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Healing in the Borderlands: a Journey with Translanguaging, Queering Yerevan and Arts-based

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Healing in the Borderlands: a Journey with Translanguaging, Queering Yerevan and Arts-based Authoethnography (Catherine McGovern)

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This thesis was deeply inspired by border thinking and the work of Gloria Anzaldua. It is a personal journey of finding healing through interactions with three principal sources: the linguistic concept of translanguaging, the work of a queer Armenian collective, and autoethnographic ways of thinking, writing and being.

The author explores notions of fluidity and opacity in regards to identities as well as conceptions of language and communication. She does this through unpacking the complexity of her various identities and connecting this to literature, research and theory that question the false construct of static and monolithic identity. She also explores and questions the space in between language, semiotics and art.

Inspired by the concept of translanguaging and how it relates to the work of the collective Queering Yerevan, who use multilingualism and multimodality to question the heteropatriarchy of the Armenian state, the author uses both linguistics and art to create a zine that questions potentially harmful forms of normativity. Autoethnography is woven throughout, as the author connects personal experience to larger societal implication, narratives and myths.

Acknowledgement

I dedicate this thesis to the individuals and collectives I have met on this academic adventure. One important encounter is the feminist collective Queering Yerevan, whose art, writing and ideas have influenced me greatly. Though I have never been able to meet them in person, they have graciously responded to my emails expressing interest in their work. Their bravery and ingenuity in challenging the heteropatriarchy through art and the subversion of cultural norms inspire me to continue on my own feminist journey. Meeting Gloria Anzaldua through her daringly honest writing and poetry has also brought this thesis into being. Finally, I cannot forget to acknowledge the recently departed bell hooks, whose work has drawn me in for years. Her call to engage with theory in a way that allows for individual and collective healing lies at the heart of this thesis. I want to acknowledge my cohort in Education and Globalization. The opportunity to converse with and be challenged by a group of critical thinkers from all over the world has made this master's a transformative experience for me. I am also so grateful for the work of the faculty here at the University of Oulu. I have never had such dedicated, inspiring experiences with educators until this program. Working with Magda Karjalainen, who is my thesis supervisor, has brought me to new questions and ways of thinking. It has seemed as though she has instantly understood and related to the questions and ideas I've had on this journey. Her work continues to inspire me. Audrey Paradis has provided so much encouragement, support and helpful feedback throughout this master's.
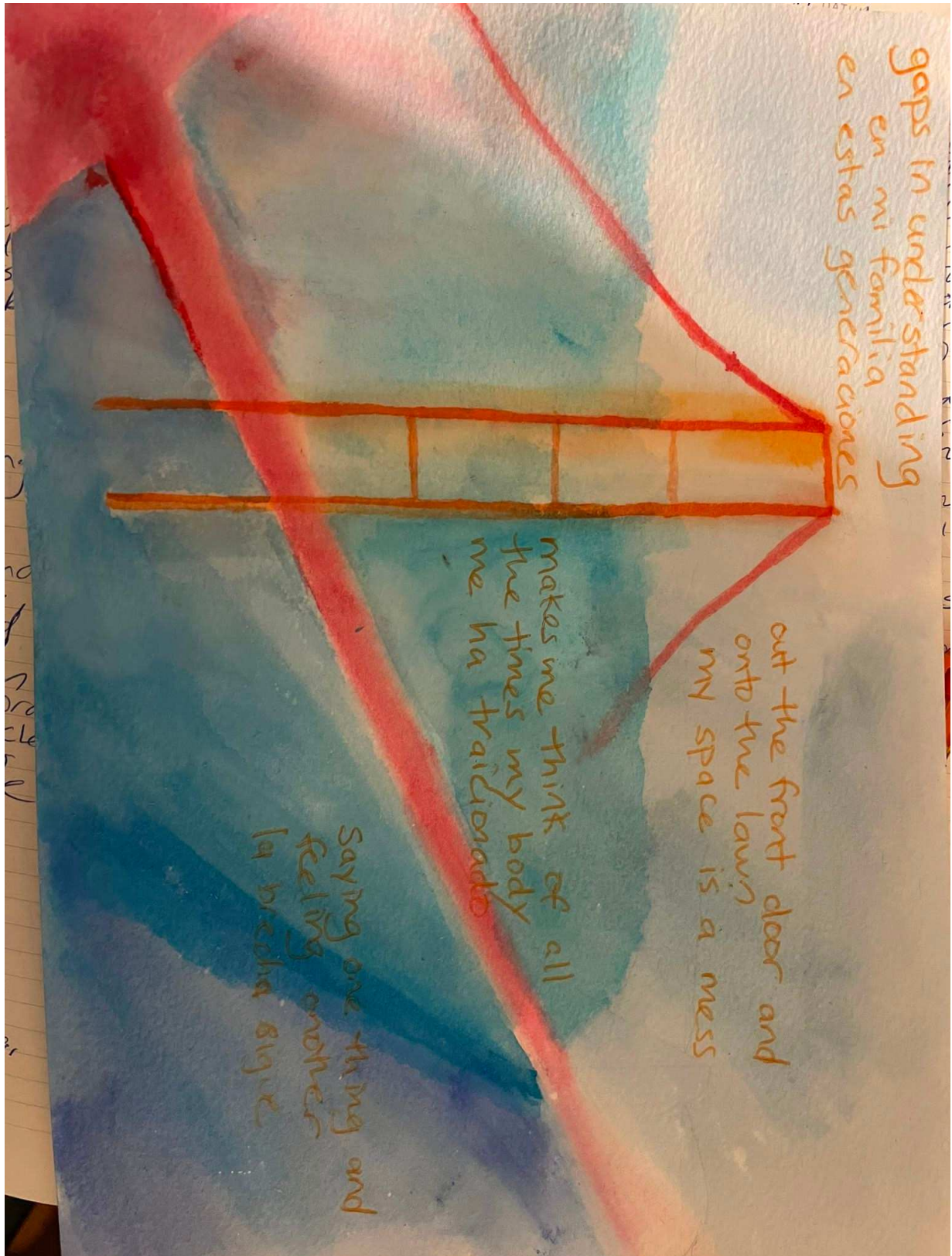
Finally, I want to thank my family for all of their support throughout the writing of this thesis. There have been moments in this process where I thought that I would not be able to finish. This journey has been transformative because of how challenging it has been. These trials have been more easily overcome because of their encouragement and love.

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Capitulo I
Separation

Image 1 Snapshot from my zine

Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passage-ways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla, a Nahuatl word meaning tierra entre medio.
(Anzaldua, 2002, p.1)

1. Bridges, and embracing the spaces between

The words of Gloria Anzaldua are something I keep coming back to. As a queer chicana feminist theorist and writer living on the US Mexico border, her identity did not fit neatly into boxes of sexuality, ethnicity and nationality. "Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders... to survive the borderlands/you must live sin fronteras/be a crossroads" (Anzaldua, as cited in Garcia and Wei, 2014, p. 37). When Anzaldua speaks of the borderlands, she is addressing how her very existence, which exists outside labels such as gay or straight, resides in the so-called borderlands. Her complex identities, which do not fit neatly inside of any box, proves that these dichotomies are mere social constructs. Her writing examines the ways in which common dichotomies with which people are grouped (i.e. rational-emotional, gay-straight, male-female) are often limiting and untrue.

The truth is that none of us fit neatly into these boxes. "Rather than dis-missing them as insignificant, as marginal zones, thin slivers of land between stable places, we want to contend that the notion of borderlands is a more adequate conceptualization of the "normal" locale of the postmodern subject" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 6). Here Gupta and Ferguson are referring to the increasingly complex identities experienced by people in the twenty-first century. Due to the increased connectedness of people around the world thanks to advances in technology that make it easier for people to travel as well as to communicate, our identities are increasingly complex, and most of us do not fit neatly into boxes of nationality, ethnicity or sexuality. However, these social constructs continue to exist, and make many of people feel as though they are "other", causing widespread insecurity and anxiety.

In this thesis, I speak of my own experience of not fitting neatly within boxes of identity. For me, when Anzaldua speaks of bridges, she means how embracing living in the borderlands, outside of restrictive binaries, can lead us somewhere new. Bridges are the borderlands, the third space. They are the spaces in between the dichotomies that surround us: gay and straight, personal and profes-

sional, emotion and rationality that are connected the cartesian split (Short, 2020). I understand the borderlands as gaps in understanding, the way our words can never seem to adequately describe our experiences to others, leaving spaces between us. By talking of the borderlands and bridges, I believe Anzaldua is speaking about how these spaces and gaps can be passageways, ways to transition, to open, to change perspectives. For the many of us who do not fit neatly into restrictive binaries, living in between can lead us to new ways of knowing and being. I wrote this thesis with the hope that it can be a bridge; An academic piece of writing in which I use the first person, inhabit the space in between the academic and the personal. I will speak of my emotions, my body, my conflicting identities (national, sexual, linguistic). I want to embrace gaps and empty spaces, while acknowledging that its two-dimensional pages will never be able to fully encapsulate the emotions, thoughts and hopes of the author.

1.1. Border thinking as the thread running through the three main sources of inspiration

This section will first explore the epistemological framework related to the concept of border thinking, which is a central concept in the thesis. I will briefly explore some of the thinkers associated with border thinking, and how it relates to more Eurocentric theories. Then, I will outline the three main sources of inspiration for this thesis, which are translanguaging, the multimodal work of the queer collective Queering Yerevan found in their book *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art*, and autoethnography. I imagine border thinking as a thread linking the three main sources of inspiration. All three question potentially harmful forms of normativity, the assumption of objectivity in knowledge production and reality, and historical power imbalances in research.

Border thinking can be summarized as being epistemologies that come from outside of Eurocentric traditions. It involves the use of different forms of expression than those that are normally used within academia (Icaza, 2017). The Bandung Conference in Belgrade in 1995 saw the emergence of border thinking as a concept (Mignolo, 2011). Despite this, border thinking has a long tradition before this conference, and is exemplified in the work of Ghandi and Frantz Fanon (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2012). Both Fanon and Ghandi had an understanding of the way in which they had been structurally and politically created as other in the societies in which they lived, also known as the so-called double consciousness (ibid.) Gloria Anzaldua is a Chicana writer and activist who expanded up on the concept of border thinking in her work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, in

which she breaks down how border thinking seeks to challenge the idea of a researcher as knowing and existing in juxtaposition with the supposedly unknowing subject involved in research. Border thinking happens when an individual locates the ways in which they have been subalternized by society, as opposed to the othering that can occur when academics from the Global North use the data and stories of people from the Global South. The geo and body politics become a source of data and knowledge through speaking about our awareness of the subaltern within ourselves (ibid.).

Border thinking will look differently according to the geopolitics and body politics of the person or collective undertaking it. The variation here means that border thinking does not involve abstract universalisms. This makes it a decolonize lens that is different from European frameworks such as Marxism, in which knowledge is established in the geopolitics of universal truths (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2012). Border thinking does not fit within European frameworks such as post colonialism or poststructuralism because the epistemologies lie outside of the framework of colonial mindsets (ibid.). This makes it similar to poststructuralism in the aspect that border thinking calls for a pluriversality of experiences and voices (ibid.) As opposed to postcolonialism or poststructuralism, border thinking appears different depending on the body and geo politics of the individual undertaking it (ibid.) Mignolo and Tlostanova stress that though border thinking may look different depending on the individual or collective undertaking it, different ways of going about border thinking are similar because they necessitate an awareness of colonial mindsets (ibid.) This means not accepting any ideas of inferiority by colonized people or giving in to assimilation of dominant cultures (ibid.) In this way, border thinking allows us to image a future that defies hegemony, colonial framework of knowledge and universality (Mignolo, 2011).

The first encounter that I experience in this thesis is my engagement with the concept of translanguaging. Translanguaging is a linguistic theory that questions the assumed separation of named languages, and it also emphasizes the importance of breaking down the relationship between linguistic and nonlinguistic semiotics in human communication (Wei, 2018). Wei (2018) and Pennycook (2017) emphasize the importance of a further exploration of how kinesics and other semiotic systems are used in conjunction with language in human interaction in distinctive temporal and physical contexts. To me, these scholars are arguing for linguistic concepts that take into account the complexity of human interaction. In our increasingly globalized world, multilingualism is the norm for many people, and code-switching (moving back and forth between languages) is a natural and useful form of communication (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Yet code-switching continues to be a stigmatized due to the continuing colonial idea of nationality identity being connected to one language (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Not only do many linguistic theories not take into account the complex and

fluid ways that humans use language, which do not correspond to rigid ideas regarding rules in language, but they also do not take into account that the majority of our communication is non-verbal. For example, it has been estimated that only 35% of our communication is verbal, with the remaining 65% falls into the non-verbal category (Duke, 1974). In addition, human communication keeps evolving in the internet-age of our increasingly globalized world. Much of our communication happens online, and includes memes, emoticons, videos, photos, etc.

Wei and Pennycook's assertions that translanguaging should be re-explored to include kinesics and semiotics has been a central source of inspiration for this thesis. Learning about how rigid ideas about the correct and incorrect ways to teach language (which I have experienced first-hand as both a student and a teacher) that align with the idea of one-nation, one-language, are related to colonial mindsets have made me appreciate the power of translanguaging to question coloniality. As Ingrid Piller explores in *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice*, multilingual areas are often characterized as being a monolingual habitus (Piller, 2016). As a teacher in different countries, watching how multilingual students would deal with shame around linguistic processes that came naturally to them such as code-switching has made me realize the necessity of translanguaging in education. Questioning the rigid divide between human language and communication in the natural world could also mean a posthuman shift that can allow us to more deeply deconstruct human violence in the world (Pennycook, 2017). The work of Wei and Pennycook have led me towards an interest in reimagining the concept of translanguaging as multimodality.

Looking into how translanguaging could be reimagined as multimodality brought me to the work of a queer collective based in Armenia known as Queering Yerevan, which became the second main sources of inspiration for this thesis. After reading Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in which she writes in both English and Spanish to question the assumed separation of language and nationality, I became interested in other books that used multilingualism to question problematic idea of normality regarding linguistic identity and nationalism. My thesis supervisor sent me an article by Madina Tlostanova named "Border thinking and disidentification: Postcolonial and postsocialist feminist dialogues" (2016) that highlighted the work of a queer feminist collective based in Armenia called Queering Yerevan. I found that they were a group of mostly academics and artists who had written a book in both English and Armenian called *Queered: What's to be done with Xcentric Art* that highlighted their aims and showcased their writings and various artistic exhibitions. As I began to read more about the group, it almost felt as if our meeting was destined. They

were questioning the heteropatriarchy in the Armenian context using both plurilingualism and multimodality, thus building upon Pennycook's call to expand upon research in translanguaging by delving more into semiotics and multimodality.

The third and final source of inspiration for this thesis is autoethnographic arts-based research. This is the methodology upon which this thesis is based. Autoethnography arguably has more to do with a way of living than a methodology (Barone & Eisner, 2011). It is for this reason that I say that arts-based autoethnography is the third main source of inspiration for this thesis, instead of merely stating that it is the methodology that is being used in the thesis. The autoethnographic living has to do with inquiry that puts questions about ways of being into dialogue (Adams & Ellis, 2013). By using my lived experiences as the data in this thesis, I hope to connect my personal experiences to larger societal questions involving multimodality, queerness and healing.

All three main sources of inspiration relate to gaps and spaces in between in two important ways. They embrace existing outside of normative ideas and dichotomies, and also encompass gaps in understanding and realities. In this way, though I am inviting the reader to interact with a broad range of theories and ways of living, I hope that they can carry Anzaldua's description of bridges and spaces in between that I believe encapsulates the concept of border thinking with them throughout the thesis. For the remainder of "Separation", I will go more deeply into the unusual format of this thesis. From there, I will situate myself, the researcher, and tell the story of what brought me to these sources of inspiration, and to ultimately writing the document in front of you. Yet, I encourage the reader to think of this thesis as the bridges that Anzaldua has described earlier. By embracing the third space, I hope that each reader may find something different here, as they look at this document through the lenses of their own thoughts, emotions, physical bodies and experiences.

1.2.   The Research Question

Here I will pose the central question of the thesis.

How can I search for personal and collective healing by engaging with translanguaging, multimodality, and arts-based autoethnography?

how to seek without finding

write without answering

hold in your hand without grasping

how to move in between

truths

the words that sit on this page

between me and you

how to find connection

in solitude

in the embrace

of what cannot ever be fully touched

of what cannot ever be fully touched

1.3.   Queering the Hero's Journey

I will briefly outline how the remainder of "Separation" will be ordered. As stated earlier, this thesis is built on the idea of how embracing uncertainty and gaps can lead us to new perspectives and transformations, and I write this document with the understanding that it will be interpreted differently for different readers. However, as I am attempting to delve into many complex ideas and topics, and as this thesis is untraditional in its structure, I will try my best to take the reader by the hand and lead them through the formatting of this document. In each segment of the thesis, I will briefly

explain how and why I decided to order the section in the way that I did. For the remainder of this portion, I will first go deeper into the structure of this thesis.

The formatting of this thesis is based on the idea of the hero's adventure, as written by Joseph Campbell. In particular, the formatting of this thesis is based on Campbell's work The *Power of Myth*, which was created into a PBS series with the interviewer Bill Moyers. Campbell is arguably the most famous interpreter of myths of twentieth century America (Ellwood, 1999). For Campbell, myths are timeless, and have been used throughout human history with a similar format that involves a search for authenticity and findings one's bliss (ibid.). Campbell also contended that myths were better explanations of the human condition than science, because they explain using stories and metaphors (ibid.). Research has shown how integral stories are to the way humans make sense of the world. Indeed, it has been mused that perhaps humans should be called homo narrative instead of homo sapiens (Caracciolo & Weida, 2017). This draws parallels to the field of narrative research. Just like auto ethnography, which this thesis draws much inspiration from, narrative research embraces fluidity and pluriversality in its approaches (Nasheeda, Abdullah, Krauss & Ahmed, 2019). In addition, it emphasizes the importance of both our personal and collective stories, as well as the importance of a researcher being able to recognize and situate their own stories and how that influences the research (Trahar, 2009).

According to Campbell, the hero's adventure is one of the most common myths throughout time and space in human history. Campbell believed that the hero's adventure was disembodied and universal (Ellwood, 1999). When I look at the framework of the hero's adventure, it fits neatly into a vast array of religious, literary and mythical stories. There are three main phases of the hero's journey. The first phase is the Separation Act, where the hero leaves their ordinary world. In the second phase, the Initiation Act, the hero adventures into unknown territory and faces various trials and tribulations. In the third and final phase, the Return act, the hero returns home triumphant.

One might be confused about how this thesis connects to the hero's journey and the work of Joseph Campbell. How can we go from translanguaging, to a queer collective in Armenia, to arts-based research, to a common framework for understanding of human condition based on mythology and religion? I first became inspired to format my thesis in an untraditional way after reading the doctoral dissertation of my thesis supervisor, Magda Karjalainen. Magda's dissertation (2022) is also an autoethnography, and it is structured around the four main components: winter, spring, summer, and

autumn. Reading her thesis reminded me of the stark contrast between the seasons in the subarctic environment in Oulu, Finland. During the winter we go from experiencing polar night, in which there are only several hours of muted daylight. The ground is covered in snow, and the coniferous trees are frosted in snow. Underneath the snow however, the ground is still full of life. Then the snow melts, the trees bud and it feels as if we are living in a completely different world of midnight sun.

One reason for the seasonal formatting of her thesis was the argument that, just like the seasons, the dissertation is cyclical and ongoing. All parts of the dissertation are connected and feed into each other (Karjalainen, 2022). In addition, just like the seasons and the years, the dissertation is not a finished product, wrapped up with answers and solutions. It is an ongoing process, reflecting the cyclical nature of time, that leaves us changed with movements through cyclical time. We then return to the same questions, but with new perspectives, as we have changed through the process (ibid.). Just like the seasons, the hero's journey is also a cycle, where all parts of the stories are connected and indispensable to each other. The ending, when the hero returns home, leads then to new journeys and new beginnings. I have always loved J.R. Tolkien's story of *The Hobbit.* Bilbo Baggins may listen to the call for adventure, encounter various challenges and triumphs on his journey, and return home to the shire (Tolkien, 1937). Yet, the call for adventure then leads him to new journeys and transformations. The image below shows the different stages that all hero's on the hero's journey, including Bilbo Baggins, undertake as according to Campbell.

Image 2 The Hero's Journey, Creative Educator (2016)

One reason that the formatting of the hero's journey appealed to me is because of this movement away from a linear research narrative. The linear way of structuring research aligns with the idea of objectivity and neutrality that I previously stated that I am trying to move away from as based on the idea in postmodern curriculum that there is a connection between the ideas of reality being able to be represented easily, and of a linear progression, with both ideas being critiqued (Doll, 1993). I also believe the linear structure of much of academia and research are related to our gendered conceptions of validity, authority, and intelligence. For example, in Sady Doyle's book *Trainwreck: The Women We Love to Hate, Mock and Fear… and Why,* the author explains how femininity continues to be related to ideas of chaos, to a lack of reason and to passivity (Doyle, 2016). In turn, masculinity continues to be related to an ordered, linear progression and authority.

To move away from this linear, objective, and neutral stance in research is to move away from this idea that expressing uncertainty can be associated with weakness. It is also a movement away from this masculine idea of certainty being related to authority and knowledgeability. To arrive at new ideas and understandings, we must admit our uncertainty. In *Invitation to ˊNegativeˋ Comparative Education* by Takayama (2020), we are introduced to the "wayfaring" approach to research. Here, Takayama urges us to embrace Tim Ingold's notion of embracing research as an explorative journey rather than a planning-based approach. It is only by leaving our knowledge at the door that we are open to new perspectives (ibid.). Reading Takayama's work brought me back to the work of one of my favourite Buddhist authors. Pema Chodron writes in *Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Diffi-*

cult Times, "Things falling apart is a kind of testing and also a kind of healing. We think that the point is to pass the test or to overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don't really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. It's just like that. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy" (Chodron, 1996, p. 17).

This quote by Chodron has brought me comfort when it feels like things are falling apart in my own life. As seen in the graphic image of the hero's journey, the cyclical nature of things falling apart and coming together is ever present. The hero is called away from what they know by the promise of adventure and experiences a transformation through his ordeals. When he returns home, things come together again. For a short while, that is, until he is called back out to adventure. To me, this movement away from a linear progression reminds me of concepts in poststructuralism and post-modernism. In postmodern curriculum theory we can see a critique of linear progression, and of re-ality is being representable (Doll, 1993). According to Doll (ibid.), postmodernism emphasizes change, randomness, and multiple interpretations.

This thesis embraces multiple interpretations as well as the gaps between rigid dichotomies that are a result of the Cartesian split (Pfeifer, 2009). Thus, formatting it in a cyclical rather than linear for-mat was important to me, where there are no definite answers, but a repeated process that always brings us to new adventures. In this first section, "Separation", I have briefly outlined the main sources of inspiration for the thesis. I am now delving into the reasoning and justification behind the formatting of the thesis. In the remainder of this section, I will attempt to situate the researcher by trying to show the reader what brought me to the sources of inspiration for this thesis. Finally, I will address the question of why? What is the point of all of this?

"Initiation" will involve my further encounters with the main sources of inspirations, which also lead me to some ordeals and transformations. I will begin with the linguistic theory that began this whole adventure for me: translanguaging. Just like the hero meeting other characters on their jour-ney, my meeting with translanguaging will involve both challenges and revelations, and I will de-scribe how this encounter leads me to the next central source of inspiration: the book *Queered: What's to be done with Xcentric Art.* This meeting will be both revelatory and a battle of sorts, which leads me deeper into autoethnographic ways of scholarship, acting and being. Just like the initiation in the graphic provided earlier, "Initiation" will be the central point of action in the thesis.

It will involve things falling apart. My research methodology, timeline and purpose all fall apart. I do as well.

In "Return", I delve into how the action in "Initiation" connects to the central idea of this thesis. That being how these theories, methodologies and ways of conducting research connect to bell hooks idea of theory as healing (hooks, 1991). I address how allowing room for gaps in interpretation and cartesian dichotomies relate to my own journey of healing. Finally, I address the significance and wider implications of this research.

Not only does the structuring of this thesis move away from standard academic formatting by aligning with the idea of the hero's journey, but it also attempts to subvert some other patterns in scholarship. As you probably have already noticed, I am writing using the first person. While methodologies such as autoethnography are challenging the idea that first person is not appropriate in an academic work based on the perceived dichotomy between the personal (first person) and the professional, in some branches and methodologies of academia the use of the first person continues to be controversial. This is related to the false idea of neutrality in research which can mask how the racialized and gendered way knowledge is produced (Barone & Eisner, 2011). The concept of academic neutrality relates to an ontological idea of universalism, or that there is one objective reality that we all experience. This thesis does not claim to be based on one objective reality and does not claim to be neutral in its findings or focus. In this way I hope to align myself with the idea of "strong objectivity" as proposed by Sandra Harding, which aims to move beyond trying to justify research into trying to highlight the process of discovery involved in research by speaking more about the researcher's background and experiences (Harding, 1995).

In addition to the use of first person, this thesis includes both poetry, visual art, and photographs of the researcher. I speak about my experiences and identities in a personal way that is part of a growing part of autoethnographic research (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013). I address my sexuality, mental health, as well as emotions related to my background and family upbringing. By doing this, I am going back to the idea of subverting dichotomies, in particular the dichotomy that separates our personal and academic lives. By acknowledging that research can never be objective and neutral, I attest that our identities and experiences inform our academic work. The premise of this thesis rests on that. It also rests on the fact that this is a reciprocal relationship, as the way we interact with theory and academia can be connected to our personal healing (hooks, 1991). By delving into my per-

sonal life I am joining a line in auto ethnographic inquiry which emphasizes the power of sharing out lived experiences (Barone & Eisner, 2011). Judith Butler speaks of our willingness to be brave and share our stories and identities in relation to others is an opportunity at becoming human (Butler, 2005).

There are some problematic issues with the conceptual underpinnings of the structure of this thesis. To begin with, Campbell's hero's journey has attracted criticism. Critics of Campbell have argued that his hero's journey is not inclusive (Bond & Christensen, 2021). They attest that Campbell has used primarily western mythology as to create a monomyth that attests for a singular story that is inherently Eurocentric (Ellwood, 1999). The majority of the heroes that Campbell finds in mythology are white and male (Bond & Christensen, 2021). By creating a singular cyclic nature of the hero's adventure, it does seem to me that Campbell's monomyth could fall into a sense of universalism that attests to an objective reality that does not align with this thesis' ontological stance.

In addition, it has been argued that Campbell's hero's journey is inherently individualistic (Ellwood, 1999). This makes sense, as Campbell argued for the existence of the monomyth in a twentieth century America that emphasized rugged individualism (ibid.). Arguably, Campbell's hero is masculine and individualist. In the monomyth, it could be argued there is no collective action, and the hero uses weaker people as instruments (Bond & Christensen, 2021).

I do think it can be argued that Campbell did not intend the hero's journey to be an individual one. In *The Power of Myth,* Campbell argues that while the journey is about the transformation of the hero, this is the method through which the hero could transform the world (Campbell, 1988). If we believe that we are all interconnected, then one person's transformation would lead to a collective action. For me, this ontological stance falls in line with an autoethnographic way of thinking and being. Autoethnographic writing allows us to see how we share a lived experience that shapes who we are both individually and collectively (Barone & Eisner, 2011). Since we are all connected, an individual's search for healing and meaning through an exploration of their personal experiences may lead to collective healing.

I am looking to challenge the idea of a masculine, universal monomyth of the hero's journey in this thesis. Firstly, I am writing in the first person of my experiences as a self-identified queer woman. I speak openly about my emotions and mental health. I do not identify with the externally strong, authoritative hero. I also hope to challenge the idea that the hero is an island of sorts, who only exists

to affect and influence the secondary characters in the story. I mutually interact and influence the other "characters" in this story, which range from theories to books to the methodology of autoethnography. While I refer to these interactions as being with characters in a story, this connects to a larger trend in autoethnography of collecting data in various ways, such as collecting artifacts and documents, interviews, self-analysis and reflection (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013).

I also hope to challenge the existence of a singular monomyth or human story. For this reason, I am not breaking the thesis into the twelve steps of the hero's journey, as I believe that these twelve steps create too rigid and precise a framework. I am instead focusing on the three major phases in the hero's journey (Separation, Initiation and Return).

1.4.   Situating the hero/heroine

Image 3 Photo of the author (left) with her sisters

Who is writing this? Why have they been drawn to the idea of translanguaging? How did they make this connection to Queering Armenia, and to autoethnography? And who or what are they trying to heal? I will attempt to explain what brought me here.

It is hard to find the right words to begin to describe myself. Should I start with where I was born, and talk about my immediate family? Then move to my education and previous career choices? As with the overrunning theme of embracing opacity in this thesis, I will leave it to the reader to fill in the gaps in this brief and incomplete explanation of who I am and what brought me here.

I was born in New York City and grew up mostly in a northern suburb of the city. My parents were born and raised in New York City. My four grandparents all moved from rural Ireland to New York City as young adults. From a young age I was very close to them, especially my paternal grandfather. He would often talk about "the old country" over dinners. He wore a little Irish flat cap and planted tomatoes in his back garden. He was intensely witty and charismatic. I adored him. He was also a very serious Catholic, and I grew up going to church and Sunday School. I stopped going to church as a teenager. Though I am not religious and do not believe in the Catholic dogma, I still find comfort in going to church and the Catholic prayers I grew up with.

I am the middle of three sisters. Yet as a child I often felt a bit lonely. My father was strict growing up, and we were not really allowed to watch television, or to go out with friends that often. We were not allowed to have cell phones, and we only had one computer, which was in the middle of the living room. It was hard sometimes to connect with my peers, as I did not know some of the cultural references of the television shows they talked about. On top of that, I was very shy.

I felt a lot of pressure growing up regarding grades in school. From the time I was a pre-teen, I was so concerned with the number I would get on exams. Looking back, I think there are multiple reasons for this. One reason was familial pressure, but this is not the full picture. Research shows that academic stress is becoming a major concern for secondary and tertiary students (Pascoe, Hetrick & Parker, 2019). Though this research from 2019 was conducted a long time after I finished secondary school, it shows how the pressures and stress I felt in secondary school are becoming an increasing problem for many students. For me, I think that getting good grades was a way I felt like I could receive validation and attention from my parents, who I sometimes felt disconnected from.

I often felt trapped growing up in lonely suburbia. As a child and teenager, I would bury myself in books. I found comfort getting lost in other worlds. Sometimes I would find myself getting so

deeply lost in a story that coming back to reality felt uncomfortable. I ended up majoring in literature in university, and there I learned more about critical literacy. Critical literacy attests that all forms of communication are political and social acts and examining issues of power can lead to reflection, transformation and action (Norris, Lucas & Prudhoe, 2012). Learning about how literature and art can both reflect and question the dominant ideas of a society and epoch brought me an even deeper appreciation of the power of stories. It also made me aware of how important it is that we gain tools to question the motives we have for telling the stories we choose to tell, both on an individual and collective level.

This is part of the reason that I chose to queer the hero's journey as the format for this thesis. I have learned in my studies and have experienced how stories are central to the way humans learn and understand the world (Caracciolo & Weida, 2017). They hold a lot of power over the way we think and what we believe. I believe it is so important to study the stories and myths that we grew up with.

While completing my bachelor's degree, I spent an academic year studying at Lancaster University in England. I loved the experience. I met people from all over the world in my studies. I also had the opportunity to travel for the first time. I decided that when I graduated, I wanted to live abroad. Upon completing my degree, I moved to South Korea and then to Spain to teach English. While teaching abroad, I made a really good friend who had seen the necessity for antiracist education in Madrid and who had started an NGO providing trainings in antiracism to educators. I attended many of the workshops and the events, and I became good friends with the rest of the team. I was invited by them to become an organizer for Women's March Madrid. I met many people who inspired me after becoming involved in grassroots activism. My passion for grassroots activism that question the heteropatriarchy led me to the work of Queering Yerevan.

Working as an English teacher to second language learners inspired me to learn a second language myself. When I began to learn Spanish from scratch in Madrid, I experienced first-hand the emotional journey that is language learning. I also saw how violent the classroom can be for language learners. Students who felt that their level is not as high as their classmates would stay quiet. Others who misspoke or codeswitched between Spanish and English were shamed by their classmates. Though it is natural for language learners and bilingual speak, colonial ideas regarding the assumed separation of languages shames multilingual children (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Becoming more interested in how language is taught and learnt inspired me to want to do a master's in education. When I

found the website for the master's in Education and Globalization at the University of Oulu, it seemed as if the curriculum and questions being asked mirrored my own.

All of these experiences have led me to writing this thesis in the Faculty of Education at the University of Oulu. The time I have spent living outside of New York over the past decade has led me into more deeply questioning some of the stories I grew up with. I have begun to reflect more upon the pressure that I felt as a teenager to get certain grades, as well as the strong individualist mindset that I grew up with. When my lonely teenaged self would talk about friendships, my mom would often tell me that it was best to just focus on myself. By writing this thesis in the format of Campbell's monomyth, I hope to more deeply question the myths that I grew up with and that continue inside of me.

This sense of loneliness and disconnection which has followed me is part of the inspiration for this thesis. Sometimes I still feel like that teenager who silenced her own opinions and feelings. Who stayed quiet. On top of this self-silencing, living in different countries and different places has sometimes left me feeling even more ungrounded and disconnected. When I think back on my hometown and my friends and family from New York, it makes me feel a bit sad that my newer friends have no reference to the places or people that I speak about. My friends in Finland cannot feel the way the sunlight came through the kitchen window in the little apartment I lived in La Latina, Madrid. They cannot smell the dusty metro station near our apartment or visualize the colorful flags and decorations of the summer street festivals. They cannot taste the fried chicken I would eat every day on my way home from teaching middle school English in South Korea.

One of the central ideas that has driven the writing of this thesis is the idea of connection. As a dual-national, queer woman who has lived in various countries and who can feel a bit ungrounded, I find connection and healing in the idea of the borderlands, where all of us reside. I think that I am not the only one who has felt lonely and disconnected. I think that I am not the only one who has struggled with what can feel like the overwhelming demands of the modern education system. I am not the only teenager who has measured their worth by the number they get an on exam. I am not the only adult has felt like a failure for not falling into the timeline society says is socially acceptable for rights of passage such as marriage, buying a house, and getting a certain type of job. Academic literature supports these findings, with evidence that youth unemployment and underemployment has significant effects on mental health (Thern, de Minter, Hemmingsson, & Rasmussen, 2017.)

I understand how this thesis is dealing with a lot of complex ideas that may seem different from each other. What does the borderlands and the gaps between socially constructed ideas about language, nationality and ethnicity have to do with gaps in understanding and post structural theory? What does this have to do with the individualist and often violent modern education system? How can we define this education system as violent? Davies & Elder (2004) defines three major roots of conflict in which education plays a role. To begin, education often reproduces socioeconomic structures because it excludes marginalized groups. In addition, education adds to various types of violence such as gender-based violence. Finally, there is a pattern in education of reproducing reductive ideas about ethnic, racial, national and religious identity because of representing those identities as static and rigid (ibid.). I see the borderlands combating this violence through promoting a deeper understanding of the way in which static and monolithic identities have been falsely reproduced by the formal education system.

I think that lonely teenaged self who felt trapped by the rules of my strict household growing up is related to my attraction for breaking rules. Perhaps that teenager is still inside of me. She is trying to break the boxes we use to quantify the material world, the theoretical world, and each other. I think that this explains my attraction to critical theories that subvert and question dominant narratives.

To me, finding connection is a way of subverting these narratives. Finding connection between the linguistic concept of translanguaging and arts-based research challenges humanist conceptions of language and reimagines a linguistic theory as multimodality and semiotics. As an Irish-American who has never been to Armenia, finding connection with the questions a queer collective in Armenia has been asking has brought me a sense of intellectual bond. Perhaps most importantly, arts-based education and autoethnography have led me to new ways of connecting with myself. For a long time, I have felt disconnected from my own body by feelings of shame and the unprocessed violence of a sexual assault I tried to suppress. Connection with and between various theories and arts has helped bring some personal healing. As hooks writes in *All About Love*, "rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion." (hooks, 1999, p. 215). Though this thesis is an autoethnography and told from the perspective of an individual searching for healing, this healing can only occur through my journey where I meet other characters (theories, methodologies and collectives) in a process of mutual interaction and influence. As this thesis is based on the idea of inherent interconnectedness, I understand my personal healing journey in the perspective of our collective healing.

1.5.   Situating the Research

In this section I will situate the research in this thesis. With border thinking as the central thread running through the thesis, I will first explore the epistemological and ontological orientations of border thinking. Later, I will go through some of the other theoretical inspirations for the thesis. I need to remind the reader once more that border thinking emphasizes the importance of embracing the space between theories, ontologies and epistemologies. In this way, I do not seek to define or place this piece of research within a strict location, but rather take the reader on a journey within and between some of the epistemological and ontological origins that inspired this work. Border thinking involves a rejection of both hegemonic and marginal fundamentalisms (Grosfoguel, 2008). Fundamentalisms share the tradition of claiming that there is one epistemic tradition that can lead to truth and universality (ibid.). Border thinking challenges this, and in this way, I believe that it does not line up with any epistemological or ontological universalisms. Grosfoguel (2008) argues that border thinking argues firstly for the necessity for a larger canon of thought that goes beyond the western canon, and secondly for a movement away from abstract universals, and towards a pluriversal dialogue between various theoretical and epistemic positioning. Finally, border thinking engages with and finds inspiration from subalternized voices and bodies outside of the western canon (ibid.).

I will explore some connections now between border thinking and other ontological and epistemological orientations, as well as between border thinking and other theories I engage with in this thesis. However, I want to emphasize that I do not align border thinking within these positions. As Grosfoguel asserted, I am not situating this thesis with any epistemological or ontological universalisms. As I will engage with further in "Initiation," I also believe in the importance of moving away from the western canon, and towards collectives and subalternized voices, such as the work of the queer Armenian collective Queering Yerevan. This thesis is not positioned within any particular ontological or epistemological stance, but instead seeks to engage in dialogue between various epistemic positions. In this thesis I will take the reader on a journey making connections between the linguistic theory of translanguaging and critical theories, queer theories, and towards an expansion of translanguaging towards multimodal autoethnographic exploration of the work of the queer Armenian collective Queering Yerevan. In this way I am attempting to align myself with the border

thinking present in subalternized groups such as the Zapatista movement in Mexico, who do not reject the Eurocentric notion of democracy but rather reimagine it within a slogan that may seem paradoxical in the west "we are all equals because we are different (Grosfoguel, 2008). I am reimagining translanguaging as multimodality, redefining the normally linear thesis structure as a queered version of the cyclical hero's journey as outlined by Joseph Campbell, and going on a journey for personal and collective healing rather than abstract universalisms.

Border thinking necessitates pluriversality as opposed to universalism in ontology, which aligns with my ontological and epistemological perspectives in this thesis. By letting the reader into my family background, my sexual, gender, national and ethnic identities, I am not writing this thesis under the pretense that these identities are not affecting the research process. Instead, I am situating my geo and body politics centrally in this thesis and positioning my ontological stance as a pluriverse that is determined by the body and geopolitics of an individual. While I do not align the ontological underpinnings of this thesis strictly within constructivism, the emphasis on the geo and body politics of the individual aligns with Higgs and Trede's definition of ontology as being socially constructed, and perceived by people (Higgs & Trede, 2009). Guba and Lincoln define constructivism's approach to ontology as including "multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110).

The other important theories explored in the thesis fall underneath or perhaps close to the umbrella of critical theories, and also can be aligned with constructivism. Critical theory can be defined as originating in Marxist school of thought and emphasizing reflection and critique of society (Rasmussen, 1996). Later on in the work I will more deeply engage with and between translanguaging and queer theories. Translanguaging can be argued to fall underneath the umbrella of critical theories, as it pushes learners to disrupt the socially constructed barriers within and between languages and allowing multilingualism as a source of social change and learning (Tian & Link, 2019). In this way, translanguaging aligns with critical theory, as critical theories move towards changing and critiquing society (Fui, Khin & Ying, 2011). I believe that queer theory can also be argued to fall under the umbrella of critical theories, as queer theories aim to question socially constructed understandings of gender identity and sexuality (Barker, 2016). In this way, queer theories also move towards critiquing and changing society. I believe that critical theories, and both translanguaging and queer theory can be argued to fall near the ontological stance of constructivism as well, as they emphasize the existence of a pluriverse of realities are socially constructed.

Some other important theories that will come up in this thesis are those of postmodernism and post-structuralism. Postmodernism and critical theories share many similarities. Both postmodernism and critical theories critique modernity and traditional philosophy (Best & Kellner, 1991). However, postmodernism has been sharply criticized by some critical theorists such as Habermas of the Frankfurt School (ibid.). Outside of these theoretical disputes, I believe that both postmodernism and critical theories can fall under the ontological position of constructivism. They both emphasize a movement away from universalisms and towards a subjective ontological underpinning. Further along in the thesis I also engage with poststructuralism. Poststructuralism first emerged in the 1960's as a critique to Structuralism and aligns with a relativist ontology that reality does not exist outside of the observer (Moon & Blackman, 2014). This emphasis on subjective realities and pluriversality continues throughout the thesis.

Though I have avoided the typical thesis linear structure that usually begins with the introduction and clearly distinguishes between theoretical framework, methodology, discussion and conclusion, in many ways autoethnography does serve as the methodological underpinning of this thesis. Methodology can be defined as, "how do we know the world or gain knowledge of it?" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this case, I am moving away from more conventional approaches to methodology, in which I am attempting to gain concrete or objective univeralisms through this research. Instead, through autoethnographic inquiry I am assuming not only a stance of pluriversal ontology, but also of the idea that we are all interconnected, and my journey towards personal healing cannot help but to have ripple effects. In this way I am aligning myself with the I-Though encounters as written about in Martin Buber's philosophy (Bilgen, 2022). In this case, when the individual I encounters Though, whether that be a theory, epistemic stance, or the multimodal work of Queering Yerevan, there forms a connection and a shared exchange. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of a natural world is mutually effecting and changing each other, I believe that my personal healing in this thesis can lead to collective healing. This takes me to the final section of "Separation", where I attempt to answer why this research is necessary.

1.6   Why this research is important

How is this relevant? Why am I trying to reimagine the linguistic concept of translanguaging? How does translanguaging connect to the multimodal work of Queering Yerevan? Why is autoethnographic work important? How does all of this relate to education and healing? Basically, what am I trying to do here? I will delve into these questions here.

The question of how this thesis fits within the field of education is a relevant one. I have been asked various times by people whom I have explained the thesis to, what does this have to do with education? For many, the concept of education continues to be defined by what fits inside of the classroom of the formal schooling system. However, recent research has added to the call to expand the traditional definition of what fits inside the traditional education system. There has been significant recent scholarship which seeks to illuminate education outside of the formal system. "Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002), Emdin (2010), Hill (2007, 2009), and Hill and Petchauer (2013) discuss the ways in which hip-hop plays a key role in the advancement of literacy and other content areas; Soep and Chavez (2010) showcase sites of learning within youth radio media creation; while Hern (2008) discusses the multiple opportunities for youth to become educated through de-schooling projects within their own communities." (Cordova, 2017). These examples are part of a larger movement that is re-evaluating the disciplinary boundaries of research in education.

As can be seen from the examples above, what we conceive of as education can be reimagined beyond the formal schooling system. "According to Schultz & Burdick, Education is an enveloping concept, a dimension of culture that maintains dominant practices while also offering spaces for their critique and re-imagination" (Cordova, 2017). In this way, education exists not only in our classrooms, but in everything that instills knowledge and values into people. This can include grassroots movements, the civil society sector, as well as media and arts. Education can instill both the dominant narratives and values of a society, or offer ideas that subvert these narratives. My own experiences of the formal education system was of a system that instilled the dominant values of the New York society I grew up in. One was taught that grades were important and high grades and productivity were related to future earnings and status. In such an unequal society without a solid welfare system, I grew up being told that getting poor grades would mean that I would not be able to survive in the competitive world. These beliefs further deepened my feelings of anxiety and dis-

connection. The grade I got on a test became more important than my understanding of or passion for what I was learning.

My experiences in the formal schooling system made me interested in education that happens outside of the formal schooling system. In education that offers space for critique and re-imagination of dominant practices. In education that can provide space for passion for learning. In education that gives places for healing instead of disconnection and anxiety. My interest in language, art and queer activism brought me to the concept of translanguaging as well as to the work of Queering Yerevan. Interest and passion are a vital component of education that is often missing from the formal schooling system. When people learn in areas that interest and motivate them outside of the formal school system, they tend to learn more deeply, regardless of socioeconomic status (Hayes & Gee, 2010).

I am drawn to educational research outside of the formal schooling system because of the importance in understanding the complex curriculum that youth and adults engage with every day outside of the classroom. Public pedagogy pushes for an understanding of the curriculum that we engage with throughout our lives, and for the importance of defining education and learning in expanded ways outside of the traditional rhetoric (Cordova, 2017). Much of this curriculum is difficult to quantify, and exists in a range of sources. Public pedagogy exists in activism, as well as youth groups, libraries, museums, families and church (ibid.). This thesis is not an effort to precisely define and measure how public pedagogy exists as empowering education. Rather than trying trying to precisely quantify and define public pedagogy, I am interested in the often intangible education that exists outside of formal schooling and has potential to heal through questioning the dominant values of the formal schooling system. As I addressed earlier on with the work of Davies & Elder (2004), the modern formal education system enacts violence in the way that it reproduces socioeconomic structures and involves gender-based violence and the reproduction of reductive ideas about identity.

This thesis is drawn towards the questioning of binaries, as well as reductive and static ideas about language and meaning. I am drawn towards questioning and deconstructing rigid ideas about identity and language because of the violence that I have seen these static ideas impose in the formal education system. While growing up in the United States, I could see how much our neighborhoods and schools were divided based on socioeconomic status and race. I also saw how this affected the resources that a school district had, as schools are funded in New York State by local income taxes

(Hammond, 2022). While teaching English in Spain, I could see how multilingual kids were shamed for code-switching and using all of their linguistic resources in conversation. This happened even though research shows that children learn better when they are able to use all of their linguistic resources (Garcia & Wei, 2014). These experiences are just two examples that led me towards ways of thinking and being the question violent binaries in the formal schooling system.

It appears to me that there is an increasing need for educational research that challenges violent dichotomies in education. After the attacks on September 11th, 2001, it seems that there is an increase in binaries pertaining to in groups or out groups (Zembylas, 2015). I remember specifically the day that the plane hit the twin towers in New York City. I was ten years old. In the suburban New York town I grew up in, many of our parents worked in New York City. Our teacher explained very calmly that something had happened in NYC. Thankfully, nobody in my class had any family members who had been hurt or killed in the incident. I remember the intense media coverage about the people who had participated in the attacks, specifically Osama Bin Laden. I had nightmares about Bin Laden chasing me through the school, and I would hide in bathroom stalls, going into the fetal position in the corner and praying he didn't look under the door.

Looking back, I see the power the media at the time held over my young mind. I did not know the history of western imperialism that led up the attacks, and I could not understand the damage that was inflicted in Afghanistan and then Iraq when the United States invaded. It is only as an adult that I understand the danger that these two-dimensional media caricatures of "foreign enemies" hold. Since September 11th, I feel like I keep seeing these binaries grow more polarized and violent. I remember the horror I felt the night Donald Trump got elected to become President of the United States after running on a polarizing, populist platform that opposed immigration and multiculturalism (Lacatus, 2020). It seemed as if our nation became more and more divided after Trump's election. Four years later during the next election, I remember watching news from my native New York City where reporters showed buildings that had been boarded up in anticipation of the violence and looting that might occur.

As you can see, there is a need for education that moves beyond harmful, violent binaries and promotes peace and healing. I am aligning myself with Herman's three phases of healing in this thesis. These three stages involve the finding of stabilization and safety, remembering and grieving, and finally the return to everyday life (Zembylas, 2015). It is interesting to me that these three stages

happen to align with the three main pieces of the hero's journey, and that the final stage is return, just like the final section of this thesis. At the same time, there is a necessity for ways to promote this healing outside of the formal education system. It is unfair to place the entire burden towards deconstructing this violence on the shoulders of the formal schooling system and teachers (Zembylas, 2015). In addition, perhaps we should question whether an institution that both historically and currently imposes violence and restrictive binaries is the institution we should turn to. As the title of Audre Lorde's seminal book is aptly titled, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House" (Lorde, 1979). In order to question and undo the violence in the formal school system it is necessary we look outside of traditional educational structures and rhetoric.

Perhaps then it is important to turn to public pedagogy, and to the curriculum people interact with everyday through their families, clubs, ngos and media. This is the reason that I chose to look at the linguistic concept of translanguaging outside of the formal education system, where it is most often studied. But one may wonder, if the idea of healing is centrally important this thesis, what does translanguaging have to do with healing? Translanguaging questions the assumed separation of named languages, and by doing so, questions reductive and potentially harmful ideas regarding ethnic, national and linguistic identity. In this way, I see translanguaging as a linguistic concept that promotes healing, as it allows multilingual speakers to communicate in a way that feels natural to them.

Much of the research on translanguaging has taken place in the context of the formal schooling system, and delves into the ways multilingual children use their linguistic resources to learn, as well as they challenges they face while doing this due to neo-colonial perspectives in school. However, linguistic scholar Li Wei (2018) states that although translanguaging is often associate with moving beyond the division between named languages, it also attempts to transcend the divsion between language and non-linguistic semiotic systems. Both Wei (2018) and Pennycook (2017) argue for the necessity of expanding the understanding of translanguaging to includes semiotics and multimodality. Lamb (2015) also argues for the necessity of multilingual spaces in city spaces that challenge a monolingual hegemony. Reading their arguments for this expansion and finding connections to the multilingual and multimodal work of Queering Yerevan, who use art and language in the city landscape of Yerevan to question the heteropatriarchy in Armenia, has been a central inspiration for this thesis. A central inspiration for this thesis is to add to more complexity and criticality to this linguistic theory as argued for by Wei (2018) and Pennycook (2017), and to question how a reimag-

ined idea of translanguaing as multimodality is related to questioning other potentially harmful forms of normatively that expand beyond linguistic, national and ethnic identities.

Capitulo II

Initiation

Image 4 Snapshot from my zine
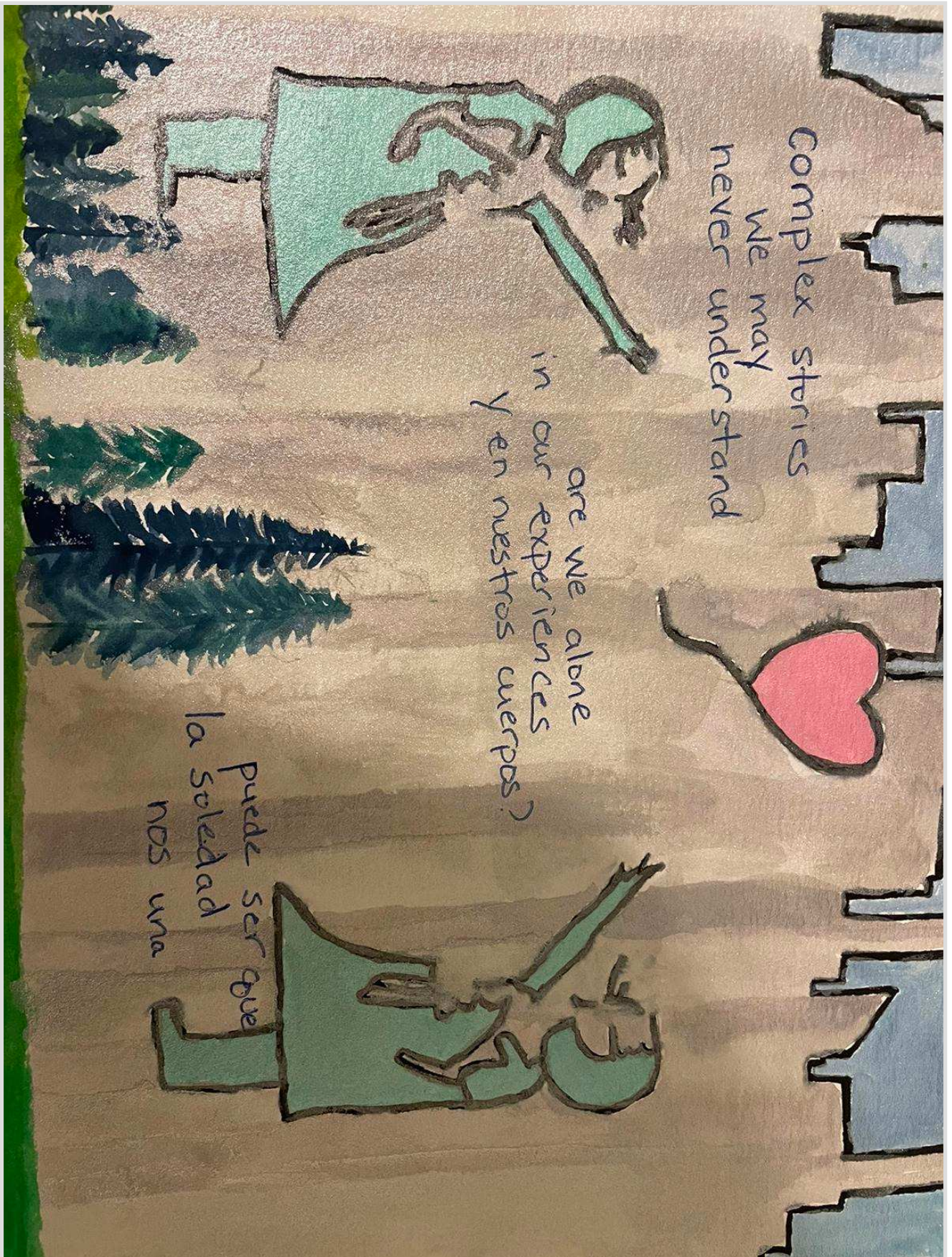
2.1 A journey within and between translanguaging, Queering Yerevan and arts-based Autoethnography

In this section of the thesis, "Return", I engage with translanguaging, the queer Armenian collective Queering Yerevan, and arts-based autoethnography on a queer hero's journey. These three main sources of inspiration act as characters with which I mutually interact with cause a transformation of sorts, both to myself and to this piece of research. As stated earlier in "Separation", this is a journey with the intention of finding personal and collective healing. Here I will outline the action that the queer hero (researcher) took to make connections with and between theories, multimodality and art in the search of healing.

2.1.1 First encounters with translanguaging

I learnt about the linguistic concept of translanguaging thanks to a class that I took in the first semester of my studies called Language, Education and Society. I decided then that this topic would be central component of my master's thesis. Later, when discovering the work of Gloria Anzaldua (1987), Pennycook (2017), and Wei (2018), I realized that I wanted to build upon new research that expanded and reimagined the idea of translanguaging. Inspired by Anzaldua's work, in which she uses her multilingual resources to question dualisms and binaries and embrace her distinctive identities, I saw a reimagining of translanguaging as a potential source of healing. For me, reimagining translanguaging as multimodality has shown me how questioning the divide between linguistic and non-linguistic form of communication is related to Anzaldua's questioning of problematic binaries and other forms of normativities, as led me later to the work of Queering Yerevan. It has also led me to create a zine, three snapshots of which are in this thesis before the beginning of each chapter.

2.1.2 Finding connections within and between theories

Translanguaging as a concept began in 1994 with Welsh-English learning in which output and input in the classroom was conducted in two different languages (Hornberger & Link, 2012). It is related to a heteroglossic understanding of language, which is an understanding that the multilingual people have an interconnected and single system of language as opposed to distinct and separate languages

(French, 2016). Translanguaging allows multilingual students to use their linguistic resources as a tool in different environments for separate uses. Its use in education means that multilingual children see their linguistic capabilities as a resource in the classroom instead of as a hindrance (Hornberger & Link, 2012). This linguistic theory holds importance because it reflects the way that multilingual people naturally use language, and is natural and fun for multilingual students (Wei, 2010).

Translanguaging is related to border thinking due to the fact that it questions the separation of named languages that is related to colonization (Garcia & Wei, 2014). It rejects monocultural and monolingual norms and additionally it is a rejection of the way that multilingual students can be applied with a deficit discourse. As opposed to being positioned as multilingual students, bilingual children often are given the label of second language learners, and due to this may be viewed as being behind their peers (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Because translanguaging encourages students to engage in ways of communication that are natural and fun for them, the deficit discourse that positions them as being behind their peers is challenged. It is a powerful tool because it affirms students multilingual and perhaps multinational and multiethnic identities and challenges the colonial ideology of one language and one culture (Hornberger & Link, 2012).

Translanguaging is also related to border thinking in that they they also both relate to questioning normative ideas about ethnic and national identity. In Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987) she expands this questioning to include all dualistic thinking that involves hierarchies and the creation of potential violence against people who exist at the bottom of such hierarchies. Anzaldua translanguages and codeswitches betwee Spanish, English and indigenous languages in her writing as one way to challenge binaries and dualisms. These binaries of gender are present in many contexts around the world and these are often tied to colonially (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2012).

Gloria Anzaldua´s work demonstrates how translanguaging is not only related to normative ideas about gender, which Anzaldua addresses in her work, but also to normative ideas about sexuality. Anzaldua (1987) identified as queer, and she spoke in her work about living in-between for her involved living in between static ideas about language, ethnicity, nationalism, gender and sexuality, and she used her various multilingual resources to challenge these dualisms and binaries. Queer

theories challenge boundaries and universal truths when regarding sexualities in exchange for more fluidity (Barker, 2016). Finding connections between queer theories and translanguaging, which emphasize fluidity and the questioning of boundaries, and the push from linguists to expand up on the understanding of translanguaging to include other types of kinesics and semiotics systems, brought me to the central inspiration that I find with the linguistic concept of translanguaging. How can translanguaging be reimagined as multimodality and multilingualism as inspired by the work of Queering Yerevan and Gloria Anzaldua? And how can this reimagined concept question normatively not only related to language, ethnicity and nationality but other potentially harmful forms of normativity related to sexuality and gender?

2.1.3 Aporias and considerations in engaging with translanguaging

The main aporia that comes up with reimagining translanguaging as multimodality is the idea that perhaps this adds too much complexity to this thesis. I concede that this thesis is engaging with a complex variety of theories and perspectives, and this is something that I myself have questioned in the writing of the thesis. I keep coming back to the words of Audre Lorde when I find myself questioning this. "There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." (Lorde, 1982). A reimagining of translanguaging in a way that could question other potentially harmful forms of normativity could have meaning for the lives of many of us who live in the borderlands and who have multiple identities that do not fit neatly into a box. It brings up the concept of intersectionality as defined by Kimberly Crenshaw, and the need for nuance and complexity in our understanding and navigation of identities (Fotopoulou, 2012). There is a need for complexity and nuance in education research. In order for us to achieve critical peace education, we must develop more varied theories and practices (Zembylas, 2015).

2.2 Introduction to my second inspiration: *Queered: What's to be Done with Xcentric Art*

The second part of *"Initiation"* deals with my interactions with finding a book in which a queer collective from a context that I have never been to seemed to be asking similar questions to myself about how to navigate and perhaps embrace gaps in understanding and identities. Finding this book has been part of a search for community and healing. It has led me to a deeper understanding of Armenian history and geopolitics, as well as the commonalities in searches for identity and understanding between diasporic groups. This section second of "Initiation" is the beginning of my journey with Queering Yerevan, which continues in the third section, where I delve into autoethnography as a research methodology that I used to explore *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art.*

I will begin to discussing how I was first introduced to the work of Queering Yerevan as well as the book *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art.* I will then briefly explore how the history and current geopolitics of the Armenian context has led to an ethnonationalist heteropatriarchy. Finally, I will delve a little bit into the work of Queering Yerevan, as well as some information about the book *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art*, which I will be exploring in the third section with autoethnography.

2.2.1 A Search for Commonality and Healing with Queering Yerevan

The reader may be wondering how an Irish-American who had never traveled to Armenia found the work of Queering Yerevan. Additionally, I would like to address the issue of my own privilege, and potential problems with a highly privileged person writing a thesis about a country they have never traveled to. I will address these questions here. How did I find the work of Queering Yerevan, and how did this lead me towards the book, *Queered: What's to Be Done With Xcentric Art?* What have I done to address the potential problems arising from my thesis potentially misrepresenting the work of a group with whom I have no personal and arguably few cultural connections?

I found the work of Queering Yerevan when my classmates and I were told to choose a reading for Comparative Education during the spring of 2020. Our course teacher and my future master's supervisor Magda Kajalainen knew of my interest in feminist collectives that worked in intersectional

and radical ways. She sent me an article entitled "Border thinking and disidentification: Postcolonial and postsocialist feminist dialogues" (2016). The authors address work being done in postcolonial and postfeminist spaces that uses border thinking to question dominant narratives and dichotomies. The work of Queering Yerevan is highlighted in the article, and the way that Queering Yerevan uses art and language to question the Armenian heteropatriarchy caught my eye.

At that point I had realized that I wanted to focus my thesis on the power of linguistic theories to question dominant ideas regarding ethnicity and nationality. I already knew that I wanted to focus on the intersection of linguistic theory and education for my master's thesis based on the years that I had spent teaching English in Spain and South Korea. Researching linguistic theories had led me to the concept of translanguaging. Translanguaging excited me because of it legitimized natural linguistic processes like codeswitching that I had personally experienced and seen in my multilingual students and friends. I had already researched and written for other courses in the master's about the potential of translanguaging to reframe the way that we understand language. Doing this work had introduced me to the work of Gloria Anzaldua, and I was inspired by the way that she wrote using her various linguistic resources to question binaries.

Reading in Tlostanova's article about the way that Queering Yerevan used different languages as well as various forms of artistic expression to question the heteropatriachy in Armenia felt like a light had turned on in my brain. The images I found of their work (street graffiti, exhibitions, and photos of their books) stayed in my brain long after I had finished reading the article. I began to question how translanguaging could be reimagined to not only question our assumed separation of languages, but also to question the separation between semiotics and language. Pennycook writes about how while language human beings use and non-human communication in the animal world is distinct, the complexity of non-human animal communication is often overlooked (2017). Pennycook acknowledges there are differences between human and non-human communication, but also a lot of overlap (ibid.). We should question why we draw the line so firmly between our species communication and that of other living things (ibid.). By re-conceptualizing the theory to encompass multimodality, could we not only question the separation of language based on coloniality, but move towards posthumanism linguistic understandings? Additionally, as I addressed in Separation, linguistic theories do not seem to encompass the vastly complex and constantly changing repertoire of human communication that encompasses language, semiotics, body language, art, and the digital world. By reimagining a linguistic concept that has the potential to challenge harmful dichotomies

in a way that encompasses the complex reality of human communication, is it possible that it's power to question these binaries is increased?

There is another reason that I was immediately attracted to and interested in the work of Queering Yerevan that goes back to the main question of this thesis. It seemed to me that the collective was using language and art not only to question the Armenian heteropatriarchy, but also in a way to search for individual and collective healing. While reading about their work, they were using their writing and art to process the various emotions that arise when existing as a group of queer women in a conservative society. As I spoke about in Separation, my personal experience of growing up as a queer woman in a conservative family has led me towards work that involve speaking truthfully about your existence. Even if, and perhaps especially if, this is uncomfortable. Seeing these women so bravely make the personal political by speaking openly about their queer experiences to challenge a conservative heteropatriarchy felt a bit like finding my own people in an unexpected place.

As I have addressed, this thesis is part of my own search for healing. Finding unexpected solidarity in a queer Armenian collective has been a part of that search for healing. For an expatriate dual-national who has spent the last ten years living in different places, there are moments where I question where my place is. To find solidarity while reading the words of a group I had never met, from a context I had never been to, is a part of the healing process. I will go deeper into the process of healing in "Return" but want to touch briefly upon how a search for commonality in places you might not expect it might feel like healing. In *Butoh: Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy*, Sondra Fraleigh addresses how the artform of Butoh is connected to what might be a human desire for commonality and universalism (Fraleigh, 2010). This longing for commonality, for finding healing in a collective, is part of what led me towards queering Yerevan.

Reading the doctoral dissertation of my master's thesis supervisor Magda Karjlainen "Treading Gently Between The Wor(l)ds: autoethnographically exploring strange dialogues within the modern university" (2022) furthered my interest in this search for universality connected to Butoh. The dance form, which originated in Japan in the 1960's, is inspired by Surrealism and the Japanese avant-garde (Tadashi, 2020). In Magda's thesis she speaks about her experiences in a butoh class, and how the instructor led them deeper into self-connection through walking exercises. It reminded me of a walking exercise that we did during the beginning of our master's for the course Language, Education and Society. Magda led us to a place near the university, and we walked backwards along

a tree-lined autumn path. While doing the exercise, I was at first a bit uncomfortable and unsure. My classmates and I laughed nervously as we awkwardly began walking backwards, rolling from the balls of our feet towards the heels. Soon, I transitioned from awkward laughs towards a rhythmic motion of moving from the balls towards the heels. As I am not used to walking backwards, it felt as if my mind emptied to complete the task at hand. Toes on the ground, then ball of foot, then rolling towards the heel. Next foot. And repeat.

During this exercise as if my mind was emptied momentarily. For someone whose mind always seemed to be too full, to be able to disconnect and just "be" in that moment, away from theories, intellectualizing and analysis was freeing. I have found later that this type of walking, called "walking body" in Butoh, is at the root of the practice. "Walking body" is supposed to help to empty and purify the body from the self (Lorandou, 2013). I experienced the feeling of emptiness during this exercise, and perhaps counterintuitively, this emptiness felt like connection. Connection with myself, with the autumn leaves, with the path under my feet, and with the people walking in front of and behind me.

Perhaps it is through leaving room for gaps, and through emptiness, that we can find connection. Gaps in our ever-changing and complex national, ethnic, sexual and gender identities. And gaps in our understanding. While reading about the work of Queering Yerevan, it has often felt as though I was reading my own questions in their work. Questions about whether we can or even should try to bridge the natural gaps in understanding in our communication, especially amongst a diasporic group with different mother tongues. Questions about ways to challenge rigid ideas about gender and sexuality that go outside of traditional politics and the formal school system. Questions about the divide between languages, and between art and language. Finding these questions written in a language I have had to translate, as I cannot read it on my own, and written by a group I have never met based on a national context that I have never been to is a source of healing. As I addressed in Separation, though globalization has made it seem easier to connect that in decades before, it sometimes seems that we are living in an increasingly polarized world. Perhaps the desire to empty ourselves of ego and rationality and labels is a way to connect. And healing and connection are intertwined.

2.2.2 Exploring the Armenian context

In this section I will address some of the background history of the Armenian context. Due to my interest in the work of Queering Yerevan and how that work has helped inspired this thesis, I think it is important that I give more background information on the Armenian context, to make clearer the relevance of the collective. Where is Armenia? How is its location related to its history? How does history and geopolitics reflect in the current state of the ethno-heteropatriarchy in Armenia?

Armenia is a landlocked country located in Southwestern Asia bordering Azerbaijan proper, Azerbaijan-Naxcivan exclave, Georgia, Iran and Turkey. (The World Factbook, 2010). It has a strong Christian tradition, with a sense of national pride emerging from the fact that it was the first country to formally adopt Christianity as the religion in the 4th century (ibid.). Despite period of autonomy, Armenia has come under the rule of various empires during its history, including the Roman, Byzantine, Arab, and Persian and Ottoman (ibid.). In 1828 the eastern portion of Armenia was ceded to Russia by the Ottoman empire and this area declared its independence following the Bolshevik revolution in 1918 but was captured by the Soviet army in 1920 (The World Factbook, 2010). In the Ottoman controlled western area of the country during World War I there were policies of forced resettlement and other types of violence that resulted in a genocide for Armenia people with approximately one million lives lost (ibid.).

The history and current political situation in Armenia is very much related to its geography. Armenians faced further violence in the Azerbaijan-Naxcivan enclave during the late 1980's, when there was systemic violence against Armenians living in the area by some people in Azerbaijan (Miller, Miller & Berndt, 2003). Later, in the economic crisis that followed independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenians were interviewed about their perspectives on the political and financial issues that were gripping the nation (ibid.). People interviewed said that they felt that the current issues that they were facing had to be seen in view of a larger geopolitical context, rather than simply as issues between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey (ibid.). People pointed out that the United States had interests in maintaining ties with Turkey due to its powerful location between Western Europe and Russia (ibid.). Meanwhile, Russia has its own interests at stake in maintaining strong ties with Armenia, due to its position as a Christian enclave in an area that is predominantly Muslim (ibid.). People interviewed recognized the fact that the violence Armenia was facing from neighbor-

ing countries like Azerbaijan and Turkey was related to its problem of existing as a small, land-locked country situated between larger geopolitical powers.

The history of colonization, violence and genocide of Armenian people by neighboring empires has had effects on understandings of both gender and the nation state in Armenia. Following the genocide in Turkey, national imagery and ideas related to gender began to show a strong gender binary based on traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity. An untitled picture that appeared in a publication known as Sargavakin Daretsuytse shows a boy and girl standing together, with the boy holding a rifle and standing protecting the rock that symbolizes mother Armenia, and the girl embodying the nation by standing on the land and holding the tricolor flag symbolizing the Armenian Republic (ibid.). The boy wears masculine black garments, and the girl wears a white red-cross outfit, symbolizing her role as a nurse and caretaker (ibid.). This imagery is significant because it shows the gendered way that many Armenians made sense of the recent trauma and genocide that they experienced. A strong push for traditional gender roles and heteronormativity was related to the idea of survival, and even to a sort of healing after so many Armenian lives were lost. The creation of strong gender roles and a push for children is not exclusively an Armenian concept. After the mass genocide of Jewish people during World War II, there were accounts of increased numbers of Jewish babies being born in Jewish neighborhoods in Germany (ibid.).

After the Armenian genocide, living signified a king of revenge for Armenians (Ekmekçioğlu, 2016). "Existence- as an individual, as a community, as a nation, and as a state- had become more than a state of being, it had turned into a political act (ibid.). In both mainstream publications as well as the feminist bi-weekly *Hay Gin* there was an emphasis placed on the traditional mother who had many children and who raised them patriotically (ibid.). *Hay Gin* also spoke disparagingly of abortion, which was related to the political context of the time, in which fetuses could be seen as being linked to territory (ibid.). The Paris peace settlement negotiations agreed that the nationality of a region would be the same as the group who made up the majority of its inhabitants (ibid.). "Liberal progressivism that roots for gender equality is a threat to the hierarchically ordered "tradition" that Armenians insist on conserving in order to continue their presence in a Turkey that insists on structurally discriminating against them." ibid., p. 163)

This view that liberal progressivism, feminism and a turn away from traditional gender roles could be seen as a threat to a group of people who have experienced so much recent violence and geno-

cide is one that appears to still be relevant in present-day Armenian. Recent surveys of people living in Armenia have shown that the traditional gender roles related to the trauma of violence and genocide that the Armenian people have experienced continue till this day. Large percentages of people interviewed about perspectives on what gender, nationality and sexuality mean in Armenian today expressed conservative and rigid definitions that reinforced ethno-nationalism, the gender binary and heterosexuality (Sargysan, 2017). People living in Armenia identify as 97 percent ethnically Armenian, leaving other ethnic groups marginalized (ibid.). The results of a survey from an Armenian LGBTQ+ NGO shows that there is a disapproval of homosexuality for 90 percent of Armenians (ibid.). For me, learning more about how ideas of ethno-nationalism and a rigid understanding of sexuality and gender are related to larger issues of geopolitics and history has been eye-opening. Understanding more deeply how the geography of a small country landlocked in between oftentimes violent neighbors who has recently undergone a genocide and that continues to undergo attacks from Azerbaijan impacts the understanding of gender and sexuality has opened my eyes to the necessity for ways to address homophobia and ethno-nationalism that consider the origin of potentially harmful beliefs regarding ethnicity and gender. It also made me think more about how addressing potentially harmful forms of normativity in a specific context such as Armenia means taking into consideration larger geopolitical and historical issues that may be exacerbating the heteropatriarchy.

Reading about the recent violence Armenia has experienced and how this has created a stronger sense of heritage in which survival and reproduction is a type of revenge and activism has made me understand more deeply the intensity of ethnonationalism in Armenia. It has made me think again about the false binaries and boxes we are taught that identities such as sexuality, gender, nationality, ethnicity are meant to fit in, and how many times the majority of us do not fit neatly inside. One way that some Armenians have responded to the violence that they have experienced is to fight to the end, so they would never end up again feeling like a lamb going to slaughter (Miller, Miller & Berndt, 2003). Another way that many Armenians have responded is by never allowing themselves to be in a position to be attacked by emigrating to a more democratically ruled country (ibid.). As someone with also belongs to a large diaspora that was created by colonization, a large famine and decades of poverty, I have always been interested in the question of diaspora and identity. I have often had it commented to me by other people from the United States that I am "Irish", yet Irish

people love to tease if you bring up any heritage from their country as such a large percentage of United States people have some form of Irish heritage.

These questions of whether the diaspora can claim identity to the country of their ancestors' birth feeds into larger questions of how we are humans create groups. "The very thing that gives individuals roots, a sense of heritage, a sense of collective values, and therefore a bulwark of communal support is also the occasion for group conflict and great human tragedy. This para-dox, unfortunately, is the human condition." (Miller, Miller & Berndt, 2003) This brings me back to the healing found in gaps, in finding connections and bridges in the spaces between us. If we inflict violence upon each other based on in-group out-group mentalities, perhaps understanding our identities as more fluid and complex will allow us to celebrate heritage and belonging while understanding a type of shared universalism that I addressed earlier when speaking of the emptiness and connection associated with Butoh movement.

Reading more about Armenian geopolitics and history has been a part of the search for connection and healing for me. It was interesting reading about how the Armenian people who banded together with neighbors and relatives during the financial hardships after independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 found shared humanity in similar ways to New Yorkers after the September 11th terrorist bombings in the United States (Miller, Miller & Berndt, 2003). People met with neighbors and relatives in each other's homes to share warmth, play games and tell stories (ibid.). Just as finding connection with Queering Yerevan as well as with the Armenia diaspora due to my identity as part of a diasporic group has brought me healing, it's interesting to see how healing in Armenia after violence and crisis has had to do with connecting with neighbors and relatives.

2.2.3 The Work of Queering Yerevan

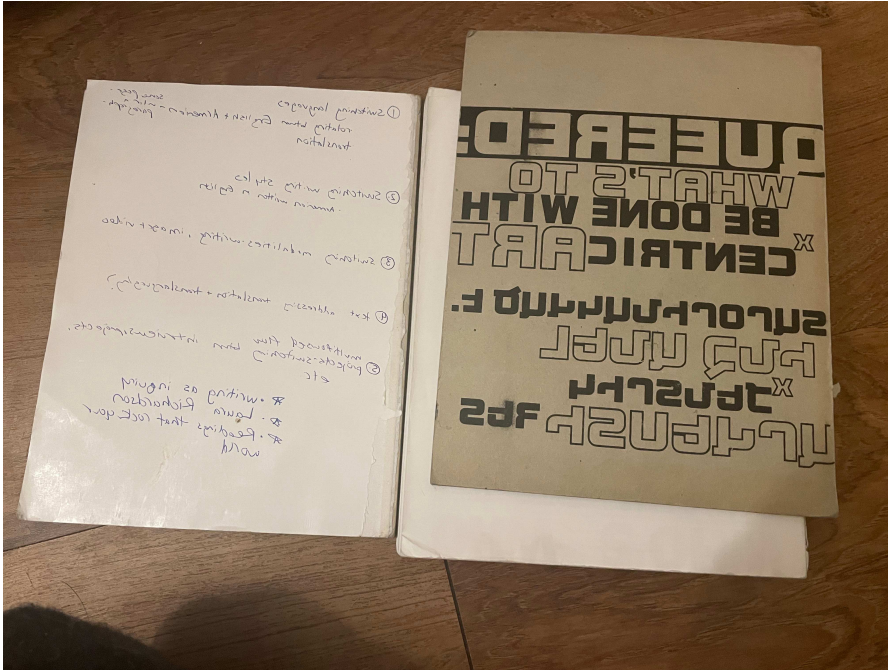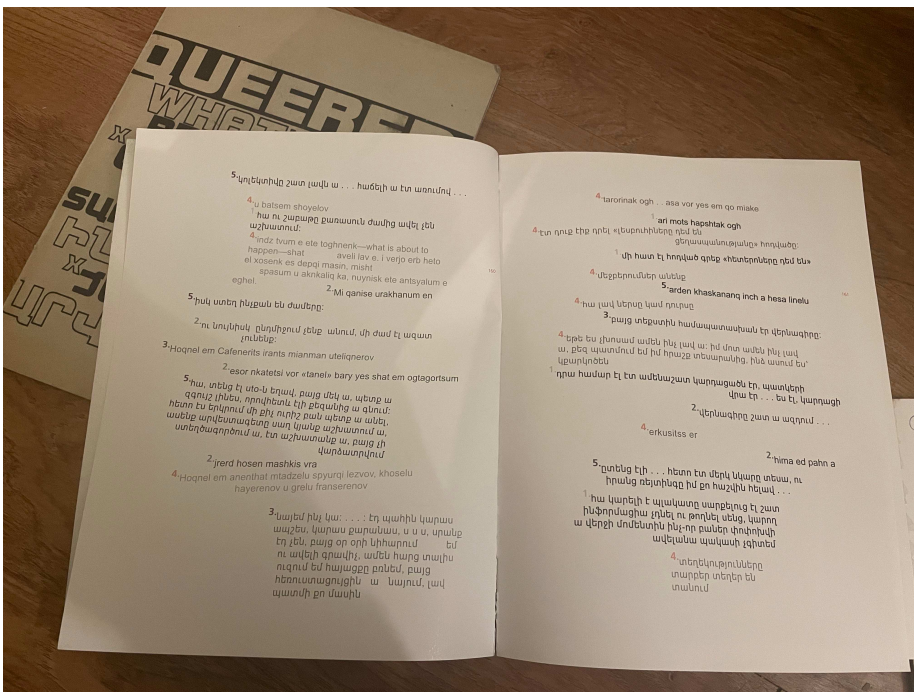**Image 5** A photo of *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art*

Image 6 Second photo of *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art*

Queering Yerevan is a collective of cultural critics, writers and artists who are queering and using Yerevan as an space to engage in various forms of activism (Eder, 2014). They formed in 2007 and were motivated to form by the silencing of queer artistic expression in the Armenian context, as well as by the violence that queer people experience in Armenia (Krasny, 2019). They organized their first event called "Coming to You To Not Be With You" in 2008 (ibid.). Queering Yerevan not only seeks to queer the Armenian context, but also to extend these questions and issues to the Armenian diaspora as well (ibid.). The extension towards the diaspora is significant, as it is estimated that around 8-10 million people of Armenian descent are currently living outside of Armenia, in comparison with the estimated 2.9 million Armenians living within Armenia (ibid.). Queering Yerevan has involved a heightened interest in the Armenian context within the Armenian queer diaspora, which is a subject that I have addressed as being personal to me throughout this thesis as someone who is also a member of a diaspora.

The work of Queering Yerevan is referenced by Tlostanova et. al (2017) when the authors explain the concept of border thinking, which strengthens border thinking functioning as the thread running through this thesis. I see the work of Queering Yerevan relating to the concept of border thinking in several important ways. To start, both border thinking and the work of this queer Armenian collective promote a pluriversality of perspectives and a movement away from abstract universalisms. Queering Yerevan speaks of embracing the gaps in understanding between the group due to language differences of being a diasporic group, and write of how they do not seek to have their slant activism result in any particular approach from public engagement, but rather that they embrace the differences of reactions and understandings of their work (Agabian et. al, 2011). Like border thinking, Queering Yerevan also embraces a pluriversality in the ways the members approach research, art and activism (ibid.). Additionally, both border thinking and the work of Queering Yerevan involved locating the subalternized other within oneself. The individuals in Queering Yerevan use art to express how they have been created other due to their gender and sexualities in the city landscape of Yerevan, as well as through their art exhibitions and their writing (ibid.).

The work that I am focusing on, *Queered: What's To Be done With Xcentric Art,* was published in 2011 and consists of art exhibitions, excerpts from free writing, parts of their blog, their email exchanges over a 4 year period, as well as photography and pieces from art exhibitions (Agabian et. al, 2011). It is written primarily in English and Armenian, though some pieces are written in Russian (ibid.). Reading about this book, and then physically ordering it from California and having it

shipped to Finland is an encounter that has changed the course of not only this master's thesis, but has helped me in my journey of personal healing. It brings me back to an article that my thesis supervisor recommended to me called "Readings that Rock Our World" (Rhoads, 2018). An encounter with a single text can have a dramatic effect on not only our academic work but our lives, which is something that is not always acknowledged in academia (ibid.). Seeing the power of a single text is something that I experienced with my interactions with *Queered: What's To Be Done with Xcentric Art* and something I will now explore in greater detail.

2.2.4 Addressing Aporias with Exploring the Armenian context

There are several potential aporias that arise when my engagement with the work of Queering Yerevan. I will address them here, and then continue to unpack them in the following sections. Though I have tried my best to reconcile this research with the potential problems that arise, I understand that this work is never completely done. Here are the questions that have stayed in my mind regarding my engagement with the work of Queering Yerevan. How can I acknowledge and engage with my privilege when speaking about my research involving a group of women experiencing multiple forms of oppression? And how can engage with the work of a group whom I have never met, and with whom I do share a similar cultural context?

To begin, I will address how the issue of my privilege has been on my mind throughout the writing process. The first issue that comes to mind when regarding the work of Queering Yerevan is the thought that I do not want to fall into a long pattern in research in which researchers from privileged positions travel to contexts they do not know much about. Spivak writes of the tendency of Western researchers to travel to the Global South to do fieldwork and collect data, often according to their own monetary or professional interests (Kapoor, 2004). This pattern of research is a historical pattern that seems to continue to this day. My short-term experience of being in academia has shown me a pattern of research that seems focused on increasing the prestige and the privilege of the people conducting the research. I feel that this pattern leads to research that can indiscriminately negatively affect the so-called "subjects" of the research. Their thoughts and emotions can be codified, quantified and analyzed in a way that might not necessarily reflect of the subjects' best interests or their worldviews.

As I will get into in the next section, in which I explore the third main source of inspiration for the thesis, which is autoethnography, I was unsure of how to interact and engage with the work of Queering Yerevan based on my fear of falling into this pattern of research. Though I knew I wanted to engage with the work of this queer collective in my thesis, I was worried about how to go about it. The first aporia at hand was how to acknowledge and be more aware of my privilege while conducting this research. I am interacting with women who come from a post-soviet background, and from a region of the world with which I have previously had little personal knowledge or experience. Meanwhile, I am aware that by coming from the Unites States, that my identity adds some extra layers of complexity and privilege. The United States as a recent geopolitical player has been very involved in conflict and violence around the world, and from the cold war onwards has had a tense relationship with socialism. The more I learn about my country's history, the more that I realize how involved the United States has been in geopolitics around the world, and how much increased violence and pain this has often caused. I do not want to fall into this pattern of Western academics who conduct researchers in post-Soviet contexts or in the Global South, and who inadvertently harm the research subjects.

Throughout writing this thesis, the thought of my privilege has been on my mind. Another aspect of my privilege that I have been considering is how my privilege affects the research process. Not only have I been privileged in the writing of this thesis because of how comfortable I am with the English language from growing up in the United States, but I also have another layer of privilege due to the fact that I am an Irish-American dual national. Having an Irish passport has not only meant that I do not need to pay the tuition fees, but that I have been able to take more time with the research and writing processes. Being able to take time with this writing process is a privilege and has also played a role in the healing process for this thesis. I will go further into the connection between slower research and writing processes and healing in "Return".

Finally, I want to acknowledge the potential problems with my lack of connection to the Armenian context. I have never been to Armenia, have no Armenian heritage, and before beginning this thesis process, had few Armenian friends and connections. I understand the tension that can exist when a researcher is conducting research that involves a context that is not completely familiar to them. In "Essentialism and Experience," bell hooks critiques the work of a theorist Fuss who argues that issues of identity that erupt in the classroom often involve essentialist viewpoints to dominant discussion (hooks, 1991). hooks writes that Fuss' argument that marginalized groups use their so-called

authority of experience to silence others during discussions, does not address how the voices of marginalized groups have been historically and currently silenced in the education system. Hooks concludes by saying that she is fearful that critiques of identity politics may serve as a new way to silence students from marginalized groups (ibid.). I agree with hooks assessment that complete rejections of "identity politics" can serve to disregard or silence continuing inequalities regarding whose voices are heard and respected.

At the same time, I have a deeper understanding of the complexity of identities. That is indeed a central idea within this thesis. As I addressed in "Separation", the false binaries we are taught to believe in regarding ethnic, national and sexual identities make many of us feel like imposters. These incorrect dichotomies mask the fact that identity is complex and is not static. As Gupta elaborates, they mask the fact that most of us are living in the borderlands. Stein addresses this issue. ¨Wiegman also notes the ambivalent effects of linking epistemological authority about a subject to one´s embodiment of/identification with it, to do so is not only to place impossible demands on individuals to ¨represent¨ an entire an entire, heterogeneous population or set of experiences, but it also threatens to strip subjects of epistemological authority over everything they are not. At the same time, there is a risk of entirely divorcing knowledge from experience and assuming that all knowledge is universally accessible.¨ (Stein, 2017)

The tensions in the connections between knowledge and experience are something that have seemed to move throughout my mind throughout the writing of this thesis. There are no simple answers to these questions of privilege, identity, and the connection between knowledge and experience. Just as I have kept them in my mind throughout the writing of this thesis, I hope the reader can also take hold of them during the reading of the thesis. I will delve more into how I have engaged with these issues in the next section, in which I explore the third main inspiration for this thesis.

2.3 My Third Inspiration: Autoethnography

In the third and final section of *Initiation* I will meet and interact with the final source of inspiration for this thesis, which is autoethnography. I will begin by exploring my journey away from Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodology with which to explore the book *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art* and towards autoethnography. I will then explore the difficulties that arose in the

while trying to write the thesis using autoethnography as a methodology, and I will explore why I and how I chose to do autoethnography in the way that I did. I will then explore any aporias related to autoethnography in this thesis.

2.3.1 Longing for Legitimacy

My journey towards finding autoethnography as a methodology and as a source of inspiration in this thesis took time. In the beginning of my thesis work, I began looking through Queered: What's to be Done About XCentric Art using a type of discourse analysis known as Critical Discourse Analysis. This section of the proposal will expand upon why I first chose this type of discourse analysis as the methodology of the thesis, and how I began to move away from CDA towards autoethnography. I will explore how the ontologies and epistemologies of border thinking led me towards Critical Discourse Analysis, and later towards autoethnography. Finally, I will explore how autoethnography aligns with the main question of this thesis, which is finding individual and collective healing using border thinking as a lens. I will delve into why I chose painting, poetry, and the creation of a zine to be the type of art that explore in arts-based autoethnography.

The reader may be wondering why I am choosing to write about the journey from my original methodology for the thesis towards my eventual encounter with autoethnography. There are two main reasons for this. To begin, as I stated in the introduction, the writing of this thesis in terms of the cyclical hero's journey as opposed to a more traditional academic format is that I want to emphasize the cyclical rather than linear nature of writing this thesis. In including my work in using CDA as a methodology, I hope to emphasize the full journey of encountering autoethnography, and that I do not view my work using CDA as a methodology as erroneous. The second reason for explaining my original reasoning in using CDA as the methodology, as well as my journey towards autoethnography is that I felt (however shameful this is to admit) that others, especially my family, would see as being more legitimate. My movement from CDA and towards arts-based autoethnography was another path towards my individual and perhaps even collective healing.

Before I began to see this thesis and the study of linguistics and semiotics through its potential for individual and collective healing, I was most interested in how language and semiotics could be analyzed for its potential to question dominant and potentially harmful narratives regarding expression

of identities such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity. This brought me to Critical Discourse Analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis is a popular type of discourse analysis that began in the 1980´s with the work of scholars such as Ruth Wodak, Norman Fairlclough, and Teun Van Dijk (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). One of the central ontological assumptions of Critical Discourse Analysis is that the language of a particular time and geographical area will reflect, reproduce and potentially challenge the values of that society (Dev Regmi, 2017). The ability of language to reproduce and potentially challenge the values of a society is something that has fascinated me thanks to a lifelong love of reading fiction that led to me major in literature in my bachelor's degree. The power of myths and stories to shape the dominant values and beliefs of a group of people is something that I explored in "Separation". I was first drawn towards CDA because I wanted to use it to explore how language was used in *Queered: What's to be Done with Xcentric Art to* question dominant and potentially harmful forms of normativity.

There are connections between Critical Discourse Analysis and border thinking in several important ways. Like border thinking, CDA is related to a pluriversality of methodological approaches (Dev Regmi. 2017). Border thinking depends on the individual, group and context that under takes it and thus is also related to pluriversality (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2012). Dev Regmi (2017) draws a connections between CDA and border thinking in that they both require a critical understanding of the relationship between hegemonies and societal values, and how discourses have the capacity to both challenge and reproduce hegemonies. I felt that the connections between CDA and border thinking made CDA a viable methodology for my thesis.

Norman Fairclough's Discourse and Social Change makes a methodological outline for CDA, and breaks the methodology into three different section (Blommart &Bulcaen, 2000). Discourse-as-text has a focus on the linguistic features of the text being studied, with the examples of the vocabulary and grammar being used (Dev Regime, 2017). Discourse-as-discursive-practice focuses on intertextuality. Intertextuality can be further be broken down, such as "manifest intertextuality" and "interdiscursivity". The study of how a text overtly references other texts is manifest intertextuality, and how a text is made up of heterogenous elements is interdiscursivity (ibid.). The last methodological approach for CDA which is known as discourse-as-social practice is the study of the relationship between language and hegemony (ibid.). Hegemony is defined by the marxist critical theorist Antoni Gramsci as the creation of alliances between dominant societal groups. Discourse-as-social-

practice studies how changing hegemonies in a context are either challenges or further encouraged by the text that is being examined (ibid.).

As at this point, I did not have any Armenian friends at the university, I relied on using the google translator app on my phone to painstakingly translate the book from Armenian in English. Once I had fully translated the book from Armenian into English, I planned on coding the book for the use of translanguaging with Critical Discourse Analysis. I would then analyze how the use of translanguaging challenged ideas of normativity in the Armenian context.

I wanted to use all three of the main methodologies outlined by Fairclough to connect the frequency and forms of translanguaging to the challenging of potentially harmful forms of normatively related to identities such as gender, sexuality and nationality in Armenia. I planned to reimagine translanguaging as multimodality and semiosis and to look for four types of translanguaging in the book using this lens. The first included the switching of languages (as in changing between writing in English and Armenian), switching writing styles (including Armenian written in English). The second type of translanguaging that I was looking for was switching between physical modalities in the book (the use of written text, image and video, as well as written text interposed with image and video). The third type of translanguaging I was looking for in the book is known as multifocused flow (the changing of different projects used by the group, such as switching between interviews, projects etc.). Finally, the fourth type of translanguaging to be studied in the book would include text specifically addressing translation and translanguaging.

I began with first trying to translate the book from Armenian into English. This was no easy task. Much of the book was written in Armenian. I began by translating little pieces of text from Armenian into English using the google translator camera app on my phone. I would translate only as much as would fit into a screenshot for my phone. I would then screenshot the English translation, and email myself the various screenshots with the page number of the translation in the subject line. This was extremely slow and painstaking. I spent several weeks and dozens of hours going through the book in this manner.

2.3.2 Methodological and Mental Breakdowns and Healing

Here I will explore my desire to show how the dissolution of my methodology relates to the dissolution of my personal life around this time. Moving towards a methodology that would involve personal vulnerability and no clear-cut answers was frightening. What brought me to moving towards CDA and towards autoethnography? And how does this relate to my personal healing?

As I explored in the last section, I spent a month attempting to translate *Queered: What's to Be Done with XCentric Art* from Armenian to English. The effort it took using a camera translator app to translate a book of 335 pages was intense. Translating parts of paragraphs at a time, (as the app has a maximum amount of characters it can translate at a time), was taking me so much time. In one month, I had only managed to translate 57 pages of the book. In the beginning of April, as the deadline for the thesis loomed, something changed with availability for Armenian for google translate seemingly overnight. Suddenly Armenian was no longer available on the app. Panicking, I started looking for other apps that would allow me to use Armenian. The only ones that were available were apps where you had to make a yearly payment to use them.

Now unable to translate anymore of the book, I decided to focus on the parts of the book that were already translated or that were written in English. I began going through the sections looking to code for the four types of translanguaging that I referred to. Once I had coded the book for these types of translanguaging, I planned to go back and look into how these different types of translanguaging questioned potentially harmful forms of normativity in the Armenian context.

I became completely stuck at this part of the process. I would go through the same section multiple times, unsure if my coding was correct. In addition, I had begun to realize that CDA seemed antithetical to the group's purpose. Queering Yerevan wrote in Queered: *What's to be done with Xcentric Art* of embracing the gap in communication. Describing how they existed as a diasporic group, they stated that some of the members struggled to communicate in English, and some struggled to communicate in Armenian (Agabian et. Al, 2011). It was only through allowing for there to be a space in their understanding of each other, and through creating and enjoying art together regardless of linguistic barriers, that they found mutual healing and connection (ibid.). I realized that coding the book in a systematic way was quite problematic. As someone outside of the Armenian context, with no connections to Armenia and who had never even visited Armenia, it already felt potentially problematic to be analyzing the group's work to draw conclusions about their purpose. As I read

more about how embracing the gap in communication was an important challenge for a queer group that existed as part of a diaspora with linguistic and cultural barriers, I realized that critical discourse analysis did not fit as a methodology. I had spent weeks at this point translating the book from Armenian to English.

I began to feel lost and unsure of what I was doing. I was also feeling lost in my life in general. Along with the stress over not being able to translate the book from Armenian to English and realizing that the methodology that I had been using did not fit, various other things had happened in my life that were making it difficult to cope.

As I addressed in "Separation", I had been struggling with my mental health throughout my life since I was a teenager. By the spring of 2021, issues that I had tried to push down were coming to the surface. By writing openly here about my emotions, I hope to question the idea of the objective researcher who writes with the aim to discount their emotions. I also hope to question the stigma associated with speaking of mental health issues, especially in a piece of writing as formal as a master's thesis.

In many ways, the unstructured time I had writing the thesis, as well as the time I spent living alone during the coronavirus epidemic, allowed me no escape from some emotions I had been trying to avoid for some time. From a young age I had felt somewhat disconnected from my own body. Part of this was due to the anxiety that I had felt throughout my life. From pressure about my performance in school, to my feeling like I needed to look a certain way, feelings of anxiety seemed to press down on me many days. In my twenties, some experiences I had further deepened these anxieties. I was sexually assault after moving to South Korea. This left me feeling very confused for some years. The feeling of disconnection deepened. I began to isolate myself a little bit from friends, as well as friends at home. I felt consumed by anxiety, and very alone. When I moved to Madrid, these feelings of confusion and disconnection continued. I consumed myself in my work. By the end of my time in Madrid, I was working eleven-hour days most days a week. I would leave for work a little after nine, and I wouldn't arrive home until half past ten most days.

When I moved to Finland to do this master's program, it felt like a breath of fresh air. It was exciting to feel challenged intellectually and to be back in university after working full-time as a teacher for six years. At a certain point in the master's program, however, I began to suffer with different health issues. My first winter here, I developed pneumonia. I had an extremely high fever and had

difficulty breathing as well as a lot of pain in my chest. For a couple of months afterwards I struggled with fatigue. This happened during December and January, two of the darkest months of the year. I was living by myself in a flat that winter. I struggled to make food for myself, and lost weight.

Later, during the summer of 2020, I got into a bike accident that resulted in several loose and broken teeth. It took months for me to get my teeth fixed, and my insurance only covered a quarter of the expenses. I eventually got fillings, a root canal, and a crown on one of my front teeth. During this time, I also developed constant tinnitus in my right ear. When I saw a doctor, they tested my hearing and found unexplained hearing loss in that ear. I still don't know if the hearing loss is linked to the severity of the fall that I experienced during the bike accident.

Along with the tinnitus, I began to develop more stiffness and pain in my back. Eventually, it got so bad that I was in excruciating pain and I lose feeling in the tip of one my fingers, and the numbness has never gone away. I could not do anything except lie in my bed for days at a time. I was prescribed muscle relaxants and opioids by a doctor and was told that I was having muscle spasms in my back. As is often the case with back issues, I had difficulty getting exact answers on what could be wrong from medical professionals, but I was told that it could have been exacerbated by anxiety. It was as though my body began trying to alert me that I needed to slow down and listen to it, and was becoming increasingly loud and agitated and its demands for attention.

 Throughout these health issues, the coronavirus filled the background of all our lives. It was declared a global pandemic in March of 2020. Starting in the spring of 2020 all our classes became virtual. I was living alone at this time, and I often only saw other people when I went to the grocery store. I felt very alone.

Though restrictions changed a lot from the spring of 2020 to the following spring of 2021, I continued to feel isolated. This was the spring in which I had begun coding *Queered: What's to Be Done with XCentric Art* using CDA as a methodology and realizing that it was antithetical to Queering Yerevan and perhaps my own motivations. I was also beginning to feel very mentally and physically tired. In the spring of 2021, I was feeling like I was hitting a low point. I was turning thirty in several months, and I was feeling unhappy with where I was both personally and professionally in my life. I was starting to feel anxious about my career options when I graduated from the master's program. I had just been rejected from a doctorate program that I had been excited about the possibility

of attending for a couple of years at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. When I began to look for other job opportunities online, I was overwhelmed by the preferred credentials for entry-level jobs.

I decided to talk to a therapist to try to resolve some of these issues. I explained to her how I was feeling stuck both personally and professionally in my life. She asked me a lot of questions about past experiences, which brought up things that had happened to me from both my childhood and my early twenties that I had been trying to keep buried. Bringing these things more to the surface was strange. I felt as if something inside of me had broken.

My depression drastically worsened. Suddenly nothing in my life seemed to have any purpose. I started having trouble getting out of my bed. I would lie there for most of the day and watch series well into the night. Feelings of shame overcame me. I became completely despondent. The courses for our master's had ended and for the first time in years I found myself without any structure to my days.

It was as though my body had collapsed after of a long time of feeling like I was barely keeping myself together. Many years in which I often felt if I was holding my breath. The busyness of my work schedule in the years prior to the spring of 2021 had distracted me from the intensity of the tension and anxiety that I was often feeling. Not having a fixed schedule imposed by someone else in which to write my thesis brought me face to face with my anxiety. I became unable to control my crying, even in public. I would find myself in tears on the bus, or in the grocery store. If I ran into an acquaintance at the university or in the city centre and they asked me how I was, I would burst into tears. The few times that I tried to meet up with friends, I would cry, even if we were meeting in a public place. I remember meeting up with two friends from my master's cohort in a sushi restaurant, and their confused and uncomfortable faces as I cried throughout the lunch we were having.

At the time that I was falling apart, my work with CDA was falling apart. I had a meeting with my thesis supervisor. She said that she understood that I was saying, and she suggested looking into autoethnography as a methodology. I told her that I was unsure about autoethnography as a methodology because my source of data was a book rather than my lived experiences, which I assumed that autoethnography should be based on. She told me that this would not be a problem, as in autoethnography data can be taken from various types of sources.

After talking to her, I started to think that autoethnography aligned more with what appeared to be the motivations of Queering Yerevan. They were using translanguaging and art to not only question the heteropatriarchy of Armenia, but also to find community and what appeared to be healing in a diasporic group of queer women who had experienced extensive intergenerational gender-based and ethnic trauma.

My supervisor had discussed the idea from bell hooks of theory as healing, and of using this premise as a central idea in my autoethnography. What if I interacted with *Queered: What's to Be Done with X-Centric Art* in a way to find personal and perhaps collective healing? My supervisor bringing up bell hooks struck me. It reminded me of hooks work *Theory as Liberatory Practice* in which she discusses pain that she felt growing up in a family where her parents both embraced patriarchal norms (hooks, 1991). Her father was not very emotionally present in raising the children, but he used corporal punishment as a way to discipline them (ibid.). Hooks discusses her parents' frustration when she would question her father authority to use corporal punishment to discipline the children when he was not so involved in other aspects of raising them (ibid.). She then explains how she often felt in her childhood that she did not have a sense of home due to this violence and the disconnect with what she thought and her parents' views in how to raise children. Critical thinking, reflection and theorizing helped hooks make sense of the pain that she felt growing up, and thus became a source of healing.

But the question of how to actually move away from CDA and towards my own personal healing seemed impossible. In mind at the time, it seemed to involve a movement away from research methodologies that held clear pathways to conducing research, towards methodologies that stress pluriversality. Where could I even begin? This is an issue that has existed for other auto ethnographers as well, as the question of how to do autoethnography does not have clear answers (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013). I realized how hard it was to move away from clarity and quantifiability when I tried to explain my new way of engaging with *Queered: What's to be Done with Xcentric Art* as a way to find personal and collective healing to my mom and some of my classmates. It felt as though I could never explain it well enough. I would try to articulate it in a way that I hoped would sound more academically legitimate. Still, I repeatedly found myself being asked by classmates what the point of the thesis was. Or, what felt even worse, was that I would explain and be met with silence. When I told a friend in studying biology at the University of Oulu what I was doing, they seemed amused that I was painting and using art in my thesis.

Ultimately, deciding that I wanted to find healing in this thesis has meant an attempt to move away from other approval and the insecurity within me that values others' opinions on what is considered "valid" and "important" research more than my own. I realized that regardless of what transpired, merely choosing to use this thesis as a vehicle for healing was a radical movement for me. The teenager who still exists within me has worried about the grade I will get on this thesis. Choosing to do autoethnography has been an attempt to help empower my young self, who felt measured by the number she would get on an assessment. Even as I have written this thesis, I have been continually asked How do I measure healing? How do I write a thesis in a way that embraces pluriversality and opacity in academia, where such concepts are not so often espoused? Like many other questions I pose in this thesis, these are questions I continue to come back to, with new understandings and perspectives with each reencounter.

2.3.3 Why autoethnography?

What is autoethnography? What types of autoethnography do I most closely align with in this thesis? How does autoethnography relate to the central lens of border thinking which I am using in this thesis? And how can it bring individual and collective healing? I will now engage with these questions.

Autoethnography is defined as an approach to research that seeks to systematically analyze personal experiences to understand larger cultural issues (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). It is documented as emerging as a research approach beginning in the 1980's, due to the emerging presence of postmodernism in academia, which questioned the ontological and epistemological limitations of the scientific emphasis on universal and objectives truths (ibid.). The assumption of universal and objective truths and its relation to colonial authoritarian impulses and a history of research in the social sciences that exploited marginalized cultural groups for professional and monetary gain galvanized some scholars to considering approaches to research that would not feign objectivity and neutrality (ibid.). Nowadays, the lack of objectivity in research is a more normalized stance, as there is recognition of a researcher's capacity to choose what, when and how to conduct research (ibid.). There is also acknowledgement of how a researcher's personal values and beliefs may influence how research is conducted.

Autoethnography strongly aligns with the premise in this thesis that the stories of a time and place influence dominant cultural values and narratives. In this way, scholars were originally drawn towards autoethnography to conduct research that connected more with literature than with traditional scientific approaches (ibid.). For me, this approach in the social science towards methodologies and practices more related to literature than quantitative research makes sense. Creating quantifiable data and conclusions about human practices seems violent to me and hides the complexity and individuality of the human experience. Humans make sense of themselves and of their world through both individual and cultural stories and myths (Carraciolo & Weida, 2017). It makes sense then that methodologies and practices in the social sciences would reflect this. Stories are essential in autoethnography because individual stories show larger social realities of the physical and temporal reality that an autoethnographer writes from, therefore allowing the possibility of social critique (Barone & Eisner, 2011).

I am also strongly drawn towards autoethnography because of its ability to question the dominant colonial narrative of research. Kapoor (2004) writing on Spivak states, "she is concerned primarily with the politics of knowledge production, specifically the way in which Western university researchers, armed with personal/institutional interests, go to the South to do fieldwork and collect data." Through the situation of the autoethnographers as both the research and the subject, I see autoethnography as working to transcend the politics of this knowledge production. This transcendence of the traditional and colonial divide of researcher and subject relates to the common thread of border thinking throughout this thesis. By exploring individual stories to understand societal issues, autoethnography situates knowledge in the body and geopolitics of an individual. As I explored earlier, border thinking also situates knowledge in the body politics of an individual. Both border thinking and autoethnography move towards relativism and pluriversality.

Autoethnography does not only align with border thinking, but also with translanguaging and with the work of Queering Yerevan. Both autoethnography and translanguaging would fall more under the umbrella of critical theories. Autoethnography also aligns with story telling, which I explored earlier with Joseph Campbell and the centrality of myths of stories to understanding and questioning societal values. This criticality of how storytelling plays a role in both individual and collective myths is something that has been explored throughout this thesis, even playing a part in the how the thesis was written based on the idea of the hero's journey. Stories take central importance in auto

ethnography, and is based on the premise that sharing our stories is a way for us to provide space to create relationships that are reflective and critical (Barone & Eisner, 2011).

2.3.4 How to do autoethnography?

Just as the idea of pluriversality is central to this thesis, there is also a pluriversality and openness to approaches in doing authoethnography. For many auto ethnographers, something that is central to auto ethnography is the idea of openness regarding methodology (Barone & Eisner, 2011). This openness made it difficult to begin the process of writing the thesis itself, as I saw a multitude of possible paths to take.

As I discussed in the previous section, I began the process of trying to decode the Armenian writing in *Queered: What's to be Done with Xcentric Art* using google translate, which turned into an very painstaking task. This in turn led to me meeting an Armenian friend at the University of Oulu named who was also in the Faculty of Education. She was instrumental to not only connecting me to a friend and connection of hers in Yerevan, but to me forming a deeper connection with the Armenian context, even though I had never been to Armenia. We met up several times for coffee and eventually became friendly with each other, and I enjoyed many conversations with her both around the University of Oulu as well as around the city center.

The transition I made from originally wanting to use Critical Discourse Analysis to wanting to engage with autoethnography was sparked by a conversation with my supervisor which I went over in the last section in which I began to delve into the idea of theory as healing as written about by bell hooks in "Theory as Liberatory Practice". This led me to further questioning how I could interact with *Queered: What's to be Done with Xcentric Art* in a way as part of of a healing journey rather than using CDA as the methodology. Realizing that using google translate was not a viable way to engage with the Armenian writing in the book, I asked my Armenian friend at the University of Oulu if she knew of someone who could help me with the project of translating the book from Armenian to English. She connected me with a friend of hers in Yerevan, and we began the process of meeting for two hour weekly sessions in order to go over the book together. I explained to her that my primary goal, which was to find healing through theory. I also told her about my interest in reimagine translanguaging as multimodality, and that was something I would like to focus on. We did this for six weeks, and I gained a lot from these meetings not only in terms of more fully under-

standing sections of the book written in Armenian, but into gaining a deeper understanding of the Armenian context. She gave me more information on what life as a queer woman could be like in Yerevan, and she also shared that she actually knew one of the members of the collective, as Yerevan was a relatively small city. Not only did she help me in translating sections of the book from Armenian into English, but she was able to explain cultural references in the book. For example, in the last section of the book, which includes email correspondences between the group, she was able to explain to me how they referenced typical Armenian foods, and she was also able to explain to me how this correspondence included inside jokes between the group that I would not have been able to understand without a deeper understanding of the Armenian context.

I wrote the notes from my conversations with her in a maroon notebook, and I then transformed that writing into free writing, in an effort to find healing and connect more deeply with my subconscious. I made the decision to use the notes I had written in the maroon notebook to delve into arts-based research. I was drawn towards arts-based research because I thought that art could be a part of my healing journey, as art allows us to more deeply access our emotions and may help us to see things differently (Yorks & Kasl, 2006). In addition, as I expanded upon before, I was interested in reimagining translanguaging as multimodality, and in doing so to question the assumed divide between language and other forms of semiotics. I decided to use this free writing that I had created based on the notes in the maroon notebook to create poetry. In addition, I made several paintings using watercolor while meeting up with friends for a weekly art night.

Image 7 Photo of my maroon notebook

Image **8** Photo of notes from notebook
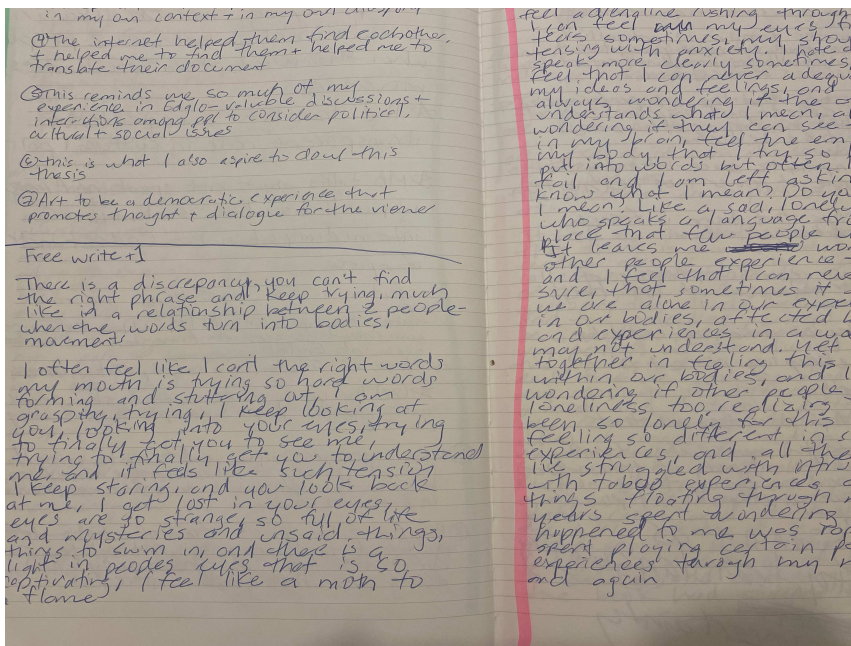
My decision to use my notes to free write and then create poetry was based on a desire to connect more deeply with subconscious and in this way bridge the disconnect that I sometimes felt within myself. Richardson is a researcher who has theorized extensively about experimental writing and poetic representation, and about the possibility of conceptualizing layers of meaning that emerge between what is present and absent in a text (Leavy & Scott-Hoy, 2009). This is what has drawn me to poetry, as a large part of this thesis is the acceptance and even embrace of opacity in understanding. In addition, writing poetry is immersive and allows us to potentially potentially understand different subjectivities (ibid.) I hoped by free writing that I would be able to do as David Mamet describes and bridge the gap between myself and my unconscious mind and in doing so to find peace (ibid.).

I was drawn towards painting for a couple of different reasons. To begin, one of my lifelong dreams that started in childhood was the dream of being an artist. I wanted to get back to that childhood dream by making watercolor paintings a part of this thesis. In addition, visual image holds the power to either reproduce or challenge our preconceptions. Bell hooks addresses this in *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (1995), in which she writes about the power of visual image. Hooks writes about the power visual image has in demonstrating the beliefs, political ideas and cultural undercur-

rents of a particular time or place. While visual image can reproduce cultural stereotypes and assumptions, it also hold the power to challenge these assumptions (ibid.). This power of visual image to transform and challenge can be found in the slant activism of Queering Yerevan, who use image such as graffiti to challenge the heteropatriachy in Armenia (Eder, 2014). This qualifies as what Queering Yerevan refers to as slant activism, as they refrain from using a direct or traditional approach to send a particular message or elicit a particular response (ibid.).

I was really drawn to the approach of slant activism, and to the idea of leaving opacity both in the particular message or response that I was trying to send with the art that I created based on my inspiration from *Queered: What's To Be Done with Xcentric Art*. Reading through the book with my new friend in Armenia and reading about how the group worked to embrace this ambiguity not only in the message they were trying to send to the public but the message that they were sending to each other as well, as members of a diasporic group who did not always speak the same language, (as some group members primarily spoke Armenian and other primarily spoke English) (Agabian et. al, 2011). As a member of a diasporic group myself and as someone who often feels gaps in understanding within my immediate family (which has caused me sadness over the years), reading about how Queering Yerevan embraced this was healing for me. I wanted to create artwork that reflected this embrace of opacity, and I felt that painting with poetry transcribed on top would not only leave room for different readers to be inspired in different ways.

Writing poetry on top of watercolor paintings allow me to use multilingualism and multimodality to question potentially harmful forms of normativity as inspired by the group of Queering Yerevan, and thus create a form of reimagined translanguaging that could question potentially harmful form s of normatively. It also allowed me to create a zine, an ambition of mine for a long time. A zine is usually a small magazine of sorts created using simple writing and drawing materials and copy machines that were popular in the 1990's in the United States, especially by young feminists, to fight structural oppression (Jackson, 2022). They are known as being associated with the riot girl movement, a punk feminist movement that is associated with third wave feminism (ibid.). Zines have the potential to teach us about how representations of both the individual and the community are complex, ever changing, and ambiguous (Licona, 2012). This movement away from static and monolithic identities as embraced by many creators of zines aligns with border thinking and many of the concepts present in this thesis. As I have stated throughout this thesis, I am aware of my positionally as someone writing about the work of a queer Armenian collective as someone who has previously

had no connections to Armenia. Just as Queering Yerevan creates art based on the city landscape of Yerevan, I wanted to create art that is relevant to my own upbringing and context. Though I was a child in the 1990's, I have long been inspired by punk feminists movements such as the riot girl movement. Just as creating these paintings and poetry have been a way of reconnecting with the child in me who dreamt of being an artist, creating this zine is a way to make my dreams of being involved with the riot girl movement (I was a bit too young at the time) come to life. I have left three pages from the zine in this thesis, with one page before each main section ("Separation", "Initiation" and "Return").

2.3.5 Addressing autoethnographic aporias

The major aporia that continues to come up regarding autoethnography is the question I have gotten from my family and some friends about how this research is relevant and meaningful. How can a piece of research that explores the individual writer's feelings and experiences have relevance in the academic world?

As I have stated before in this thesis, the underlying ontology is one of interconnectedness, thus aligning itself with border thinking, and postcolonial and indigenous paradigms (critical ontology and indigenous ways of being). As I am writing this from the assumption of inherent interconnectedness, while I am writing about my personal hero(ine)'s journey in this thesis, my individual journey is related to the commonality of the lived experiences that we all have. "Autoethnographic writing can enact memorial by creating texts that imprint our collective experience and memories for the present and future. Such texts allow us to see how sharing a lived experienced shapes who we are, as individuals and as a culture, creating sites for cultural memory to be witnessed and remembered." (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p.123)

Capitulo III

Return

Image 8 Snapshot of my zine
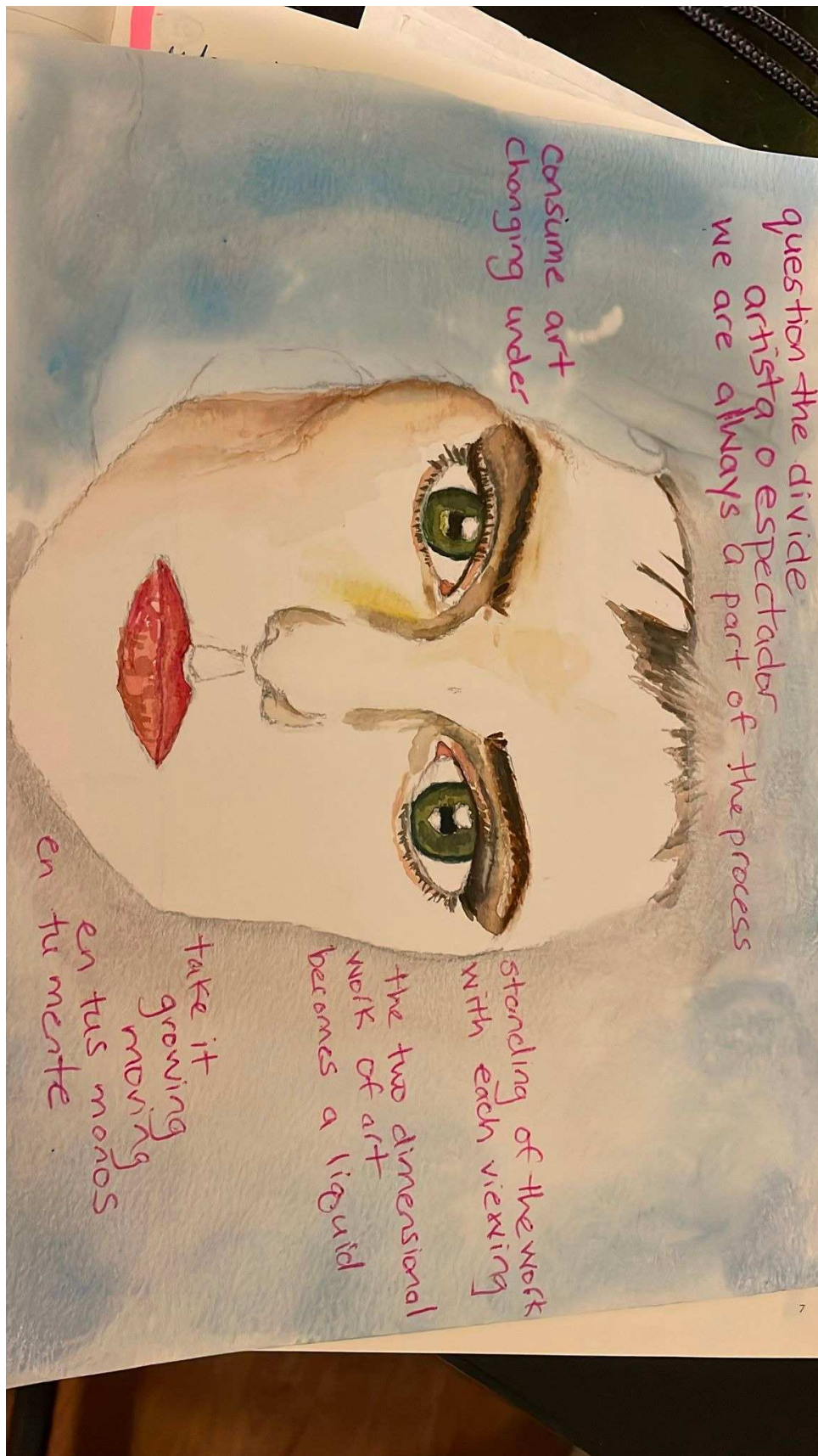
3.1 Reflections on This Journey

In "Return" I will discuss some of the reflections and thoughts on this journey of searching for healing through interactions with translanguaging, the work of Queering Yerevan and autoethnography. I will first discuss how the process of writing this thesis has allowed me to connect more with my body and with my unconscious, to find community, and how this is related to my mission of finding healing through this project. I will then extend the findings of this thesis from my personal healing towards what I hope could be collective healing, and explore further implications for the research.

3.1.1 Connecting with my body and unconscious

To begin, the process of writing this thesis has involved healing in multiple ways. One of the ways that I have found healing is through becoming more present within my own body. As discussed in the second section of "Initiation", I became very depressed during the writing of this thesis. The time that I spent alone during the pandemic finally forced me out of a pattern that I had been engaging with for years. I had spent a long time keeping myself distracted from my own feelings and body with work. For the first time in my life I was really forced to sit with myself in the spring of 2021.

I was forced to uncover some things that I have been trying to suppress for a long time. I no longer had a set structure dictated by a job or school to distract myself from my own thoughts and feelings. I became overwhelmed with thoughts about things that had happened in the past, and after talking to a therapist and trying to unpack some of these issues, I became even more depressed. Part of the depression stemmed from the fact that a sexual assault that I experienced years ago and had since not engaged with came to the forefront of my mind and did not leave. I cried in grocery stores, on the bus, and in front of sometimes uncomfortable classmates at the university. It is so hard to know how to engage with things like sexual assault, and my way of dealing with it had been to push it from my mind and to try not to think about it. Over years, this deepened the disconnection that I felt with my own body and feelings.

The process of creating the zine for this thesis has been part of the process of connecting with my own body again. Creating the zine has involved time spent both on my own and with a group of friends whom I would sometimes meet up with to create art. As they stitched, knit and drew, I slow-

ly began the process of painting the zine with watercolors. I would get lost in the process of painting and would lose a sense of time. Being surrounded by friends who were lost in their own process of creating art gave me a feeling of peace. The rhythm of picking up the brush and choosing colors and watching them fade and mute on the watercolor paper felt similar to the backwards walk that I experienced in one of my thesis supervisor Magda Karjalainen's classes. The process of painting emptied my mind which has often felt painfully full of thoughts. During the master's the academic coursework sometimes added to the cacophony in my mind. Questions that I had long engaged with involving how to understand identity, and how we can engage with and understand each other in an increasingly polarized political climate in my own home country multiplied. The process of painting, just like the backwards walk, allowed me a stillness and peace in which I could more deeply connect to my mind and body.

The healing and connection with myself and with my friends creating art around me is part of a larger picture of the power of art to allow us to enter into other spaces. While reading a book called *The Urgency of Arts Education* (2017), I uncovered many stories of educators, academics and students who have been impacted by the power of art and its importance in education. Reading the story of an academic who writes about the power of art and how it relates to the concept of play was a similar experience to reading *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art* by Queering Yerevan, where I found connection and community in unexpected places. She writes about her own experiences of growing up in a family with rigid and strict ideas about authority, and I could relate to her experiences with my own childhood. "A desire to free the child in me from the sort of narrowly unemotional identity constraints that pervaded our family also drives me. In choosing to research and write about play I quietly rebel against narrow academia, while paradoxically also being academic. I write in order to heal, with a focus on feeling, play, arts, rationality, the rhythm of being and feeling awake and alive in myself, with others in and with the world." (Carraciolo & Weida, 2017)

I feel so many connections while reading about her work and her reasons for focusing on researching and writing about play. The angsty teenager within me who feels angry about the rigid and sometimes unfair strict family that I grew up in has meant that I also find myself quietly rebelling against narrow academia. I am also writing this thesis to heal and it's interesting that I have found the word rhythm to be an important way to describe the process of creating art and writing. Just as I am hoping that this thesis could have implications to finding community and healing beyond myself, she describes how she wants to feel awake within herself, with other people and with the wider

world. Another aspect to her work that I find interesting is that she also describes the venture into art and play as a transcendence of sorts. This idea is something that has continually come up for me in the writing of this thesis. By transcending the rigid ideas we carry around concerning our identities as well as meaning, she also seems to believe that we may find a certain kind of peace within ourselves and with others.

She writes about her experiences engaging with art and play with very young students. I could relate to what she found based on my own experiences teaching in Spain and South Korea. The way she described playing and finger painting with small children outside moved me. "Playing with such materials can blend experiences of body, skin, earth, self, boundaries, as in the event above, in very healing and artistic ways. The act of playing implied a relaxed and open, freshly fluid attitude, a way of being and feeling vitally awake and alive, while moving." (Carraciolo & Weida, 2017) This description reminds me of the process of painting the zine with my friends. It felt as though our experiences were blending by creating art together, and it gave me a sense of peace and connection. The experience of free writing my findings from *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art* also felt fluid and like a way of feeling awake and alive. Writing down whatever came into my mind and letting it flow onto the paper allowed me to connect to my body and mind that have often felt very disconnected and even at odds with each other. Taking those words and using them to create poetry and then placing them on the paintings that I created has felt like a movement away from an academic tradition that tends to seek objective realities and quantify and human experiences in a way that can feel violent and untrue.

The process of writing this thesis has involved making connections with myself and with others through accepting the spaces in between. As the previous author shares, creating art with my friends has felt like a process of moving into a new space of flow where we lose track of time and allow our minds and bodies to join together in the rhythm of making art. Entering into the third space of flow after a long period of time in which I felt very disconnected from myself following a sexual assault has allowed me to connect with my body in a different way. Entering into a third space has also been part of the process of letting go of rigid ideas about meaning. Creating art with my friends, where we are all exist in the flow of realities of knitting, painting and stitching, has been part of allowing bridges to form between gaps in experience and understanding. We were not quantifying each other's art, but instead letting there be a space between what we were creating. I did not always

understand the origins of the stitching pattens that my friend was creating, but would admire them in silence, and watch the rhythm of the needle moving in and out.

The idea of creating a zine alongside a group of friends who were also creating art and falling into a third space together reminded of what Queering Yerevan wrote in *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art.* The group wrote about embracing the gap in communication between the various members, some of whom were from Armenia and did not speak English fluently, and others who were from the United States and could not speak Armenian. While creating art and writing that challenges the Armenian heteropatriarchy, they spoke about the natural gaps that occurred in understanding (Agabian et. al, 2011).. Rather than continually quantifying and trying to translate each other's work, however, they spoke about how embracing this gap in understanding was part of the purpose of their work (ibid.).

The idea of finding healing and bridges in embracing the in-between-ness was an unexpected finding of this thesis. Reading about Queering Yerevan's purpose of moving towards an appreciation of the separateness of our realities is something that holds a lot of power for me. It is a feeling I experienced in the flow of the third space in making art with my friends and doing the backwards walk in Magda's class. We each fell into our own silent rhythms and I felt my mind empty and connect with my body. I think that this perspective of embracing the gaps in between our realities means that we can let go of the idea that we can ever fully understand where the other is coming from. As I spoke about in "Separation", the increasing political polarization of the United States as well as other areas of the world has led to an increasing feeling of us-versus-them. I often get the feeling that language does not allow us to fully express the complexity of our lived experiences, and how these experiences affect our beliefs, emotional reactions and thought processes. The idea of embracing the gap in between reminds me of a line from a Rumi poem that I love. "Our beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about. Ideas, language, even the phrase 'each other' doesn't make any sense." (Rumi & Barks, 1996)

I have also found connection with myself through embracing the gaps between identities. I have been asked by people in Finland if I identify more with being American or with being Irish. I have also been asked if I find myself being more attracted to men or to women and have long wondered to myself how to identify my own sexuality as I feel it does not fit neatly into a label. Exploring

more deeply the connections between the linguistic concept of translanguaging and the work of Gloria Anzaldua who used her linguistic resources to question harmful ideas relating to normativity has allowed me to understand my own identities as complex and fluid. Furthermore, reading about the work of Queering Yerevan and the fluid and complex way they understand identity has been part of this journey. Reading about how they expand upon rigid ideas about Armenian ethnic identity by creating connections between local Armenians and the Armenian diaspora has helped me own understanding of belonging to a diasporic group evolve. Additionally, their use of language and art to question the heteropatriarchy has inspired me to live and create in ways that question rigid ideas about normativity.

Finally, the concept of embracing the spaces in between communication, language and our individual realities has helped me in navigating some of the relationships in my life. During the writing of this thesis, I have struggled with navigating the differences that I have with my more conservative family. I was raised by a strict father who holds different views to me about how I should be living my life. When I go home to visit family and friends, I am frequently reminded how I should be focusing more on making money and finding a more secure job that includes a pension. Both of my parents grew up working class in New York City, and their experiences have given them anxiety about the financial wellbeing and future of their children. As I touched upon earlier in the thesis, my parents hold different views to me as to what qualifies as a "good life". This has caused tensions in our relationship. When I go home they have sometimes tried to steer me in directions that they think would be more fitting for me. I have been encouraged to apply to join the New York Police Department many times, though this is one of the last occupations that I would be interested in joining.

Exploring the concept of embracing the gaps in between our individual realities, and in between the words that we use in an attempt to express those realities has been personally healing in some of my interpersonal relationships. Especially in relationships in which it has at times felt as if the gaps between us were insurmountable, such as with my parents. While I still (attempt to) communicate my reality, feelings and views to my family, I do not find myself getting as frustrated as I used to in the inevitable misunderstandings and communications that occur. I feel that I am not the only person who has felt this way in the inevitable spaces that we cannot seem to surmount regarding our interpersonal relationships, especially in the recent political climate of increased polarization as I addressed in "Separation". I am not advocating that we are complacent or complicit in agreeing with or accepting behavior or views that may be harmful or hurtful to ourselves or others. Rather, I am

reflecting on how it has been personally healing for me to reflect on how perhaps our perspectives, feelings and realities cannot ever be fully grasped, never mind communicated accurately in words. By acknowledging and respecting these gaps, perhaps we can engage with each other in different ways. Perhaps we can participate in dialogue in ways that are a bit more curious, gentle, and respectful.

3.1.2 Finding Community

Expanding upon the idea of connecting with oneself and others in the third space comes the second main finding that emerged in engaging with translanguaging, the book *Queered: What's to Be Done With Xcentric Art* and autoethnography. Working with these three main sources of inspiration have brought me to unexpected connections and a sense of community in a project that can often feel quite solitary. In this section I will briefly explore how engaging with translanguaging, with the work of Queering Yerevan, and with autoethnography led me to finding community.

To begin, this journey really started with discovering the linguistic concept of translanguaging. This concept excited me based on my own experiences of teaching and learning new languages, and seeing how the colonial mindset of one-language-one-nation plays out in formal education and hurts the identities and learning of multilingual people (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Exploring the concept of translanguaging led me to the work of Gloria Anzaldua, who is another central inspiration for this thesis. Reading her poetry and her work has allowed me to reimagine translanguaging as multimodality, as described by Wei (2018) and Pennycook (2017).

Engaging with and between various theories, such as the relationship between translanguaging and queer theories explored in "Initiation", has continually helped me to find an academic community of sorts. Originally reading about the linguistic concept of translanguaging was eye-opening. As described by bell hooks (1991) in "Theory as Liberatory Practice", it was a moment in which theory named and explained the discomfort that I had often felt as a teacher and learner of languages. As an English teacher, I had witnessed the taunting that would happen in classrooms where students would use their native tongue or language they spoke at home in English classes. I had disagreed as a teacher with the pressure put on students learning English to exclusively use English in classrooms, as I felt that it made students ashamed of the code-switching that naturally occurred as multilingual

people. Realizing how that pressure is related to the colonial mindset of "one nation, one language", as described by Garcia & Wei (2014), and how additionally, it hurts multilingual and multicultural students' because translanguaging is a natural expression of their identities and helps students learn (ibid.)., made the reasons for my longstanding discomfort clear.

Indeed, though it may seem strange to describe the connections that I have made with theories and scholars as finding community, this process has been a part of the healing process. In many ways, reading about and interacting with concepts such as translanguaging, and theoretical models such as postmodernism and poststructuralism has made the solitary work of writing a thesis feel a bit more connected. Writing is a process in which one is never in isolation, as we form a part of a discursive community through this process (Bizzell, 1982). That is why it was important to me to write this thesis as a queer hero's journey, as I am trying to move away from the idea of the solitary researcher coming up with abstract universalisms. Instead, I feel as though I have been influenced by, and hopefully influenced the concepts, theories and scholars that I have gone on this journey with. I have been influenced and experienced healing through interacting with theory, as in the case of translanguaging being related to colonial models of language. New understandings around the history of "one nation, one language" and how this understanding can lead to decolonial approaches to language learning has given me hope. Alternatively, I hope that my engagement with translanguaging and how it can be reimagined as multimodality in a poststructural and posthuman form that questions socially constructed binaries that cause imbalance power structures shows how theory is meant to be engaged with and constantly evolving.

Not only do I find healing and community through engagement with theories in this thesis, but I also find it through connecting with like-minded scholars, writers and artists. Engaging with the multilingual writing and poetry in Gloria Anzaldua's seminal work "Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza" has a source of healing. Seeing on the pages in front of me how Anzaldua used language to assert her identities (gender, sexual, national, ethnic, linguistic, etc.) that the society around her told her were unnatural has been one of the most important source of inspiration for this thesis. Though it may sound trite, I feel as though Anzaldua has been with me on this queer hero's journey. That to me shows the power of theory, writing, poetry, and literature. As I explored in "Separation", deconstructing the stories and mythology around us can bring us to a deeper understanding of how we have arrived at some of our individual and collective values and ideas. If some of these concepts are unhelpful, or unhealthy, as I believe is the case in terms of the common emphasis in my home

city of New York on money, status and individuality, we can begin to create new values, understandings and healing thanks to this deconstruction. I also believe that stories have the power to create connection, empathy and community between individuals and groups who might not otherwise have interacted (Gauthier, 2015). In a world that feels increasingly politically polarized, I believe that this is powerful. I feel such a connection to the work of Anzaldua, bell hooks, and Queering Yerevan. I have pored over their books and works, and have sat here writing this thesis filled with emotion and even tears. To have such an intense connection to the work of people who inspire me has helped me to feel connected to them, connected to people whom I have never met, and in the case of bell hooks and Anzaldua, to people who have already passed. I believe that this has helped me to achieve the yearning that Fraleigh (2010) speaks about in terms of butoh's power to connect us to some of the most basic aspects of ourselves, our humanity and each other in a way that many of us seem to yearn for. Thanks to writing this thesis, I now feel deep connections to people and places that heretofore I had little knowledge or connection to. I feel connected to Armenia after learning more about the recent painful history of genocide, repeated attacks by neighbors, economic struggles, and the hope and resilience of the people there after decades of national upheaval and difficulty. I feel connected to Queering Yerevan, a group of women whom I have never met. I feel connected to and inspired by the pioneering work of women of color such as bell hooks and Anzaldua. I also hope that the reader might feel some new connections and inspirations after reading this thesis.

Finally, writing this thesis has allowed me to create new relationships and deepen preexisting ones as well. I have befriended two Armenian women thanks to the writing of this thesis. They have helped me to create a deeper understanding of the context that I am writing about. Additionally, writing this thesis has allowed me to the opportunity to form deeper connections with friends in Oulu, Finland. Thanks to my weekly art meet up with friends, I strengthened some of my relationships. Also, I found myself connecting more deeply with classmates and mentors at the university when I spoke about my thesis. When I talked about my own search for personal healing through engagement with theory and art, I found myself talking more personally and vulnerably with classmates about how they were also on a search for healing due to their own struggles with burnout and mental health during the covid19 pandemic. Writing this thesis has not only helped me to find community with theories, scholars, writers and artists from other physical and temporal contexts, but with people around me in Oulu, Finland.

3.1.3 Finding Healing

In this section I will discuss the implications of this thesis regarding the central question that I asked in Separation. Here I am coming back to the question of how engaging with translanguaging, *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art* and autoethnography can bring both personal and collective healing. In this section I will delve into how this journey is related to my personal healing. For the final conclusion of the thesis I will explore further implications for this thesis in terms of collective healing.

As I wrote about in "Separation", this thesis is based on the premise of healing as three stages. This is Herman's fundamental stages of recovery from trauma and involves firstly the creation of a safe environment. The second stage involves remembrance and mourning, and the third stage allows one to reconnect with ordinary life (Zembylas, 2015). I will go through how my journey with translanguaging, the work of Queering Yerevan and autoethnography allowed me to move through the three stages of healing. I will also include how these three stages were related to the work of other theories related to community, theory and arts for healing, most importantly being the writing of the American feminist theoriest bell hooks.

Herman's first stage of healing, which involves the creation of a safe environment is something that I was able to achieve throughout the time of writing this thesis. As I stated earlier in "Return," writing the thesis in Finland was the first time in a long time that I had an unstructured amount of time without a set schedule to distract me from my own feelings and body. As I talked about in "Initiation," having this unstructured time meant that I was forced to confront emotions and issues that I had been trying not to deal with.

I want to acknowledge that arriving to the first stage of healing, or the creation of a safe environment, has a lot to do with the level of privilege that I have in studying in Finland. I am studying here as a European student thanks to the fact that I have an Irish heritage passport, which means that I have four years of study rights as opposed to the two years given to international students who do not have European citizenship. I also do not need to pay the tuition fees imposed on other international students, which has given me less of a financial burden and allowed me the space to engage with healing. Before moving to Finland and beginning this master's program I was working very long hours in schools and English academies in Madrid, and I did not have the time to think

about healing from the assault. Having this longer stretch of unstructured time of writing the thesis in between different internships meant that at one point I fell into a deep depression because I was forced to confront my body and feelings. The reality is that having a safe space to finally explore my feelings looked and felt messy and painful, but it was the beginning of the healing journey for me.

The second stage of healing, that of remembrance and mourning took place thanks to the time and space to reflect on some painful things in my past I had not allowed myself the time to think about, such as the sexual assault that I experienced. This remembrance and mourning took place thanks to having the time and space to fully process. Some of this processing took place as a result of having the time and resources to invest in therapy and having the professional space to discuss the assault and the issues that it had on my life. Another aspect of remembrance and mourning took place in the writing of this thesis.

The forming of community has also been a part of the second phase of remembrance and mourning for me. Meeting with friends to make art has meant that I have been able to connect with friends who I can share the details of these issues with. During and after these arts sessions my friendships have deepened which has given me the space to talk about the assault and create a stronger community here. Having the space to talk about something which society has often silenced survivors of, such as sexual assault, has been healing for me. Thanks to writing this thesis, I have had the opportunity to deal with something that I have pushing down for a long time.

The third phase of healing, that of reconnection with ordinary life, is something that is still ongoing for me. This is something that I found in the literature that I read on healing as well. Healing can be a long and complicated process that is not linear (Zembylas, 2015). This connects to the other non-linear processes that have continually come up in this thesis. Realizing and acknowledging healing as non-linear and messy has allowed me to be more forgiving with myself, and taken away the pressure to arrive at a final destination where I have all of the answers. This thesis, which is written in an unconventional, nonlinear and cyclical format, has been an opportunity for me to embrace the nonlinear process of healing.

Writing this thesis in a nonlinear way and over a longer period of time has also been a part of the healing process for me. As I touched upon in Separation, I experienced a lot of anxiety and pressure around my grades and performance in school, and sometimes attached my self-worth to the number

that I got in a class or on an exam. The research that I found on school performance and anxiety showed me that I was far from the only young person who felt this way, and that this is a common problem. For a long time, I felt very ashamed that I had taken longer than two years to finish this thesis and to finish my master's degree. However, I have realized that perhaps I have unwittingly become part of a movement that has been emerging in the burnout of fast-paced and pressured research. The slow science movement criticizes the rushed and pressurized approach in research, arguing that just like fast food, fast science is quickly prepared and not particularly delicious (Stengers, 2016). Still, in the United States it is highly unusual to take a longer time to finish bachelor's and master's degrees, perhaps also due to the high cost of education there. I have found myself continually explaining to my confused and somewhat disapproving family why I have taken longer with the degree. Though we have finally reached some kind of understanding, it has given me greater insight into our individual realities and beliefs, and that perhaps it is not always possible to make others understand us completely, or approve of our decisions. For a woman who has long struggled with worrying about the opinions of others, especially of my family, realizing this has been a part of the healing process. Additionally, writing this thesis in an unconventional format and addressing topics that are not often addressed in an academic thesis, such as how to engage with theory and art in a way that could help process from my own experience of sexual assault, has been healing for me. It has meant moving beyond the part of me that still wants to measure the value of this thesis by the number from 1-5 that it will be given by the people who assess it. For someone who long placed her own value on what others thought of her academic performance, moving away from that feels empowering. "Worry less about being 'good' and focus on being engaged. Be fully present in the process. That's the best any of us can do. Once you release a piece of work into the world, make peace with it. Your work will never be all things to all people, so it's important to learn to let go and accept that you have your own relationship with your work, and others will have theirs. Finally, have fun. Just as learning should be a joyful process, the research process can be joyful too" (Barone & Eisner, 2011). Making peace with this thesis, which seems to always feel unfinished and imperfect, and sending it off into the world as it is, feels healing in itself.

Finally, I find myself moving backwards and forwards towards and away from this third phase of healing, that of reconnection with ordinary life, after a sudden move back to the country that I was born and grew up in, the United States. It is interesting to me that I am writing this third chapter, "Return", following my own return to the land that I grew up in. Not only does this third chapter

involve a return to my home country, however, but it also involves a return to one of the hobbies that was most important to me growing up, which is painting. That little girl who saw herself as an artist, who spent her free time drawing and painting, slowly stopped creating art. When I would shy-ly tell people that I wanted to be an artist when I grew up, my father would laugh and tell then, "she's going to be poor her whole life". As I grew up, I realized that in the high-pressure New York environment I grew up in, painting was seen as a frivolous thing to study and focus on. Still, in high school and later in university, I continued to study painting. I found myself repeatedly doubting my abilities in the painting classes that I took, however. During university, I stopped studying painting. Then I stopped painting altogether. Though part of me still feels scared of sharing the painting and the poetry that I have done in the zine with the readers of this thesis, I keep pushing myself towards the vulnerability of continuing to paint and share it with people as an adult who is afraid of judge-ment. Just as I have returned to the county I was born in, I want to return to that little girl who dreamt of being an artist.

3.2 Considerations of Ethics and Aporias

In this section I will discuss how I have attempted to deal with some of the ethical issues of writing this thesis. The main issue is how did I navigate the issues of engaging with the work of a group from a marginalized context that I have heretofore been unfamiliar with. Other aporias (such as the potential for this work to be dealing with too much complexity, as well as the question of whether autoethnography is not relevant by being too focused on the individual), have been gone over in "Initiation".

To begin, I need to address the potential harm that could be caused by me engaging with the work of a queer Armenian collective when this is not a context that I was previously familiar with. In work-ing with this thesis I also befriended two Armenian women. One woman works at the University of Oulu and was introduced to me by my thesis supervisor, who knew that my thesis included the Ar-menian context. This woman became a friend of mine, and I have seen her around the university and in the city center since then. She introduced me to another Armenian woman who had also studied at the University of Oulu, who is now living and working in Yerevan. I had some meetings online with this woman, where we slowly went over the book together.

Befriending and speaking with these Armenian women has been an integral part of this thesis. It has helped me more fully understand the Armenian context, outside of the other research that I have done. It has also been a part of the central journey towards healing. Finding and making community and connections with people who are asking similar questions about the heteropatriarchy and finding healing in the borderlands has been an important part of this thesis. However, I have had to question whether I could have potentially caused any harm in speaking with these women about the Armenian context. The woman who I video called with from Yerevan has connections with the queer community in Yerevan, and had even met one of the women who wrote *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art*. Reading through the book with her as she helped me to translate sections that I had not been able to understand due to the issues that developed with the camera feature on google translate led to us discussing her own experiences with the queer community in Yerevan.

Could speaking about the queer community have caused her harm? I also wonder if speaking about the other various types of violence that has recently happened in Armenia could have caused her harm. We spoke about the various occupations of Armenia by Russia and the more recent conflicts with Azerbaijan. For me, as I have never been to Armenia and have previously had friends or connections there, I wonder if it is more painful for her to speak about these violent happenings than for me. I did not want to fall into the pattern of the working as a researcher from the Global North who uses the stories and people of data from other contexts.

I have tried to avoid causing harm to these two women who have assisted me in the writing of this thesis by asking them if it is alright if I talk about their contributions. I have also tried to avoid harm by avoiding writing their names. Additionally, I did not ask the woman I spoke to in Yerevan questions about her experiences with the queer community in Yerevan, and we simply focused on translating the book together. The stories that she had about queer life in Yerevan came up arrived organically from the process of discussing the book together, and I wrote them alongside the translations *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art* in a large maroon notebook. However, I have not included her experiences or stories in a way that is trying to analyze or quantify them to arrive at objective conclusions. Instead, these stories were transformed into free writing, which were then transformed again into poetry that were placed on watercolor paintings inspired by the process of translating *Queered: What's to Be Done with Xcentric Art*.

3.3 Concluding thoughts and implications of the research

I hope that this thesis may have added to research that will re-examine the linguistic concept of translanguaging through the lens of multimodality and semiotics as discussed by Wei (2018) and Pennycook (2017). By reimagining translanguaging as multimodality, I am questioning whether a more complex and varied understanding of translanguaging gives this concept the potential to challenge harmful forms of normativity that go beyond the linguistic, ethnic and national by delving into other potentially harmful forms of normativity including gender and sexuality. By adding complexity and more varied theories and practices to research in education, I hope to this research can add to critical peace education (Zembylas, 2015).

Finally, I hope that this thesis can join arts-based auto ethnographic scholarship that seeks to find healing (Giorgio, 2008). In an academic world increasingly overcome by burnout and mental health issues, I wish for this thesis to join the ranks of research that seeks to find individual and collective healing. As the writing and art of Queering Yerevan has helped me to find community and a sense of healing, I hope that this zine and thesis could lead the reader to community and healing as well. In addition to healing, I hope that this autoethnography can join the ranks of other arts-based auto ethnographic writing that seeks to enact change (Holman Jones, 2005). Just like Queering Yerevan used slant activism to challenge or inspire without seeking to elicit a specific response (Eder, 2014), I am not looking for a particular reaction or action plan from the reader. Instead, I hope that this may lead the reader to create connections in their own life, and lead to ways of thinking, writing and being and creating art that I myself could never have predicted.

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