Recognizing its inherent contradictions,
yet refusing a duality that understands spaces outside
the academy as more privileged sites of social change,
we call for a fugitive anthropology. A fugitive anthropology is
an anthropology that, grounded in black feminist analysis and
praxis and inspired by indigenous decolonial thinking,
centers an embodied feminist analytics while working
within the contested space of the academy.

—Maya Berry, Claudia Argüelles, Shayna Cordis, Sarah Ihmoud, and Elizabeth Estrada (2017)
"Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field"
Cultural Anthropology 32 (4), 560.

Contingent Horizons: The York University Student Journal of Anthropology
ISSN 2292-7514 (Print)
ISSN 2292-6739 (Online)
Legal Deposit: June 2022, Library and Archives Canada
ch.journals.yorku.ca

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1 (2021)

Published and generously supported by
the Department of Anthropology at York University, Toronto
4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON, Canada M3J 1P3

ABOUT *CONTINGENT HORIZONS*

Contingent Horizons is an annual open-access, peer-reviewed student journal published by the department of anthropology at York University, Toronto, Canada. The journal provides a platform for graduate and undergraduate students of anthropology to publish their outstanding scholarly work in a peer-reviewed academic forum. *Contingent Horizons* is run by a student editorial collective and is guided by an ethos of social justice, which informs its functioning, structure, and policies. *Contingent Horizons*' website provides open-access to the journal's published articles.

CONTACT INFO:
contingenthorizons@yorku.ca
Attention: Contingent Horizons
Department of Anthropology, 2054 Vari Hall
4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON, Canada, M3J 1P3

Printed in Canada by York University Printing Services

CONTINGENT HORIZONS

The York University Student Journal of Anthropology

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1 2021

DISRUPTION

Contingent Horizons Volume 7, Issue 1 (2021), ISSN 2292–7514, online ISSN 2292–6739.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *Contingent Horizons* editorial collective would like to thank the Anthropology Department at York University for their generous support of the journal, including the department chair Shubhra Guruani and the administrative staff, Colleen Robinson, Diana Baldassi, and Roshan Singh. Thank you to Tomasz Mrozewski for the support and troubleshooting with the Open Journal System (OJS). A special thanks to our faculty advisor, Othon Alexandrakis, who has supported the journal since its beginnings in his method fieldwork class of 2013 and continues to offer his guidance to the editorial collective. We are grateful to all the faculty and students in the department who enthusiastically support, promote, and contribute to the journal.

Each year the editorial collective is grateful to receive submissions from graduate and undergraduate students across Canada and the world. To our peer reviewers, thank you for contributing your expertise and time to the journal. Thank you to all the authors whose work is published in this issue. We are grateful for the time, patience, and energy that you dedicated to this issue, especially during the final months of polishing your already-excellent pieces for publication. A heartfelt thank you to Kathe Gray for continuing to offer her expert design skills to the journal and making the print issue a reality. The entirety of this issue, from submission to publication, occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are especially grateful for the time and dedication that all put towards the issue in spite of the challenges of these times.

PALBI SHARMA BHARGAVA

Disruption

This issue of *Contingent Horizons* explores the theme of Disruption. In light of the global disruptions that have come from the COVID-19 pandemic, we focus on moments and experiences of disruption, disjuncture, break, and the reorientations that come during and after such moments. In this issue, we ask: what does it mean to experience disruption? How do we distinguish between disruptions as temporary interruptions or as fundamental reorientations? How do disruptions in academics' own lives shape their approach to theory and research? And how do people work to minimize or adapt to disruptions?

We are pleased to publish five original articles that contend with disruptions across different scales and dimensions. In "Exploring Connections Between Food Insecurity and Subjectivity Amongst Post-Secondary Students," Diego Lopez explores how students negotiate self-perceptions of food security in the new context of university campuses through comparisons to their childhood experiences of food access. Palbi Bhargava contextualizes the rise of self-care rituals like healing stones and evil eye exorcisms in Greece as a means for people to gain control of their lives within the uncertainty of the Greek economic crisis in "Fortune Telling, Healing Stones, and the Evil Eye: The Impact of Alternative Self Care Rituals on Psychological Harm on the Neoliberal Body and Personal Well Being in Athens, Greece." Both articles speak to ways through which people strive to gain understanding and control over their lives in the face of destabilized well-being.

The three other articles engage with themes of migration and diaspora, delving into experiences of displacement and making lives in new places. In "Rethinking War: Autoethnographic Accounts of Disruption, Debris, and the Ongoing Impacts of War," Lea Alilovic presents an autoethnographic account of family stories of living through and leaving Bosnia during the Yugoslav Wars of Secession, demonstrating how memories of strain and uncertainty can infuse daily life. Sagal Jama explores how three Somali women now living in Canada process the experience of being refugees and their relationships to their families and former lives back in Somalia in "Three Stories of the Journey to

Contingent Horizons Volume 7, Issue 1 (2021), pp. vii–viii, ISSN 2292–7514, online ISSN 2292–6739.

Canada." Finally, in "An Essay of Longing and Love," Alexander Matika presents a creative reflection weaving together the writings of Mahmoud Darwish and Walter Benjamin on poetry, images, and stories through their respective diasporic lives.

Exploring Connections Between Food Insecurity and Subjectivity Among Post-Secondary Students

DIEGO LOPEZ
MA STUDENT , SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
YORK UNIVERSITY, TORONTO, CANADA

This article examines the connections and relationship between food insecurity and identity amongst post-secondary students in the North York Area. Through engagement with participants who are currently enrolled in post-secondary education or participants that contribute towards the production of the post-secondary student experience, I explore how each participant comes to understand and experience the impact of food security or insecurity and its relationship with identity. I use interviews, observation, and personal narratives as my primary methods. This research contributes to a greater understanding of the various consequences and effects that food insecurity may have for post-secondary students, and to further propose practical steps towards improving the rising issue of food insecurity within the North York area.

KEY WORDS food insecurity, identity, subjectivity, post-secondary, students, capitalism, experience

> The poor starving college student has become a cliché. Clichés are usually avoided and so are hungry students. They are referred to in a jovial lighthearted manner that seems to insinuate it's not really true. It is a myth. I am a living witness; it is not a myth. I get awfully hungry sometimes, all 130 pounds of me.
>
> —Bob Golden, *The Daily Kent Stater: Ohio's Top Collegiate Daily*

The transition between high school to university or college has often been depicted in western countries as a rite of passage into adulthood, a transition from one "chapter" or "stage" of life to another, where the individual is prepared for "the real world." For many students, this transition involves moving out of their home or leaving their country to live in residence halls, learning to take public transit, having newfound freedom, and juggling new responsibilities. However, there is a growing number of students whose transition may also involve deciding whether to have instant noodles, go to the foodbank, skip meals, grab fast food, and/or rely on canned goods. Such transitional experiences have become fragments of the "freshman 15" and the "starving student" narratives that are "so often normalized and even sometimes romanticized for post-secondary

Contingent Horizons Volume 7, Number 1 (2021), pp. 1–14, ISSN 2292–7514, online ISSN 2292–6739.

students" (Baradie 2021). Nonetheless, such narratives speak to the current food insecurity reality many students are confronted with when entering post-secondary education.

When I first began my own post-secondary education at York University, I remember being overwhelmed by this idea of participating and becoming a member of this "modernized" form of education. During my first year of university, I always found myself in the student center acquiring food from the various food spaces being provided. Yet as the semesters went by, I found myself just buying coffees and nothing else. This realization in the ever-changing behavior I had undergone throughout the years led to my understanding that perhaps I, myself, had become part of the student food insecurity reality. However, my subjective understanding and experience of food insecurity could be interpreted in different ways.

Food insecurity has been a rising issue among the Canadian population (PROOF n.d.). While researchers and policymakers have long monitored and reported on household food insecurity, research on food insecurity amongst post-secondary students has only emerged in recent years. Within the emergent research on food insecurity amongst the student population, the focus has been on generating quantitative and qualitative information as a way of engaging and understanding the rise of student food insecurity (Henry 2017; Hughes et al. 2011; Peterson and Freidus 2020; Regan 2020). Although the emergent research further engages in the understanding of food insecurity amongst students, my research brings forth a new perspective by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how experiences of food (in)security influences students' subjectivities. More specifically, I argue that individual self-perceptions and experiences of food (in)security has a more relational, contingent dimension than the current literature might suggest.

The theoretical background of this paper is concerned with an examination of the interrelation between the individual subjectivity of students who are food (in)secure and the clichés surrounding student food insecurity. Throughout the analysis, I aim to show how subjectivity is influenced by students' everyday interactions with other people and their surroundings, as well as the experiences they have encountered throughout their lives. In anthropology, subjectivity can be seen as experiential, embodied, socioculturally constructed, and singular (Biehl et al. 2007, 15). Moreover, subjectivity as a phenomenon is dynamically formed and transformed because it is a negotiation of positionalities through structural and agentic processes (Butler 2006, 197). Subjectivity can be understood as being composed of emotions, feeling, and experiences of subjects as they are embodied, connected, and projected into domestic spaces, public life, interpersonal struggles, and exchanges (Biehl et al. 2007, 15). The analysis of subjectivity and food (in) security among students is discussed further throughout the study through the brief references and life experiences of the three informants, along the themes of the formation of subjectivity through family upbringing, food consumption and evaluation of access and campus dynamics. This paper aims at shedding light on the subjective experiences of food insecurity among the student population by gathering different perspectives on the impacts and experiences individuals are dealing with and challenges they are currently experiencing. However, it is important to understand that subjectivity is always in motion, and I thus attune my analysis towards the fluidity of food (in)security as shifting subject-positions. Therefore, this paper aims at engaging with those moments/fragments of subjectivity that reject the hegemonic ideas of what it means to be a food-insecure student.

This paper places great emphasis on bringing forth an understanding of how these factorial implications come to influence the individual's life choices and behaviors. I became intrigued in not only the student's perspective but also how certain members of this institution come to engage with the cliché of the "starving student"—the popular media trope of the post-secondary student experience, marked by instant noodles and cheap food. Why is it that this form of lifestyle has become normalized by popular media in this manner? Do students relate to this form of representation? What does food (in)security mean to students or members? How does the situation they are in come to impact their academic performance? These questions challenge preconceived ideas about students and the food (in)security experience in which they currently find themselves.

Literature Review

Food Insecurity

The economic recession that occurred in Canada throughout the 1980s resulted in the increased awareness of food insecurity (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020). This was a time when food banks, charitable programs, and community organizations began to be established to collect and redistribute food among those in need. The emergent response was initially intended to be only temporary. However, the rapid growth in food banks and the increase of individuals using them led researchers and policymakers to begin taking a representative measure of Canadians experiencing food insecurity (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020). Despite surveys around food insecurity being able to be traced back to 1994, it was not until 2004 that Canada began implementing "The Household Food Security Survey Module" (HFSSM), which was developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, for measuring household food insecurity as part of the population-based cross-sectional Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020). The HFSSM, used by Statistics Canada, consists of 18 questions about the experience of food insecurity—ranging from marginal, moderate, or severe food insecurity—due to financial constraints (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020).

Health Canada defines the term food insecurity as the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so (Health Canada 2020). If the individual lacks access to sufficient and nutritious foods, as well as being faced with running out of food, having to rely on food relief, and facing challenges to acquire their next meal, they are considered to be affected by food insecurity (Hughes et al. 2011, 27). However, it is important to acknowledge that even if an individual is still consuming calories every day, they can still be food insecure if the foods they are consuming are nutrient-poor (Henry 2017).

As of 2018, it was estimated that one in eight households in Canada were food insecure in (PROOF n.d.). This number includes households that fall under the categories of marginal, moderate, or severe food insecurity. This means 4.4 million Canadians were living in food-insecure households (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020). According to PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research, an interdisciplinary research program investigating household food insecurity in Canada, food insecurity is more complex than just a food problem (PROOF n.d.). Households who are food insecure tend to compromise their spending on

all kinds of necessities, including housing and prescription medications, which can lead to exacerbated health problems, especially for chronic conditions (Tarasuk and McIntyre 2020).

Students and Food Insecurity

Although there has been a significant increase in awareness and monitoring of household food insecurity, there has been very limited research about food insecurity amongst post-secondary students. Nonetheless, there have been studies such as a multi-sited study conducted by a non-profit organization known as Meal Exchange. The study reported the prevalence of food insecurity in Canadian Universities to be 40%, which is four times higher than the general Canadian population of 10% (Bhat 2020).

However, studies around food insecurity within the student population have also shown that it is related to many factors such as time constraints, transportation limitations, housing situation, cooking, budgeting costs, and even stigma, which can prevent students from seeking help (Peterson and Freidus 2020, 126). Aside from the various factors that studies have found, it is important to also understand how previously, getting into universities and colleges was not an opportunity that was open for anyone. Now, attending university or colleges has become the "key" towards a successful career and financial security (Hughes et al. 2011). The growing number of students being enrolled in post-secondary education has led to a shift in demographics to include more students that are from lower income households, students of color, working, non-traditional, older, and having to undertake family responsibilities (Henry 2017,7). Lisa Henry explains how these changes are also "coupled with a decrease in state funding for universities, increasing tuition costs, and increasing costs of goods and services" (2017, 8).

Moreover, the student population is situated in a position of "expectancy" where they are presumed to become financially stable and food secure after graduation. Therefore, the cliché of the starving student, which depicts students as getting through university by subsisting off cheap or unhealthy food, also adds another factor to the acceptability of food insecurity in the student population by positioning food insecurity as a temporary and soon alleviated experience (Canadian Federation of Students Ontario 2013). With the rising costs of tuition and housing, decreases in access to healthy and affordable food options, and the overall post-secondary lifestyle, students that are struggling to keep up with these changes—even with the aid of loans and grants—are being left to deal with these issues on their own.

Although more studies have emerged on post-secondary student food insecurity, there have been very few studies that take on a qualitative methodology. There is a need for a more open-ended approach for understanding food insecurity, how it affects students, the role of stigma, and the strategies students have developed to address it (Peterson and Freidus 2020).

Methodology

Fieldwork for this paper was conducted in February 2020 as part of a research methods course at York University, Toronto. I conducted three interviews with students and

student service representatives. I used semi-structured interviews to allow for flexibility and further engage with the participants. Before commencing my interviews, I provided the participants with an explanation of what is expected of them, my goals for the research, the broader theme of my research, and explained how their anonymity will be maintained. Moreover, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. For this study, I reached out to two of my friends, both of whom I met at York University. Caroline Frossard and Thijs Jeursen suggest that friendships in an academic setting can become a way of solving the discrepancies between available resources and performance expectations (2019, 117). One out of the two students identified themselves as being food insecure, while the other identified themselves as being food secure. I also used email as a medium to reach out to York's student services members by highlighting what my project entitled and what was expected of them if they were to consent to participating in my research. Given the small sample size of the study, I would argue that my findings could be approached as a "cartography" of the present food (in)security experience and might offer important themes that could be explored in future research (Piot 2010, 16).

My initial guiding research question for this project revolved around my subjective understanding of food insecurity and its connection with academic performance. However, as the interviews progressed, I found myself trying to search for more information about this connection. After conducting the interviews, it occurred to me that perhaps food (in) security did not play as consciously a critical role in academic performance as I had previously thought. The participants were more inclined to discuss further on the connection of family upbringing, accessibility, and healthier food alternatives within university campus. Moreover, since my research evolved around the student experience of (in)security, due to my own status as a student at York University, I was able to build rapport with my participants as fellow students. Although different students (and in this case non-student but members that focus on providing support to students) have expressed different experiences, there was a middle ground in which we could relate. Perhaps even though I may not have had the same situation, I could still relate to the embodied experience of being a student. Therefore, I could see my subjective position within the field becoming more evident to myself as I went through my interviews. Based on Foucault's proposition on how the subject is produced within discourse, I could see how this came into play in my field (Hall et al. 2013, 39). Furthermore, several parts of my research were left open due to the current pandemic from the COVID-19 pandemic that has occurred during the time in which this project took place. Some of the places such as the Food Support Centre at York University had closed, and I was not able to conduct participant observation as I had intended to.

Understanding the Meaning and Experience of Food Insecurity

The Formation of Subjectivity Through Family Upbringing

Whilst current studies of post-secondary student food insecurity disclose the ways that students are experiencing food insecurity on campus, students' subjective embodied experience and understanding of food (in)security throughout their childhood is often

disregarded (Peterson and Freidus 2020). Yet, all interviewees highlighted how their understanding of food (in)security were influenced by their experience of food accessibility throughout their upbringing. Although the current study is limited to three participants, the participants' experiences highlighted the demographic enrollment shift that has emerged over time and has brought forth implications of how food insecurity is perceived and understood by the student population. Erica Regan outlines in her research on food insecurity among college students, how studies suggest that already disadvantaged demographic groups, such as African American students, Hispanic students, and first-generation students, are more likely to experience food insecurity (2019, 9). Therefore, it is important to take into account individuals' bodily experience, history, and political and economic position as it relates to food (in)security (Biehl et al. 2007, 15).

Valentino, 21-year-old 3rd-year York University student is a second-generation immigrant to Canada. He self-identified as food secure now, though has not always experienced being food secure. When he was a child in Toronto, he remembers having a very limited variety of food available. Valentino's childhood food experience was significantly impacted by his parent's arrival into Canada. As new immigrants, his parents had to learn to navigate their way through an unknown country and lifestyle. However, this new transition along with other stressors, complicated his parent's situation, eventually leading to his parents' divorce. There were days when he would have little food available in the household, but his mom being a single parent was able to push through and provide for the family. Valentino noted how this contributed to the food insecurity he experienced as a child as well. Aside from his personal experience of being food insecure during his childhood, he noted how his situation was different from the one his cousins are currently experiencing:

> Back home in the Philippines my cousins don't always get the opportunity to go on three meals a day, they usually just have breakfast and dinner, and me every day when I go home I know I always have food waiting for me and I feel blessed for being able to be food secure.

Therefore, for Valentino, his childhood experience and witnessing the reality that his cousins were facing during that time, shaped his perception and understanding of what food (in)security is, creating a standard of food insecurity against which to compare his current experience.

Sophia, a 20-year-old 3rd-year international student at York University from the Dominican Republic who identifies as food insecure, shared a very similar upbringing. She recounted how growing up her mother was the one that provided for her family and had to provide both food and shelter for not just her kids but also for her parents. Sophia also mentioned how her mom has also been able to pay for her schooling by working in more than one job and taking out a loan. She explained that she grew up in an environment where food was never wasted, where if someone in the family did not finish their meal, it was given to another family member to finish or saved for later. After leaving her home country to study at York University she noted how people's relationship with food is different compared to her home country. She was surprised by the amount of food people threw out when they are done eating and in certain cases, she had offered to finish the food to prevent any from going to waste.

Mike, a member of York's student union in a position focused primarily on student food services, also shared his struggles growing up in a single parent household. Although he grew up having both his mother and father around, his dad passed away when he was young. After losing his father, his mother took on another job and worked hard to provide for him and his sibling. He mentioned how he and his siblings were fortunate because his mother managed to get paid sufficiently to support her children, but since she was always busy working, they only got to see her on Sundays. However, she always reminded them — "you are lucky to be able to have food at your disposal because many kids do not have the same opportunity you do." For this reason, since entering post-secondary education, he has been helping with food services on campus and trying to help students who are facing challenges in food accessibility.

All three participants came from families whose roots are not from Canada, they were either first- or second-generation immigrants or international students. As Tina Moffat et al. highlight, immigrant families experience more food insecurity than non-immigrant families in Canada, though immigrant families tend to adapt and change their diets to the host country they are in (Moffat et al. 2017, 16). In this case, both Mike and Valentino witnessed the challenges and obstacles first-generation immigrant families can face when adapting and navigating life in a new country. Although they learned to "adapt" to living in a new country, it had a significant impact on their subjective understanding of what food insecurity is. They developed a reference point of what it feels like to be food insecure. Conversely, for Sophia, this has been an ongoing challenge she has encountered during the time she's been at York University.

Alternately, all three of the participants expressed their subjectivity through the embodied reflection of their life experiences. Throughout the interviews, family was brought up when discussing their understanding of food (in)security their situation. Henry argues that food insecurity amongst college students is usually caused through a combination of events, of which divorced and single-parent households became reoccurring factors (2017, 12). Valentino and Mike expressed how their mothers became single parents, either through divorce or the loss of their father. Although, during the time the interviews took place they were food secure individuals, they grew up in a food-insecure household. Furthermore, Sophia was also very outspoken about the importance familial relationships and how her perceptions of what food insecurity means through her upbringing has changed as she got more involved with the York University community. It is worth noting that even though she identifies as food insecure, back home her family can afford sufficient food, which she described as being healthier than the food she can acquire here for the same price.

These findings also show that experiences and perceptions of food (in)security are influenced by family experiences, and it was more likely for participants to understand food insecurity based on their own experiences. In many cases, food insecurity among the student population has been linked to family experiences of low socio-economic status and what Henry calls "tipping points" (combination of events that prevented students from being able to manage for themselves), which was evident in the experience the participants encountered as kids (2017, 12). Moreover, many students who are food insecure get motivated to keep attending school by making it a goal to get a degree, with the priority being aimed at securing a better job and career so they can financially assist a family

member. This "prioritizing" outweighs the hunger many students are faced with (Henry 2017, 6). This reflects Sophia's experience when she mentioned that, "there is this need to give back to your parents and you cannot mess it up now. That is the only thing keeping me up right now." This further illustrates the significance family plays in influencing the student's subjective understanding of food insecurity and through that understanding, how they develop methods of overcoming the challenges.

Food Consumption and Evaluation of Access

Above I demonstrated the influence childhood upbringing can have in participants' subjective understanding of food (in)security. However, Valentino and Sophia's embodied experiences throughout their childhood also had a significant influence on their conceptualization of food access in terms of quantity and quality. Furthermore, students expressed how the way they navigate university grounds when it comes to acquiring food, reflects the influence family learned behaviors have had on them. While both students spoke about the impact of lack of money on food access, Sophia focused on the issue of healthier food options on campus while Valentino stressed the issue of accessing sufficient quantities of food.

Valentino explained how food insecurity has come to affect his personal life by rendering him more "open-minded" and understanding of people's food insecurity reality. He explains this affect on his personal life:

> Well, honestly I understand that I'm one of those people that are blessed to have access to all those foods, but I would say that this topic impacts me not directly because I do not need to worry about whether I'm going to have three meals a day, but I understand there are people that are struggling and its helped me become open-minded and understand why people are going through those situations.

For Valentino, accessibility to a variety of diverse food options and ability to consume three meals a day illustrates his conceptualization of food access and (in)security based on quantity. It is also noteworthy that in Valentino's experience, the opportunity to acquire meals from his household is always an option, and if he wakes up early enough, he brings a "Nutella sandwich" to campus. However, he emphasized that he sometimes gets meals on campus, but usually he only spends money on cheaper items like chocolate milk from Tim Hortons or the occasional hotdog from the stand outside the student center.

On the other hand, Sophia expressed her conception of food insecurity on criteria distinct from Valentino, mainly because she is still experiencing the harsh reality of having to face the challenges and difficult experience of food insecurity. Throughout the interview, she expressed her concern and experience with food quality and health. She brought up how "back home healthier alternatives are cheaper than here," and how her parents taught her to appreciate the journey of going to their local supermarket where food is always fresh and less processed than the food options she has access to at York. She noted how the way she navigates school grounds, social relationships, and family relationships are greatly influenced by her situation. In her case, she is struggling to maintain her previous lifestyle due to her being an international student and having to adapt to new societal norms.

Although she experienced food insecurity even when she was living in the Dominican Republic, she was able to have access to healthier alternatives and a greater variety of food options, but now she had to adapt to the resources that are available within York University grounds.

York University has a food support center that aims at providing food and basic needs available to students who are in a position where they can no longer afford to purchase these items for themselves. In contrast to Henry's claim that students avoid seeking help due to "overwhelming feelings of shame from the inability to provide for themselves" (2017, 11), Sophia saw the food support centre as a helpful resource. Yet, Sophia did try to avoid the food centre when she could, not out of shame, but distrust. She explained that "there is something about getting food for free that I do not like. It makes me wonder if there is something wrong with the food." She made the remark after explaining how the food support center had meat and vegetables available in the food center and how she never really trusted it. Usually when she went to the food center, she reached for the canned foods and easy-to-make meals. While she struggled to hold on to her previous lifestyle, her experience of going to the university food center, discussing food insecure issues with colleagues, developing coping mechanisms, and even acquiring food has been greatly influenced by her food accessibility within York University grounds. It has become part of her daily life, a situation that has become embedded within her current lifestyle.

Furthermore, when asked what York University can do to provide students with more accessible food and healthier food options, Mike responded by saying "that is something that York is really behind on, so if you look at Ryerson and UofT, over the last few years they have studied and remodeled the food that they provide on campuses." He emphasized how Ryerson University and University of Toronto have begun approaching the emergent issue of food accessibility and healthier food alternatives by either hiring "professionals" to investigate the food supply and food services for their school campus or canceling previous contracts with suppliers.

In contrast, York has an agreement with a large food services corporation Aramark and most of the restaurants outside of the student center are owned by them. They have a monopoly on the food that they are providing, which Mike suggests are providing things that the company thinks will sell the most or have the highest profit. Therefore, he suggests that York needs to investigate how they can provide a healthier food model for the school. He also outlines how there are small organizations within York that help provide healthier alternatives for students, such as the farmers market that is available every Wednesday, which sells fresh fruit and vegetables so students can obtain these items at cheaper prices. However, he feels York should follow Ryerson and UofT's steps and at least conduct a study as to how they can improve the food services on campus.

Campus Dynamics

The campus accessibility to food became another common theme described by the three participants, which brought forth unique subjective experiences. Campus food access has come to affect many of the students, especially the ones living on campus. Although universities have aimed at creating programs and services, such as meal plans, to increase access to food options for students, Peterson and Freidus found that many of the students

they interviewed who had meal plans still expressed concerns on food accessibility (2020, 133). Additionally, they found that student meal plans are usually limited and forced students to ration their meals near the end of the semester. However, programs and services are only fragments of the spatial and temporal reshaping of students' food accessibility on university campuses.

Like many students who live in residence, Sophia had to acquire the meal plan to get access to food and in her case, she acquired the bronze meal plan, which she explained was the cheapest of the options available. However, she mentioned meals increased in price in comparison to the previous year, which created further implications for her and her family. She explained how most students, like herself, that acquire the meal plan usually run out of funds around February, short of the end of the semester in April. Sophia also noted that the moment her meal plan ran out she inclined to use the food support center as a way to cope with the lack of food she experienced. She also obtained a job on campus to cover, amongst other things, her food expenses, but most importantly she obtained a job because she did not want her parents having to worry about sending her money all the time.

When it comes to on-campus foods, many students experiencing food insecurity develop coping strategies such as buying cheap fast food, sharing food with roommates, suppressing hunger with excessive fluid intake, and downsizing meals (Henry 2017, 14). However, when it comes to fast-food restaurants, one of the factors many of the studies failed to address was the relationship between meal plans and access to quality foods. As mentioned before, Sophia had the bronze meal plan, but she explained many of the food options available to purchase through the meal plan are, for the most part, fast-food restaurants. Yet, even without a meal plan, the food available in both the Food Support Centre and York University is not always the healthiest option. Within York University many of the restaurants available are fast-food chains, in which Wendy's, Popeyes, Pizza Pizza, Bubble tea, etc. become widely used spaces for students to purchase food due to their cheap prices.

Moreover, York's campus is divided into two complexes which includes different faculties. Sophia pointed to how the two complexes provided different food options. Within complex 2 students had more access to healthier alternatives such as salads, healthier breakfast options, and even the option to buy edible grass. Meanwhile, complex 1 provided cheaper and more unhealthy options such as pizza and fast-food items. The distinct groups of food options between the complexes illustrates the uneven spatial distribution of food quality across the York University campus.

Furthermore, Mike discussed throughout the interview how usage of the Food Support Centre has grown over the years. During the time the interview took place they had experienced exponential growth of customers with an average of 2000 students a month. Moreover, emergent studies on student food insecurity have noted the rise of tuition cost to be a rising factor in implicating student's food experiences within the campus. Besides the rapid increase, Mike suggested that since the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) had decreased their financial aid for students by 20-30% while tuition prices only decreased by 10%, student that have depended on OSAP funding were left with 10% less funding. As Mike mentioned, this 10% could harm those students that relied on that money for food or rent, which could explain the increase in Food Support Centre

usage. However, in response to my question about whether the food provided by the Food Support Centre was healthy, he replied saying:

> Well we try our best to have healthy choices, but what happens is we end up getting what students request, and most of the time the students that use our service live in the Village (right off campus), and those are not ideal spaces because there around 8–12 students living in the same house and you have those students sharing one kitchen, so must students request easy to prepare meals, whether that is mac n cheese, easy to prepare noodles or canned vegetables because they do not have the time to prep a meal.

In some cases, students living in residency often aim at obtaining quick, easy-to-prepare meals because most of them do not have access to proper kitchen appliances to store and cook food (Henry 2017). Correspondingly, Sophia mentioned not always being able to buy healthy foods because of the price or because there is one kitchen that resident students must share, which means she had to adjust around others' use of the kitchen to prepare her meals.

Moreover, when talking about the OSAP and tuition changes with Mike, he mentioned how he feels that the "powers at play" (whatever level of government) do not have cohesive understanding of how policies impact marginalized folks. They do not realize how these changes to policies can affect a student's decision on whether to eat or not eat. Furthermore, emergent studies on student food insecurity have noted the rise of tuition cost to be a rising factor in implicating student's food experiences within the campus (Henry 2017; Hughes et al. 2011; Peterson and Freidus 2020; Regan 2020).

Therefore, these findings show how campus spatial factors such as the separation of healthy and less healthy food options into the two complexes, kitchen access for students, and engagement with the Food Support center come to reshape student's food access within the university. Additionally, students experience food accessibility and thereby food insecurity within university campus on a temporal dimension as well. For Sophia, this was emphasized through the pressures she had to overcome when her meal plan ran out before the end of the year. Peterson and Freidus also noted in their findings how "despite the potential for campus meal plans to increase access to food, students with and without meal plans are equally vulnerable to food insecurity" (2020, 132). For Sophia, not only did she have limited access to food quality and quantity within university campus, but she had to find alternative method of food access when her meal plan ended early. This brings to light how other students may find themselves in similar situations based on the spatial and temporal effects university grounds can have on student food accessibility.

Conclusion

Recent efforts towards understanding food insecurity among the post-secondary student population has revealed the complexity of this growing issue. In many cases, students are faced with several different factors that come to shape their own lived experiences and understandings of insecurity that research has yet to explore in depth. For instance, Regan

argues that to understand the stratification implications of food insecurity among students, more research should be done to understand if the case of food insecurity is a "pre-existing or college-specific phenomenon" (2019, 8). However, the stories and embodied subjective experiences of food (in)security among the participants paper bring forth a different understanding on how students perceive food insecurity within university grounds and in their daily lives.

Through this article I have shown that individual self-perceptions and experiences of food (in)security have a more relational, contingent dimension than the literature might suggest. The analysis based on the interviews illustrates that individual and moral concerns created by family/ childhood upbringing, economic situations, intersubjective experience, and campus dynamics (both spatial and temporal) influence the social and subjective experience of food insecurity. The findings of this study emphasized how family and childhood upbringing had a significant impact in influencing participants' food consumption and formation of subjectivity. All three participants discussed their understanding of food insecurity to be influenced by their childhood experiences such as living in single-parent households, growing up in a food insecure household, and having family members in other part of the world that are currently food insecure. Mike and Valentino perceived the difficulties and challenges they experienced throughout their childhood as opportunities to help and understand others who are currently facing similar situations to what they went through. Yet, such experiences have also shaped the way they navigate food consumption on campus and the ways they engage with campus services and food programs for students. For Sophia this was highlighted in her comments on access to healthy food options (quality) on campus based on her experience of food accessibility when living in the Dominican Republic. Furthermore, Valentino's comments and experience emphasized the importance of quantity and diversity of food accessibility when addressing discussion on food insecurity

Moreover, throughout the university campus, students are faced with spatial and temporal factors that reshape their food accessibility. The spatial factors were further illustrated by Sophia's experience in both the distinguishable food option availability based on geographical locations (complex 1 and complex 2) within campus and the constraints of sharing dorm room kitchens. However, the temporal factors outlined by the pressures and "longevity" of meal plan usage within campus, and shift towards Food Support Center engagement throughout her semester(s), has also further impacted students experiencing food insecurity. Participants stressed the need for York University to contend with the effects of food insecurity on marginalized students. The lack of engagement by these "powers at play"—whether enacted by government or institutional level (such as York University)—to the issue of food insecurity and its effects on the marginalized students is something that all three of the participants perceived as an issue that should be acted upon.

Therefore, the conflicting narratives of "the starving student"—capturing the experience of food insecurity through the insufficient access to food—and "the freshman 15"—capturing the challenges of accessing healthier food options—that often get recognition among post-secondary students highlight the fragmented subjective experience students face when entering post-secondary education. Food (in)security in the context of subjectivity can only be understood as always being in motion and transforming; it is not something that can be understood as a whole, but through fragments of the subjective experience.

This ever-transforming subjectivity comes to shape the performance and awareness of one's behavior within a given space, driving the construction of identity through agentive acts that participants evaluate and remake (Homewood 2015). Each participant has become aware of who they are and how food insecurity has come to take shape in how they navigate their social relationships, food acquisition, knowledge production, educational grounds, and family relationships.

Through this research, I have demonstrated that there is a need to attend more to post-secondary students' relationship to food (in)security and the complexities that shape it. There is a need for more research on the role institutions play in the reinforcement and co-production of food insecurity amongst university students. Therefore, I hope this research points to where such research might focus and how future work might improve post-secondary student's current challenges. Without addressing student food insecurity on campus, universities perpetuate systemic inequities and thereby, further replicating the conflicting narratives of the freshman 15 and the starving student.

References

Baradie, Aya. 2021. "Mr. Noodles or Kraft Dinner? Canada's post-secondary students are suffering from food insecurity and are losing healthy options. "*The Toronto Star*, March 25. https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/03/25/mr-noodles-or-kraft-dinner-canadas-post-secondary-students-are-suffering-from-food-insecurity-and-are-losing-healthy-options.html, accessed June 10, 2021.

Bhat, Priya. 2020. "How B.C. universities are fighting campus food insecurity." *National Observer*, December 7. https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/12/07/news/bc-universities-campus-food-insecurity#:~:text=The%20problem%20is%20even%20more,higher%20than%20the%20general%20population, accessed June 13, 2021.

Biehl, João, Byron J. Good, and Arthur Kleinman, eds. 2007. *Subjectivity. Ethnographic investigations*, 1st edition. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Brocco, Giorgio. 2016. "Albinism, stigma, subjectivity and global-local discourses in Tanzania." *Anthropology and Medicine* 23(3), 229-243.

Broton, Katharine and Sara Goldrick-Rab. 2016. "The Dark Side of College (Un) Affordability: Food and Housing Insecurity in Higher Education." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 48(1), 16-25.

Butler, Judith. 2006. Gender Trouble. New York: Routledge.

Canadian Federation of Students Ontario. 2013. "The impact of government underfunding on students." https://cfsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Factsheet-Underfunding.pdf, accessed March 10,, 2020

Frossard, Carolina and Thijs Jeursen. 2019. "Friends and Favours: Friendship as Care at the 'More-Than-Neoliberal' University." *Etnofoor* 31(1), 113-126.

Gibb, Camilla. 2005. "An Anthropologist Undone." In *Auto-Ethnographies: The Anthropology of Academic Practices.* Anne Meneley and Donna Young, eds. Pp. 216–228. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

Goffman, Erving. 2004. "Performances." In *The Performance Studies Reader*, 3rd edition. Henry Bial and Sara Brady, eds. Pp 61–65. London: Routledge.

Gupta, Arjun and James Ferguson. 1992. "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." *Cultural Anthropology* 7(1), 6-23.

Hall, Stuart, and Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, eds. 2013. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices,* 2nd edition. Los Angeles: SAGE Publishing.

Health Canada. 2020. *Household food insecurity in Canada: Overview.* https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/health-nutrition-surveys/canadian-community-health-survey-cchs/household-food-insecurity-canada-overview.html, accessed May 20, 2021.

Henry, Lisa. 2017. "Understanding Food Insecurity Among College Students: Experience, Motivation, and Local Solutions." *Annals of Anthropological Practice* 41(1), 6–19.

Homewood, Christabel. 2015. "Cancer, Appearance, and Identity." *Contingent Horizons: The York University Student Journal of Anthropology* 2(1), 89-114.

Hughes, Roger, and Irene Serebryanikova, Katherine Donaldson, and Michael Leveritt. 2011. "Student food insecurity: The skeleton in the university closet." *Nutrition and Dietetics* 68(1), 27-32.

Mathews, Merle Davis. 2015. "On Beauty, Power, Resistance, and More." *Contingent Horizons: The York University Student Journal of Anthropology* 2(1), 39-48.

Moffat, Tina, and Charlene Mohammed, and Bruce Newbold. 2017. "Cultural Dimensions of Food Insecurity among Immigrants and Refugees." *Human Organization* 76(1), 15-27.

Peterson, Nicole and Andrea Freidus. 2020. "More than Money: Barriers to Food Security on a College Campus." *Culture, Agriculture, Food and the Environment: The Journal of Culture & Agriculture* 42(2), 125–137.

Piot, Charles. 2010. *Nostalgia for the Future.* University of Chicago Press.

PROOF. n.d. *Household Food Insecurity in Canada.* https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/, accessed May 24, 2021

Regan, Erica P. 2020. Food insecurity among college students. *Sociology Compass* 14(6), e12790.

Tarasuk, Valerie and Lynn McIntyre. 2020. "Food Insecurity in Canada." In *The Canadian Encyclopedia.* https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/food-insecurity-in-canada, accessed May 20, 2021.

Fortune Telling, Healing Stones and the Evil Eye

The Impact of Alternative Self Care Rituals on Psychological Harm on the Neoliberal Body and Personal Well Being in Athens, Greece

PALBI SHARMA BHARGAVA
PHD STUDENT, INTERDISCIPLINARY GRADUATE STUDIES–GLOBAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, KELOWNA, CANADA

The Greek economic crisis caused chaos in the lives of citizens and as a result many individuals suffer from anxiety and stress. Neoliberal markets have assisted in facilitating alternative self-care rituals to help citizens of Athens take control of their mental health. These markets provide alternative healing services and products to treat individuals from everyday stress and anxiety. This research project utilizes ethnographic methodology to understand how self-care rituals, such as coffee cup readings, evil eye exorcism, healing stones and evil eye merchandise play a significant role in improving mental health in the lives of adult Greek citizens. The interlocutors report that the use of alternative self-care rituals have positive therapeutic benefits in their lives. These products and services embody a rich cultural history, but over time are questioned and stigmatized due to the rationality in relation to current scientific advancements. This paper explores the sociocultural significance of alternative self-care rituals and understanding of mental health in Athens, Greece. This study is an effort to show despite the stigma towards alternative healing methods, these methods deserve our attention as they report to have a significant impact on consumers lives and identities.

KEY WORDS Greece, economic crisis, holistic health, fortune telling, mental health, healing stones, evil eye

> People come here because they know when nothing works, we have an answer. Rose quartz is for attracting love and amethyst is for protection during difficult times. It helps you throughout your life, it helps to protect you from the unknown and evil eye. There's a stone for everything and it's the answer to all your troubles. Since the crisis, we had more people coming in to ask for help to improve their situations. They come here because they know these stones heal and they work. Their problems are no more.[1]

I examined the amethyst stone the store owner, Apollo, handed to me while he went on to further explain its healing properties. I followed him to the front of the store where he brought my attention to a side table made of a large sparkling amethyst geode holding up a glass tabletop. Apollo told me the story of a client who was impressed by how amethyst had changed her life. She asked to get custom side tables made so she would be protected at home. Apollo ended the story by saying, "[l]ife will now only get better and those who

Contingent Horizons Volume 7, Number 1 (2021), pp. 15–30, ISSN 2292–7514, online ISSN 2292–6739.

use the stones know that. I am certain of it."[2] He went on to explain how business significantly increased after the disruption caused by the Greek financial crisis. The individuals who came to his shop were suffering and looking for answers to make their lives better. When there was nothing else to help them out, they came back to holistic healing methods either referred by friends, family members, strangers or because of their own research. Apollo stepped aside to pull out some books illustrating the healing properties of a variety of stones; each and every stone or crystal on earth embodied a powerful healing force. It was evident in Apollo's explanations and well-researched books: there was a stone for *everything*, and it *healed* all the problems or concerns anyone had.

As I browsed through these books, I began to think about an incident that happened this morning. The fire alarm in my apartment went off because a friend was burning sage to cleanse the apartment. The ritual she explained was used to get rid of negative energies. Eventually, the fire alarm stopped but after hearing Apollo's stories and browsing through these books, I began thinking about how burning sage was another way to relieve stress, providing a sense of certainty and comfort. My friend, Liza, was not the only one in my class who actively participated in this ritual, and all those who did happened to convince others of its *magical* properties.

Just like burning sage, the healing stones were used by the many citizens of Athens who came to the store to relieve their self-diagnosed anxieties and stresses due to the aftermath of the crisis. Other popular practices used were evil eye merchandise, evil eye exorcisms and Greek coffee cup readings. Each of these methods held a deep significance for individuals and as reported by my interlocutors, these products and rituals only made their lives *better*. These products and services were all powerful tools shaping the lives of the individuals who used them, especially when there was disruption in their lives.

• • •

The economic crisis in Greece caused drastic changes in many lives and citizens are suffering as a result. The financial crisis is spoken in terms of economic and political factors, but less is spoken about the impacts it has on the well-being of people (Knight 2017, 168-167). Not only is the crisis directly impacting the economy, but it is leaking into citizens' personal lives, impacting their cost of living and mental health. This is evident in other Greek studies all depicting the correlation between the economic crisis and mental health (Panourgia 2016; Efthimiou et al 2013; Dallas, Barousta, and Dein 2020). Individuals are not able to live as they did due to cuts and have lost a sense of normalcy in their everyday life. The economic crisis has caused prices to inflate in the country while drastically reducing salaries of citizens leaving them with less than half of what they used to earn (Panourgia 2016, 113-128). There is a lingering insecurity with the unpredictability of daily life tasks such as relationships, safety, and stability that contribute to a decline in mental health (Panourgia 2016; Efthimiou et al 2013).

Due to the stigma towards mental health and the economic crisis resulting in greater psychological impact (Tzouvara, Papadopoulos and Randhawa 2016, 12), individuals in this study have reported to take matters in their own hands. The stigma is associated with fears of social discrimination (Tzouvara, Papadopoulos and Randhawa 2016, 1-2) and as result there is an increase in suicide (Antonakakis and Collins 2014 in Tzouvara,

Papadopoulos and Randhawa 2016, 12; Panourgia 2016). They realize their situation is causing them harm and in order to combat it they have turned to alternative healing practices. These holistic methods have been used by individuals as a means to feel better, bring luck, or bring change to current situations (Carlos 2018; McClean 2006; Seremetakis 2009). The turn towards these methods could be linked with biomedicine not meeting their own needs or due to the stigma attached with self-diagnoses of dealing with feelings of stress and anxiety (McClean 2006; Efthimiou et al 2013; Herzfeld 1981). Conducting and participating in these rituals helped to alleviate illness and healed them in all domains of their lives: socially, biologically, spiritually and psychologically. Interlocutors reported their use and belief in these practices sparked when they had reached a tough period in their lives because of the economic crisis. Despite having these rituals available through generations, the *value* of them, as interlocutors reported, was realized when they turned to these rituals during their darkest times.

Using an anthropological methodology to understand these alternative care practices will incorporate a cross-cultural approach to further dwell into the issue of mental health in Greece. A cross-cultural understanding provides the framework to look at the benefits, commonalities, and limitations between alternative healing and biomedicine (Millman 2011, 88; Micozzi 2002; Kleinman and Hahn 1983). This ethnography shows how different forms of alternative healing caused a significant impact in the lives of users. It allowed them to have a space where they could be open to share their problems and alleviate them without feeling any shame or worry. A commonality that strings these rituals together is meaning and trust, which are *key elements* to help heal in both alternative healing and biomedicine (Welch 2003; Millman 2011; Micozzi 2002). There are many different reasons why this path for healing is chosen by individuals; some of those reasons are religion, socioeconomic status, and societal and cultural influences (Carlos 2018; McClean 2013). Each culture views mental health differently and has beliefs set based on these views. Despite biomedicine being a dominant paradigm for health, it is not the only answer to mental health related problems, and does not take into consideration social and cultural influences (Millman 2011, 81). In Greece, culture is an influential factor for mental health and instead of getting therapy many individuals rely on family and friends (Dallas, Barousta, and Dein 2020, 723). It is important to understand the causes of illness and the techniques that can be used to treat them, as this in return can help build more efficient integrated models of health care.

As I navigated the city of Athens from my apartment to various shops and cafés, I was interested in learning about my interlocutors' personal stories of how they used different practices as a means to cope through difficult times. Moreover, I came across articles and media posts depicting the transformation that alternative healing methods had on the lives of people in Greece, and as a result many healing stone shops came into business as well as cafés offering fortune telling services. This article explores different alternative self-healing methods and practices that the citizens of Athens employed to alleviate their stresses and anxieties. Through examining the narratives of my interlocutors, this research will explore the significance and roles that these alternative healing practices had on their lives, the socio-cultural and political significance of these practices, and how these alternative healing practices can broaden our understanding of mental health and biomedicine. I argue that the increasing interest and participation in alternative self-care

practices reflects wide-spread anxieties about the economic situation in Greece; people are turning to practices such as healing stones, evil eye exorcisms and fortune telling in order to achieve a sense of personal control over their well-being. Further, these practices are being reshaped through neoliberal ideologies of individualism as there is an insurgence and demand for neoliberal markets providing services and merchandise for self-care as a direct result of the economic crisis. The contributions of this study will help to understand cross-cultural self-care rituals and perspectives on mental health. These different practices can reach the attention of others to help them cope and help medical professionals learn other ways to help their patients besides the traditional biomedical approach. As one interlocutor put it, "[s]ometimes we don't know the answers to many things and these so-called *superstitions* or *magic* are used as an alternative in the hope of gaining new information and gain therapeutic or healing benefits."[3]

Methods

In order to grasp the understanding of the alternative healing practices used by my interlocutors, I employed the methods of participant-observation, and informal and semi-structured interviews. To determine my key locations for this study, I researched nearby stores or cafés that offered fortune telling services or sold healing stones. My field sites were primarily located at the Healing Stone shop, Café, and various evil eye merchandise vendors. From there, my secondary research locations arose from shop owners referring me to other individuals they thought would help me gain further insight into alternative healing methods. In addition, I called these locations ahead of time to determine if there were any language barriers, and to my luck many of these locations employed their very own interpreter.

I came to Athens as a part of a study abroad program at my university and was unfamiliar with the city other than reading about ancient Greece and exploring travel blogs. My interest in exploring alternative healing methods dealing with stress and anxiety stems from my interest to learn about coping with mental health and my personal life. Furthermore, many of my friends and family have adopted unique self-care methods to deal with their everyday stress and anxiety that they have encouraged me to try as well. I was familiar with crystals, evil eyes and fortune telling based on my own cultural understanding, however, I wanted to learn and understand their personal and cross-cultural significance, how they worked and their specific use in the Greek culture.

Adapting to life in Athens was not as difficult as anticipated due to the cultural difference and language barriers. This was because I familiarized myself with cultural norms, dynamics, and interactions among the participants to provide a comfortable and risk-free environment for interlocutors to engage in. However, issues arose at times when I asked individuals about their uses of alternative healing methods because—unbeknownst to me – the topic of my research was taboo. This was due to many reasons like the rituals being considered outdated customs, the belief the rituals would not work if they were spoken about out loud, the pressure to fit into *modern* society, and for some it was a secret they wished not to share. After this discovery, I thought it would be difficult finding participants, but interlocutors were interested and felt it was important for people to finally realize these rituals and products have positive benefits. I met and built rapport with many

participants by *deep hanging out* at these shops, who came from a wide range of professions, such as doctors, students, business owners, and teachers. They all had come to consume these rituals or gather particular products as recommended to them as a way to deal with their stress and anxieties.

During my time in the field, I heard many narratives of people paying a lot of money to individuals who turned out to be *con* fortune tellers. These individuals were fooling people into believing they would help them and get rid of their misery, but instead contributed to their problems. While some laughed and called these incidents a good lesson for the individuals who believed in fortune tellers, others empathized with their pain. An interlocutor described the situations of betrayal as being devastating and losing hope for humanity. "People just take advantage of poor lost souls" he said.[4] Others I met said they did not want to fall into the trap fortune tellers created so they avoided them at all costs and warned me to do the same. Some individuals were confused about why I cared about alternative healing methods and suggested I see a professional biomedical doctor instead because "they treated *real* problems."

Participant-observation initially began by quietly observing my surroundings and examining interlocutors' behaviours and expressions when they visited shops and cafés to receive alternative healing products and/or services. This allowed me to better understand these healing alternatives and develop an unbiased perspective of these methods, which helped me better develop my research questions for when I immersed myself in the field as a participant rather than observer.

I was an outsider in Athens studying abroad for the summer, but in these spaces, I was connected with citizens of Athens as I became a subject of my own research. There were a few circumstances when interlocutors felt I needed to be protected from the evil eye and rushed to conduct exorcism for me. I found these circumstances interesting parts of the journey that helped me think more about the process of these rituals and beliefs as I became part of them. It was confusing for me at first and I wondered if something I said was lost in translation, but like the sage burning performed by Liza, the underlying intentions were good.

These methods helped me gain a deeper look into the lives of my interlocutors as well as examine specific care rituals and products. The research questions focused on the narratives that led my interlocutors to embrace alternative health practices and how these practices impacted their everyday lives. I spent time speaking with both shop owners and consumers, as getting insight on both sides would help me to get a view of understanding how one feels, thinks, and acts in curating and consuming self-care rituals.

Discussion

This section explores three different alternative self-care rituals practiced by interlocutors: evil eye merchandise and exorcisms, healing crystals, and Greek coffee cup readings. These narratives demonstrate the role alternative healing methods play in the lives of individuals and the significance it holds for them.

The evil eye ritual, healing stones, and coffee cup readings were passed down by generations as a form of healing (Korkman 2013; Dallas, Barousta, and Dein 2020; McClean 2013; Carlos 2008). The objects used in these methods, whether it be stones, charms, or

coffee cups are relevant in their time and place (Tsang 2004, 94-95). The use of these New Age beliefs is to ward away the bad and bring in the good and used in a complementary manner in combination with Greek Orthodox beliefs (Roussou 2011; 8).[5] This is seen in the use of the evil eye exorcisms as they are a part of religious beliefs and have been adapted into present times (Roussou 2011; 8-10). The use of New Age practices in lieu of Greek Orthodox practices depicts the creation of individualistic versions of religious practices instead of collective practices, as people are influenced by old and new beliefs and practice (Roussou 2011; 85-90). Throughout Greek history, alternative methods of healing have been used to treat mental and biological illness (Dallas, Barousta, and Dein 2020; 721). Services like coffee cup reading, healing stones, and evil eye merchandise are becoming a part of an emerging neoliberal market for the New Age (Heelas 2008; Korkman 2013). They are called New Age despite having a long history because these previous rituals were adapted to the present world. These are practices involving holistic and multi-sensory exchange (Seremetakis 2009, 340-347). Crystal and spiritual healing through engagement with clients' experiences bring out effective healing and thus having a good healer and believing in the healer's abilities is crucial for the healing process (McClean 2013, 62-63).

Feelings of hopelessness in addition to stigma towards mental health has a detrimental impact on psychological health. There is a stigma attached to mental health and illness due to the negative attitudes of the public and society (Papadoulos and Tzouvara 2014, 1-2). The stigma is a result of societal ideologies making it difficult for individuals to take control of their mental health by seeing a professional or even acknowledging their mental health concerns. This shows the Greek economy only cares for their capital, as human beings are being treated as commodities and there is no acknowledgement towards human care (Panourgia 2016, 122-123). The loss of normalcy and living in a state of uncertainty has resulted in an increased suicide rate, for example, in elderly people who feel they have no control over their lives anymore and that they are pressured in a way to end their lives in order to escape the situation (Panourgia 2016, 122-126). Specific disorders like depressive and anxiety-bound disorders cause suicidal risks as well (Patel and Kleinman 2003; Efthimiou et al 2013).

Section 1: Evil Eye

Walking on the cobblestone streets of Athens, I saw evil eyes all around me. Whether they be attached to bags, bracelets, posters, scarves or anywhere else, these often blue and multi-colored symbols followed me everywhere. These eyes held a deeper meaning for the people of Athens, they were not just tourist merchandise but cultural symbols. They are known as the *evil eye* or in Greek are referred to as *mati* (Greek Boston 2016). The concept of the evil eye has been present since the sixth-century BC, and is described as a stare a person may pass due to feeling envious of another person causing them to be harmed or to experience misfortune (Greek Boston 2016). In other words, if a person experiences any misfortune or were feeling ill "it is probably because someone gave them evil eye."[6] The harm itself can manifest in a variety of ways like physical pains such as headaches, job loss, or an unstable mind.[7] The evil eye curse is manifested in physical forms aligning with the evil eye givers' intention. A café owner, Zeus, warned me, "this isn't something

to take lightly--the evil eye impacts all aspects of someone's life and is the reason for their suffering."[8]

I recall an incident while wanting to learn more about the evil eye, I had become victim to it. I walked into Zeus' café one evening seeking a chocolate dessert. His café was the best for desserts—it had everything! As I peered through the glass display carefully examining what to pick, Zeus began asking me about school. I knew the owner quite well by now, as I would visit the café quite often. Whether it was a frappé before class, a snack or dessert – I often found myself there. While he was packing up my dessert, I asked him if he knew any local fortune tellers that I could visit. At first, he did not understand why I would be asking such a question. I reminded him it was for the research project I was working on and if he knew anyone who could help.

Zeus told me he did not believe in any of those things but if I had any concerns about my future or present, it might be because I have gotten the evil eye. I was confused and worried, had I got the evil eye? He told me the evil eye is to blame for all my worries in life and reassured me all my worries would be resolved once I undertook an exorcism to ward off the evil eye's curse. He has performed it many times and could relate to what I was going through, promising me that within five minutes I would be healed. I tried to explain to him I was doing this for research and not to worry about the evil eye for me. But something seemed lost in translation: he was concerned for me and was now *sure* I had gotten the evil eye.

Zeus was now on a phone call with someone and speaking quickly in Greek. It turned out he had called his wife and told me to wait. My dessert run had turned into something chaotic—*what had I gotten myself into*? Zeus continued his conversation on the phone pausing briefly asking me to say my entire name. I watched him repeat my name back to his wife over the phone and later end the call. He told me not to worry anymore or think about fortune tellers, especially the "palm reading gypsies"[9]—stay away, he warned. Zeus told me that within five minutes I would feel much better, but I may get a headache and that is just an after-effect of the evil eye removal. It is sign that the evil eye has been warded off. He then directed me to take an aspirin if needed. I asked him about the telephone exorcism and Zeus explained a woman conducts the ritual using water and oil while whispering the prayer into a man's ear to complete it. I thanked him for helping me out and he offered—if I ever felt sick again—to repeat the ritual for me. I left the shop in confusion and tried to make sense of what happened. I tried to retrace the experience in the café to recall my body language or words I used that gave off any sort of distress. I was taken aback—they did this whole ritual just for me, a stranger, who they realized was going through some trouble.

This event reminded me of a previous incident that happened the week before to my friend and I while heading to airport. The main door leading outside our apartment was jammed and we tried, to no avail, every which way to open it. In fact, after several failed attempts we accepted our fate: we were not going to Santorini that weekend. We told the Uber driver who was waiting outside that there was no way this door was going to open, and she could leave. The Uber driver, a woman named Amara, told us to stand back and take a deep breath while she tried opening the door one last time. Miraculously, the door opened. During our car ride, Amara told us she had used a prayer often used to ward off

the evil eye and that is how our door finally opened. Amara admitted the evil eye was a tradition forced upon her and she did not really believe in it. She explained that evil eye prayers were a way to show affection and security towards your loved ones. Amara resorted back to it during her current situation as result of the economic crisis. To Amara the evil eye prayer provided comfort and hope for things to get better. My travel companion asked her if she could tell us the prayer and its meaning but Amara was hesitant. Amara felt by telling us the prayer she would lose her *power* to remove evil eye curses but assured us if a man was present, she could whisper it to him, and he could tell us. Unfortunately, no man was present, so we were not able to learn the prayer.

Taking Amara's point into consideration I asked Zeus some questions about the evil eye ritual. For starters, I wanted to know about the words uttered for the prayer, but he told me he could not tell me the prayer because it would lose its magic. He reiterated the evil eye was real and gave me some examples of how it protected his family. Zeus told me if his family did not perform this ritual then his family would be in great trouble because of the crisis, but that this ritual saved them. He believed in the power of the evil eye curse but was skeptical about fortune telling, which is also said to use metaphysical forces towards the betterment and protection of individuals. Reflecting back on my experience, I did feel better and more energetic. This could have been due to the ritual or the awe for the altruism to help relieve me from the evil eye Zeus believed I had. The ritual was indeed special, and it felt nothing less than *magic*.

Zeus and Amara made me reflect on these incidents and wonder why I was getting the evil eye. I thought about who I could be getting the evil eye from or what made them think I had the evil eye more generally. I headed to a shop that sold evil eye merchandise referred by a friend who, just like Zeus and Amara, credits the evil eye exorcism and merchandise she wears and sells as the reason she was not severely harmed in the crisis. The shop carried all sorts of different colored evil eyes like blue, red, and green. The eyes were found on many different kinds of products the shop sold but it was the jewelry that particularly caught my eye. I was casually talking to an associate about the charms in the shop and she began talking about the evil eye in greater detail. The associate, a woman named Alexa, told me about the evil eye and the role it played in her life as well as the lives of many fellow Greeks.

This shop was started by her father who would create various structures with the symbol of the evil eye as it was a famous mark. Since then, the shop has been open for many years, passed down from generation to generation and now she was in charge with her daughter. She described the evil eye as something that held great significance in the Greek culture. It provides a sense of protection and good luck for the individual who possesses these charms with evil eyes on them. Alexa also wears these charms to protect herself from any evil eye curse and says it has worked well for her. She was certain it worked well because she had personally experienced it and so have others who come to her shop, meaning it would work well for me, too. She mentioned that if there was ever a day she forgot to wear her charm, she would feel worried and stressed about the loss of protection until the charm was back with her.

Wearing the evil eye charm makes her feel safe, stress free, and as she mentioned, is a key reason why her shop was saved from the impact of the economic crisis. Alexa explained she strongly believes if it were not for years of protection through selling evil eye

charms to help others, wearing the charms, and evil eye exorcisms she conducted when needed, her family would be suffering greatly from the crisis. Instead, her store was running well and was even in a better position than prior to the crisis. Many individuals came into her store to get charms to help them during those difficult times and she expressed a sense of gratitude towards helping individuals improve their conditions by supplying evil eye charms. Individuals come by thanking her for being around because without her they would still be suffering from the anxiety and stress caused by their situations. Her store still runs well today, and she feels protected and optimistic about the future for Greeks.

Section 2: Healing Stones

I was introduced to the concept of healing stones back in Canada as it has become an increasingly popular way for individuals to improve their psychological health. The use of healing stones dated back to ancient times in Greece promising to heal and restore the balance in one's mind, body, and soul connection.[10] The popularity of healing stones as reported by the shop owner spiked after the crisis. An interlocutor, Apollo, owned a healing stone shop in Athens. I do not recall any time business was slow, rather the opposite—he was always busy. Apollo owned the shop for several years and was well versed on finding the right stone to heal individuals from any situation or difficulties they would encounter. Like Alexa, Apollo told me there was a boom in the business after the crisis as many people resorted to finding natural ways to better their situations.

Apollo's father was a geologist who loved stones and brought beautiful stones to share with the public. He told me there was a growing interest in the use of healing stones around the 90s to the 2000s, as more people were keen to learn the meanings of the stones. Apollo uses healing stones and has placed them all over his home. Apollo mentioned he kept clear quartz and rose quartz in his home because they are known to bring in positive energy and love. He further elaborated on positive energy being good fortune that wards off negative energies.

Many Athenians stopped by the shop, buying various healing stones aligning with their concerns to be resolved. The stones are displayed all through stores and made into products like tables, jewelry, and polished stones to put in vases or bags. Apollo emphasized the stones helped individuals holistically and even doctors currently practicing biomedicine believed in the power of such stones. He brought this up often during our interview and offered to connect me with the doctors if I needed reassurance. Apollo mentioned that doctors who use healing stones prove its value, as those who are expected to have the answers do not always, and they too need help sometimes. Apollo told me not to mistake this as a placebo because it is nothing of the sort—these stones are natural healers. The stones are said to have a deeper connection that can only be understood by the consumers who believe in the power of the stones.

Apollo illustrated an example of a woman who had symptoms of depression and anxiety. She had lost her job due to the crisis and worried how she would be able to get back on her feet. The medical aids she was taking were of no help and it was not until she started using healing stones she noticed a positive difference in her life. She came into the shop and Apollo suggested stones for her to use according to her situation. The woman left with hope and in a couple of months of keeping the healing stone with her, she was now free

from depression, anxiety and she even had a new job. Apollo stressed, "because she used healing stones it changed her life! Her life is now better than it ever was!"[11] He reiterated the healing stones actually work if you believe in the power they possess and embrace the connection you have with the stone.

The crisis has increased the interest in healing stones and Apollo is happy to help individuals remove their problems with the stones sold in his store. Whether it be black tourmaline for wealth or using amethyst to ward away the evil eye, he was well equipped to help everyone. I noticed while we were talking many people were eagerly waiting to have a word with him so they could find the perfect stones to rid their anxieties and stresses. While they waited, people shuffled through books, made photocopies, and were ready to devote themselves to the mystical powers the stones held. This place reminded me of a pharmacy, but one for spiritual healing, and as Apollo said, "we are helping people in the ways physicians cannot." He definitely did help, as this shop continued to fill with people ready to heal thanks to the power of the stones and of course, Apollo's wise guidance.

Section 3: Coffee Cup Reading

Coffee cup readings, also known as tasseography (Chrysopoulos 2015), date back to old traditions in Greece. The ritual is conducted using Turkish coffee made by the fortune teller or in this case by the barista. The cups used are regular espresso cups not containing any symbols, and a fresh batch of coffee. The person who wishes for their fortune to be told is instructed to drink the coffee in the cup, leaving the sediments at the bottom to settle. The fortunes were personalized as individuals drank from the cup and the residue left behind gave insights into the future. The cup is then flipped upside down to reveal an array of symbols left to be interpreted by the fortune teller. This also meant each experience was unique to each individual.

I found a café known for its coffee cup readings and their coffee. This café had a clean white marble interior and a barista bar on the first floor. The second floor was where the fortune telling took place. The café opened after the crisis to help individuals with their problems as anxieties and stress levels were elevated. Since then, it became popular among the public to help relieve their problems by taking better care and control of their situations.

I observed people in the coffee lounge area eagerly waiting for their turns to be seen by the fortune teller. They drank their coffees with a look of despair hoping to seek solutions and understand what was happening in their lives. It felt like the same tension found in a waiting room at the doctor's office—anticipating the result of one's fate as if it was a question of life or death. Alongside I observed the clients walking down the stairs after their appointment with the fortune teller. Those who were finished with their appointments came down with huge grins and rays of optimism as if a weight had been lifted off their shoulders.

This particular day, I decided to get my own fortune read to learn more about the clients' experience. I observed and made conversation with those around me as I waited to experience the fortune teller. It did not hit me until I was called up for my appointment that this empty cup with leftover coffee residue would predict my future. I was not sure what the fortune teller would tell me nor was I prepared to hear anything devastating and

hoped my experience would mirror the joyful clients who zoomed passed me. This empty espresso cup was somehow the root to my future and was a sacred object revealing all truths when put in the hands of a wise fortune teller.

I walked up the stairs with my interpreter for the appointment. She asked me questions about myself and how I found out about the coffee shop. We arrived in a room secluded from the café shop and it felt as if I was entering a different dimension. The room was filled with tarot cards, fortune telling posters, healing stones, evil eyes and now, a new addition, my empty espresso cup. The fortune teller asked me a few questions about my birthday, age, and where I was from. I had an interpreter for my appointment because the fortune teller did not know much English. The way the fortune teller and translator were speaking with me felt as if we were friends rather than strangers in an awkward power dynamic where she held all the knowledge of my life and I was there to listen. I felt some truths of my future may be lost in translation unlike the other clients. The wording of the predictions made them more personal rather than applicable to everyone. Some of her comments regarding my past and present I agreed with and others not so much, but I hoped her comments of the future would be true. I left the session thanking the fortune teller and explaining my project to the translator who was happy to help me with my work.

While walking down the stairs the translator told me something important. She said the fortune teller did not learn to do these predictions but possessed a power she discovered when she was growing up. She has been doing this for many years because she wants to help others with their problems especially after the devastating impact of the economic crisis. She explained the fortune teller was a healer for everyone but unfortunately, she is not able to see her own fortune as she is only gifted with seeing the futures of others. After my conversation with the translator and experiencing the coffee cup reading for myself, I wondered what returning and new clients thought of this experience and what it meant for them.

I came back to the café often to learn more about the clients' experiences. All of the individuals I spoke with agreed that this was very therapeutic for them. A woman I met named Ida described her therapeutic experience by saying, "the fortune teller knows everything, and she wants the best for me. I trust her and she always helps me resolve all my worries – no one else would understand but she gets it, she gets me".[12] To her this was more like a therapy session where individuals would seek out the *expert* to help them talk through their worries and come up with a solution. Instead of the client foretelling their problems to the fortune teller, she told them what was wrong while the client listened. This comparison reminded me of psychotherapy, particularly talk therapy, where individuals would talk out their issues with the therapist hopefully feeling a bit better than they had prior. Many interlocutors admitted the fortune teller helped them relieve all their stresses and feelings of anxiety. They feel they now have more control over their situation and are able to make the change they have been wanting. It provides them with courage and optimism that everything will be alright.

Ida's view of the fortune teller mimics a therapist with whom people build reliable relationships and are certain their expertise will free them from their issues sooner or later. But some had disagreed--they thought the fortune teller was ridiculous and cunning. "They are all cheaters!" one of my interlocutors exclaimed.[13] He continued saying, "If you have issues, they are caused by someone who has given you the evil eye—that is something

worth believing in because it is true and there is a cure."[14] When used purposefully the act of fortune telling was improving the mental health of interlocutors as they reported to me.

Just like evil eyes and healing stones, the coffee cup reading was a service strung together by belief and an invisible force helping individuals deal with their anxiety and the stresses of life in a way they found helpful. The power of belief along with objects being used for healing is what causes the changes. Either someone believes in the magical force with all their faith or they are *half-believers,* individuals who are hesitant to say whether they believed or not and are stuck in between (Tsang 2004, 100). The power of belief and the altruism is what seemed to thread these self-care rituals together allowing individuals to feel healed after their use. It enabled interlocutors to gain the control they lost in the times of uncertainty. This claimed magic is an effort to gain control over one's life and a way to provide security (Brune 1983, 55-58). These beliefs have been found to be more adaptive for an individual than maladaptive as they provide a sense of hope for protection, security, and positive change (Vyse 2013, 76). These self-care modes are a part of holistic health, meaning they focus on the mind, body, and spirit connection (American Holistic Health Association 2016). These tools and practices for self-care provide individuals with security, protection, and a positive change in their well-being. They were protected and saved from the severe impacts of the crisis because they believed. In order to better understand the significance and rise of alternative healing methods it is important to explore the narratives of users. McClean (2013, 61-62) speaks about learning more about the effectiveness of rituals like healing stones by taking a qualitative approach. This provides a depth of insight to learn more about the subjectivity, experience, legitimacy, and personal effect it has on clients and the healers' perspectives. This approach is adapted for this article as the narratives of interlocutors describe their personal uses and effectiveness of these practices providing progress change and protection from the crisis in their lives.

Conclusion

In the wake of the economic crisis, people look toward the future, turning to various practices to improve their security and personal well-being. Due to the stigma attached to mental health many people are not able to seek care for their concerns. Rather than seeking medical aid to guide them through treatment of stress and anxiety, some individuals resort to alternative treatments. As the interlocutors in this research project indicated, when these alternative self-care rituals were used they positively improved the mental health issues for their clients and themselves. Many people who used these practices have said they work, and that biomedicine was not needed for their healing. But that is not to say that we should dismiss it entirely because when things do get out of hand it is important to seek help of medical professional. The findings of this research indicate an alliance to be made with cultural self-care rituals and biomedicine to improve the way mental health is understood and treated in Greece. Many people have taken up various forms of alternative self-care as they turn towards these practices before going to a medical practitioner.

The purpose of the paper was to explore alternative self-care practices adopted by Athenians after the economic crisis to aid in the betterment of their psychological well-being. These practices are not accepted by everyone and are often dismissed due to stigma

or being called *foolish, voodoo,* or *fake,* they did have an impact on the lives of those who believed in them as well as those who did not. These rituals and products provide comfort, therapeutic relief, and hope to interlocutors that their current situation will be better. All of these healing stones, coffee cups, and evil eye rituals meant something. The alternative self-care rituals were more powerful than the stigma of the people holding it back. Individuals built an emotional connection allowing them to understand and learn the significance of these healing methods. By exploring alternative ways of healing, different from what is considered to be familiar, there are more solutions. The metaphysical forces or magic referred by interlocutors helped them to heal and transformed their current state for the better.

Note

This content was presented previously at the Student Conference on Greece at York University on March 22, 2019.

References

1. Apollo, interview with the author, Healing stone shop, Athens.
2. Apollo, interview with the author, Healing stone shop, Athens.
3. Interlocutor, interview with the author, Healing Stone shop, Athens.
4. Taxi driver, informal conversation with the author, taxi ride, Athens.
5. These beliefs are "new age" as they are not a part of the dominate Orthodox Greek beliefs but have been incorporated alongside them.
6. Zeus, informal conversation with the author, café, Athens.
7. Zeus, informal conversation with the author, café, Athens.
8. Zeus, informal conversation with the author, café, Athens.
9. Zeus, informal conversation with the author, café, Athens.
10. Apollo, interview with the author, Healing stone shop, Athens.
11. Apollo, interview with the author, Healing stone shop, Athens.
12. Ida, interview with the author, Café, Athens.
13. Interlocutor, informal conversation with the author, Café, Athens.
14. Interlocutor, informal conversation with the author, Café, Athens.

References

Antonakakis, Nikolaos and Collins, Alan. 2014. "The impact of fiscal austerity on suicide: On the empirics of a modern Greek tragedy." *Social Science & Medicine* 112, 39–50.

Brune, Lester H. 1983. "Magic's Relation to the Intellectual History of Western Civilization." *Journal of Thought* 18 (1): 55–64.

Carlos, Kristine D. 2018. "Crystal Healing Practices in the Western World and Beyond." Honours Undergraduate Thesis, University of Florida. https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorstheses/283

Christodoulou, Nikos G., and Dimitris C. Anagnostopoulos. 2013. "The Financial Crisis and the Future of Mental Health in Greece." *International Psychiatry* 10 (1): 3–5. doi:10.1192/S1749367600003507.

Chrysopoulous, Philip. 2015. "Greeks Look for Future Inside Coffee Cups." https://greece.greekreporter.com/2015/05/18/greeks-look-for-future-inside-coffee-cups/.

Dallas, Theodora, Noelle Marina Baroutsa, and Simon Dein. 2020. "The Power of the Divine: Religion, Rituals, and Healing in Greece." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 23 (8): 718–32. doi:10.1080/13674676.2020.1825363.

Greek Boston. 2016. "What You Need to Know About the Greek Evil Eye (Mati)."https://www.greekboston.com/culture/modern-history/evil-eye/.

Hahn, R A, and A Kleinman. 1983."Biomedical Practice and Anthropological Theory: Frameworks and Directions." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 12 (1): 305–333.

Herzfeld, Michael. 1997. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-state.* New York: Routledge.

Kapur, R.L. 1979. "The Role of Traditional Healers in Mental Health Care in Rural India." *Social Science and Medicine Part B: Medical Anthropology* 13 (1): 27-31. doi:10.1016/0160-7987(79)90015-2.

Kleinman, Arthur and Gale, James L.1982. "Patients Treated by Physicians and Folk Healers: A Comparative Outcome Study in Taiwan." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 6 (4): 405-23.

Knight, Daniel M. 2017. "Energy Talk, Temporality, and Belonging in Austerity Greece." *Anthropological Quarterly* 90 (1): 167-91.

Korkman, Zeynep. 2015. "Fortunes for Sale: Cultural Politics and Commodification of Culture in Millennial Turkey." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18 (3): 319–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549414526727.

Malinowski, Bronislaw, and Robert Redfield.1954. *Magic, Science and Religion: And Other Essays.* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

McClean, Stuart. 2013. "The Role of Performance in Enhancing the Effectiveness of Crystal and Spiritual Healing." *Medical Anthropology* 32 (1): 61–74. doi:10.1080/01459740.2012.692741.

Micozzi, Marc S. 2002. "Culture, Anthropology, and the Return of 'Complementary Medicine.'" *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 16 (4): 398–403.

Millman, Heather. 2011. "Cultural Curing: Magic in Medicine and the Pursuit of Alternatives." *Platforum* 12: 80-99.

Panourgia, Neni. 2016. "Surreal Capitalism and the Dialectical Economies of Precarity". In *Impulse to Act*, edited by Othon Alexandrakis, 112-134. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Patel, Vikram and Kleinman, Arthur. 2003. "Poverty and common mental disorders in developing countries." *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 81 (8): 609-615.

Roussou, Eugenia. 2011. "Orthodoxy at the Crossroads: Popular Religion and Greek Identity in the Practice of the Evil Eye." *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 20 (1): 85–105.

Seremetakis, C. Nadia. 2009. "Divination, Media, and the Networked Body of Modernity." *American Ethnologist* 36 (2): 337–50. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1425.2009.01138.x.

Tzouvara, Vasiliki, Chris Papadopoulos, and Gurch Randhawa. 2016. "Systematic Review of the Prevalence of Mental Illness Stigma within the Greek Culture." *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 62 (3): 292–305. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764016629699.

Tsang, Eric W. K. 2004. "Superstition and Decision-making: Contradiction or Complement?" *Academy of Management Perspectives* 18 (4): 92-104. doi:10.5465/ame.2004.15268696.

Vyse, Stuart A. 2013. *Believing in magic: the psychology of superstition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Walter, Suzan. 1999. "Holistic Health." https://ahha.org/selfhelp-articles/holistic-health/.

Rethinking War

Autoethnographic Accounts of Disruption, Debris, and the Ongoing Impacts of War

LEA ALILOVIC
PHD CANDIDATE, SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
YORK UNIVERSITY, TORONTO, CANADA

This paper looks to the ways in which memory works as an ongoing force within disrupted and displaced lives. Based on storytelling and conversations with family, I tie together the mundane and everyday experiences of living and leaving Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Yugoslav Wars of Secession. Here, in the banal moments of disrupted lives, the waiting and going-on that mark an everyday struggle for survival and wellbeing extends into the present. An autoethnographic working, this paper adapts personal and generational experiences to discuss the complexity of war and migration. In doing so, this paper highlights how the effects of war and migration processes, including feelings of fear and uncertainty, remain active hauntings. Tales and retellings come to demonstrate the debris that lingers as forces of history, drawing the body through memory production passed on generationally through remnants like memory, habit, and language. This paper illustrates the messiness of such traces, where storytelling and memory work come to reflect the normalized yet innately disordered life. Ultimately, moving away from seeing the debris of war and refuge as wholly disruptive and violent, this paper instead focuses on how the workings of temporality and storytelling within the migratory experience reveal active modes of being-in-the-world. In such modes, memory and storytelling evidence durational or nonlinear temporalities, as the past mundane experiences of survival continue within the present.

KEY WORDS Immigration, displacement, war, waiting, debris, memory, storytelling, autoethnography, Yugoslavia, Bosnia

In 1993, my family left Bosnia. In 1991 the republics of Slovenia and Croatia left the nation of Yugoslavia. In 1992, the war began in Bosnia. Understood as an interethnic conflict, religious divide motivated aggression from Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian military forces, assuming nations, communities, and families could easily divide and fall between these lines. In 1992, as the war in Bosnia began, my family left. This departure was not and is not simple. It is complex and ongoing with debris that may remain active and apparent on both those doing the leaving and the places left. Debris scattering and clinging to memories, habits, language, and even physical and bodily traces.

This paper looks to unsettle and reinterpret conceptions of war that focus on violence. This is a privilege. It is a privilege to reflect on war as a personal or familial experience and

Contingent Horizons Volume 7, Number 1 (2021), pp. 31–40, ISSN 2292–7514, online ISSN 2292–6739.

to name only particular traumas – traumas that have caused no physical harm and only emotional ones. However, there is something to speak and expand upon: to recognize even mild cases as a particular occurrence that may be widespread. This paper is a generational and personal working at heart as it looks to how memories of disruption, displacement, and waiting change and alter through storytelling.

I have no interest in discussing the details of the Yugoslav Wars of Secession or the Bosnian War. To do so creates lines and sides, ignoring the fact that (this) war intended to divide and segregate relationships and livelihoods in unnatural, messy, and unnecessary ways. Rather, this paper intends to examine this mess: the disturbances and reactions of war on civilians. In moving away from seeing debris and disruptions of war as wholly destructive and violent, this paper will, instead, focus on themes of waiting, stillness, and decision to demonstrate that the most potent elements of humanity exist in the liminal periods of war.

My family's history has always been a complex topic for me. I have only ever heard partial stories—stories that would be conferred amid elaborate tales of my dad's childhood. Like the father-son relationship in the movie *Big Fish,* I never truly had a sense of what was real (Zanuck et al. 2003). The imagery I had developed of my family was always influx. Deaths, locations, even family members were always unstable and unknowable. At some age, I realized and accepted I would never have a complete or coherent description and understanding of my family. Like Lauren Berlant's discussion of the "good life fantasy," I am reminded that the "dynamics of attachment, self-continuity, and the reproduction of life" are messy—not fitting neatly into premade conceptions and descriptions of family and lineage (Berlant 2011, 15). Maybe, in the same sense, my parents could never neatly share their stories. Their stories never aligned with the ones I was accustomed to hearing. There was no comparison; never the worst, while never being extremely interesting either. The stories changed each time they were told as if these memories were not finished but ongoing, still being felt and understood by my parents.

I learned to be creative: when to ask questions, what kind of questions would be answered, and which ones would never get a response. My parents' memories and stories created a flowering of images and narratives, which came together when I pushed for answers. Never neat, never whole.

This paper reflects a methodology that looks to balance the migrant narrative and the *autoethnographic* experience of long-term listening. In rummaging, dealing with, and reflecting on the vignettes of my parents' experience escaping civil war, this approach reflects data collection that lacks clear boundaries between familial accounts and my own. Here, conversational details such as dates are approximate. In mirroring a lack of precision in storytelling, where aspects such as dates, duration, and simultaneous events are not used to mark personal storytelling, my methodology looks to reflect the heterogeneous timeline given.

Such an approach adapts Kathleen Stewart's notion of nervous ethnography, where the space of alterity can be approached but never arrived at because of the always-partial knowledge and shifting way of things (1991; 1996; 2008). As is evident in the redundancy of my parents' portrayals, and what Stewart argues through the approach of nervousness, storytelling becomes a means to note *mimetic representations where events are organized temporally and further locate narrators in space and time.* This parallels Stef Jansen's (2002; 2006) analysis of interviews in the Post-Bosnian War context, where catchphrases,

practiced storylines, or vagueness can be seen as a coping mechanism as straightforward stories reflecting dominant discourse provide comfort in uncomfortable times. In this way, storytelling becomes a critical method in witnessing self-making through its maintenance of nervousness and the contaminated.

The use of narratives post-crisis evidences how the overheard, repetitive, and echoes of my family's stories lend to Ann Stoler's conception of imperial debris and duress, "what is left and what people are left with" (2016, 17). In this conception, stories and ways of simplifying complex and uncomfortable experiences that exist outside hegemonic attention are produced and managed through these narratives. In order to access and trace the debris evident in storytelling, I specifically look to Stoler's (2009) method, "reading along the archival grain," where the focus is on the granular rather than the seamless texture of such accounts. The uneven and nonlinear retelling in this approach becomes a means to witnessing the ways in which duress and the past continue to exist in traces and hauntings of the intangible.

The Event/ Event-ness of War

War is often characterized by violence and destruction. There is not necessarily a fault in this characterization. War does allow and produces violent acts, atrocities, and loss. However, these elements of violence do not occur at all moments; there are moments of rest, silence, maybe even peace during war.

My father describes war as always existing. He explains that this was a projection of his grandmother who always bought extra food knowing that war would come, and when it did, there would be little left for people. Fear of war and its potential to occur is inherent to this geographic location, he explains. My father was in a bar, having a beer with his friends when war was declared in Bosnia. They had just finished their weekly basketball game when they found out that they were now a part of a nation at war. My father rushed home to my brother and mother.

For months there was an anticipation of war beginning in Zenica. And, in some ways, it did: life sat in fear. Fear over the lack of food in emptying grocery stores. Fear of attack perpetuated by constant sirens signalling threat. Fear of harm and subsequently moving to impromptu bomb shelters in apartment basements for safety. Crisis alters conceptions of time and space. These moments only become smooth over time, with perspective, where an understanding of form can be uncovered and conceptualized. For my family and Bosnians alike, the crisis was their state of existence, occurring around them, threatening them. War became a force of movement.

Like Brian Massumi's discussion of George W. Bush's colour-coded terror alert system, life in Bosnia restlessly settled in a state where safety does not "merit a hue," and fear is the new norm (Massumi 2005, 31). Whether bomb or terror alerts, these signals worked as "signals without signification," activating bodily responses through modulating feelings (32). Moreover, the power of this fear and its activation, resting on what Massumi labels a "perceptual mode of operation" (34), permits fear to be an autonomous force of existence, becoming its own self-sufficient power, or ontogenetic (42).

Such an approach to crisis highlights Janet Roitman's (2013) notion of crisis as a "transcendental placeholder" of a state of emergency, an empty signifier without positive

content itself. Yet, for Roitman, while crisis is always asserted after the fact and seems self-evident, crisis is not a decisive moment but a chronic condition that is not locked into time (2013, 9-10). Beyond its structural framing, crisis can be seen as moments of exception – the minor – allowing for moments of muted registers of the otherwise.

Here, despite Vincent Crapanzano describing fear and how we act out of fear as due to a "much more primordial fear that comes from the absence of any possibility," life moves on (1985, 21). My father describes the stillness that emerges with alarms: "there was nothing to do… there was nothing [he] could do." But, by the 221st or 222nd siren, my parents moved on, deciding to play tennis instead of waiting for an end.

Waiting

> We linger because we know from past experience that we can do nothing. We linger because we know that 'the forces of history' will have their way. (Crapanzano 1985, 45)

The concept of waiting in war appears contradictory or tactical. Waiting in war appears with soldiers waiting to attack or for the perfect plan of aggression to unfold. This waiting is brief, with an expected end. Civilians face another concept of waiting. Waiting for the war to end. Waiting for food. Waiting for loved ones to return. Waiting for stillness, even peace. The civilian in war appears to be perpetually in a state of waiting. As Vincent Crapanzano discusses in *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*, within the horror and fear which renders lives in times of crisis, whether the Apartheid or Bosnian War, the tales are perpetuated by the media, becoming a time of folklore (1985, 42). At the same time, these narratives neglect the reality of waiting: "[w]aiting for something, anything, to happen" (42).

Authors who examine the effects and rebuilding of Post-War or Post-Dayton Agreement Bosnia and Hercegovina, such as Stef Jansen (2015), place focus on the lingering feelings of waiting evident through the sensation of "not moving well enough." Here, feelings of stuckedness appear as a desire for normality. Jansen's work takes up Ghassan Hage's (2009) notion of *stuckedness*, where waiting is read as a forced temporality and experience of time. *Stuckedness* in crisis becomes an *endurance test* for those willing to stick it through.

My parents felt as though they were nothing during the war – their lives meant nothing in this state. Waiting occurred after the decision to get out. Fear of losing their life, of losing each other to a nation at war that did not care about their well-being, their lives were constrained, determined to some degree by factors that did not care if they truly existed or not. So, they carried on by waiting.

Waiting during war is an *in-between-ness*. As Crapanzano notes: "waiting… must be appreciated in all of its banality. Therein lies its purity – its humanity" (1985, 43). I notice how my parents' story focuses on the moments that maintained a sense of normal in their day-to-day lives. Their renderings remove focus from the prominent and evident events of crisis in war: they avoid mentioning the impromptu bomb shelters in apartment building basements, the lineups for food, and the distance or worry for family scattered around

Bosnia in similar situations. Instead, they define their experience based on events that were once mundane tasks that would come to mark loss during the war: the end of weekly basketball games, tennis matches, and the number of sirens.

In these terms, waiting is not described as a stuckedness. Instead, akin to Brian Massumi's conception of waiting as a movement, waiting here is regarded as a force both involuntary and allowing potential, in turn emphasizing that even stillness allows for "severe twists" (2002, 5). In these familial stories of waiting during the war, life and experience are marked as happening, going-on—a hopeful continuing. When these mundane moments of sanctity or ritual are challenged, the structure of waiting changes for them, like when their tennis matches were interrupted by bombs sounding off closer and closer. This moment of convergence forces a restlessness, where waiting in the meantime is now marked by a need to get out.

Distinguishing waiting as an active being-in-the-world and thus distancing from notions of the concept as solely passive and reactive, highlights the complexity of the temporality of waiting. Following notions of "durative unfolding," accredited to Henri Bergson (1889) and further adapted by Brian Massumi (2002; 2005), where time is conceptualized as heterogeneous with multiple potential unfoldings, waiting can be accounted for as allowing hope in the "not-yet" (*cf.* Bloch 1959). In this sense, waiting in war may not necessarily be a choice but a power that decides this fate "doesn't just force us down certain paths, it puts the paths in us, so by the time we learn to follow its constraints we're following ourselves" (Massumi in Zournazi 2002a, 223).

While the act of describing and narrativizing waiting in itself may be a way to homogenize history and experience into linear events, the focus on waiting through the lens of the mundane emphasizes another timeline of other events unattended and left behind by dominant narratives. This maintains a margin of maneuverability. As Jarrett Zigon (2018) argues, endurance and feelings of hopelessness highlight how being-in-the-world consists of continuous temporal shifts and slips, where hope cannot easily be conceived as passive or active, or simply as a hope for a better future. Such understanding emphasizes that hope is a temporal structure and not just an attitude, where hope becomes a method of witnessing the expression of being-in-the-world and acting in the world. Here, hope is not solely tied to ideas of a better future, but instead towards an orientation to present moment making, where hope is necessary.

Movement and Hope

The breakage of routine and the mundaneness surrounding such events as the last tennis match initiated a desire for my parents to find a way out. The stories of leaving Bosnia are scattered and thin: moments of intense fear over safety, over a sense of future, over leaving family, and over the potential mistake being made, left little desire to recall. The memories that remain and are shared, are painted as the most painful parts of the war. My father recalls having to make the difficult and risky decision to drive through the war alone in order to find resources and the paperwork to leave. The heartache and distress surrounding their separation was an intense reminder of their fragility within the circumstances.

After weeks of separation and arduous travel through the ongoing war, my parents were able to secure Croatian documents and a place to stay in a distant acquaintance's

vikendica, or cottage, in the Croatian peninsula region of Istria. A temporary resting spot in a demilitarized zone, Istria would act as a space to dream, be still, and live again. There they would continue to wait for permission to enter Canada.

The retelling of the near year spent in Istria is hazy and clouded with a filter of serenity and mostly nostalgia. The configurations of these memories hold weight in that these were the stories that were told to me over and over again—cherished, relived, and held in reverie. After the worst of it, the period of stillness in Istria profoundly shaped a sense of dream-like living.

I am reminded of Kathleen Stewart's (1996) study and conception of a space on the side of the road. Stewart looks to the remnants of biopolitical production in attending to and unfreezing narratives of "other America" by imagining spaces like the Appalachians as real and desired. Here, Stewart recognizes cultural acts of poesis, or the creation of the new through acts of mediation, in aspects such as storytelling and gossip, noting how attachments in memory and imaginings come to formulate a world uncontained. Similarly, the consistent retelling and focus on this period by my parents flowers a romanticized image. The waiting, the stillness, the fear culminates and is overshadowed by an image of Istria concocted in storytelling and familial clichés. Such memory work in itself is inherently contaminated in its edited, illuminated, fantasy-like formation. Yet, as a moment and act of poesis, what is thrown together and pinned down in such fantasy is also a generative force and modality allowing for "worldings of all kinds" (Stewart 2008, 73).

These formulations, created both in the moment and in hindsight, demonstrate, as Berlant argues, how slow death signifies and allows for multiple subjectivities and potentials in its initiation, event-making, progression, and affect (2011, 100). Rather than a submission into a *stuckedness*, this conjuncture emphasizes agency, in Berlant's apt description as, "…an activity of maintenance, not making; fantasy, without grandiosity; sentience without full intentionality; inconsistency, without shattering; and embodying, alongside embodiment" (100). The production of storytelling, peace, and joy, evidently opposing a sense of uncertainty and loss inherent to war experiences, formulates the role of self-making as an activity exercised within the ordinary and taken for granted moments, like sharing stories with one's child.

Recognizing how self-making prospers not in moments of major crisis or the traumatic but in everyday experiences, emphasizes a world that is not reduced into *discrete components*, but rather one where its *manyness* remains at the forefront (Massumi in Deleuze and Guattari 1987, xiii). Here, space is "open-ended," meaning people can "rise up at any point and move to any other"; this world is "immersed in a changing state of things" (xii-xiii).

These portrayals of event-making allow for and are modes of potential in that these moments of *other* or *openness* emerge to create *somethings* (Stewart 2008, 76). Here, expressions of fear or stillness challenge notions of an "already-formed system" or mode of experience through modification and change (cf. Little 2020, 65). Choice and agency exist in the ordinary *somethings* of war. Despite there being nothing to do, as my father describes, to live with persistent fear, the time of war for my family was not just a time of insecurity but also a time of possible joy in his eyes. Time in crises operates in these *somethings*, where even with a coinciding fear of losing everything, my father narrates that they were somehow "living in peace every day."

This was a narrative my dad often portrayed. Early memories of my dad opening up about his experiences during the war revolve around the idea that escaping to Istria was one of the happiest times in his life. Central to this imagery he would conjure up was the closeness he had to my mother and brother at the time. He would repeat that in the most "challenging moment in their lives," he and my mother were never closer. They knew they had each other and knew they would only find their way together.

For many years this was the only account I had of my family's experience of that time, and I remember feeling confused and unsure of how to understand joy and peace in clear moments of crisis and uncertainty. Ghassan Hage's description of hope in hopeless times as the capacity to experience life transition and movement begins to situate the conflicting and almost contradictory experience (in Zournazi 2002b). Hage here reminds us that hope exists alongside uncertainty, where doubt can formulate a will to live. In parallel, for Janeja, Manpreet, and Bandak (2018), endurance or waiting are categories and experiences that coexist with doubt and uncertainty. While such a rendering sheds light on the inherent ties of hope, doubt, and uncertainty, they furthermore allow for critical approaches to precarious existences in allowing recognition of how these feelings can be forces of social movement and energy.

From my knowledge, my parents have three pictures from this time. With not many cherished goods kept or surviving this period, these pictures are a rare reminder of an in-between life lived in a small Istrian coastal town. Unlike the others, *one photo in particular maintained a special status in that it was always on display in our home.* Slightly back lit, the picture shows my brother standing on a short-stone wall, my dad supporting him with a hug. In the distance, the sun sets over the Adriatic Sea. The peace and stillness desperately fought for at the time signified and captured in this moment. My dad explains a feeling of being overwhelmed by the happiness on both his and my brother's faces. He would remind whoever was listening that my brother was only four at the time. This point, a seemingly minor aspect in his narrative, nags and unravels the years he *wrestled the complexity of my brother's ability to handle the stress of the time.* He explains that my brother never complained about the life lost, of the series of drastic movements and changes. My dad states his worry that my brother may have lost a part of his childhood, but maybe this photo marks the hope that in Istria, he was able to experience it again.

Memory and Storytelling

> "Yet we remain haunted by the historic past, as if those who lived long ago had permeated the earth, continuing to speak to us in ghostly whispers, their presence felt in the dank air that recalls their dying breath" (Jackson 2013, 105).

Important memories are often passed on through generations. They become hauntings that continue to speak to others as ghostly whispers (*cf.* Jackson 2013, 105). While feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability are prevalent and remain constricting, it is the daily release from these feelings that creates *something.* This release occurs in "often magical ways," like storytelling (Crapanzano 1985, 44). In storytelling, "we pretend ourselves that we are indifferent to the object of waiting" (44).

Storytelling as inciting a *something* recognizes that "despite our rage for order," our reflecting on memories makes clear the innately disordered life (Jackson 2013, 54-55). These fragments and debris of happenings that constitute the unfinishedness of life, puts at the forefront the unfolding effects of life, where the uncertainty and vulnerability of ourselves are the force (Little 2020). Storytelling reminds us and becomes evidence of the ways we change and shape-shift. Self-making occurs through these processes in the ability to contaminate and "transgress the constancies of space, time, and personhood" by stretching ourselves over loneliness, the mysteries, and what is unknown (Jackson 2013, 3). As Michael Jackson notes, it is through stories we, "summon these very resources to break down the walls that hem them in" (86). These feelings, objects, landscapes, instances are not static, and through storytelling, we are able to see and feel the potentials that have and may currently exist.

When I tell my story, I share remnants of memories present in my parent's storytelling. I am the celebratory child. Months following my family's arrival in Canada, I was born. I grew up immersed in the continuing of the *somethings* that exist for immigrant parents. I learned a mix of Serbo-Croatian and English, which I was able to retain from day-care and school. My parents worked two to three jobs during the initial years after their arrival. Eventually, they would go back to school to achieve accepted Canadian degrees or certificates. Life moved on. For a long time, this moving-on was all I was attuned to, not aware it was a moving-on. Stories of the old country changed as I grew older, as the gaps and breakage highlighted that these were not normal stories. Departure was not normal. Their departure, in particular, was not normal. The things left unsaid in these stories were not normal. As Jackson reminds us, there are "certain events and experiences of which we choose not to speak," not because we fear them or our fragility, but because we have no words to adequately describe them (2013, 23). "Silence is sometimes the only way we can honour the ineffability and privacy of certain experiences" (23). Over two and a half decades since they left the war, the debris and memories managed to collect has allowed me to curate a story of my parents' departure and experience in war.

There is one memory in particular my parents have shared that I remember by heart. It was told to me so many times as a child that today it has become my own. It always begins with: "You know, Lea, we only had one cassette tape in our car when we were in Istria… Me, your mother, and your brother listened to it non-stop…" When I hear this story, my mind starts to play Neil Young's "Harvest Moon" as if it was the only record I, too, owned. I hear the story and the song hum simultaneously in my ears. Both begin slowly; it is an immersion. There I go, subsumed. I feel like I am in the same car—at least what I imagine the car to look like as a child again, being driven, almost sunken into the back seat because my body is once again small. I hear my father talking to me from the driver's seat. His salt and pepper hair and the tips of his ears poke above the head rest. I look adjacent to him, my mother is in the passenger seat. I get a glimpse of the side of her head. It is blonder than usual. It looks sun-kissed. I have to shift and extend myself to see through the car window. The sun is setting, and we are on a narrow, winding road. I do not give much attention to the details of this landscape. Sometimes we are driving along the seacoast. Other times I focus on the rocks and pebbles that in my mind characterize Istria's roads. But the colours of the sunset, the sound of Neil and my father combining – how I feel – becomes my memory, a product of my father's storytelling that I, too, would go on to share.

Notes

1. Post-Dayton is referring here to the temporal period following the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, which ended the war in Bosnia.

References

Bergson, Henri. (1889) 1957. *Time and Free Will.* Edinburgh: Riverside Press.

Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Bloch, Ernst. (1959) 1996. *The Principle of Hope*, Vol. 1. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Crapanzano, Vincent. 1985. *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa.* London: Granada.

Hage, Ghassan. 2009. "Waiting Out the Crisis: On Stuckedness and Governmentality." In *Waiting*, edited by Ghassan Hage, 97-106. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Jackson, Michael. 2013. *The Other Shore: Essays on Writers and Writing.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Janeja, Manpreet K, and Andreas Bandak. 2018. "Introduction: Worth the Wait." *Ethnographies of Waiting: Doubt, Hope and Uncertainty.* 1-39. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Jansen, Stef. 2015. *Yearnings in the Meantime: 'Normal Lives' and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex.* New York: Berghahn Books.

———. 2006. "The (Dis)Comfort of Conformism Post-War nationalism and Coping with Powerlessness in Croatian Villages." In *Warfare and society: archaeological and social anthropological perspectives*, edited by T. Otto, H. Thrane, and H. Vandkilde, 433-446. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press. 433-446.

———. 2002. "The violence of memories: local narratives of the past after ethnic cleansing in Croatia." *Rethinking History* 6 (1): 77-93.

Little, Kenneth. 2020. *On the Nervous Edge of an Impossible Paradise: Affect, Tourism, Belize.* New York: Berghahn Books.

Massumi, Brian. 2005. "Fear (The Spectrum Said)." *Positions: East Asia cultures critique* 13 (1): 31-48.

————————. 2002. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

————————. 1986. "Translator's Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy." In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, ix-xvi. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.

Seigworth, Gregory, and Melissa Gregg. 2010. "An Inventory of Shimmers." In *The Affect Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, 1-28. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Stewart, Kathleen. 2008. "Weak Theory in an Unfinished World." *Journal of Folklore Research*, 45 (1): 71-82.

————————. 1996. *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

————————. 1991. "On the Politics of Cultural Theory: A Case for 'Contaminated' Cultural Critique." *Social Research* 58 (2): 395-412.

Stoler. Ann L. 2016. *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in our Times.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

————————. 2009. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Zanuck, Richard D., Bruce Cohen, Dan Jinks, John August, Tim Burton, Ewan McGregor, Albert Finney, et al. 2004. *Big fish.* Film.

Zigon, Jarrett. 2018. "Hope and Waiting in Post-Soviet Moscow." In *Ethnographies of Waiting: Doubt, Hope and Uncertainty,* edited by Manpreet K. Janeja and Andreas Bandak, 65-86. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Zournazi, Mary. 2002a. "Navigating Moments: An Interview with Brian Massumi." In *Hope: New Philosophies for Change,* edited by Mary Zournazi, 210-243. London: Routledge Press.

———.2002b. "'On the Side of Life'—Joy and the Capacity of Being. A conversation with Ghassan Hage." In *Hope: new philosophies for change,* edited by Mary Zournazi, 150-171. London: Pluto Press.

Three Stories of the Journey to Canada

SAGAL JAMA
BA STUDENT, ANTHROPOLOGY
YORK UNIVERSITY, TORONTO, CANADA

In 1990 a civil war began in Somalia that would change the state of the country for decades. With the war came the countless people who fled from the conflict for a safer life. Since the 90s the rise of Islamic Terrorism has made the conflict even more complicated, further creating more refugees in the 2000s and today. In the Somali diaspora, there are a number of communities in many countries including in Toronto, Canada. As the world has more refugees today than in modern history, understanding the journey they take both physically and mentally is important as it is a traumatic and often grueling experience. Using the many tools from anthropology this article seeks to understand three women who took such a journey to Canada and how it plays into larger themes in the Somali Diaspora.

KEY WORDS refugees, Somali Civil War, terrorism, diaspora

> "No one leaves home, unless home is the mouth of a shark, you only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well (Warsan Shire, 2017)."

In 1960 Somalia was declared an independent State bringing an end to the colonization of the country by Italy and the United Kingdom since the late 19th century. Somalia's situation was unique because of the deeply embedded tribalism that still permeates the country. Abdi Mohamed Kusow elaborates, "even the indigenous Somali government of the early 1960s, despite its legitimate authority and strong nationalistic will, never reached its subjects across the land (Kusow 1994)." The government established in 1960 did not last for long as it could not maintain power over the entire country. This led to Siad Barre seizing power in 1969 which would establish a united Somali government that had control over the entire country in a way both the colonial powers and the following government could not. "Two important factors helped the Siad Barre government to achieve cohesiveness. First, the writing of the Somali language enabled the government to reach the people through its publications. Second, the restriction and the ban on tribalism in the country helped facilitate integration (Kusow 1994)." This ban on tribalism forced Somalis who were divided across clan lines to work together as a single united country. However, by 1975 the Siad government was unable to distance themselves from the deep-rooted

Contingent Horizons Volume 7, Number 1 (2021), pp. 41–50, ISSN 2292–7514, online ISSN 2292–6739.

tribalism that had created and maintained the Somali political organization for hundreds of years (Kusow 1994). As time went on clans that had felt targeted by Barre had voiced opposition, in response to this Barre began surrounding himself with people of his own clan further alienating members of other clans (Kusow 1994). These events coupled with the disastrous Ogaden War in 1978 set the groundwork for a coup and civil war that began in 1991 and is still ongoing today. When Barre was ousted a power vacuum emerged where different clans vied for power. Over time this has shifted from a clan-based war to a more complicated situation. One that has been affected by the rise of Islamic extremism in the last twenty years.

Both my parents lived in Somalia during Barre's regime but were lucky enough to leave the country two years prior to the war for Canada. However, in the capital of Mogadishu, many of my family members had to suddenly leave the city they had spent their entire lives in. My aunts and uncles, like many other Somalis, fled to countries around the globe. Many settled in countries such as England, Sweden, and Canada not only because of the social safety nets offered by these countries but the opportunities their children would have in their future. This scattering created a large diaspora so much so that virtually every Somali person I have met has family overseas in Europe, North America, Asia, or other parts of Africa. Evelyn Hu-DeHart expands on the meaning of 'diaspora' further by describing how the traumatic experience of forced removal or even voluntary departure for political or economic reasons and subsequent scattering of people over many destinations has become increasingly stretched to cover a range of phenomena. Hu-DeHart goes on to draw from Khachig Tölölyan who states that the term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, exile community, overseas community, and ethnic community (Hu-DeHart 2015). Feeling a disconnect from your ancestral homeland is not uncommon for the generation of Somalis born outside of the country. Although Somalis do preserve their culture well wherever they go, as marrying outside of the culture is uncommon, it still is not the same as experiencing it where Somalis are not the minority (Somalis make up less than 2 percent of the Canadian population) (Statistics Canada 2016). For those born outside Somalia like me, there is a sense of not belonging anywhere. Even when visiting Somalia, as someone born overseas, there is also a sense of not fitting in as most people will know you were not born there (they will call you 'Fish and Chips' to playfully make fun). When I visited Somalia in 2019 it was painfully obvious to the locals of Mogadishu that my sister and I grew up overseas, as people would point out the ways we would pronounce words, dress, or the knowledge that we had about the country. These moments did affect my overall experience a bit as I tried not to speak too much Somali to locals because the conversation would almost always end up in them invalidating my "Somaliness" even if it was not their intention. This raises the question: with 2 million Somalis living outside of Somalia does one have to be born and raised in Somalia to be truly Somali (Pew Research Center 2016)? With the ongoing refugee crisis that is seemingly getting worse, how can one identify with a single nationality, and what does nationality mean in a world that is becoming more and more interconnected? Reflecting on my time there I wish I had not let these moments cloud my experience but there is something strange about seeing an entire country of people that look like you, speaking

a language you understand and a culture that you grew up with but still somehow feeling out of place. What does it mean for the countless people of a diaspora who also experience this odd feeling? With more and more diasporas growing larger this notion of identity and where one belongs is something a lot more people relate to. Whether it is a young British-Somali girl who has never been back home or a 30-year-old Swedish-Somali man who left Somalia as a young kid.

The three women I interviewed when starting my research all had different experiences with the system and they also varied in age. Halima, Ayan, and Idil, whose names have been changed for the purpose of anonymity, all came from the same city my mother was born in and my father grew up in, Mogadishu, which is sometimes called Xamar (pronounced Hamar), at least ten years after they had left. I aim to not only understand this unique perspective on life but to also examine the ways in which a diaspora operates. This article will further examine the ways things such as religion and culture are used by the Somali diaspora to keep a hold of our history and to cope with the trauma of war. Furthermore, I will aim to also understand the journeys that refugees take both physically and mentally and what this speaks to as we enter a world where refugees are becoming more commonplace than ever. I argue that it will also reflect on the unique nature of being a refugee, the waiting that is endured in the process, and the ways in which they are seen as humans by governments but not given the rights of humans.

Methodology

In my interviews with the three women I talked to I found myself using different types of methods to get their stories. As I spoke to them, I remembered to tread carefully. Instead of asking questions directly, I had to think of how to adjust the way I asked questions as these women were also dealing with the trauma that they had endured. I had to subtly introduce ideas and topics so the women would not be jarred. I also knew that with my identity as a Somali woman I would also be able to produce work that could be more accurate than the coverage done by most, who do not have the same proximity to the subject I have. Being a child of Somali migrants to Canada I am in a unique position to understand a lot of the feelings migrants have about coming to a new country. As my parents arrived before the time the majority of people started fleeing Somalia, there were not nearly as many Somali people in Canada as there are today. Although they had quite a few Somali people they knew living around them, for the most part there was not the growing and substantial Somali community that is seen today. Therefore, with my perspective I can paint a picture for just how much the Somali diaspora has grown since my parents moved to Quebec in the late 1980s.

I first had to establish my subject position and understand what I brought to the field. Most anthropologists who do research in Somalia (and Africa in general) must deal with a history of outsiders using marginalized groups for the benefit of colonial powers. Even in the 21st century this is something people must consider when doing research. However as someone who is Somali and the relative of several refugees, I had some experience around them but never had in-depth conversations with them about the process. It also helped that as a woman talking to other women it would be easier to have conversations about things such as forced marriage and the dangerous situations for women in Somalia. I also

considered the power structures that could influence what the women decided to tell me and what they kept from me. For example, something like religion, which is extremely important to Somalis, will influence what they decide to tell me. Furthermore, I had to remember to be a lot more careful when talking to Ayan and Idil because they are newer to Canada than Halima who has been here since 2016. I had to understand that although I was surrounded by many family members who were asylum seekers, I still had a lot to gain from listening to their stories.

In approaching the research, I take cues from James Clifford and George Marcus' work on reflexivity. This was very integral to my research. Talking to refugees already has a political connotation as the reason for their displacement is itself political in nature. Being reflexive would not only help in my research but would be essential to present my interlocutor's stories in context. As I mentioned, I was raised my entire life around Somali culture and someone like me doing this kind of research would be advantageous as I have a better understanding of that culture than an outsider. On the other hand, my life as someone who was not born or raised in Somalia could have also affected my understanding of what I was told by the three women But analyzing what I was told using interpretive anthropology with a lot of reflexivity would allow me to not only write whatever they were telling me but to address the contexts, cultural and social reasons behind why exactly they tell me the things they do. Furthermore, what they choose to keep from me and what they believe in by telling me certain things. Somalis are known for being very conservative Muslims and having religion influence almost every aspect of their lives, this was something I had to consider when the women were telling me their stories. What mattered most to me when approaching how to conduct this research was that the story and ethnography had to be polyphonic and contain multiple voices that spoke to the experiences these women endured.

Halima

I had spoken to my mother about wanting to interview refugees, and she informed me about a woman she knew, Halima. I quickly took the chance to speak with her as she was someone who would give a lot of insight into my research. Once I had set up an interview, I quickly made my way to the West end of Toronto to speak with her. Halima welcomed me into her home in an apartment building. She lived with her five young children who vary in age. As we sat down one of her daughters brought me a bowl of grapes while Halima told me about her children. She had four girls who are 13, 11, 9, and 5 in age and one boy who is 7 years old. They were surprisingly calm for children of that age who usually cannot sit still from my experience. I spoke to the children for a little bit talking to them about online school but as Halima and I began our interview she told them to go to another room in a tone very reminiscent of my own mother. Once her children had gone to their rooms, we commenced our interview. Halima began her story by telling me she arrived in Canada in 2016 by herself. She had left her children in Uganda where they had initially fled from Mogadishu. She explained her experience with the system, "I left Uganda without my children for Canada. As soon as I came into the airport I applied for asylum, and I was told to wait for a judge to hear my case and whether I could stay or not." She went on to tell me she waited six months for the judge to ultimately hear her case and let her stay.

I asked her what she thought about waiting for six months and she assured me that she was, in fact, luckier than most because other people wait much longer than six months.

Halima told me about how what you say to the judge can impact whether you stay or not, and she remembered hearing stories that would make her cry. This makes the case that the more tragic the story the better chance one would be granted asylum. This was a stark reminder of the ways refugees must use and sell their trauma and compete with others who are also in danger in order to survive. She told me that she lived here for three years without her children, taking ESL (English as a second language) courses, and working towards getting her Permanent Resident status to sponsor them.

When I asked her about how she would cope with being away from her children for so long, she told me she had trouble sleeping and would not be able to sleep for long periods of time. Her youngest who is five years old now was just a baby when she had left them back in 2016. She told me she wrote numerous letters to her MP asking to bring her children to her but she never heard any response. When I approached the question of why she had left Mogadishu in the first place Halima told me it was mainly for safety reasons, with the number of bombings and attacks that happen she hadn't felt safe living there, but she had also mentioned the topic of forced marriage but did not elaborate beyond that. I wondered why she would bring that up so I told her about how several years before I had met a sixteen-year-old Somali mother from Mogadishu who was married off when she was fourteen. I brought this story up to Halima and she informed me that this was common. I used this story to ask Halima if one of the reasons she had left Mogadishu was because of a forced arranged marriage, and she told me that it was. Because of the hold extremism had on Mogadishu especially, for a long time, young girls and women getting married against their will became normalized. She was arranged to be married to a man she did not want to and left Somalia with her—at the time—three small children, for Uganda where they would live for a couple more years before coming to Canada by herself in 2016.

Ayan

My next interview was with a woman named Ayan. When I told Halima about my research, she was the one to put me in contact with Ayan. They both had met when Ayan arrived in Canada seven months ago. Ayan was a 34-year-old mother of a 14-year-old son who lived in Kenya. Like Halima, Ayan left Mogadishu for Indonesia where she lived for a long time before claiming asylum. She lived there by herself leaving behind her son in Kenya. Like most Ayan left Mogadishu because of the civil war. She left in 1999 when the conflict was already ongoing for eight years and saw no chance of stopping in the near future. She left for Kenya, which is home to the most Somali people outside of Somalia with 2.4 million Somalis living there (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). Ayan is currently taking ESL courses because she can barely speak the language but hopes that her son could join her soon as she has not seen him since 2013 when she left Kenya. Although Ayan still longs to see her son she feels more mentally at peace here than she did anywhere else.

From both of these interviews what I gathered the most and what kept coming up was the theme of waiting. Whether it was Halima, who was away from her children for two years, or Ayan who has not seen her son in seven years, waiting has come up a lot for both. Apart from waiting to see their children, there was also the time both endured while

waiting for a judge to hear their case. Refugees spend so much of their time waiting for things that are out of their control and whether the desired outcome happens they have to abide by it. Jennifer Hyndman and Wenona Giles explain, "Waiting among refugees has become the rule, not the exception (Hyndman and Giles 2011)." Ayan and Halima had no promises of citizenship or that their cases would be accepted after being heard from the judge, but they still opted to face not only the wait which caused them to be away from their children but also the possibility of waiting for a long time only to be rejected. Both women's experiences of being away from their families bear a close resemblance to the experiences in an ethnography written by anthropologist Livia Wick. Wick spent time with women in Palestine and wrote about the waiting that dictates so much of their lives due to checkpoints that stop them from seeing their family members. For one woman it was especially painful when it came to the loneliness she felt as her family could rarely visit her from a neighbouring village because of the checkpoint and because her husband had to work long hours on a construction site. Her loneliness would physically manifest itself into a choking sensation at night (Wick 2011). This especially reminded me of Halima mentioning how she could not sleep at night being away from her children. For Ayan this process of waiting is still ongoing, she doesn't like to dwell on being apart from her son she tells me, it makes it easier after all these years to not think about being apart from him, but to think about what can happen once she gets her PR status and is able to sponsor him.

For both Ayan and Halima, Canada represented a new life for themselves and their families. They both expressed to me that they value so much of what the country has to offer. Things such as free education for their children, free healthcare, and the general peace they feel here compared to where they fled from. Both mothers had almost decade(s) long journeys leading them to where they are now, a process not uncommon for almost all refugees, and one that takes a severe toll on their mental health. Cindy-Lee Dennis, Michael Kariwo, Kaysi Eastlick Kushner, et al write about how migration and parenthood in a new country increases risks of mental health problems including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder for refugee parents and children. Furthermore, loneliness, which is a key index of social support effectiveness, predicts poor health outcomes including depression (Stewart et al. 2015). This reminded me of what Halima and Ayan had told me about their time apart from their children. Growing up I was told by relatives and family members that things such as depression were in our control as humans, that the most powerful thing to wield against it is prayer. I saw this when both Ayan and Halima told me the best way they coped with being apart from their children was prayer. Before the war, Somalia was not nearly as religious as it is today, this sudden shift to religiousness could be the way Somalis coped in the aftermath of the war. Turning to religion helped them with the immense trauma that comes from war. Kiesha Ross, Paul Handal Eddie Clark, et al examine the relationship between religion and coping: they cite that the role between religion and mental health is an essential one. Furthermore, the use of religious coping in stressful situations assists in positive adjustment (Ross et al. 2009). Religion gives many a purpose to keep going when all hope is lost, and this is also another way in which a power structure has had a role in the way people cope. In Somalia, mothers are the backbone of the family. Although it is a patriarchal society the mothers play the biggest role in children's lives. For Halima, she has started a new life with her children

where she feels safe and content, but for Ayan and for many more refugees they continue to wait for their new lives to truly begin as they have for a very long time.

Idil

I met my next interlocutor through Halima as well, who wanted to help me find more refugees to interview. Idil was a 27-year-old woman who also came to Canada seven months ago. But while Ayan and Halima were mothers, Idil did not have children. She came to the country with her husband very recently after living in a refugee camp in Uganda since 2013. Halima and Ayan both left for different reasons, Halima had to leave to escape an arranged forced marriage, while Ayan had left because of the overall dangerous situation in Xamar. Idil's situation was one that was more specific than Ayan's and one that involved Al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab is a terrorist fundamentalist group that was founded in 2006 in East Africa. Born during what was arguably one of the most unstable periods of the civil war, Al-Shabaab gained notoriety and eventually pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2012. Since its creation, the terrorist organization has been responsible for numerous devastating attacks including the 2014 Westgate mall shooting in Kenya. The english translation of Al-Shabaab is "the youth" and this name is fitting as many members are unemployed young men. As the civil war left most young men aged 14–30 unemployed and a 73 percent of the total population living under two US dollars a day, Al-Shabaab became a viable alternative (Farquhar 2017). For Idil, the problem with Al-Shabaab hit very close to home. As we spoke she took many pauses to prepare herself for the trauma of retelling the events that forced her to flee. Idil, with a sad tone to her voice, told me about her father who was murdered by Al-Shabaab. While undertaking this research project I knew that this kind of trauma was something that I would come across but hearing about the things Idil went through made me even more astonished in the ways in which people like Idil can overcome such an experience. Although Idil's voice did give away her feelings somewhat, she spoke very matter of factly. Something I have witnessed among many people in Somalia when discussing traumatic things such as experiences with terrorism. This further exhibits the ways in which people cope with trauma. Idil would not spend too much time talking about her father and when she would, her words were not emotional even if her voice was emotional. To retell this sort of trauma is very triggering and from the fact that she was using as little detail as possible, it was evident she was trying her best to prevent herself from re-experiencing this trauma. Idil and her husband would spend six years at a refugee camp in Uganda before applying for asylum in any country that would take them. I asked her what she thought of Canada and the first thing she expressed to me was how grateful she was to have some semblance of rights. After living in a refugee camp for six years Idil and her husband were used to not being thought of as 'citizens' rather just inhabitants of a space. Hyndman and Giles explain that "refugees in long-term limbo are stuck within a shrinking humanitarian space, many without access to livelihoods, mobility and the protection of citizenship (Hyndman and Giles 2011)." Even when a refugee has entered a country, there is not any guarantee they will be allowed to stay. So, there is a feeling of not being seen as a human without the government protection citizenship provides.

For the last decade fleeing from terrorism has been one of the catalysts in the recent refugee crisis. Places like Syria and Iraq have been hotbeds for the Jihadi Fundamentalist group ISIS to commit its attacks against the people of the region. Stephen Zunes writes, "Many of the refugees crossing into Europe are from Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Somalia, all countries where the violence and turmoil are attributable primarily or at least in part as a result of U.S. military intervention (Zunes 2017)." With the emergence of Al-Shabaab and ISIS in Africa and the Middle East coupled with the West's hand in their creation, it is not unfathomable to understand the influx of refugees to Europe and North America. I considered this when asking Idil about what she thought about the people who believe refugees only come to North America and Europe to 'spread' Islamic extremism and enact Sharia Law. Idil reiterated what Halima and Ayan told me, that she wouldn't be in Canada if she could stay home. She also told me that what people in the West need to understand is that the refugees coming to places like Canada are here because of the terror groups they are accused of being a part of. She got visibly emotional at this point, and it was clear why. For Idil and her husband to be accused of being a part of the same organization that had killed her father was unthinkable to her. What reinforces Idil's comment is the fact she hadn't left Somalia until 2013 and only after her father was killed when she and her husband were directly in danger of being targeted by Al-Shabaab.

Another thing Idil has in common with Halima and Ayan is what she is appreciative of when it comes to her new life in Canada. Idil is grateful for the benefits the government gives to refugees, and the fact that schooling is free for when she and her husband decide to have children. Because of the years of being stuck in a system that leads to nowhere for many, being allowed to thrive was something all women were very grateful for. It also raises the question of the way in which humans are valued and the differences government papers make. As discussed before, refugees are always in a constant state of not knowing their future. Along with this, they depend on the trauma they faced to be used as a way to survive when it comes to pleading their case to stay in a country. This coupled with the fact these same nations have exacerbated or had some hand in the issues in their homelands brings about this strange situation of depending on the system that had, in a way, made refugees out of them. Idil doesn't like to speak about what happened to her father or get into specifics as she still suffers from the mental health ramifications of losing one's father in such a violent manner. Like Halima and Ayan, Idil turned to Allah to help her grieve after her father's murder and help ease the trauma she had faced. Today Idil and her husband take ESL classes and prepare to start a family and their new lives in Canada.

Three Women's Stories and The World Today: A Conclusion

After my visit to Mogadishu in 2019 what stuck with me the most was the way in which the city's people lived their lives. While my sister and I were overly cautious and tried not to be in the busy areas of the city too long, the locals did not let the terror of both the war and Al-Shabaab stop them from going on about their days. Halima, Ayan and Idil all endured things no person should. Their stories all speak to the way in which Islam is heavily embedded in the culture of Somalis and how it has been instrumental in helping people cope. Speaking to them helped me in understanding how the power structures of religion influenced the ways in which these women dealt with their trauma. For Halima and Ayan their

strife came from being separated from their children for so long and for Idil it came from being forced to flee her city and dealing with the aftermath of her father's murder.

The experiences of these three Somali refugee women speak to many who have been stuck in this limbo of existing as a human when one has none of the rights of a human. In a way, the same ways in which people of a diaspora are in limbo between identities. Talking to the women gave me a new view of my experiences as a first-generation Somali person. As more and more Somali children are born outside the country there are going to be more people not knowing Somalia as a country but with women like Halima, Ayan and Idil there can be a closer connection to the country as it is today. And with the diaspora expanding more every year, what in the end, is the definition of 'Somali?' In the end there is no meaning, especially in the world we live in today. Romanticizing the past is something many Somalis do, something I am also guilty of, but as the situation of today leaves many hopeless, instead of looking to the past we should be looking to the future of the large young population of Somalia and hopefully the change they can bring. Right now, as the Covid-19 pandemic is occurring families are separated and everyone has been experiencing their own form of waiting. In the United States, undocumented families of refugees are being separated and put in cages waiting for months for fleeing the same situations Halima, Ayan and Idil were. With the impending climate crisis, the world will see more refugees in the years to come and there needs to be a reexamination of who is considered 'human' and worthy of protection and rights. Today, according to the United Nations, there are 70 million displaced persons around the world (UNCHR 2019). Many of them are facing a perilous journey, one that Halima, Ayan, and Idil faced. The journey of being a refugee, one that involves waiting, trauma, and the uncertainty that guides so much of their life.

References

Farquhar, Samantha D. 2017. "When Overfishing Leads to Terrorism." *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 21 (2): 68-77.

Hu-DeHart, Evelyn. 2015 "The Future of 'Diaspora' in Diaspora Studies: Has the Word Run Its Course?" *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 1: 38-44.

Hyndman, Jennifer and Giles, Wenona. 2011. "Waiting for what? The feminization of asylum in protracted situations", *Gender, Place & Culture,* 18:3, 361-379, doi: 10.1080/0966369X.2011.566347

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. n.d. "2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census Volume IV: Distribution of Population by Socio-Economic Characteristics." Last modified February 21, 2020. https://www.knbs.or.ke/?wpdmpro=2019-kenya-population-and-housing-census-volume-iv-distribution-of-population-by-socio-economic-characteristics

Kusow, Abdi Mohamed. 1994. "The Genesis of the Somali Civil War: A New Perspective." *Northeast African Studies* 1(1), 31-46. doi:10.1353/nas.1994.0004.

Pew Research Center. 2016. "5 Facts about the Global Somali Diaspora." Accessed July 7, 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/5-facts-about-the-global-somali-diaspora/

Ross, Keisha, Paul Handal, Eddie Clark, and Wal Jillion Vander. 2009. "The Relationship

Between Religion and Religious Coping: Religious Coping as a Moderator Between Religion and Adjustment." *Journal of Religion and Health* 48(4):454-67. doi: 10.1007/s10943-008-9199-5. Epub 2008 Oct 2. PMID: 19890721.

Statistics Canada. 2016. "Census Profile." Accessed July 7, 2021. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E

Stewart, M, C L Dennis, K E Kushner, N Letourneau, K Makumbe, E Makwarimba, and E Shizha. 2015. "Challenges Faced by Refugee New Parents from Africa in Canada." *Immigrant Minority Health* 17(4):1146-56. doi: 10.1007/s10903-014-0062-3. PMID: 24989494.

UNCHR. 2019. "Figures at a Glance." Accessed August 7, 2021. https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html

Warsan Shire. 2017. "Home." Accessed June 7, 2021. https://www.facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance/warsan-shire-home

Wick, Livia. 2011. "The Practice of Waiting under Closure in Palestine." *City & Society* 23.

Zunes, Stephen. 2017. "Europe's Refugee Crisis, Terrorism, and Islamophobia." *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 29:1–6.

An Essay of Longing and Love

ALEXANDER MATIKA
PHD STUDENT, ANTHROPOLOGY
CORNELL UNIVERSITY, ITHACA, NEW YORK

This series of reflections explores historical experiences of disruption and migration through the self-elegy of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish and the memoir of German philosopher Walter Benjamin. Darwish and Benjamin both lived diasporic lives and adhered to a notion of truth as an aural phenomenon. This work takes the performed poem and the told story as sites to explore the suspension and reemergence of memories, termed imagistic precipitates of experience, as expressed through the sentiments of longing and love. According to Benjamin, images hold smells, visions, gestures, and sound-forms. This essay asks if images can indeed be heard. Additionally, it asks if images are a language and, if so, what are its expressive characters? This essay seeks to address what images as a language might enable or permit by invoking anthropologist Lisa Stevenson's claim that images can shape forms of life.

KEY WORDS forced migration, Germany, longing, love, Palestine, storytelling

> There is no trace of al-Birweh on the right side of the road from Nazareth, except for its place in your imagination that is now pierced by the horns of bulls, chewing and mulling over your memory fodder. You said: I will pass by at sunset to let the darkness feed my imagination and help the stranger in me sculpt images from stone.
>
> —Mahmoud Darwish (2011, 140)

-Graphy

The suffix -graphy has long formed the names of artistic and scientific practices from calligraphy and photography to sonography and ethnography: pens inscribe paper pulp, light etches film negatives, soundwaves depict bodily organs, and anthropologists document sociocultural life. Derived from the Greek -graphia, the suffix means "to represent by lines drawn", "to scrape or scratch", "to draw", or "to record or express by written characters" (etymonline). Sinan Antoon adds one more -graphy to the long list in his introduction to *In the Presence of Absence:* poetography (Darwish 2011, 5-6). Theorists of literary form have debated the distinguishing characteristics of poetics since the time of the ancients,

Contingent Horizons Volume 7, Number 1 (2021), pp. 51–60, ISSN 2292–7514, online ISSN 2292–6739.

but Aristotle (384-322 BCE) is thought of as having initiated this tradition. The principal element of poetography is "where opposites bleed and blend into each other: life and death, home and exile, but also, and most important, poetry and prose" (Darwish 2011, 8). Poetography engraves, it scratches and scrapes; it sculpts images of the absent in the realm of the present: images of home amid exile. Longing for their birthplaces from a distance, Mahmoud Darwish and Walter Benjamin both lived diasporic lives of disruption and migration.

The following series of reflections takes the performed poem and the told story as sites to explore the suspension and reemergence of memories, termed imagistic precipitates of experience, as expressed through the sentiments of longing and love. The aim is to address whether images can shape the ways we live. However, reflection as method requires that one know not entirely what the end result will be. As Benjamin will later detail using the idea of information, contemporary society has placed a primacy on forms of communication that are immediately intelligible if not patterned and predictable: a market-based exchange logic of sorts, perhaps all in the name of efficiency or expediency. Reflection, for many, has lost its place because it is a waste of time (Lyotard 1988, xv). The results are simply less punctual, the process less productive. This essay is too a meditation on time, how we have configured it or how it might be reconfigured once more. Formally, this essay is an attempt to convey the mood of a moment when time will cease to matter, where straightforward transactional logics become mere afterthoughts. A simultaneous aim is that in gesturing toward the obscurity of time's passing, a certain connection may become apparent, one that intimates belonging beyond a single place or person; or in our current global moment of upheaval, where one need hardly move to be displaced, one can feel a certain intimacy even in isolation. Ultimately, this essay asserts that a certain strength is held within the contradictory opacity of images and that poetography is characteristic of such an antinomic melding.

0

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) was only seven in 1948 when armed forces of the nascent Israeli state razed and depopulated his birthplace, the village of al-Birweh (Jadaliyya 2011). Shortly thereafter, Jewish settlers occupied what little remained. The village's former residents became refugees, many of whom left the Galilee to live in Lebanon. Darwish's family followed suit but only one year later returned secretly (American Academy of Poets). Israel would designate Darwish and many others like him a present-absentee—one who had 'left' and yet lingered like a specter. He first published a collection of poetry at twenty-two. In less than twenty-five years, Darwish would sell over a million books in Arab majority societies alone.

Under the constant gaze of the state, Darwish frequently faced harassment and imprisonment for the public recitation of his work. His poems were designed to be performed, drawing on the depth of the Arabic prosodic tradition, constantly crafting new incantations from older forms (Said 1994, 114). One such example is *In the Presence of Absence*, Darwish's penultimate work published in 2006, which develops the pre-Islamic genre of self-elegy. 'Pre-Islam' is a temporal divide of indeterminate duration, marked more by its end date (622 AD) than beginning. The literary forms of the era are largely derived

from celebrations surrounding polytheistic pilgrimage sites like the Kaaba of Mecca and the mercantile exchanges of Arabian Peninsular communities (Allen 2000, 17). Classical Arabic poetics were undoubtedly affected by the pilgrims and merchants who came, listened, retold, and went. Darwish was a journeyman too from his early adolescence onward. He left Israel in 1970, only to briefly return twenty-six years later. Darwish would migrate as far east as Moscow and west as Houston, where he lived his last moments in 2008. "Since Darwish left Beirut in 1982," said Edward Said, "one of the main topoi in his verse is not just the place and time of ending (for which the various Palestinian exoduses are an all too persistent reference) but what happens *after* the ending, what it is like to live past one's time and place" (Said 1994, 115). Formally and thematically, *In the Presence of Absence* stretches back and peers forward. Its performative arrangement lingers in reflection and yet moves us beyond one's final moments.

Like Darwish, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) found that life only becomes communicable at the moment of death (Benjamin 2019, 38). The time of dying is the time of storytelling. Yet, the storyteller began as a listener who listens to the repetitions of lives past. "From the beginning," writes Hannah Arendt on Benjamin, "the problem of truth presented itself to him as a 'revelation… which must be heard, that is, which lies in the metaphysically acoustic sphere'" (Benjamin 2019, lxi). It is the orality of Benjamin's story and the public iterability of Darwish's poem that reveal bit by bit, telling after telling, that *truth is above all acoustical*. But one has to be aware and receptive to be attuned to the telling. This process of deeply listening, absorbing, and integrating others' experiences—experiences that derive authority only in dying—is what this essay refers to as attunement, a form of social organization called "the community of listeners", that Benjamin thought to be disappearing (Benjamin 2019, 35).[1] Of course, truth as oral (or aural) exists only in relation; it inherently implies a connection beyond oneself. The self-elegy of Darwish and memoir of Benjamin express a kind of attachment that is based in a place but not forever delimited to it, a nearness or intimacy despite the irreversibility of exile common to their life experiences. As if the space of attunement ("the community of listeners") had a material hold over the reiterations of tales originally told by voices passed, like a relative holding an image of a deceased loved one and feeling their human grasp. Furthermore, attunement demands intention. It requires an engagement close to submission where revelation commands an ear. The prophetic traditions of Islam and Judaism are, of course, progenitors to Darwish and Benjamin's oral truth. It is this shared conception of truth as well as the place of dying in writing and reciting that positions these two authors so closely.

Benjamin was born to a well-to-do Jewish family in Berlin at dusk of the nineteenth century. Precocious, he studied in progressive boarding schools and elite universities in Southern Germany and Northern Switzerland. Yet, Benjamin authored an unconventional doctoral dissertation and was forced to withdraw his final submission, making his future as an academic all but quashed. He then worked as an art and literary critic, contributing to magazines and newspapers as well as a radio broadcaster and translator. He also wrote many essays, short stories, and poems. Unlike Darwish, Benjamin never attained fame during his life. *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, a virtually unknown memoir, only appeared as an entire text ten years after his death. As Benjamin's relationship to Nazi Germany became increasingly tenuous, he would move between coasts of the Mediterranean and North Seas. He left Germany for the final time in 1933, only to be imprisoned in Vichy France

while the Second World War dawned. Fleeing across the southern border, Benjamin was turned back by authorities. Facing a precarious death, he ended his life atop the Spanish Pyrenees in the autumn of 1940.

1

The Arab poet pre-Islam was characterized as an artisan who gave defined form to raw matter and whose compositions were deemed akin to embroidery or chiseling (Kilito 2014, 2). Between the sculpted stones, within the atmosphere of craftsmanship, existed a particular form of communication among artisans. Storytelling, according to Walter Benjamin, thrived in the milieu of work—the maritime, the rural (Benjamin 2019, 36). Stonework, like flawless pearls or matured wines, was a precious product crafted through patience and diligence, imitative of organic time like the ageing of the oyster or the ripening of the grape. Like the process of fermentation, the concentration of essences and alcohols and their preservation by tannins, glass, or—in the case of a shell—calcium, the story conserves and condenses its potency, "capable of releasing it even after a long time" (Benjamin 2019, 34). The story, as a shell in the sea, sinks into the life of the storyteller only to be brought out again and to be given a new form: to be shucked and shined.

> For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
> and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
> making it bring forth and sprout,
> giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth (Bible Gateway)

Like the slow layering of an oyster shell's prismatic columns of calcite, narratives are revealed by retelling, resurfacing, and reemerging as water precipitates and evaporates. With repetition, humans leave telltale imprints. "Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to a clay vessel" (Benjamin 2019, 36). These residues and remnants adhere according to organic long-chain time, which accumulates to a temporal limit, cyclically as nutrients do in soils, season after season, where fecundity no longer ebbs and flows but peaks and plateaus. Such a time cannot be abridged (Benjamin 2019, 37).[2] One would work and wait as long as it takes, patient at the threshold of time where time will soon cease to matter. The story and the stoneworker belong to this time.

2

An epitaph chiseled in a headstone, *In the Presence of Absence* is a self-elegy: a bidding farewell to the self. Storytelling too belongs to the moments of dying and death. For Benjamin, life becomes transmissible only as one dies. "Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end," one's knowledge or wisdom—the stuff of stories—emerges and imparts to the living an imprint, a touch, a sense of being graced by a hand (Benjamin 2019, 38). The trace of a connection or the sense that one is being held represents the authority that the dying and the dead possess for the living around them.

This is the authority at the source of a story. "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death" (Benjamin 2019, 39). This authority stems from uncertainty about whether the dead are truly dead, whether they are truly absent or present (Stevenson 2014, 40).[3]

Like the lingering impression of a light on the back of the eyelid at night, death, like poetography, is a bleeding of opposites. As sequences of images set in motion—the montage of 'life flashing before your eyes'—they reemerge as blended precipitates of experiences. Benjamin, like Darwish, was also expelled from his beloved birthplace by the impending threat of violent erasure. Benjamin knew he would never see the city of Berlin again. Prior to bidding farewell, the images of his childhood resurfaced and in early 1932 Benjamin began to compose *Berlin Childhood around 1900:*

> When, having mastered my senses with great effort, I arrived to quell the uproar after prolonged fumbling through the gloomy corridor, I tore off the two receivers, which were heavy as dumbbells, thrust my head between them, and was inexorably delivered over to the voice that now sounded. There was nothing to allay the violence with which it pierced me. Powerless, I suffered, seeing that it obliterated my consciousness of time, my firm resolve, my sense of duty. And just as the medium obeys the voice that takes possession of him from beyond the grave, I submitted to the first proposal that came my way through the telephone (Benjamin 2006, 49–50).

Benjamin was delivered. Pierced, he was powerless in reminiscing his earliest experiences using the telephone. Time was obliterated—as in the temporality of the story or the stoneworker; it did not matter. The voice on the other end was a voice 'from beyond the grave': a voice of the dead. His resolve and his duty were annihilated by the authority that the dying hold over the living or the spirit possesses over the medium. Benjamin knew he would forever be homesick, that there could be no final detachment from Berlin—no final moment—where his absence from the city would mean its absence from his life (Stevenson 2014, 41).[4]

3

Benjamin would forever long for the place where he belonged. For longing is a line drawn in one's interior, a scrape or scratch as one's roots to their land are cut away. Longing is the topographical friction ridges of the fingers imprinted by the exiled who exiles another. Darwish too longed for his home: a land he would leave, and return to, and leave once more, time and again. Here, he reflects further on how it feels to live 'past one's time' (Said 1994, 115):

> Longing is a scar inside the heart and a country's fingerprint on the body. But no one longs for his wound, no one longs for pain or nightmare, but for what was before. For a time when there was no pain except of primary pleasures that melt time, like a sugar cube in a cup of tea, and for a time of heavenly images. Longing is the call of ney to ney to restore the direction broken by the horses'

> hooves in a military campaign. It is an intermittent ailment, neither contagious nor lethal, even when it takes the form of an epidemic. It is an invitation to stay up late with the lonesome and an excuse not to be on equal footing with train passengers who know their own addresses well. It is the transparent fabric of that beautiful nothingness, gathered to roast the coffee of wakefulness for the dreams of strangers (Darwish 2011, 111).

Longing is a trace, an impression of a connection, the print of a potter clinging to clay, or the residual echo of a voice clinging to life as it bids farewell to itself. Longing is a time of both agitation and stillness, where the water peaks and crests or merely rests. It is a time where sea shells or sugar cubes float freely, suspended. A time where desire drifts, where primary pleasures are as undivided and unbounded as the oceans, as unified as the child at a mother's breast (Freud 1962, 11–13).[5] Longing is an oceanic time where time dissolves, where it knows no limit, where it no longer matters. Longing is intermittent, and it is uncertain. But it is certain in that wherever one is absent longing could always be present, and it is certain in that 'to know an address well' one need not listen to the letters of lost loved ones, need not reciprocate the requests of the return addressee. Longing is transparent, yet, it is an "utterance less transparent for meaning than the word itself" (Stevenson 2014, 12).[6] It is the unformulated fabric of craftsmanship, the artisanal embroidery, the enmeshing of the story's "slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers" (Benjamin 2019, 37). It is the iridescent, porcelaneous prisms of nacre-colored narratives. Longing is the slow stimulant to sleep, the 'wakefulness for the dreams' where dreams think themselves in images. Longing is where, even in the waking world, "thinking in pictures stands nearer to unconscious processes than does thinking in words" (Stevenson 2014, 44).[7] Longing is where waking and sleeping blend—where they melt and mingle—opposites though they may be. Where what was thought to vanish at daybreak, emerges at sunrise. Where what was thought to design only dreams styles reality. "It [then] becomes crucial for us," implores Lisa Stevenson, "to dissolve the difference between dreaming and what it is to be held captive by an image" (Stevenson 2014, 45). Such 'captivity' is bound by the unformulated, murky qualities of sentiments like longing. One is held by the unresolved paradoxical nature of an image, a dream, a story, or even a mode of thinking. This affective embrace incites new political arrangements that revolve around the properties and possibilities of time (Rancière 2004, 13). The obscurity of time's passing—dissolvable, undivided oceanic time—expands the limitations of who can speak or who can be heard, democratizing our sense of belonging.

4

Images that continue to resonate with us and that animate us over the course of our lives are what Benjamin called "precipitates of experience" (Stevenson 2014, 11, 42). As in chemistry and storytelling, precipitates are condensed and concentrated forms that are stronger and more potent than the originals. For Benjamin, a few fragmentary images[8] encapsulate "the whole distorted world of childhood" (Benjamin 2006, 98).[9] Precipitates float freely like solids in solutions or shells in the sea; only through agitation (in Benjamin's case, disjuncture and forced separation) do precipitates emerge as suspensions. Images and stories do not expend themselves at the moments in which they are new. They conserve or

preserve their strength, and are capable of releasing said strength even after a long time. Although images solidify and strengthen, precipitates cannot be understood as piths. They are montages or collages, conglomerates that do not inherently contain clarity.

Similar to images, stories do not aim to convey the pure essence of a thing (Benjamin 2019, 36). Images are not necessarily straight-forward biographical depictions, and thus their representations by lines drawn—the -graphy of biography—need not be linear. As precipitates resurface or reemerge their expressions can present as distortions, their compositions unclear or even untrue (Stevenson 2014, 11). "The image is a language which expresses without formulating, an utterance less transparent for meaning than the word itself" (Stevenson 2014, 12).[10] Benjamin contrasts storytelling with a newer form of communication that emerges from the middle classes and the printing presses: information. "Information lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime requirement is that it appears 'understandable in itself'" (Benjamin 2019, 33). Stories, like images, need not be immediately intelligible nor ostensibly true.

5

If images are a language, what are its expressive characters? What are the markers of its nonlinear and unformulated utterances, or its—if I may be permitted—imagography? Furthermore, what do images as language enable or permit? What do images allow for creatively? What do they hold within them—that which is agitated, brought out again, and given new form? That which precipitates experience and evaporates absence? Lisa Stevenson, in her recent ethnography, *Life Beside Itself,* partially addresses these inquiries. *Life Beside Itself* juxtaposes Canadian humanitarian interventions in the lives of Inuit communities throughout the tuberculosis epidemic of the 1940s to 1960s alongside the suicide crisis starting in the 1980s in order to conceive of alternate forms of attending to and caring for others who matter. Stevenson's methodology is one of images, which she refers to as 'image as method'. Using Benjamin's works, including his memoir, she sees images not as mere representations but as forms potentiating care. Images are a means of thinking and knowing that, like stories, need not appear immediately understandable in and of themselves. Instead, the ambiguity or contradiction of memory is held within a sensorial array. As expressions without formulation, images articulate new possibilities of relating ethically and politically to others.

One particular anecdote that Stevenson draws on is from E.M. Forster's novel *Howards End* (1910).[11] A handwritten note arrives in the morning mail, the return addressee the matron of Mrs. Wilcox's nursing home. The note instructs Mr. Wilcox and his son, Charles, that she, Mrs. Wilcox, would prefer her friend and not her family to inherit her house at Howards End. Mrs. Wilcox had recently died at the nursing home, which her husband and son knew beforehand. The mourning men assessed the request, deliberated, and decided it was written in illness. Mr. Wilcox and Charles ripped the note and burned it. Forster writes, "To them Howards End was a house: they could not know that to her it had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir" (Stevenson 2014, 35–36).

Mr. Wilcox and his son did not allow themselves to trace the inscriptions in the paper pulp—to sense the graceful handprint of the dead. They did not permit themselves to be held by the dying and be told one last story by a beloved wife and mother. They rejected the story's uncertainty, certain themselves that she was truly dead, truly absent. "To allow Mrs. Wilcox

to remain a presence would be to allow her handwritten note *the status of an image*, an image being that which has a hold on us even after its informational and symbolic meaning has been decoded" (Stevenson 2014, 36, emphasis added). The dead woman's note, the recording of a voice from 'beyond the grave,' could have attained the status of an image (Stevenson 2014, 36). The strength—the potency of a precipitate—was on the verge of reemergence, on the crest of resurfacing. Yet, one must answer the phone. One must tear off the two receivers and thrust their head between them. If the ringtone falls on deaf ears, if paper pulp becomes mere tinder, "The gift for listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears. For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when stories are no longer retained" (Benjamin 2019, 35)." One must be attuned to the story; one must listen to the image in order to hear the voice on the other end: the voice beyond the grave.

Imago-

Images and feelings are strictly interdependent. If an image can be felt, if it can be heard, what are the expressive characters of an image language? According to Benjamin, images hold smells, visions, gestures, and sound-forms within their concentrations (Benjamin 2006, 39).[12] Curiously, the sensorial array captured within precipitates of experience is not static or stagnant. Smells waft, visions morph, gestures jerk, and sounds snap.[13] As when stories reemerge and their narratives are retold in new forms, images pass from one state to another. The condensation of the precipitate, the preservation of potency, is not pithy precisely due to this reason. Stories do not convey essences because of the shifts in their nature. Sinking and surfacing, the strength of the story does not appear as a still image. Rather, experiences and stories are locomotive; they possess motility or motivity. They themselves move as they are concurrently capable of shaking and displacing us. The movements of images and stories contain uncertainty and contradiction, the uncertainty as to whether the dead are actually dead and the contradiction as to whether the dead are absent, present, or both (Stevenson 2014, 10).[14]

A particular strength is held within such an antinomic melding. To sit with, to receive, to absorb the reemergent movements of memories, to attune oneself to a different time, is to integrate relations with those who have passed that may transform connections in the present. "The 'images' Benjamin provides in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*," according to Lisa Stevenson, "are not merely tokens of a dissolving past, but they actually shape and condition a form of thought, and perhaps even a form of life" (Stevenson 2014, 42). However, what dissolves is not sought after to be reconstituted. Beyond the disruptions and displacements in the lives of both Benjamin and Darwish, longing is not a simple desire for the restoration of a time prior to the end. Hannah Arendt, in introducing Benjamin's works, expresses that "Although the living is subject to the ruin of time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization" (Benjamin 2019, lxiii). Similarly, *In the Presence of Absence* looks forward as much as it reflects back. Longing, too, is a simultaneous expression of dissipation and concentration, of accumulative, cyclical time. Longing oscillates between the already and the not yet in the now. Within the ambiguity and antinomy is a contemporaneous plurality, an openness to always being made. The moments of metamorphosis are saturated with the images and stories of love:

> In the beginning of love, beginnings swarm down on you, deep blue. At the height of love you live it, you forget it, it forgets you and makes you forget the beginnings. At the end of love you look long at the clock. In absence, beginnings find the residual aches of the room: not having a second glass of wine, a missing blue shawl. The poem is filled with missing elements, and when you complete it with an incompleteness that opens into another poem, you are cured of memories and regrets. The gold in you does not rust. As if writing were, like love, the offspring of a cloud. When you touch it, it melts. As if the utterance were only incited in an effort to make up for a loss. The image of love reveals itself there; in a profoundly present absence (Darwish 2011, 116).

Looking long at the clock. To linger, to long for love. To long for what was forgotten, what was obliterated: absent time. As a lover departs, their belongings arrive: cordials and clothing. As at the airport terminal where baggage is checked the floor above where it is claimed. One loves, leaves, and comes in layers, like the palatine manteaux draped over and against itself or the childhood that greets you as you say goodbye to your birthplace. The tick-tock of the clock snaps and the image sequence is set in motion. Flashing before your eyes, the residues and remnants resonate; they ache as you recount, rewind the dial: the hour, the minute hand. But the eyes grasp at what the hands cannot reach, like the boat that slips out of sight: the absence that we still desire, long for to be present (Stevenson 2014, 37).[15] The space of presence, up in the clouds, when you reach for it, when you seek to traverse it, the distance dissolves. The space is erased. The cloud condenses, precipitates, evaporates. Its shapes shift as clouds do. You lie back, gaze above, and their sequences set in motion. They waft, they morph, they pass from one state to another, one place to another. But you forget it. Love moves. Then it forgets you. Love moves you. It displaces you, shakes you, like the larvae left behind by the butterfly: the imago. That when you look back at the cavity of the chrysalis, when you bid farewell to yourself, you might sense that even amid your absence, even amid your death, life and love may be present.

Notes

1. Interestingly, Benjamin thought such a process and community to be disappearing given the general lack of societal boredom. Integrating a story into one's own experience "requires a state of relaxation which is becoming rarer and rarer. If sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation." There is also a spatial element where the "nesting places" of "boredom [a]s the dream bird" are disappearing too; the spaces in the city and country that foster relaxation and integration are vanishing. See Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 35.
2. "All these products of sustained, sacrificing effort are vanishing, and the time is past in which time did not matter. Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated."
3. Stevenson is describing the lingering effects of viewing a photograph of the once living; "this makes me think more about the relationship of photographs to the images we hold in our mind's eye… and the hold they both have over us. Both share a kind of afterlife…"
4. Stevenson is commenting directly on Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood*.
5. Freud's oceanic state: "It is a feeling, then, of being indissolubly bound up with and belonging to the whole of the world outside oneself."

6. Lisa Stevenson is quoting Michel Foucault commenting on Sigmund Freud. See also Foucault, Michel. "Dream, Imagination and Existence: An Introduction to Ludwig Binswanger's 'Dream and Existence." In *Dream and Existence,* edited by K. Hoeller, 29-78. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1993.
7. Lisa Stevenson is quoting Sigmund Freud.
8. Chapter titles in Benjamin's Berlin include, among others: "Butterfly Hunt," "The Sock," "Two Brass Bands," "Colors," and "Tardy Arrival."
9. See also Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself,* 41.
10. The quote is Michel Foucault commenting on Sigmund Freud.
11. This recapitulation is derived from Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself,* 35–36.
12. See also Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself,* 42.
13. Snap, as in, to pass from one form, state, or level to another.
14. "Images—in the broad sense that I use the term—are useful precisely because they can capture uncertainty and contradiction without having to resolve it."
15. Stevenson is making reference to anthropologist Michael Taussig, who is drawing on the work of film scholar Gertrud Koch.

References

Academy of American Poets. "Mahmoud Darwish, 1941–2008." Accessed March 2021. https://poets.org/poet/mahmoud-darwish.

Allen, Roger. 2000. *An Introduction to Arabic Literature.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Antoon, Sinan. "Mahmoud Darwish: Standing Before the Ruins of Al-Birweh." Last modified March 13, 2011. Accessed May 2020. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/23789.

Benjamin, Walter. 2006. *Berlin Childhood around 1900.* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 2019. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections.* Translated by Harry Zohn. New York, NY: Mariner Books.

Bible Gateway. "Isaiah 55: 10–11, NRSV." Accessed May 2020. https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+55&version=NRSV.

Darwish, Mahmoud. 2011. *In the Presence of Absence.* Translated by Sinan Antoon. Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books.

Freud, Sigmund. 1962. *Civilization and its Discontents.* Translated by James Strachey. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Kilito, Abdelfattah. 2014. *Arabs and the Art of Storytelling: A Strange Familiarity.* Translated by Mbarek Sryfi and Eric Sellin. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Lyotard, Jean-François. 1988. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute.* Translated by Georges Van Den Abbeel. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Online Etymology Dictionary. "-graphy." Accessed May 2020. https://www.etymonline.com/word/-graphy.

Rancière, Jacques. 2004. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible.* Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. London, UK: Continuum.

Said, Edward. 1994. "On Mahmoud Darwish." *Grand Street* 48: 112–115.

Stevenson, Lisa. 2014. *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.