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Aesthesis

The Politics and Praxes of Un/bordering

Cover art by Dani Kriatura



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York University, Tkaronto, So-Called Canada

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

What does a border do, and how is it un/done? *New Sociology's* 7th issue, *Aesthesis: The Politics and Praxes of Un/bordering*, responds to this question, foregrounding the process of aesthesis. To approach un/bordering through aesthesis is to ask how power governs, and how this governance is in turn felt, sensed, rehearsed, and contested in everyday life. It is also to ask how people make, feel, and see otherwise beyond the arrangements of enclosure that seek to define the world as is. The works gathered below explore these inquiries, united by their refusal to leave the border at the level of a line, wall, checkpoint, or prison. Borders instead emerge as social relations, practices, and sensations; that which routes movement, organizes care, disciplines passage and shapes the terms upon which people are seen, heard, and made to belong.

Across poetry, visual commentary, photography, collaborative art practice, and reflective prose, borders appear across the collection, not only as stable state infrastructures, but as documentary rituals, racial scripts, inherited myths, professional codes, and intimate negotiations of power. Here, the border travels. It appears in visa forms, labouring bodies, languages of legitimacy, gender norms, institutions of care, nationalist imaginaries, and cultural spaces that determine who may enter on generous terms and who must arrive already explained. And although shaped by the stories of those too often managed through bordering, including Black, Brown, queer, disabled, and im/migrant communities, the pieces in this issue do more than expose the violences of bordering. They attend to the practices through which people interrupt, survive, refuse, and reimagine those violences, offering precisely the kind of theory in practice, counter-archive, and freedom dreaming that the issue set out to convene.

The issue is organized around three thematic sections: *(En)countering*, *Mobilizing*, and *Refusing*. Section I, *(En)countering*, opens the issue by foregrounding the embodied, relational, and creative practices through which borders are negotiated, interrupted, and reworked. It begins with our featured piece, *The Agency of Counter-Border Narratives*, by Giuliana Raccoa. Reflecting on a collaborative project of the same name, this photo essay documents how migrant women in Barcelona explore physical, mental, and emotional bordering through speculative writing, kite-making, collective mapping, and public performance. Here, creation itself is framed as a form of knowledge co-production, one that makes border experience tangible while concertedly opening space for solidarity, visibility, and alternative futures. Thereafter we have *From the Window to Wall: A Visual Commentary on Borders, Healing, and Transformation*, by Kevin Ufoegbune, which offers an intimate meditation on how borders shape therapeutic practice, Black masculine embodiment, professional identity, and spiritual relation. Also a photo essay, this piece explores how helping professions emerge as bordered spaces structured by whiteness, colonial gender norms, code-switching, and self-surveillance, yet can and have been transformed through vulnerability, Afrocentric/decolonial praxis, and intentional relationality. Together, these works show un/bordering as a method, relation, and practice that extends simple critique.

Section II, *Mobilizing*, turns to works that show (un/bordered) movement as something unevenly administered, documented, and endured. In *Two Passport Photos to Pass-the-Port to Port-Saïd Square*, author Marycarmen mediates mobility through photographs and forms that highlight the protocols of proving, the endless waiting, and the quiet discipline of bureaucratic compliance that foreground un/bordering, while also rejoicing in

the agency that can be found from within and against such colonial abstractions. For Marycarmen, paperwork is more than a requirement. It is a meditation on the paradoxical asymmetry of state legitimacy, and the fleeting forms of border justice that appear therein. In *Survival Etched into Flesh: Migration, Labour, and Debility*, by Tanisha Dang & Thomas Tri, migration appears in paradox once more, but this time, in the form of language. Mastering the English prose that has itself necessitated their own linguistic unbelonging, Tri & Dang use poetic-narrative to carry movement through the body and across generations: through factory work, racialization, and debility, and to make salient the inherent trap of aspiring toward stability through gaining proximity to whiteness. Read together, these pieces remind us that the border does not end at arrival. It persists in documentation, labour, memory, and the ordinary demand to be grateful for structures that diminish the very lives they claim to make possible and save.

Section III, *Refusing*, gathers works that close the issue in a different register: visionary, lyrical, insurgent. In Ufoegbune's second piece of the issue, *Border-Breaker (The Policing of Black Masculinity)*, Black masculinity is named as a checkpoint, as a site where vulnerability is watched, disciplined, and made suspect, even as the lyrics insists on healing, softness, love, and political clarity as ways of crossing the lines imposed upon Black life. This is followed by *A Recurring Theme of Displacement*, by Dani Kriatura, which expands the scale of the issue's inquiry by locating bordering within the mythology of colonialism itself. Specifically, Kriatura uses original, abstract art to name the narratives through which nation-states and empires naturalize displacement, dehumanization, conquest, and erasure, and instead ask what it means to un-border, to remember otherwise, and to restore right relations through praxis. Kriatura's last piece, titled *Crossroads*, is also the cover art of the issue. The closing piece of both the section and the issue is *I Dream: An Open Poem to Canadian Hockey Communities*, by Jordan O'Dell. In this poem, O'Dell turns to the national-cultural terrain of hockey and reveals its white-colonial, cis-heteropatriarchal borders of belonging, while

refusing to end there. Instead, he dreams of the sport as anti-racist, anti-colonial, queer, trans, feminist, collective, and accountable. Together, these works give the issue its closing force. They do not treat the border as destiny. They confront it as something made and, therefore, something that can be unmade—something that can be refused, exceeded, and imagined otherwise by the very people and communities it seeks to contain.

As a collective, this latest issue of *New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis* insists that borders are sites of aesthesis: colonial realities that are produced by states and institutions with the intent to control, but which are ultimately unable to against the everyday people who reproduce and produce borders anew through their affects, repetitions, fantasies, and dreams. For us and our authors, un/bordering is not a singular act. It is an ongoing and collective practice of witnessing, relating, negotiating, artmaking, caring, refusing, remembering, and imagining. What we offer is thus not one geography, one method, or one answer. Rather, we offer a set of encounters: between migration and memory, identity and vulnerability, administration and intimacy, myth and history, harm and healing, critique and world-making. In doing so, we ask our readers to not only critique the border, but to sense it differently and to remain accountable to the difficult, collective labour of un-bordering itself, especially for those whose lives continue to be most intensely shaped by bordering as a lived condition.

We would like to thank the authors, creatives, activists, and dreamers who contributed to our seventh issue, *Aesthesis: The Politics and Praxes of Un/bordering*. A special thank you to Dani Kriatura for creating the cover art for the issue, as well as to our copyeditors, Isaac Abban and Tigist Wame, and our social media manager, Evania Pietrangelo-Porco, for all their hard work. Most of all, we want to thank the readers of *New Sociology* for your continued support and dedication. You are, and continue to be, the heartbeat of our journal.

Michelle Molubi-Johnson, Lead Editor; Jay Williams, Chief-Deputy-Editor (CDE); Jellisa Ricketts, CDE; & Prilly Bicknell-Hersco, CDE, with Dr Jade Da Costa, Founder/Editor-In-Chief.

The Agency of Counter-Border Narratives

Giuliana Racco

Abstract

La Agencia de Narrativas Contrafronterizas (The Agency of Counter-border Narratives, or The Agency) is an ongoing community art project based in Barcelona that challenges the social construction of borders. Merging participatory social art practice with critical border research, the project treats creation as a form of knowledge co-production. At its core, a group of migrant women (The Agents) explore physical, mental, and emotional bordering experiences through speculative writing, artmaking (specifically kites), and actions in public space. In doing so, they reclaim visibility, disrupt dominant exclusionary discourses, and make their border experiences tangible. By centering the migrant gaze, The Agency opens paths for empathy, solidarity, and alternative futures, pushing back against the hegemonic narratives that violently define migration today.

Keywords

arts-based research, participatory social art practice, bordering processes, agency, collective imagining

Imagine yourself in catastrophic times. It is the year 2050 in Barcelona, a city in Southern Europe. Most countries have fallen under the control of ultra-nationalist, populist regimes—anti-immigrant, anti-ecological, and authoritarian in nature. One night, a counter-border agent is contemplating the stars when she sees an object fall from the sky. She sets out to locate the landing spot and investigate. The object appears to be made of some kind of shimmering material and threads; at first, it is difficult to distinguish the inside from the outside. It is too large to fully grasp. She reaches for one of the cords, and a breeze blows, lifting the object into the air. As it rises, images begin to reveal themselves.

She meets with the other counter-border agents, and they begin deciphering the object. It seems to come from a parallel world or alternate universe carrying messages about borders...

This prompt served as the driving force behind the stories and artworks generated by *La Agencia de Narrativas Contrafronterizas* (The Agency of Counter-border Narratives = The Agency¹), a community art project operating in the Raval neighbourhood of Barcelona.¹ At its core, a group of migrant women (The Agents) explored physical, mental, and emotional borders through storytelling, material experimentation, and actions in public spaces. The aim was to explore how collective imagining, artmaking, and embodied practices shed light on the complex realities of bordering processes in everyday urban life, and to glean insights towards envisioning more just futures.



Figure 1. *Graphic recording of the Agency's workshop. 2024. Drawing by Karime García.*

¹In this project, the term “agency” carries dual meanings. First, it refers to the ability of migrant women to craft their own narratives, hinging on personal and political questions of identity, power, and belonging. These narratives push back against hegemonic representations that seek to define them. Second, it denotes the creative entity established in October 2024: the laboratory where these stories were generated, inspired by adrienne maree brown’s assertion that “all organizing is science fiction” (brown, 2017, p. 114). The prefix “counter” points to both opposition and correspondence: resisting hegemonic accounts while making space for alternative imaginaries. The concept of “border” extends beyond geopolitical boundaries to encompass social processes (Newman & Paasi, 1998; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002; van Houtum, 2010, 2022; Newman, 2006), delving into cognitive, cultural, emotional, sensorial, and psychological realms.

Employing a social art practice approach, this research-creation project applied creative and embodied methods to expand on understandings of lived bordering experiences as sensed by The Agents. By “bordering experiences,” I refer to the often neglected “everyday cultural realities in which borders are (made) relevant and thus (re-)produced in and through practices, discourses or objects” (Wille & Nienaber, 2020, p.10). These experiences took shape through text, collective mapping, large-scale kite-making, and a performance engaging with an actual border context.



Figure 2. Collective mapping of the South Raval area. 2025. Photo by Giuliana Racco.



Figure 3. Agents working on a kite. 2025. Photo by Giuliana Racco.

Through writing and group discussions, we identified themes that were transformed into patterns and designs, which were collectively crafted into three kites, forming an allegorical, speculative account of the present. This account was represented by statistics juxtaposing border management budgets and migrant deaths entering Europe; the transition, the strategy for moving towards more just futures; and the future itself—represented by a phoenix rising from burning paperwork and the new world born from a flaming placenta. These kites were then flown in a public performance in Portbou, a historically and politically charged Spanish border town adjacent to France, where Walter Benjamin took his life in a failed attempt to escape Nazism.



Figure 4. Kites in flight. Sant Pol de Mar. 2026. Photo by Giuliana Racco.

In the collective imagination, kites evoke the desire to rise beyond obstacles and towards a freedom that remains connected to the ground, serving as a metaphor for the relationship between human agency and nature. This symbolic potential was powerfully conveyed in Refaat Alareer's widely circulated poem *If I Must Die*, first published online in 2011, which gained widespread attention after his assassination by the Israeli military during an airstrike in Gaza in December 2023. In the poem, the kite became an emblem of *sumud* (steadfastness). While this connection was not intentional at the outset of the project, it came to resonate with its development and spirit.



Figure 5. Agent raising a “messenger”, part of the third kite, depicting a Phoenix. Barceloneta, 2025. Photo by Giuliana Racco.

Although originally developed as military technology in Ancient China, kites have since traversed the globe, acquiring playful, symbolic, and spiritual significances, such as guiding the souls of the deceased skywards during *el Festival de Barriletes Gigantes* in Sumpango and Santiago Sacatepéquez, Guatemala. Instantly recognizable and approachable, the kites served as catalysts for collective agency, providing an accessible entry point that fostered collaboration and experimentation. When flown, kites can be seen from a distance, making them ideal for “carrying the messages” from the speculative parallel universe that drove the project’s narrative and performative dimensions.



Figure 6. Detail and test flight of Kite 02 (*The Transition*). Barceloneta, 2025. Photo by Giuliana Racco.

The Agents reflected on borders not only as lines between states, but as processes that shape their everyday lives in the city, for example through bureaucratic systems that regulate residency, work permits, degree recognition, housing, and employment. These “paper borders”² reproduce geopolitical inequalities within the urban fabric, reinforcing precarity, exclusion, and invisibility. At the same time, a generalized focus on integration, rather than exchange, was widely perceived as lacking empathy and curiosity towards migrants. Complicating matters, in the nationalist context of Catalonia, the region with Barcelona as its capital, language is socially and institutionally framed as a tool for inclusion, yet it is often sensed as exclusion. This cultural and linguistic hegemony marginalizes Spanish-speaking migrants and perpetuates an “us vs. them/here vs. there” discourse, which mirrors broader European nationalist trends.



Figure 7. Agent during the performance. *Portbou*, 2025. Photo by Brunella Greco.

Integration was reframed through the lens of hospitality and exchange, with new figures proposed—“threshold” or “exchange” agents—who would work in border administration, schools, and public institutions, beyond standard culture mediators. These agents would be tasked with helping newcomers feel welcomed and valued, not just as subjects to be integrated into a fixed culture, but as contributors who can shape a local shared culture. This shift in narrative resonates with artworks such as Sandi Hilal’s *Hospitality Room* (2016–ongoing) and Tania Bruguera’s *School of Integration* (2019–ongoing).³

² van Houtum (2021) speaks of “paper walls guarded by pencils and computers” acting as “line(s) of defence of states” (p. 35), referring to visa procedures prior to movement, or rather, to procedures that block or regulate access to a state. Here, however, The Agents speak of the paper borders encountered while navigating daily life in the city where they already reside, epitomized by the derogatory term *sin papeles* (without papers), used to refer to undocumented migrants.

³ *4 Hospitality Room* is an ongoing project by artist Sandi Hilal that proposes refugees have the “right to host,” not simply to be hosted. *School of Integration*, by Tania Bruguera, inverts local-migrant dynamics by offering a series of



Figure 8. Agent performing. Portbou, 2025. Photo by Giuliana Racco.

The Agents discussed alternative worlds grounded in practices that challenge the dominant neoliberal paradigm, noting that some already operate in different contexts, including community-based initiatives like barter systems and time banks. Drawing from their own cultural backgrounds, they indicated that pedagogical organizations focused on transmitting ancestral Indigenous knowledge already exist, and noted that some national constitutions, such as those of Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2009), have incorporated these knowledges into their texts. Thus, rather than inventing new systems, they emphasized the importance of recognizing and encouraging existing forms of social organization that foster care, reciprocity, and connection between human and non-human life.



Figure 9. Project mantra: *Hay que ir a la caza de las utopías en el presente que se proyectan hacia el futuro.* (We must go in search of the utopias in the present that project themselves toward the future). Barceloneta, 2025. Photo by Giuliana Racco.

daily lessons conducted by communities of foreigners residing in a given territory, including craft, dance, poetry, art, and music. Both projects are itinerant and question the social construction of inclusion and belonging.



Figure 10. Agents with Kite 01. Portbou, 2025. Photo by Brunella Greco.

The Agency provided a temporary space and the material and relational conditions for the Agents to co-create stories around personal and political questions. In doing so, they activated their agency to question, resist, and envision alternative worlds into which they could inscribe their own bodies. This project fostered collective articulation and resilience, exploring the tensions created by bordering processes in everyday urban life. It promoted mutual care, solidarity, and emotional containment in the face of structural inequalities and systemic discrimination, while pointing to new understandings of both borders and more desirable futures. The Agency also functioned as a platform for sharing knowledge across generations, prioritizing the collective over the individual.



Figure 11. Agents during performance. Portbou, 2025. Photo by Brunella Greco.

The work hinges on collective embodied artistic research, engagement with public space, and knowledge-making through practice. By amplifying often-silenced voices and foregrounding migrant perspectives, the project embraces subversive play, collective imagining, and the transformative power of storytelling and performance, relying on the evocative device of the kite as both medium and method. The collective artistic vision was literally projected into the sky, breaking out from the exclusive spaces traditionally reserved for art. Through ludic, poetic, and symbolic action, The Agents claimed visibility and offered new insights in response to the urgent and violent realities produced by bordering processes



Figure 12. Kite 03 in flight. Sant Pol de Mar, 2026. Photo by Giuliana Racco.

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ⁱ The long-duration Francoist dictatorship (1939–1975), compounded by less-than-stellar economic performance relative to other Western European countries, meant that Spain was, until recently, a country of emigration rather than immigration. Over the past two decades, however, this trend has reversed, and both “regular” and “irregular” migration to the country have increased. According to a report by CEAR (the Spanish Commission for Refugees), between January 15 and November 2023 alone, 46,862 migrants in irregular situations reached Spanish territory. Although many of these migrants aim to move on to other countries, Spain is increasingly becoming a permanent destination, especially for those departing from its former colonies. The 2025 migration reform, introduced by the PSOE-led government, is expected to enable the regularization of approximately 300,000 migrants annually through legal residency and work permits under the new Immigration Regulation. While the reform has been

Acknowledgements

This project involved a group of nine adult women participants, the Agents, from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Congo, Peru, and Venezuela who are co-authors of the works. The project was developed in collaboration with *Asociación Cultural La Quinta Pata*, a migrant women-led cultural association generating socio-cultural projects through gender, intercultural, and decolonial perspectives. Based in Barcelona, it supports the empowerment of citizens in their everyday lives via various platforms and using multiple perspectives and approaches. *The Associació Barcelona Estels* is a cultural sports association that promotes the world of kites.

Author Biography

Born in Tkaronto and currently based in the Mediterranean region, I, Giuliana Racco, am an artist who explores the cultural and social construction of boundaries, identity, in/exclusion and desire. My videos, photography, installations, and drawings have been featured in international museums and foundations. I am a PhD candidate at York University, in Environmental & Urban Change, studying participatory social art and border aesthetics.

criticized for not fully covering all vulnerable groups, including some asylum seekers, it aims to incorporate migrants into the formal economy while addressing labour shortages and Spain’s aging population. Sources including the Banco de España indicate that the foreign-born population contributed significantly to Spain’s GDP growth between 2022 and 2024. Additionally, Barcelona has become a world-renowned LGBTQI+-friendly city, presenting a unique pull factor for many queer and trans migrants from around the globe who are seeking greater freedom and escaping persecution. At the same time, there has been a rise in nationalist anti-immigration discourse, represented by the ascent of the far-right Vox party and others over the past decade, in tandem with the broader rise of ultra-nationalist, anti-immigrant far-right populism across Europe, as reflected in recent European elections and the rebordering of the Schengen Area. It is within this broader context that *The Agency* unfolds.

From the Window to Wall: A Visual Commentary on Borders, Healing, & Transformation in Social Work

Kevin Ufoegbune

Abstract

This reflexive visual essay draws on my lived experiences as a Black man social worker to explore how borders, both internal and external, influence the construction of identity within and through therapeutic spaces. Systemic oppressions, stereotypes, structural inequalities, and racialized and gendered expectations born of colonialism have historically delineated healing spaces and encounters, creating borders that ultimately inhibit and inform social work and therapy practices. On the one hand, practitioners such as myself are compelled to code-switch and recalibrate to navigate racialized biases within institutionalized care systems. On the other hand, the process of clients offering their lived experiences in therapeutic spaces is a political act that challenges the assumptions of Black men and minoritized communities within wider society. As such, reflecting on borders and their impact reveals possibilities for identity formation, therapeutic care, and liberation within the field of social work. With this, the following piece advocates for a culturally and spiritually sensitive praxis that resists colonialism to empower substantive care, using a blend of reflexive standpoint and photography to capture my approach.

Keywords

Black masculinity, decolonialization, social work practice, therapeutic space, governmentality

Introduction: External and Internal Borders



This photo essay adopts a reflexive approach to explore how borders, or the act of bordering itself, shapes my therapy practice, my identity as a Black man social worker, and



the space in which my therapy occurs. On the one hand, I am a tall Black man of African descent. The state, the media, the world says men like me are always already angry and impulsive; we are said to lack emotional depth and patience (Fanon, 2008). What could I possibly know, then, about self-care and empathy; about emotional intelligence and regulation? What could I know about analytical and conceptual thinking? How does someone like me even *do* therapy?



I am aware of how I am perceived in this profession, policing myself through what French philosopher Michel Foucault (2007) calls governmentality. I carefully monitor my voice, tone, words, body language, and emotional expressions to ensure that I align with the dominant expectations of professionalism that are rooted in colonialism and the whiteness therein.

Therapy as Transformation

On the other hand, therapy is a border-crossing space; it is a form of hazardous work that crosses borders that are not traditionally crossed. In this regard, my experience as a social worker offers a counter-narrative, a life story of survival.

For example, on many Indigenous reserves, technological issues caused by a lack of Wi-Fi can disrupt virtual sessions. At other times, clients are unjustly apprehended and arrested during our sessions. These external forces complicate both internal and professional boundaries of my practice as I grapple with personal disclosure,



rethink colonial power dynamics, and strive to maintain trust in the relationship.

Undoing borders while operating within them also means co-creating a space for my clients where vulnerability, truth-telling, and healing can emerge. Through their own courageous narratives of trials and triumphs, which showcase the



complexities of their lives, those who seek my services challenge their own assumptions about Black men and Black people.

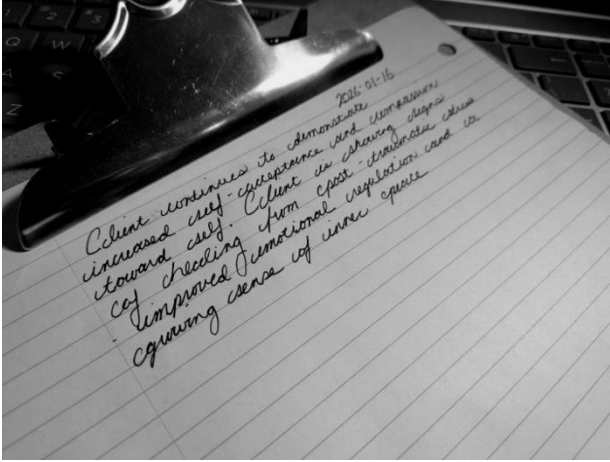
I, too, am challenged to access different energies and code-switch, while balancing the softness required by the profession and whiteness with the hardness linked to Black masculinity, and cultural and societal expectations.



This requires meaning-making afro-emancipatory approaches that centre grounding and radical self-determination, respect for the epistemologies of the oppressed, conscientious decolonial methods, and the further integration and re-centring of spiritual and divine practices such as prayer, scriptural reading, and Christian proverbs (Jean-Pierre et al., 2025).

Un-Bordering

There is an un-bordering in my work that foregrounds racialized narratives and challenges imperialist and oppressive borders. I construct a therapeutic space in



which both practitioner and client to reclaim and engage with cultural and spiritual epistemologies and modes of knowledge production. I also create a therapeutic space for both me and my clients to reconnect, explore, and uphold cultural and spiritual epistemologies through practices such as culturally grounded dialogue, storytelling, and spiritual

meaning-making, alongside conventional therapeutic approaches. My reflections reveal that borders and un-bordering can shape identities, create new narratives, improve therapeutic care and safety, and pave the way for emancipatory practice within the field of social work. Borders can help me express empathy more fully and influence the professional decisions I make as a therapist.



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Acknowledgments

To my dear cousins Nonso and Funnanya.

Author Biography

Kevin Ufoegbune is a Nigerian Canadian psychotherapist, social worker, educator, and entertainer who is currently completing his PhD. His Master of Social Work (MSW) practice-based research paper completed at York University examined intergenerational trauma and psychotherapy within the Nigerian diaspora through a critical autoethnographic approach. As a therapist, Kevin works with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) community members, families, organizations (including the National Basketball Association), and fellow Christians, to address issues such as spirituality, addictions, trauma, depression, anxiety, and other challenges. As a television producer, he co-created *Flavours of Africa* on Rogers Television in 2016. The series highlights African and international cuisine, culture, and storytelling.

Survival Etched into Flesh: Migration, Labour, and Debility

Tanisha Dang & Thomas Tri

Abstract

This co-written creative piece unfolds as an intimate act of witnessing between a child and their Vietnamese migrant mother, tracing fragments of labour, loss, and survival against the backdrop of racialization. Weaving through memories of factories, kitchens, and relentless drudgery, the narrative explores how the body becomes both a site of endurance and debility under a system that demands gratitude for its violences. At its heart, this work grapples with the paradox of migration: the aspiration toward whiteness as a promise of stability and success, even as that aspiration alienates us from the very people we are doing it for.

Keywords

Vietnamese, migrants, racism, memory, grief, diaspora

WRITING has never come naturally to me, and to say that it does is to admit that it has no correlation to any sort of subjugation. To struggle in the Language Arts is to question the English syntax, to wonder when a sentence should end and another should begin; to doubt the validity of one diction versus another; to articulately and gracefully displace language in a way that the White Man will praise.

It has always been about that, I now realize. For hours, I would sit at the school desk, a wooden pencil in hand, trying to make it so my words didn't seem wrong, out of place. I would stare at the crinkled sheet, stare real hard at the dancing letters and their hidden significations, as if enlightenment would somehow strike upon my yellow self. Inky sentences melding away into a pile of nonsensical meanings, the tops of my knees grazing against the desk's underside, my focus flickering like a sputtering car engine.

And when I found myself hopeless, I would glimpse at the other students, watching their pencils glide across the expanse of their desks in a frenzy of scrawls. Then I would think to myself, resignedly, *I wish I knew anything*.

Writing, rewriting, writing—and then erasing it all over again—leaving nothing but the whiteness of the paper.

Perhaps that is not entirely correct to say.

That, despite arbitrary scribbles no longer being penciled in dark graphite, my sentences are still visible. Ghosts. Evanesced. I am still visibly evanesced. A conditional visibility.

Both you and I, *Mẹ*.

Two green-faced immigrants, and their child, who is not quite Vietnamese, yet not fully quite Canadian either.

A sore sight for eyes that do not see beyond gold and ambition, and yet it only ever seems to look past us. Our yellowness stark against a man-made landscape of rocky mountains and harsh snowfalls. Here, the ground is hardened with

concrete; no longer should our feet feel the soil beneath them. Trees of maple and pine sprout across an expanse of frost and black ice, forever stagnant. Surely, this is a juxtaposition from all the colours of your home: grand jackfruit trees, splintered rice hats, hammocks swinging in sweltering heat. A testimony. A witness. But who are we bearing witness to, if not ourselves?

A poor farmer's daughter.

A mother. A woman.

A migrant.

Who are you bearing witness to?

You see, there will always be a word for something in the language arts, I now realize. The world is built on this proclivity of labels, for casting people like you and me into a reduction of words, a series of letters strung together to fit a slot on a piece of paper.

That is how we exist, defined by a language unbelonging to us, on a piece of paper.

Migrant. Asian. Chink.

Mẹ, I write to you in a place I fear you would never reach me, at least not in this lifetime. Yes, I am doing well in school; my grades are fine; and I am eating enough. I hope these words make you proud, and that it is a feeling you remember when we both have forgotten how to reach each other. Isn't it horrific? I miss you more than I remember you¹. And much like how your body has borne witness to the toil you've surrendered to, I am very much your witness, very much a testament that you exist, existed, still existing, engraving you onto every sliver, every molecule, every tangible thing that this great blue rock has to offer. *Mẹ*, I am your greatest witness, and the most devastating thing about it is the human condition to forget.

So, I write this to you in the very language that has wedged us deeper apart.

For to know you is to love you, and to love you is to know of your hands—their callouses and cleaves and contours.² And to know of these

¹ This line was inspired by Ocean Vuong's (2019) passage in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, "In Vietnamese, the word for missing someone and remembering them is the same: nhớ. Sometimes, when you ask me over the phone, Con nhớ mẹ không? I flinch,

thinking you meant, do you remember me? I miss you more than I remember you." (p. 186).

² This line was inspired by the following passage in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*: "Because I am your son, what I know of work I know equally of loss. And what I

wretched hands is to grasp what sacrifice truly means, to witness a village ravaged by wildfires of loss and labour.

You, who crossed the Pacific with your pinched eyes and sun-loving face. A treacherous journey of hungry waves, packed into the vessel of a wooden boat with hundreds of others who look just like you. You, who came to no man's land and should be grateful to be here, at no man's land. You, who should be a happy migrant.

But that is quite paradoxical, isn't it? To be grateful that you have chosen the lesser of two evils, that you have traded one kind of violence for another, one system of struggle for another, one type of survival for another. But happy you should be, happy you should be, for you are taking their jobs and housing and opportunities.

And I suppose that explains why you slave away in a factory with those yellow-faced just like you; or those migrants just like you. Plowing away as the White Man watches with his clipboard, fat-bellied, bellowing, berating you for tardiness like a parent would their child, but you are no one's child. You are an orphan, just like your mother's tongue, just like me.³

They say people like you and me do not know how to speak English, but that is a faceted truth. For it does not truly matter whether or not you could, can, speak English. No. For as long as you speak it with an accent, it is always wrong.

You are wrong. To be reduced because of something that is your own is to say your existence is wrong, not right, condemned.

And we'll spend our lives paying for it.

I know all of this because you once took home crates of plastic boxes and, at the kitchen table with your back against the twilight slipping through the curtains, you sat stapling expiry dates. And I would help, my hands soft and nimble, because in my mind's eye, I found a swelling of pride in the words you spoke:

Giỏi quá! Giỏi quá!

This swelling only ever grew, festering until I couldn't see all the wrongness within it. At ten years old, you took me to the factory with you, the factory where one person became many, and it was difficult to care—difficult to see a difference in all the lives swept away by ice-cold drudgery. At first, it was sitting in empty break rooms with nothing but paper cups, wooden sticks, and sugar cubes for me to play with. Then it was counting plastic boxes in the loading dock, then it was carting crates from one station to another, and then, all of a sudden, it was standing against an elongated table in a unified line; a frenzy of crinkled eyes, sun-burnt skins, and swift hands, blurring, blurring, blurring, all in the same bleached work coats and ratty hairnets, a devastating erasure of you and me.

A lonely portrait. A cut in skin.

It is an epilogue of bygone memories and robbed moments, soiled by bleeding cynicism. It is a meaningless afterword.

Because worthlessness becomes you when I fail to remember where I came from, when the line between legacy and livelihood starts to sound one syllable less different.

Study hard, work hard.

A mantra by which I would only remember you when memory begins to neglect and the earth starts to swallow you up. Study hard, work hard, and your wrinkled eyes will convey the rest, a daunting truth: *so you don't become like me.*

But where has all that effort gotten us? What has it gotten *you*?

Hours of lying in bed, the sounds of your groans echoing in an otherwise silent house. The massager gun tossed on the couch, bottles of ibuprofen capped off, and the living room clock continuing to tick in an otherwise silent home. Aches all over, from your shoulders to your knees, migraines sprouting along the cracks of your skull, sickness bleeding into your cuts.

Funnily, these would be the only times I'd see

know of both I know of your hands. Their once supple contours I've never felt, the palms already callused and blistered long before I was born, then ruined further from three decades in factories and nail sons." (p. 79).

³ This line was inspired by Ocean Vuong's passage in *On*

Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous, "Our mother tongue, then, is no mother at all—but an orphan. Our Vietnamese a time capsule, a mark of where your education ended, ashed. Ma, to speak in our mother tongue is to speak only partially in Vietnamese, but entirely in war." (pp. 31-32).

you, the only times, albeit fleeting, of intimacy I got with you: the moments when you were closest to eternal stillness.

And still there is something there unspoken—an unvoiced oath—in the moments where the line between naivete and hopefulness is despairingly distorted; in the images of a jilted child watching the hallway lights flicker on and studying the shadows that shift underneath the door; in the eyes of another watching their mother arrive home, cut down from silver tongues, collapse onto the couch, a bottle of medicinal oil twisted open, the scent of eucalyptus and menthol lingering, the couch, a leisure item for guests to lounge on, now a devastating symbol of respite. Is this the future that beholds us?

In which you spend standing upright ceaselessly, slaving away to the litany of oil sizzling and bells chiming, shuffling back and forth as you carry plates brimming with steaming cuisine—swept into a waitress' wretched routine, unable or perhaps undaring to take breaks.

In which you finish one work shift only to spend the remainder of the day slouched over marble desks, holding a white woman's hand, nail dust and polish fumes seeping into cracked skin and healthy lungs.

In which a sheet is pinned on the refrigerator, so meager of a note that it could be mistaken for a grocery list. But it is a more savage truth: a request for a doctor's note, the fruition of those never-ending, wretched hours of standing. The mind so engrossed in its financial survival, so engrossed in the ideals of man that it forgoes the basic necessities of its own body, watching it chill into a pile of kidney stones.

A poignant metamorphosis, then, sickness made tangible in inky scribbles. Rather than a butterfly, you decay. Although, I suppose a butterfly becomes beautiful before its own imminent death; therefore, you are only beautiful right before you die. You are remembered only after you die. A stone-cold truth then confronts me: my own survival is beholden to your very hands. The same hands in which blisters and sores have sprouted, medallions from holding countless of hot plates at the *bánh mì* shop. The same

wretched hands that glide so expertly at home, so gracefully across the steaming kitchen stove, over simmering bone broth, hot pans of lemongrass and beef, while I wait, wait and watch as the tendrils of your mind are consumed by age, retaining nothing of substance, my ambitions fueled by rage.

For to know you is to love you, and to love you is to know of your hands, *Mẹ*. For every callous, every blister, every aching limb, every migraine patch that is torn open, I do not forget, carving it deep beneath my skin, in my veins.

The body sustains everything;
the muscle remembers.

It is a theory of debility (Puar, 2017), then, that contains people like you and me, a society that encapsulates us in perpetual vulnerability. A cut-throat world, indeed. A culture of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) and slow deaths (Berlant, 2007). To imagine that you will go on without ever knowing what silk feels like on skin; how might diamonds and jade rest upon your lovely collarbone; days without bodily aches; and daydreams of lottery-winning and lavish living, in which you forgo living at all so that you may see it vicariously through your child's. It is the American Dream; another saying for an aspiration towards Whiteness.

It is death by a thousand cuts.

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Acknowledgments

We offer this work in deep gratitude to our *gia đình*, whose lives carry the weight and wisdom of histories larger than any single telling; our ancestors who endured the violences of French colonial rule; and to those who lived through American imperial forces and war. Your survival and resistance are the ground upon which we stand. This piece honours the labour, sacrifices, and quiet acts of care and love that have made it possible for your children, and their children, to imagine futures beyond the boundaries of home.

Author Biographies

Tanisha Dang (she/her) is a child of Vietnamese immigrants and refugees, whose father escaped by boat during the Vietnam War and shortly brought her mother over to Canada. She is a BA Honours Communication and Media studies major at the University of Calgary with an embedded certificate in Creative Writing. Her research interests focus on intergenerational memory, trauma, rhetoric discourse, and migration challenges.

Thomas Tri (they/he) comes from a family of Vietnamese immigrants and refugees who escaped by boat during the Vietnam War. They are also a community organizer and an incoming Ph.D. Social Work student at York University in Tkaronto. Their research interests lie in disability, migration, and queerness.

Two Passport Photos to Pass-the-Port to Port-Saïd Square

Marycarmen

Abstract

This short essay begins with a personal narrative describing the taking of passport photos and the intimacy of that moment. It then moves into broader reflections on regimes of mobility and waiting. The essay shifts between the intimate act of taking passport photos, critical reflections on visa regimes, and the author's lived experience of traveling in Algiers, Algeria, ultimately culminating into a moment that gestures toward the possibility of divine intervention.

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Keywords

visas, colonialism, nation-states, borders, Algeria, Muslim belonging

Two Passport Photos

The passport photos below were taken on May 11, 2025, in Bangla Town, on Danforth Avenue, East Toronto. This was Mother's Day in so-called Canada. Although the photos shown here were originally taken in the 50 × 70 mm format used for Canadian passports, they were reprinted in 35 × 45 mm to meet the dimensions required for the Algerian tourist visa application. We had not planned to take these photos at the time but made an impromptu stop when I noticed the "Passport Photos" sign in the window of a Computer and Printing Store aptly named "Computer Service, Copy, Print, Fax, Scan."

The first photo shows Abdoul Malyck, who went first. His face is covered to protect his identity. I combed his hair with my fingertips as he looked at his reflection in the small mirror mounted on the wall, behind the white curtains of the tucked-in, improvised studio inside the small shop. The photo below is of me, Marycarmen, the author of this short love note to Algeria.

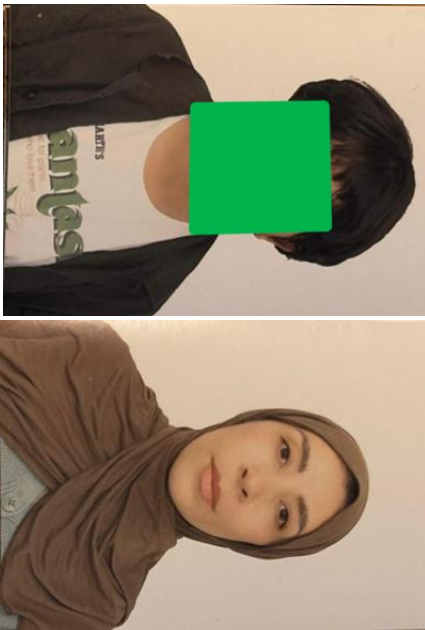


Figure 1. *Two Passport Photos.*

(Note: These passport photos are 50 × 70 mm, the size used for Canadian passport photos. I did not notice the size difference initially. We asked the

photographer to correct the size and print two copies. The 35 × 45 mm size captured only our faces, down to the neck.)

To Pass-the-Port

Libya, Mauritania, Mali, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Seychelles, Tunisia, Malaysia, and the Maldives are currently visa-exempt for their citizens travelling to Algeria. Canadian passport holders are required to apply for a visitor visa, a process I began in the spring of 2025. A form to fill out, an employment letter, proof of insurance, bank statements, proof of a return itinerary, and hotel reservations are some of the required documents. Carefully, I review each document on the checklist, place them in an envelope, and seal it before saying *Bismillah*.

Algeria's visa policy is based on reciprocity. It may be an intentional response to the restrictive mobility regimes imposed on Algerian citizens by powerful, wealthy, and neo-colonial states. For many in the west, having to apply and *wait* for a tourist visa can act as a deterrent to travel, specially those not accustomed to such procedures. Yet protracted waiting is a condition immigrants and refugees are familiar with. Shahram Khorsavi (2021) tells us protracted waiting and bureaucratic mystification make life unpredictable, producing uncertainties, anxieties, fears—leading one to question whether one is in control of their own life. Immigrant m(others) are especially familiar with this rehearsal of compliance; it is the cost of passage.

But this, for me, is quite different.

Unlike previous times, when I had meticulously read and reread application instructions; compiled documents; scanned them; filled in forms; photocopied IDs; given fingerprints, this time I felt profound satisfaction—joy, even. No longer was I learning again (and again) the quiet discipline required to prove one's legitimacy through letters, stamps, and signatures; through papers, papers, papers, always afraid to fail. Not this time.

Zimbabwe scholar Cetshwayo Zindabazewe Mabhena (2016) describes the passport as "a political and legal qualification, a distinguishing

classifier that separates border jumpers from legitimate border crossers and travellers” (para, 5). In this way, I am an impostor, a border jumper with the documents of a border traveller, a Global South Other carrying, largely by accident of geography and time, a Canadian passport. And so, I experienced a sense of joy when I went through the process of getting my passport photo taken. Is this a rare alignment of paperwork and justice?

In this moment, the weariness, the uncertainty of the administrative, procedural, and waiting weight of mobility quietly rotated, if only briefly, and even if toward me. Yes, if only briefly, the asymmetries of passport power were unsettled, perhaps just symbolically. Despite being the applicant, this felt like a form of border justice.

On July 12, 2025, Abdoul Malyck and I flew to Algiers from Barcelona. It was a short flight, but it gave me enough time to prepare.

To Port-Saïd Square



Figure 2: *The Casbah*. Casbah, July 14, 2025. Taken by Abdoul Malyck Shahzad-Lara. Taken on Ektar 100 film with a Minolta SRT-101.

It happened at noon on July 13. Abdoul Malyck and I had just argued. Our plans to walk up the Casbah changed unexpectedly, but when we found Tantonville Café, we were reminded that there is nothing a Ramy and a fine espresso can't fix. It was hot, our clothes sticking to our skin, and it didn't bother us much. We were sipping our drinks among locals; the heat was another quiet companion. In that moment, I wanted to be Algerian. Our clothes may have told a different story, but others knew we prayed

towards the Quibla. This shared orientation, both ontologically and figuratively, may have granted us belonging, if only for a moment.

We found Tantonville Café in Port-Saïd square, right next to the National Theater; these are the remnants of French colonial presence. In conversation, Abdoul Malyck and I imagine 1954 and onward: the Front de Libération Nationale, Petit Omar, Leila Djabali, Frantz Fanon, Boualem Rahal—the sophisticated, organized, and synchronized insurgency of the Algerian Revolution—and the explosions. “Your Abuelita was born in 1960,” I uttered quietly while sipping my second espresso.

Two women sitting next to us are also taking a break from the burning intensity of the sun. Both are dressed in black, including their head scarves. One of them is grandmotherly; she also had a cane. Her name I will not reveal here, or elsewhere. She felt uncannily familiar, not because of her voice or appearance, but because of her presence.

“Es-tu Tunisien?” the woman asked Abdoul Malyck.

“Tunisien? Non, Mexicaine et Pakistanais,” responded my son.

“MashAllah,” she said.

Just like at home in Mexico City, everything there felt intense; everything seemed familiar. I didn't know anything, but I knew everything.

My reader, I won't reveal who she is or what happened next, beyond this sparse telling, at once incomplete and sufficient. That day, Abdoul Malyck and I were shown, in the strangest of ways, a kind of divine intervention. In the end, our grandmother made a du'a for us, and we understood a little more, though not all.

Some things are never meant to be published, and the sacred place where she took us must remain just that. *MashAllah*, indeed, and *Alhamdulillah* for the two passport photos to pass-the-port to Port-Saïd Square.

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Acknowledgments

I dedicate this story to my father, José Luis, who shared with me his love for Algerian raï music. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, we wandered through Mexico City's flea market *La Lagunilla* hunting for burned CDs of Cheb Khaled, Cheb Hasni, Cheb Mammi, and Rachid Taha.

Author Biography

Marycarmen holds a PhD in Social Justice Education from OISE, University of Toronto. Her research explores the intersection of visibility, race, and capitalism with a focus on the visual representation of Blackness and Indigeneity. She currently works in the public sector advancing equity through policy, research, and community engagement. A first-generation PhD graduate and immigrant m(other) of two, she is still recovering from the neoliberal academy.

Border-Breaker (The Policing of Black Masculinity)

Kevin Ufoegbune

Abstract

Centering Black masculinist epistemologies and critical pedagogy, *Border-Breaker* is a rap song and an intersectional, critical method that examines how Black manhood is bordered, monitored, negotiated, and controlled both internally and externally, and formally and informally, within Black communities, Black geographies, society, and the carceral system. Drawing on the tradition of imaginative storytelling in Hip Hop and Black culture in the 21st century, the artist employs wordplay and lyrical skill to highlight the over-policing and surveillance of Black masculine bodies and to confidently challenge the powers that be, including the state, for its negative control over Black vulnerability. This song depicts the Black masculine body as a resisting entity and a checkpoint, using lyrical devices rooted in Hip Hop culture to communicate its message. The author/artist emphasizes healing and care practices, faith, spirituality, brotherhood, and resistance throughout this sociopolitical interrogation. The artist situates this work within a lineage of Hip Hop lyricism and Black radical expression, drawing influence from artists such as Lauryn Hill, Nas, KRS-One, Talib Kweli, Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G., Nicki Minaj, Erykah Badu, Queen Latifah, and Common, among others.

Keywords

Black masculinity, hip hop studies, critical pedagogy, creative praxis, surveillance

Border-Breaker

Ayo!

Chorus

I know they want my
Black masculinity
A checkpoint to police my vulnerability
Official borders just to hide all identities

Verse 1

Your boy a healer, I been border-breaking
They tell us don't cry when our hearts be aching
Surveillance, watch a brotha move with caution
They hate that I am bold, can't be sold at auction
I could never fit your description
6'2" Black male bun your bordering system
Stay on my grind, still policed, not a victim
They want you dropped out, crashed out
Yeah, that's how the system pick 'em
They want that miseducation, word to Lauryn
Universal mind control, word to Common

Chorus

I know they want my
Black masculinity
A checkpoint to police my vulnerability
Official borders just to hide all identities

Verse 2

Who gon break down our borders,
that's physical?
Stay strong, don't be a stat, empirical
Ayo, how we still alive? That's a miracle
My body, your body, his body
You get it now? It's political
'Cause even when I'm soft, I go hard
Ain't enough reason to revoke my Black card
So, I cross lines and be everywhere with comfort
Peace of mind, brotherly love gotta come first

Chorus

I know they want my
Black masculinity
A checkpoint to police my vulnerability
Official borders just to hide all identities

Bridge

Black male bodies stay detained like ICE is
And out on the streets, bloodshed, like ISIS
Y'all already know who da nicest
Take down these walls, Tetris
My power come from the man who on the cross
he died
Put up fences, but demons wanna cross me,
why?
They on they last leg already used all 9
His angels steady fighting for me on the
frontline

Chorus

I know they want my
Black masculinity
A checkpoint to police my vulnerability
Official borders just to hide all identities

Acknowledgments

To my dear cousin Ogor.

Author Biography

Kevin Ufoegbune is a Nigerian Canadian psychotherapist, social worker, educator, and entertainer who is currently completing his PhD at York University. His Master of Social Work practice-based research paper examined intergenerational trauma and psychotherapy within the Nigerian diaspora through a critical autoethnographic approach. As a therapist, he works with BIPOC communities, families, and organizations (including the NBA), as well as fellow Christians, addressing issues such as spirituality, addictions, trauma, depression, and anxiety. As a television producer, he co-created *Flavours of Africa* on Rogers Television in 2016. The series highlights African and international cuisine, culture, and storytelling.

A Recurring Theme of Displacement

Dani Kriatura

Abstract

This visual essay asks what it means to un-border when what we know as the nation-state is, itself, mythology. Indeed, there is no component of a border more definitive than mythology. Mythology drives the recurring themes of displacement and dehumanization intrinsic to doctrines of discovery, “God’s chosen people,” “Terra Nullius,” “white man’s burdens,” and the extractive empires on which it is claimed *no sun shall ever set*. These logics reduce all they survey to the status of chattel, cattle, capital, and waste, ensuring that derivatives of these vertical extractive ways replicate themselves in every relationship. As such, the assassination of memory is vigorously carried out through incremental reckless endangerment, until systems only in existence since the cosmic equivalent of this morning are confused for all that ever was, ever has been, and ever shall be, even as they bring forth the terms and conditions of their own demise. How, then, does one un-border in this worlding? What is dismissed as just a dream, and what is continually and corrosively made into reality? Arriving at and through these questions, this essay explores how we might call upon the intrinsic parts of our being that have been relegated to the status of pestilence for over half a millennium through national mythology, and whether the constant enforcement, erasure, disembodiment, and coercion required for nation-building highlights its inherent illegitimacy. Ultimately, the essay turns to ways of knowing and seeing that have been disregarded at our collective peril, asking how authentic relations might be restored, or more accurately, cultivated and nurtured through social praxis; through the sacred magic found only in the work most avoided, and through what remains to be done—not through listening, but through daily acts of living and the relationality therein; through the collective gift of being and becoming.

Keywords

arts-based research; nation-states, colonial mythology, collective memory, un-bordering, visual storytelling



Figure 1. *Fresh New Start*. 2025. Dani Kriatura. Acrylic and chalk markers on 8.5 x 11 black paper, artist's collection. @bodythudz_artisanworks



Figure 2. *Set The Vibes Off Right*. 2026. Dani Kriatura. Acrylic and chalk markers on 8.5 x 11 black paper, artist's collection. @bodythudz_artisanworks



Figure 3. *Nadie Nos Puede Conquistar*. 2026. Dani Kriatura. Acrylic and chalk markers on 8.5 x 11 black paper, artist's collection. @bodythudz_artisanworks



Figure 4. Plain Sight is Clearly Not Enough. 2025. Dani Kriatura. Acrylic and chalk markers on 8.5 x 11 black paper, artist's collection. @bodythudz_artisanworks



Figure 5. *Las Que Me Criaron*. 2025. Dani Kriatura. Acrylic and chalk markers on 8.5 x 11 black paper, artist's collection. @bodythudz_artisanworks



Figure 6. *Free From the Need to Escape*. 2026. Dani Kriatura. Acrylic paint and chalk markers, 8.5 × 11 on black paper, artist's collection. @bodythudz_artisanworks



Figure 7. *Existence is Resistance*. 2025. Dani Kriatura. Acrylic and chalk markers on 8.5 x 11 black paper, artist's collection. @bodythudz_artisanworks



Figure 8. *Como Este Mundo No Permita Que Los Ancestros Descanzan...* 2025. Dani Kriatura. Acrylic and chalk markers on 8.5 x 11 black paper, artist's collection. @bodythudz_artisanworks



Figure 9. *Chapulín y Lazaro*. 2025. Dani Kriatura. Acrylic and chalk markers on 8.5 x 11 black paper, artist's collection. @bodythudz_artisanworks



Figure 10. *Crossroads*. 2025. Dani Kriatura. Acrylics and chalk markers on 8.5 x 11 black paper, artist's collection. @bodythudz_artisanworks

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my solidarity, gratitude, kinship, reverence, and love for all the peoples, ecosystems, and constellations that keep oxygen in my lungs; the ground under my feet; the clarity and perspective in my mind; the reflection gazing back at me with eyes, free from colonized and self-hating distortions; and the strong winds at my back, keeping the skies from falling upon us, as we honour today in defense of tomorrow.

Author Biography

Dani Kriatura (they/them) is a DIY analog outsider artist and visual storyteller working with chalk, spray paint, watercolours, acrylics, markers, wire, stencils, found artifacts, clay, ink, and paper to create alternate worlds through murals, figurines, masks, and upcycled clothing items. They are a diasporic non-binary/gendervoid auDHD adult refugee child/grown up street kid of multiple resistant displaced ancestries. Based in T'kranto since the age of four, Dani lives as the embodied shadows, celebrations, revolutionary dreams, and traumas of parents who fled the fascist military coup that took place in Wallmapu (Chile) in 1973. They claim Mapuche, Selk'nam, Basque, Andalusian, Lebanese, and Russian Jewish lineages, legacies, and contradictions. They draw inspiration from the people they know, love, fight for, and live for, and the ecosystems through which we all exist.

I Dream: An Open Poem to Canadian Hockey Communities

Jordan O'Dell

Abstract

This poem offers reflexions from my Black Canadian perspective on how hockey's lived-felt borders of un/belonging can be seen, felt, and imagined otherwise beyond its current state of toxic white-colonial, cis-heteropatriarchal cultures that keep out many "Canadians." This poem is addressed to adults connected to hockey, including fans, parents/caregivers, coaches, players, administrators, and officials who are curious to explore what hockey can actually be at its best, perhaps even imagining a hockey for everyone...or not. In the Appendix, I offer a link to an .m4a audio file containing a 10-minute audio-only performance of the poem.

Keywords

Critical Race Theory, Black Studies, intersectionality, decolonialization, ice hockey, poetic inquiry, poetry

I dream

of popping the hockey bubble
 using ingredients of ingenuity, determination, and grit
 to make something beautiful right out of the rubble
 Bye girl, resign
 All the harms left behind
 Whiteness, nah
 Settler-coloniality, see ya
 Heterosexism, peace queen
 Ableism, so long
 Macho-mascness,¹ good day
 We have better ways to play

I dream

of a deeply, uncontainable-ly crippled, queered, maddened, fattened, femmed, affordable game.
 One we can all be proud of; release the shame.

I dream

of hockey changing on the fly²
 Embracing anti-racist, anti-colonial, and intersectional anti-oppressive ways
 Bubbling up from *our* movements, setting status quos ablaze.

I dream

of hockey being used to integrate *them*
 to decontaminate then fold their Whiteness into *our* pluralist, creolized, and global-majority
 cultures,³ yum.
 Forget the bitterness of *their* extractive, exploitative, and eroding colonial-racial capitalist curse;
 White hockey should learn from *us*,
 be part of our *sweet* collectivist, connecting, regenerative, and healing multi-verse.

I dream

for everyone who wants in, who wants transformation, who's owed goodness
 to receive all the richness the sport has to offer.
 Our body-mind-souls deserve nothing less.

I dream

for everyone who wants out to have their own meaningful outlet;
 to move, heal, be healthy, express joy, and physically, but not emotionally, sweat.
 Hockey has never been and still isn't the only or best Canadian game.
 Hockey doesn't have to be for everyone!
 We all can and should make *our own* claim.
 We won't get there without praxis.⁴ Thinking, feeling, praying, planning, trying...
 then thinking, feeling, praying, planning and trying anew.

¹ Rao, 2019

² Szto, 2020

³ Szto, 2020

⁴ McGuire-Adams, 2021

We can fail forward into the grandest of freedoms...freedoms more pure and true.
 One program won't do it. One club won't be enough.
 Nor will one theme night, one campaign, or one standout player doing all the stuff.
 The pay, the cups, the medals earned...they're all master's tools.⁵
 They only go so far, on the way making us fools.

I dream

that recent declines,
 drops in minor hockey,⁶ can excite some urgency,
 get dociled⁷ hockey insiders off the sidelines.
 Drops in growth can be a green light,
 an invitation for more to join the fight,
 to more deeply consider hockey's role
 in giving us abundant access to recreation, leisure, and sport that makes us whole.

I dream

that White flight⁸ will not devalue our claims to the sport,
 that our hockeys will be embraced, not abandoned of support.
 Indigenous, Brown, Asian, and yes Black too.
 All these hockeys deserve investment. Even if *you* think they are new.
 The space, the programs, the money should flow.
 White men centered no longer, it's high time for the bubble to grow.

I dream

that race+-based data will be recorded⁹
 then used such that BIPOC and *all* players are rewarded.
 So even when players go through harm,
 they have abundant options to sound the alarm,
 then to seek justice for what they went through,
 and without punitive, carceral logics that just piles on more poo.
 Data needs to be used for meaningful progress,
 change defined by us; they'll never know our stress.
 Non-dominant communities are the ones left out.
 The game was never made for us...I have no doubt.

I dream

that hockey players have repeated, progressive opportunity
 to understand their relationship to all isms and how to they can coalesce in unity.
 To combat harm in *their* sport
 one-time learnings will always fall short.
 Beyond the token training, workshop, or course,¹⁰

⁵ Lorde, 2007

⁶ Kabetu et al., 2021

⁷ Foucault, 1995

⁸ Szto, 2020

⁹ Hodd, 2022; Kabetu et al., 2021; Snelgrove & Kabetu, 2019; Szto et al., 2020

¹⁰ Snelgrove & Kabetu, 2019; Szto et al., 2020; Ritondo et al., 2025; Szto, 2020

I long,¹¹ yearn,¹² for sustained dialogues,
 ongoing talks offering a new life-source.
 Talks in all of hockey's nooks, crannies, and cracks
 so there's nowhere to hide, no way to go back.
 In classrooms, changerooms, and stands.
 On the ice, off the ice, in-between.
 At dryland training, games, and the kitchen table.
 From the local rink to the highest level inter-national and national championships.
 Hockey should have nowhere anti-racism can lose its grip.

I dream

that hockey players will be listened to.¹³
 There is no sense in sharing our guts and best dreams
 just to be tossed aside, caving to the old regime.

I dream

that existing blueprints will be picked up,¹⁴
 the ideas deserve to be tried, not ride the bench watching from close up.

I dream

that those writing the next steps in these blueprints¹⁵ will dare to dream otherwise,
 beyond being included¹⁶... trying a bigger dream on for size.

I warn

to the hockey protector:
 get out of your own way, move *with* the sport sector.
 Move before you are left behind.
 Before the globalized, Browning capitalist economy turns completely against your kind.

I will judge

judge the sport on how well they can meet the test.
 Watching and pushing as still more of a guest.
 But I will not just sit back, wait and hope.
 That is no way to world-build, barely a way to cope.
 I will work harder, I will work more.
 I'll strive in my circles to make hockey soar.
 I haven't lost hope. No, I wish the sport well.
 The potential for greatness makes my heart well.
 I am routing for you. And us. And everyone.
 Together we will make hockey its best, yet our work has just begun.

¹¹ Thobani, 2007; Walcott, 2021

¹² Rochon & Dickerson, 2025

¹³ Associated Press, 2022; Hodd, 2022

¹⁴ Szto et al., 2020

¹⁵ Srinivasan, 2022

¹⁶ Bains & Szto, 2020; Forde et al., 2024; Litwiller et al., 2023; O'Dell, 2025; Peers et al., 2023

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Appendix

Listen to the approximately 10-minute audio-
only performance of the poem by clicking here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WrhFmG9_6oX
uLpZCrcBpxZZ28fpa4dzb/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WrhFmG9_6oXuLpZCrcBpxZZ28fpa4dzb/view?usp=sharing)

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Author Biography

Jordan O'Dell, PhD Student (he/his/him), is an interdisciplinary scholar, activist and practitioner working in the municipal sector. Without formal training or credentials in artistic practice, he notably does not claim the hyphenate of artist. However, he is drawn to art-based scholarship as an (more) accessible and powerful mode of storytelling to create and mobilize knowledge. His current lines of critical qualitative research broadly engage in/across the disciplines of critical race studies, critical disability studies, and critical leadership studies, all as they connect to community-based sport, recreation, and related human service contexts. The overarching goal of his scholarly agenda is to advance disability, racial, and social justice approaches to leadership, management, and governance.

