)? I become entangled in each story, and I feel pulled into, but still apart from, the pain of others. The presence of pain is an indication that our subjectivity is grounded in affectivity, interrelationality, and the impact of others (Braidotti, 2008); in order to relate to others in an affirmative and empowering manner, we must be attuned to affect, and open to “being affected by and through others” (p. 26). However, critical posthumanist scholar Braidotti (2018) stresses the importance of not focusing on ourselves, dwelling in our own feelings of pain; rather, we should seek new forms of connection and intimacy in our work with otherness and diversity.

I am beginning to understand that we, as educators, must learn to attune to the presence of pain in the lives of newcomers and those on the margins, to curb the urge to act as “cheerleaders of migration happiness” (Benesch, 2012, p. 127), the prevailing perspective in Canada’s national discourse on immigration and multiculturalism. We should learn not to avert our eyes to “ugly feelings” (Ngai, 2005), to the presence of grief, anxiety, despair, and hopelessness in our students. We need to “slow the quick jump” (Stewart, 2007, p. 4) to our eager embrace of hope in language and literacy spaces, to challenge the assumption that hope is an antidote to sorrow, and that progress is embedded in simplified notions of hopeful, aspirational futures (Nichols & Coleman, 2021; Stornaiolo, 2015). I wonder whether our embrace of hope in our curricular endeavours and in the larger community makes *us* feel better about ourselves as educators, and as citizens of a refugee-receiving country, because we want to feel hopeful about our students’ futures and the world we live in.

The participants’ world-making compositions are woven with the fabric of possibility and hope, forged in the living in and through multiple, painful unworldings, but hope does not necessarily spring forth from the gaps and crevasses in refugee lives and worlds. Hope emerges in shades and textures, muted, as in Kian’s black and white photo filled with absent presence; in Elif’s bright sunset coloured by sickness; and in Sara’s blurred envisioning of her future in Canada. Tentative, nuanced forms of hope surface through imagined and ambivalent belongings, tempered in lives of precarity and uncertainty, in and between worlds.

If we learn to accept, in an affirmative ethics (Bradiotti, 2008, 2015), expressions of apathy, anxiety, numbness, ambivalence, and hopelessness in the lives of English learners and marginalized students, we might nurture the political potential lodged in these so-called negative

emotions. Ugly emotions have the power to create solidarity and agency, to address injustice, and empower movements for social change, such as the feminist, queer rights, environmentalism, anti-racism, and decolonisation movements (Braidotti, 2008). The participants' worldmaking compositions are entwined with their emotions, affective intensities, and multiple identities, making visible their realities, ideologies, and beliefs (Albers et al., 2019), and the ways in which their lives are entangled with systems of power.

The participants' artworks are personal portraits, a form of political action, and critical comment on belonging and not-belonging in Canada and the world. If we attune to what is already present in their worlding, unworlding, and reworlding compositions, we may sense the vitality, the "liveness" (Ehret, 2018a), and the "violent courage to live" (Arendt, 1943, p. 268), in the spaces between grief, anxiety, and hope, that may carry meanings that are unknowable to those of us in the mainstream: meanings that may remain incomprehensible to all but those with the shared experiences of unworlding, displacement, and dis/integration.

### **Final Thoughts**

Thinking about my own worlding through our conversations, improvisations, artworks, poetic transcripts, and through the multiple belongings forged in our research setting, I have become aware of enduring questions about relationality, ethical ways of being in the world, and our ethical obligations to each other. I am left wondering: How do we dwell alongside those who are "not from here," who live somewhere between hope and sorrow, whose lived realities, knowledges, wisdom, joys, and pain, may never be fully knowable to us? How do we learn to hear, feel, and honour difference, to hold space for nuanced forms of hope and ambivalent belongings? As Sara Ahmed (2015, p. 39) proposes, it may require a different form of inhabiting,

a different form of reconciliation, based on the possibility that we might never be reconciled; we may find different ways of belonging:

in a collective politics  
based not on the possibility  
that we might be reconciled,  
but on learning to live with  
the *impossibility* of reconciliation.

Learning that we live  
with and beside  
each other.  
And yet  
we are not  
as one.



## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

This improvisational inquiry offers an arts-based, post human, post-qualitative exploration of the worldings, becomings, and belongings of four adult language learners, newcomers to Canada with refugee backgrounds. The research was sparked by my desire to know whether the refugee and immigrant learners in my classroom, who have fled displacement and conflict in their homelands, have found a welcome home here, and a sense of belonging in Canada. My inquiry has explored the complex and nuanced ways newcomer belongings and not-belongings unfold, the felt and sensed connections and dis/connections to place, space, culture, language, people, and the self. The research study is presented as an experiential reading (Blaikie 2020, 2021; Stewart, 2008), an immersion in narratives, ideas, and images, and the felt and sensed worlds of four participant storytellers, in an affective, entangled inquiry that took place during the spring and summer of 2020. I was inspired by Blaikie (2020, 2021) and Stewart's (2010, 2012, 2017, 2019) writing on worlding as storying, an attunement to individual and collective experiences of newcomer lives lived on the margins, and in silent, in-between spaces, contesting "boundaries between affects, subjects, cultures, places, times and events" (Blaikie, 2020, p. 343), in the throwing together of phenomena, material and immaterial, of affects, atmospheres, and in the labours of living through historical presents (Stewart, 2017), through worlding processes. In this inquiry, I theorize newcomer worldings as divergent, non-linear, rhizomatic processes, composed of motion, sensations, bodies, objects, in forms, and events (Stewart, 2010, 2013). Worlding compositions reveal newcomer experiences of belonging and not-belonging in multiple worlds, and the liminal spaces between belongings.

To evoke this worlding composition, an experiential reading of ideas, images, and narratives, and the felt and sensed worlds of newcomers, this work braids together theoretical

constructs and methods that draw from critical posthumanism, affect, literacy scholarship, artmaking, worlding, and translanguaging theory and pedagogy, highlighting the porous borders of temporal, physical, virtual, and (im)material spaces, as well as the permeable, entwined, and expansive boundaries between fields of study, such as language and literacy, translanguaging, affect, posthumanism, and the arts.

Creative experiments in research, such as this artistic inquiry, highlight the power of literacy to not only be affected, but to affect others, and make connections through our words and actions, and through unfolding, co-created worldings. In and through the participants' worldings, unworldings, and re-worlding experiences, I world myself as a new researcher and teacher, working in solidarity with newcomer communities, engaged in feeling-thinking (Stewart 2011) as a process and potential for activism in the fight for equity and justice. We are drawn into worlds that spin out of stories, and as we are touched, we are moved toward a more deeply felt engagement with experience beyond the written page (Ehret & Leander, 2018). I believe participants Sara, Elif, Kian, Maria, and I emerged from our dynamic research encounters with a greater awareness of our ethical obligations to each other, through the witnessing of shared stories, participating in creative, collective world-making, and in acknowledging our interdependence in belonging and becoming, in human, inhuman, and more-than-human worlds (Braidotti, 2008, 2015).

### **Reflecting on Findings**

Newcomer stories of resettlement in Canada reveal belongings that are multiple, relational, rhizomatic, and entwined, unfolding in compositional worldings, in lives shaped by posthuman others, materialities, affects, histories, places, and spaces that are constantly in motion (Blaikie, 2021). Belongings are gendered, sonic, sometimes hopeful, and sometimes

ambivalent. In the research space, belongings were emergent, desired, interrogated, and co-created in care. In moments of shared wonder, transformative belongings emerged in entanglements with power. For Maria and Sara, belongings were personal and political, arising in the reclamation of self, as woman, as human, in the face of a threatening, oppressive forces that treated them as gendered less-than-humans in a patriarchal world. The participants also revealed disturbing stories of unworlding, not-belonging to the world, through encounters with the forces of standard English, in ecologies of white normativity and “white noise” (Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009), through vivid descriptions of feeling mute, shackled, silenced, and erased, in lived experiences of dissonance and dis/integration. Those who inhabit Borderland spaces become colonized by the English language, its institutions, and raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) that reinscribe linguistic and racial hierarchies on newcomer bodies and push minoritized communities to the margins.

As newcomer worldings and unworldings unfurl and weave together, other worlds and worldings may reveal themselves in unexpected affective movements. Elif, Kian, Sara, and Maria described lived and sensory experiences of being in liminal worlds, in a space of (im)materiality (Burnett et al., 2014; Burnett, 2015), in which the boundaries between the physical, the material, and immaterial dissolve, in affective intensities elicited through encounters with the material and immaterial. Sights, smells, texts, textures, emotions, ideas, the temporal and spatial become layered, and blur in an (im)material blending (Burnett, 2015; Burnett et al., 2014); a relational bridge merges the tangible and intangible, dissolving the boundaries between people, countries, emotions, and things, in an other-worldly space of belonging. The (im)material is also a site of agency. The co-creation of (im)material texts, relationships, and subjectivities, enables literacy and social practices that are generative,

political, and ideological (Rowsell & Burgess, 2014). The multimodal artistic texts produced by Kian, Maria, Elif, and Sara evoke the (im)material to contest the often-overwhelming power imbalances that are implicated in their experiences of silence and erasure in everyday unworldings and not-belongings, in encounters with white supremacy.

This inquiry offers a definition of reworlding as worldmaking, engaging in an imaginative and political process of reimagining and remaking the world, and one's place in it (O'Donoghue, 2018; Stornaiuolo, 2015), through engagements with the arts. Reworlding entanglements seek a new way of being in the world, in complex and changing human-non-human assemblages. Reworldings enfold the present moment and the yet-to-come, entwining creativity, language, culture, nature, histories, time, space and place, subjects, and objects in worlding processes. In their artistic worldmaking practices, the participants created dual language texts and artworks that used colour, place, people, and natural environments in beautifully provocative, affective, and sometimes discordant portraits, in which hope is present, but shaded with the presence of pain, trauma, separation, and loss, in imperfect worlds and worldings.

In the participants' worldings, unworldings, and world-making endeavours, we can observe how materialities, language, ideas, and environments are interconnected and inseparable; worlds and belongings emerge within and through the braiding of social, spatial, and material networks (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2017) through assemblages of language and bodies (MacLure 2013b), and transcultural flows of emotion and affect (Burgess & Rowsell, 2020) through and between lived belongings and not-belongings. Worldings and belongings emerged surprisingly and ephemerally through powerfully affective encounters and entanglements with language, materiality, relationality, and structures of power.

## **Creativity**

The participants' artworks revealed the complexity and creativity of their imaginative responses to the issues that surfaced during our research meetings; in particular, the depth of their engagement with bilingual writing, photography, drawing, painting, and collage, as well as the evocative ways in which they deployed affect, colour, and metaphor, for critical commentary. Kian used black and white imagery in his photograph; the absence of colour is used to underscore the elements of his life that are missing— that add colour and texture — such as family, friends, and essential attachments that, for him, signal belonging to Canada. Sara purposefully blurred the Canadian segment of her video to illustrate indeterminate belongings — a lack of clarity in the present and for her future in Canada. Elif used subtle greys in her bridge painting to present her path to an uncertain future, and her vivid sunset painting conveys her desire for a family and future in Canada against her everyday experiences of dis/connection with people and place in her homeland and Canada. Maria's strikingly emotional response to the sight of a beloved geranium resonated with all of us deeply: Maria's loss of home and family were echoed in Sara's story of missing her mother's cooking of the geranium plant. And we felt Maria's haunting description of dark unworlding in English encounters: words trapped in her throat, losing her shadow on the ground, an estrangement from her self.

Literacy scholar Gunther Kress (2003) draws a link between creativity and synaesthesia, or the creation of meaning through the shifts and movements of ideas across semiotic modes, so that a text passage might be acted out in a video, or a poem may be repurposed in music, and thoughts translated and transposed from one language to another. The meanings in the semiotic modes interact and combine, so that new forms of meaning may emerge. Kress (2003) considers synaesthesia to be the heart of "much of that we regard as creativity" (p. 36). From an expanded

posthuman perspective, creativity is unpredictable, organic, and always immanent, entwined with experiences, ideas, subjectivities, and events that are always in tension, in relation, “always being experienced anew, in memory and anticipation, and in the present moment” (Blaikie, in press). Blaikie also suggests a quality of passion is paramount in artmaking. What surfaces most vividly in the participants’ creative work is a sense of vitality, vitalness (Boldt, 2021), and intensity; a fierce embrace of life emerges from the entangled spaces between here-and-there, past-present-future, joy, despair, and ambivalent belongings. Such portraits of “vital mattering” (Boldt, 2021) express what Hannah Arendt (1943) describes as the refugees’ “violent courage to live” (p. 268). The participants’ artwork is moving and powerful; it reverberates with the violent courage of life.

Kurdish-Iranian author Behrouz Boochani (2018) believes there is a life-giving force in creativity that empowers refugees to bear multiple sufferings. From his observations, Boochani views those who make music and art as “distinctly creative humans with unprecedented creative capacities” (p. 387) for resistance and survival. Indeed, Holloway (2014) describes creativity as “an antidote to hegemony” (p. 16), using multimodal artmaking to reimagine a better, more just world. Engaging in art as worldmaking (O’Donoghue, 2018; Stornaiuolo, 2015) is a political act of reworlding for newcomers. Anzaldúa echoes Boochani, stating for those who live in Borderlands, in and between the margins, “our survival depends on being creative” (Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009, p. 135). When words fail, the language of art may be harnessed to speak back to forces that silence, and to shape new worlds and new belongings from the residue of unworldings and not-belongings.

Attuning to the vital life-sustaining forces of creativity in language and literacy teaching and research has the generative potential to open up new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. In the entwining of experiences, ideas, subjectivities, and events, with arts-driven translanguaging movements between, across and beyond multiple modes, disciplines, languages, and cultures, within immanent, unfolding, affect-laden spaces of creativity, we co-create belongings and becomings in ethics, relationality, and care. Working with their full communicative translanguaging repertoires in artistic exploration and world-making, bi- and multilingual learners transform themselves into Borderlands artists and critical theorists, with alternative knowledges, other ways of being, and creative visions to shape better worlds.

### **Attunement**

This research suggests we, as educators, must work differently, with difference, by learning to embrace the unknowable and hold space in discomfort. Working in the presence of difference means confronting that which is unknowable — and may never be knowable to us - because we do not share the lived experiences of those who hold other, non-western worldviews, and those who have lived through conflict, dispossession, and displacement. We must not avert our eyes to the pain of others, to their grief, despair, and hopelessness. We should not minimise or discount the intensity or the legitimacy of these emotions. We can honour our students, and their affective lives, by accepting and respecting the presence of difficult, “ugly feelings” (Ngai, 2005), to create comfortable spaces to be and learn, and to engender a sensitive space for the critical witnessing of painful stories (Dutro & Bien, 2014; Dutro, 2017, 2019). We should stop the rush to hopefulness, to our desire to see and sense hope in newcomer worlds and worldings. “Hopeful literacies” (Pahl & Pool, 2021) are future-oriented, “attentive to what could be,” (p. 81) moving us away from the present into an imagined future. However, an attunement to affect in-

the-moment, whether sadness, frustration, fear, or hopelessness, draws attention to what is unfolding in the present, what may be present, unstated, and not fully comprehensible to us. We must learn to be still, attune with the intensities in the moment, and as Haraway (2016) says, “stay with the trouble of living and dying together,” as an act of solidarity and care. We need to honour the lived experience of pain, which those of us who are privileged white western educators may not know and may never know. This form of staying with the trouble may also involve an interrogation of *our* desire for newcomers to feel belonging to this country; perhaps this desire is a manifestation of our attachment to dominant immigration narratives in Canada, to “happy multiculturalism,” and an expectation for newcomers to express positivity: showing gratitude for being here, rather than being perceived as “melancholic migrants,” who complain about experiences of exclusion, racism, and intolerance (Ahmed, 2010, p. 131). We should, however, be cognizant of perpetuating colonialist discourses that portray newcomers as “damaged,” traumatized others, as communities in need of fixing (Gutierrez, 2008; Smith, 2012; Tuck, 2009). Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck calls for a fuller conception of nondominant peoples as complex humans, having pasts, presents, futures, and contradictions, who “at different points in a single day, reproduce, resist, are complicit in, rage against, celebrate, throw up hands/ fists/towels, and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures” (p. 420). Tuck, Anzaldúa, hooks, and other Indigenous, Borderlands, and postcolonial scholars have drawn attention to complexity, contradictions, and vibrancy of lives lived in the margins and Borderlands, in which hope may be present and circulating, but not always visible. Perhaps we need to rethink our framing of hope and hopeless as binary constructs. Attending to affect will not automatically result in happy endings in the classroom. Boldt (2021) cautions: “Affective intensities do not



inherently lead to good or beautiful outcomes” —but the lesson that affect does is teach, regardless of teaching outcomes —is that hopelessness may not be the complete absence of hope, but rather, an intermittent diminishment, an attenuation of its intensities and forces. Hope fades in and out of view but is never lost. It is like “the gentle light that strays and vanishes and returns” (Zagajewski, 2003, p. 60), glimpsed in the nearly imperceptible strands of white in Elif’s sunset painting. We must find ways to quiet our voices, bodies, and minds, to hold space in moments of wonder and in discomfort, to attune to what is immanent, and unfolding, in the entanglements of people and things and ways of being.

Sara Ahmed (2010) re-frames so-called negative emotions as “creative responses to histories that are unfinished” (p. 217). Attending to shades of hope and honouring the presence affect and emotion in classrooms and research settings, we make space for the affective assemblages in which elation and happiness, despair, hopelessness, anger, and frustration jostle and move, disrupt, coalesce, and endure. Attuning to transcultural affective intensities and flows in newcomer literacies and lives (Burgess & Rowsell, 2020) may provide educators with a more nuanced view of what the gradations of hope might feel like and do in the complicated lives of those living in and between borders and margins. Sharing space with other ways of knowing and experiencing affect may generate creative engagements with the politics of unhappiness (Ahmed, 2010), as well as more expansive ethical relationships and more just educational practices that are grounded in difference, relationality, and in differing shades of hope.

### **Voice**

One of the most troubling findings uncovered in this inquiry is the participants’ loss of voice in unworlding encounters, of silencing in the face of standard English, in “the eyes, ears and mouth of whiteness,” or what Flores and Rosa (2015) term raciolinguistic ideologies. The

participants describe unworldings in encounters with English: the devastating embodied experience of feeling blocked, dis/abled, helpless, and useless, unable to interact with English speakers in community settings, and when confronting silent, but strongly felt forms of racism, such as Sara's silencing in encounters with a city bus driver. What is particularly concerning is that all the participants in this study arrived in Canada with some degree of proficiency in English. Translanguaging theory is understood to be an empowering and transformational theory and practice (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Kleyn & Garcia, 2017), suggesting bilinguals and multilinguals often find creative and subversive ways to leverage their communicative repertoires to make meaning in a variety of English language settings, including schools and wider community (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Mazzaferro, 2018). To date, I have not found any translanguaging research that echoes the experiences of the participants in this study: of silencing and disempowerment, and the apparent inability to deploy their linguistic repertoires in encounters with whiteness, with raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015). The findings stem from a small-scale study, but nevertheless present an issue that is worthy of further exploration.

A critical posthuman lens was helpful for reconsidering the stories that surfaced in our encounters in the research setting: worlds unravelling in darkness and silencing, surprising worlding stories of the discovery of self and humanity in gendered worlds, and (im)material spaces in which beloved objects entwine with immaterial responses to create other-worldly sites of belonging-between-belongings. The participants' colourful worldmaking texts foregrounded their complex affective lives and voices. If we frame these stories as important because they amplify or "give voice" to newcomers, we risk valorizing or romanticizing refugee experiences

and reifying essentializing narratives that provoke limited responses, such as pity, or a desire to “save” the displaced other.

From a posthuman perspective, voice (and the absence of voice) can be understood as a “composition,” a worlding composition, not as emanating from an individual human subject, but rather, in Deleuzian terms, a “collective enunciation” from a “constellation of voices” (Mazzei 2017, p. 4). Voice is an idiosyncratic map of connections and dis/connections between a series of singularities; voice is one element, an active participant in unfolding worlding, unworlding, and reworlding compositions. As Stewart (2010) proposes, “the body has to learn to play itself like a musical instrument in this world’s compositions” (p. 341). Our attunement to newcomer silences and voices, and the multiplicities, complexities, and collaboratives in which they participate, may reveal more about the forces of power found in colonizing English practices in classrooms and institutions, and the ways these forces land on the bodies of newcomers. In listening to “the affective life of injustice” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 57), we are challenged to seek imaginative new ways for “the body to learn to play itself” – the social body —to contest the eyes, ears, and mouth of whiteness.

### **Relational Praxis**

The sudden lockdown of educational (and other) institutions in March 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, forced me to shift my research plans from a face-to-face school setting to an online space, using the Zoom videoconferencing platform. We found ourselves in a post-human world, in which human subjects, our centrality already displaced by an unseen virus, were now forced to navigate the intricacies, potentials, and (im)possibilities of information technology.

Considering our virtual translanguaging space with a critical post-humanist and worlding lens brings into focus the relational processes in which human and other-than-human elements, such as digital media, become entwined, unfold, and create new worlds and worldings in continuous co-composition. As participants in a research assemblage, we were able to see and sense the ways in which agency is distributed among a multiplicity of elements, including technology, each other, texts, data, and through the affective flows in our complex group (Strom et al., 2018). My experience with the shift from face-to-face to a virtual research setting has shifted my thinking to consider what may be produced in our relationship with technology, our co-productions within and between the permeable boundaries between humans and non-humans. The fluid, hybrid research space in which we gathered emerged as a world, and space for worlding, as affect, the senses, languages, and matter entwined, giving rise to “a singular world’s texture and shine” (Stewart, 2010, p. 341).

In this virtual research setting, we co-produced a collective third space (Gutierrez, 2008) a dynamic, translanguaging space (Garcia & Wei, 2014), and a sensitive space of belonging-between-belongings, in which we shared knowledge, culture, difficult memories, art-making, and literacy practices, in a space of critical witnessing (Dutro & Bien, 2014; Dutro, 2013, 2017) and care. As a virtual translanguaging space, the participants’ semiotic and linguistic practices were privileged, displacing the English-only ideologies that dominate Canada’s adult settlement language classrooms, and the raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Garcia, 2015) that reinforce racial and linguistic hierarchies in schools and the wider community. This was a homeplace (hooks, 1990), a site of resistance for contesting the forces that silence newcomers, and to question what counts as knowledge, and whose knowledge counts. By grounding the meetings in translanguaging practices and the arts, we created an innovative online space of collaborative

exploration and inquiry into the self, the world, and belonging in the world, in a space of equity, where power was distributed amongst the human-nonhuman and more-than-human bodies in an affective research assemblage.

Our collective third space also reflected an ethical, political, and decolonial stance that honoured the lived histories of the participants, their hybrid language practices, their creativity and critical thinking, and the entanglement of emotions and affect that generated in shared worldings and belongings. Collective third spaces open new lines of imaginative flight for envisioning what could be in artistic, relational, pedagogical spaces of becoming and belonging in and alongside difference.

### **Literacies of Belonging in a Third Space**

In language and literacy studies, and art education, worlding, becoming, and belonging are implicit conditions of scholarship and pedagogy (Blaikie, 2020, p. 344). Methods of teaching, inquiry, and creating artistic texts, provoke worldings (and unworldings) that are facilitated and limited by collective and individual imaginings, conditions, and dispositions. Literacy scholars Vasudevan and colleagues (2015) define *the literacies of belonging* as the communicative and expressive practices - in writing, gesture, text choice, multimodal production and more - in which people communicate their sense of belonging. My research with newcomers further develops this concept. Here, the literacies of belonging emerge in our *comingtogethers* (Ehret, 2018a), as we exchange understandings across languages and cultures, and through artistic meaning-making, in a collective third space (Gutierrez, 2008). Lived histories and an ethos of care are shared, new knowledge and new belongings are co-constructed, in a lively and vital assemblage in which people and things, languages, cultures, ontologies, and epistemologies, interact and entwine with virtual, multimodal, material, immaterial and (im)material worlds. The

literacies of belonging enable the emergence of unheard stories, *testimonios* of newcomer lives, worldings and unworldings in the everyday unfoldings of their resettlement journeys. Affects and emotions are explored, mobilized (Lewis, 2020; Lewis & Tierney, 2013) and woven with the forces of creativity in world-making endeavours. Artistic and expressive practices, whether sketching, poetry writing, oral storytelling, or sharing in charged silences, feelings of happiness or hopelessness, create avenues for refugees and immigrants to challenge stereotypical media portrayals of their lives, contest narrow definitions of language and literacy in educational settings, and confront the dehumanizing felt forces of power, and white noise that are entangled with newcomer worlds. As Greene (2011) proposes, “the undiscovered lies just out of sight in the spaces that we draw for ourselves” (p.9). Our creative and critical explorations of the self, community, and worlds allowed us to feel a sense of connection and belonging in human and other than human words; to experience liminal spaces of belonging, interrogate belonging and not-belonging in the world; and in world-making, to envision what might be.

*Everything in the universe is speaking to us.*

*It's a literacy in itself.*

(Musqua, as cited in George, 2010, p. 4)

### **Implications**

How do we, as educators and researchers, design pedagogically rich learning and research spaces for English learners and nondominant students that cultivate the literacies of belonging in educational settings? How might we create affective literacy engagements that give rise to a collective third space that is a welcoming and a transgressive site of learning? The literacies of belonging are grounded in an openness to the unknown, an immersion in uncertainty and the relational, theoretic, and political potentials that surface in moments of discomfort and

vulnerability (Ehret & Rowsell, 2021). Possibilities for discovery and surprise emerge through the privileging of home and hybrid languages in a translanguaging space that contests the primacy of standard English and confront harmful raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015). An artistic translanguaging space with an attunement to the movements and flows of affect engenders a safe, generative space that celebrates stories of joy and holds space and care for the witnessing (Dutro & Bien, 2014; Dutro, 2017, 2019) of *testimonios* of trauma, loss, and hopelessness. As a literacy site, this space actively takes up art-making, harnessing powerful potentials of creativity in newcomer bodies, and the possibilities contained in synaesthetic movements across modes, languages, technologies, and affects, in imagination, experimentation and meaning making. Teachers and researchers must create openings and opportunities for learners to explore how they carry belongings across space and time, in their literacies, memories, artifacts, and stories, and to nurture these practices of and desires to belong (Vasudevan et al., 2015), and to critically inquire into the ways in which belongings and not-belongings arise along racialized, linguistic, gendered, classed, and other lines. Teaching and research settings that create and promote the literacies of belonging enable collaborative, critical, embodied, and performative inquiry (Burgess, 2021) into the self and the complexities and contradictions of belonging and not-belonging in multiple worlds.

The goal of post-qualitative inquiry is to innovate, create, and think and do research differently (St. Pierre, 1997). Our task is to experiment “and see where that takes us” (MacLure, 2013c, p. 231). This experimental, improvisational study, an artistic exploration of belonging, has opened a path to new ways of investigating belonging, through the constant, rhizomatic worldings, unworldings, and reworldings, and world-making, in emergent and sometimes ambivalent belongings and transformative becomings. Belonging, not-belonging, and between

belongings are always unfolding, entangled with memories, in present moments, in artifacts, affinities, events, and in imaginings, anticipation, and desire.

While this research project may seem small in scale, the number of participants is appropriate given the purpose, method, and theoretical framing. It is rich in evocative, poetic lived stories that center the multiple voices and affective lives of the participants. My study also reflects my learning: it is partial, incomplete, and evolving. My work, as a teacher, researcher, and ally to newcomers, is always in a process of growth (Braidotti, 2013), and is therefore, unfinished. By tracing newcomer *testimonios*, worlds already in composition and the affectively charged moments and impacts, this work contributes to literacy research by offering itself as a counter-story that enfolds the reader, as a participant, into the movements and flows of this polyvocal affective assemblage. It acts as a bridge, a crossroads (Anzaldúa, 2009) to unheard voices that are crucial to extending our understanding of newcomer worlds and (un)worldings, deepening the impact of affective literacies (Leander & Ehret, 2019) and informing critical posthumanist and post-qualitative inquiry.

This study expands arts-based post-qualitative inquiry in language acquisition and literacy settings, engaging with experimental methods that reject coding and categorizing in favour of an immersion in data and events that glow with importance, sparking new connections among words, bodies, objects, and ideas (MacLure, 2013c, p. 229). Working with worlding, wonder, the arts, translanguaging, and affect foregrounds emotions, its movements, and political impact: How they “join with the intimate histories of bodies” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 202) and become entangled in stories of belonging and not-belonging, justice, and injustice, rippling across worlds and touching our lives. The question that lingers is: What will we do with these stories? Will they take on lives of their own, and continue to move us and affect us in unanticipated ways?



How can we be accountable to each other in our teaching and research, in our personal and professional lives? Improvisational methods coupled with a decolonial stance and praxis center ethical obligations and relationality rather than placing the focus on design (Hollett, 2021). Participants' onto-epistemologies are foregrounded to guide collaboration, moving toward openings that may be unsettling and unknown, but are ethical and relational, signaling solidarity in difference, leading us to envision other, better worlds, not-yet-known.

Let us fight no more but heal the wounds of nations.

Let us be the healing of the wound.

We are the song that sings us.

(Anzaldúa, as cited in Keating, 2009, p. 313).

### **Recentring the Participant**

I wish to conclude this chapter with my own *refusal* (St. Pierre, 2021): a refusal to recenter the researcher in my final remarks, which would privilege my voice over the voices of the participants in this project, and further reify the power imbalances that are already present in the research space (and beyond). I recognize that I am constantly present in my writing; I am speaking with, through and for my participants, as they speak with and through me, and therefore, I cannot fully remove myself from this work. However, I wish to end with a true improvisational offer from a participant, which demonstrates how our collective third space of belonging and this worlding composition are still unfolding in surprising and generative ways. Elif contacted me to share the exciting news of her university acceptance. She also included a recently written poem, which she has allowed me to share, here. Elif's poem reveals how literacy is spontaneous, rhizomatic, and alive, moving through unseen currents, multiple layers, and unbroken connections to people and things. As a literacy event, Elif's poem highlights how

literacy is deeply affective and relational; this point should be underscored as we step into classrooms and research settings. In centering affect and relationships in our research endeavours, we become enmeshed in movements, worlds, and belongings. Literacy is “in and of the world” (Pahl et al., 2020, p. 1); our artistic, affective text-bodies reflect our entanglements with each other, and our worlds.

Elif worlds herself in her poem, “Weak Soul”; she uses literacy, art, and imagination to heal wounds, build bridges, and to think, feel, and critically respond to the world around her. Upon reading Elif’s poem, we may find ourselves caught up in an experiential reading *within* an experiential reading, in unfolding and ongoing worlding revolutions, new ways of belonging in difference and solidarity, and through unexpected *comingtogethers* (Ehret, 2018a); we are all enfolded in the story, the poem, the song that sings us.

### **Weak Soul**

A bottomless pit

There is a gorgeous lady

Bearing to be free

As the lotus bloom in swamp

Her weak soul will be released

The soul is beset

By the venomous branches

Missing her own home

Serious wounds appear on

Her boiling heart, fighting thorns

When black clouds gather

Earth is impenetrable

Then the sun beamed on

Her weak soul, healed her gashes

To shine and rise in a pit.

(Elif, 2022)

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## Appendix A

### Sample Consent Letter



**Brock University**  
Office of Research Ethics  
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035  
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Date: 8 May 2020

Project Title: Emergent Belongings: An art-led inquiry into newcomer belonging in Canada

Principal Investigator: Fiona Blaikie, Professor,  
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Principal Student Investigator: Julianne Burgess; [julianne.burgess@brocku.ca](mailto:julianne.burgess@brocku.ca)

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The focus of the study is to investigate refugee belonging in Canada.

The research study will take place online, using the ZOOM 5.0+ web conferencing platform. The purpose of the research study is to explore adult newcomers' migration experiences and feelings of belonging in school and in the wider community, through a series of online art-based workshops and conversations. The research study will take place over three months, from May until July 2020.

As a participant, you will take part in 4 or 5 online conversations (to be decided by participants) at a time that is convenient to you. During the conversations, the participants and researcher will work together to decide on the most interesting topics and art activities to explore belonging. After the final meeting, you will be invited to participate in a voluntary one-hour online videoconferencing conversation that will be recorded and transcribed. You will be asked to discuss your artwork, writing, and experiences of belonging. With your permission, the research team may take photos, video, or audio recordings of the workshops and the work you create. The photographs and video may be used in publications and conference presentations, with your consent. You will receive a \$25 Food Basics gift card for your participation even if you withdraw at any stage of the study. You are under no obligation to participate in this research because of your studies in the LINC program or your relationship with the LINC teacher (the researcher); participation in this project is entirely your choice.

There are three risks and several benefits to the research. One risk associated with participating in the research is that talking about your migration journey may cause you to experience some discomfort. You are not required to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. If you feel upset, at your request, we will provide contact information for a mental health counsellor who works with newcomers. Another potential risk is that your artwork or writing

may contain information that might identify you. You will have the opportunity to make changes so that you are comfortable with the content. There is also a risk that the Zoom online platform may not be completely secure. Please use a private space and a headset for online meetings. We will use a process and take several precautions to keep meetings secure: personal information will not be collected and stored on the Zoom platform. Meetings will be password protected. We will use a waiting room to restrict entry to participants only. Recording of meetings will be stored on my private computer and destroyed after being transcribed. Benefits to participating in this study include learning about research and working with art, which may promote a deeper interest in the arts and post-secondary studies. The chance to reflect on your settlement experiences may lead to deeper self-awareness and insights into belonging in Canada. You may also add your participation in this study to your resume as a volunteer activity.

You may choose your own pseudonym for written data, which will provide some confidentiality in the reporting of results and publications, unless you have provided your written consent for your identity to be published and attached to your work. A master list will be used to link your name with your pseudonym. This will be destroyed confidentially once the data have been analyzed, along with the consent forms and original audiotapes (within 2 years). Data will be kept under lock and key in my supervisor, Dr. Fiona Blaikie's office in Welch Hall, Faculty of Education, Brock University, 1812 Sir Isaac Brock Way, St. Catharines, ON. Data will be kept for 7 years and then destroyed confidentially. Access to the data will be restricted to the Principal Investigator, and Co-Investigator.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. You may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you withdraw, your data will be destroyed in a confidential manner. Co-researcher Julianne Burgess will participate in the individual conversation with you, which will be audio recorded and transcribed by a transcriber. After your conversations are transcribed, recording will be destroyed.

Results of this study may be published in professional journals, presented at conferences and written up in a book. Feedback about this study will be available from either Julianne Burgess or Dr. Blaikie in the spring of 2021. Further, we will provide you with a written summary of the research findings, which will be available for you by email, through regular mail, or by pick up in person from Julianne Burgess at Mohawk College in Hamilton, or Dr. Blaikie at Brock University in St. Catharines.

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Julianne Burgess or Fiona Blaikie using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file # 19-259).

If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688- 5550 Ext. 3035, or reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

**CONSENT FORM - *Emergent Belongings: An art-led inquiry into how belonging is experienced by adults with refugee backgrounds.* File 19-259.**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check if you agree:

I agree to be photographed \_\_\_\_\_ videotaped \_\_\_\_\_ audiotaped \_\_\_\_\_ during this research project. Recordings will be destroyed after the contents are transcribed.

I agree to the use of my full name on my work in publications and conferences: YES NO