Unacknowledged Wounds: Enfranchising the Thousand Losses of Migratory Grief

by

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Abstract

A growing number of people around the world are being displaced due to violence, war, genocide, poverty, and the ecological crisis. Although it is now widely recognized that the experience of displacement and resettlement can be extremely traumatic, there continues to be a significant gap in both literature and social discourse on the impact of migration, specifically regarding grief and loss. This paper explores possible reasons for this absence and aims to illuminate and acknowledge the profound, innumerable, and layered non-death losses experienced by migrants. The goal is to validate, normalize and humanize migratory grief so that it can be attended to with the care it needs and deserves, and to help counsellors, migrants, and society develop a deeper understanding and sense of compassion for this experience. This paper also offers non-pathologizing and life-giving ways to honor the many losses associated with migration and nurture a sense of empowerment, hope, purpose, meaning and belonging in those who have been uprooted and replanted in new lands. Readers will be invited to consider grief as a potential source of self-discovery, purpose, and love, rather than a pathology in need of fixing. Finally, the paper will end with a discussion on the importance of engaging in advocacy, activism, and glbal movements for justice, equity, and liberation as a way to mobilize grief and prevent its perpetuation.

Keywords: migrants, refugees, migratory grief, disenfranchised grief, expressive arts, existentialism

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to many.

To my ancestors, my family, and the land I came from – I carry your wounds, your unacknowledged sorrow, and all the tears you could not cry. My eyes have become your rivers.
I also carry your strength, depth, heart, determination, and sense of what is just and what is not.

To all those who have suffered from the horrors of violence, war, genocide, colonialism, white supremacy, racism, and occupation. To all those who still do. To all those forced to stay and to all those forced to flee. To all the world's displaced trying to survive, grow, and bloom in new soil - and often, sadly, soil that carries the same stories of dispossession, injustice, and genocide, and the losses and grief of its original peoples.

To the children of Bosnia. To the children of Palestine, especially now the children of Gaza. To children everywhere. Women everywhere. Men. Humans. Young and old.

I dedicate this to you.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge that my (un)learning, writing and healing process have taken place on the traditional and unceded ancestral lands and territories of the Coast Salish xʷməθkwəy̓əm [Musqueam], Sḵwx̱wú7mesh [Squamish], and Səl̓ílwətaʔ [Tsleil-Waututh] nations. This is important because the theft and colonization of land and the violence and oppression inflicted upon its peoples are inseparable from the topic of this paper. With humility, gratitude, and sorrow, I acknowledge I am an uninvited migrant who fled war only to settle on stolen, un-surrendered land. This is a painful tension most of us must recognize and reckon with daily. I am grateful for the chance to do so.

I would also like to share my deepest love and gratitude with those who have journeyed alongside me these last few months and those who believed in my labor of love. My mama – your unwavering faith that I could do this (and everything and anything I put my mind to) kept me going in the moments I doubted myself; you are my biggest cheerleader. Thank you also for teaching me to notice injustice in the world. Thank you to my love Mathieu – for knowing how much it means to me to put all of myself into my work, for helping whenever I needed your beautiful brain, for all the hugs (and distractions), and for making my very own little “capstone” (a literal stone with an origami cap) to keep me company in what can be a very lonely process. Thank you to my brother – for always being there when I needed support and for being someone I can talk to; I hope we’ll be besties forever, like Koko and Nona. To my hearts and instant smile-makers – Dora, Luc, and Vera – my love and hopes for you motivate me to learn how to hold space for my grief in case you ever need me to hold space for yours. To my friends - soul sisters and soul brother - for doing the same for me these last few months and years. A special thanks to my Kelly, who helped me play, rest, discover, and care for myself at her “retreat” when I needed to recharge, and who got me to plant my first flowers this spring – a metaphor for tending to myself lovingly and following the cycles of nature and life.

To my dad – you were a visionary and a dreamer, and you encouraged me to think outside the box. I wish your dreams had come true, but I hope you know that a piece of you will always live on in mine.

To Randy – for teaching me that one can only lose what one has loved. Because of you, I have a deep respect for my grief. It helped me stay connected to you wherever you are and inspired me not to close my heart but to open it even further – to the risk of more loss, yes, but to the gift of more love, too. This is why I have been brought to this work and why I show up in life the way I do.

To my cohort, this paper is sprinkled with lessons learned from you, your tender hearts, and your brilliant minds. I have had the honor of becoming a better human and counsellor in your presence. A heartfelt Thank You to my advisor Sonia Plewa, an inspiring and angelic guide and teacher, for your gentle encouragement and questioning and for helping me discover what I needed to start writing and to make my capstone meaningful. You presented the possibility of rejoicing at the arrival of my grief, while always reminding me to prioritize my wellbeing. Another heartfelt Thank You to my faculty reader Dawn Percher - a brilliant mind. Your comments meant more than you could know and got me through the last stretch. You two are the highlight of my learning experience, and I hope to carry your wisdom and teachings into my work and way of life.

In the context of architecture, a capstone is a stone at the top of a wall or structure, often used to signify the finishing touch in the construction process. I find this meaningful because the completion of this Capstone marks exactly 30 years since I came to Canada with my family. I would like to see this paper as a finishing touch on all that I have managed to construct out of the destruction and loss that led me here. The following pages will also be a personal process of acknowledging a long unacknowledged grief. With these last words, this *The End*, I hope to start *A New Beginning* and live the possibilities that exist within and on the other side of grief.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I feel called to begin this introduction by sharing with you, dear reader, the deeply personal and challenging process of writing this paper because it is this process that has unexpectedly led me to the invitation I hope to offer. I humbly ask you to accompany me, to witness my meandering journey, and to trust that my words will bring you to a worthwhile destination – one that will open your eyes and your heart to the many people who you will inevitably cross paths with. This may sound mysterious, but mystery can be a gift, and it was for me.

The Gift in Writer's Block: Finding the Topic in the Wound

My writing journey did not begin as a mystery. In fact, it was the furthest thing from it. My original topic was to be an exploration of the potential benefits of integrating internal family systems (IFS) and expressive arts therapy as a combined approach to grief therapy with bereaved individuals. Sounds confident and clear, right? And I was well on my way, having written part of the paper as a requirement for my research methods class and having found most of my sources. Suffice to say, I thought I had all I needed to convince my readers that a fabulous and non-pathologizing approach was available for us all to navigate the loss of a beloved – one that would guide individuals through their grief in a way that invites curiosity, imagination, beauty, joy, passion, vitality, strength, and hope. I was given the green light by everyone I spoke with, but little did I know that light would soon turn red. As one month turned into another, the inner block that prevented me from putting down a single new word grew far beyond the typical writer's block that many students experience. It was no longer simply a matter of procrastination, perfectionism, and the desire to write a good paper. Rather, it was a hopelessness that slowly crept in and made me question the entire point of it all.

Where did this come from and how could I go back to feeling excited, confident, and clear?

I had been passionate about my topic. I knew from day one of my Master's program that this was it! My faith in the potential of the expressive arts to tend to the experience of grief emerged from my own healing journey. My pain and heartbreak over the loss of a beloved partner in my 20s was like nothing I had ever known, and I turned to drawing and creative writing for comfort and meaning. This led me to the expressive arts therapy program at Langara College, where I slowly healed and learned how I could be of service to others. Soon after, I came across internal family systems and was deeply moved by the dialogue and understanding that can take place between the "Self" that is at the core of each of us - the witnessing "I" - and the many wounded and protective parts that live inside us and do their best to help us survive (Lavergne, 2004; Turns et al., 2021). In thinking about grief, I realized that there are many parts of us that may respond to loss, including the parts that carry painful and overwhelming emotions; the parts that feel abandoned and helpless; the parts that feel angry and bitter; the parts that feel guilty for not having done enough or for being mad and resentful; the parts that fear being stuck in the grief forever; the parts that don't want to feel the loss and keep us busy; the parts that deeply miss the beloved and want to maintain a never-ending connection; the parts that want to live a life that honors the deceased; and the parts that see an opportunity for growth. There are just so many parts, and what better way to give them a voice than to offer them *all* of the arts to express themselves.

Little did I know that my own grieving parts would suddenly and lovingly hijack my attempt to write a paper on how to heal grief. From October to January, I found myself watching the horrors taking place in Gaza, unable to peel myself away. I knew I had only months to finish my Capstone, but as I witnessed the death, destruction, and unspeakable loss that Palestinians were living through before all our eyes, I felt hopeless. Not only that, but I began to feel repelled by my topic. It felt stupid, useless, and even offensive in the face of what was happening in the world and to innocent people everywhere. Gaza. Syria. Afghanistan. Ukraine. Sudan. Congo. Eritrea. Yemen. Mexico. Haiti. Venezuela. And the list goes on and on. With my eyes currently on Gaza, my parts revolted, resisted, rebelled, and cried out for my

attention. The current and historical context made me feel helpless, powerless, and above all, ashamed – ashamed that I was writing a Capstone on how to help people who have already faced loss and grief *while* people are enduring it in real time in the most horrific ways imaginable. I watched the *living* on the news and social media and thought: these people have already lost (surely all of them have), are *in the midst* of losing, and *will continue* to lose not only their loved ones, but their homes, neighborhoods, communities, jobs, livelihoods, lands, and their hopes and dreams. Not only that, but this will be ongoing because the losing never seems to end once you have experienced violence, war, genocide, systemic destruction and oppression, and displacement. There is a continual taking – of Self, of peace, of joy, of meaning, of love, of health, of time, and of belonging. This taking is historical, multigenerational, and intergenerational. It takes from the future *today.*

I asked myself how I could write about the use of expressive arts therapy and IFS to *heal* grief while witnessing so much loss being unnecessarily, incessantly, and relentlessly caused by global politics, capitalism, colonisation, imperialism, and oppression. Should the focus of all our efforts not be on *stopping* this constant losing, this *taking from,* this *theft* of all that makes life beautiful, worthwhile, and sustainable? Rather than tending to the aftermath of systematic destruction and displacement, mustn't we prevent it somehow? Amidst these questions, I could not write. What could I possibly have to say? Thankfully, my advisor was a compassionate guide who helped me go within to understand what this block meant for me and how I could make it meaningful rather than falling into the abyss of despair.

Undigested, Anticipatory, and Disenfranchised Grief

The heartache I feel as I witness the death, destruction, and injustice in Gaza overwhelms me. Not only can I see the loss, pain, terror, and sorrow, but I feel them in every part of my being. It has re-awakened a deep knowing – a remembering in my body that takes place whenever I see this kind of violence inflicted upon innocent peoples. It is a remembering of being an innocent child and having my entire life senselessly and mercilessly turned upside down by the siege of my city, Sarajevo, during the

war in Bosnia in the 1990s. It re-awakens not only my own grief for all the losses I have endured since then but also something else that equally torments me. The closest words I can find to describe this feeling are *anticipatory grief.* I am anticipating the grief of the Palestinian people who survive and all the losses that will follow what has already been far too much to comprehend and digest. And those who are "fortunate" enough to leave, migrate, and re-settle will have left their land and a whole life, and another chain of losses will ensue as they are forced to start and navigate a new one.

I say this because my own life often seems like a never-ending series of losses that began with war. Though loss is an inevitable part of being human, the losses that migrants and refugees experience can be all-encompassing and extremely complex. My own include the loss of childhood (curiosity, play, friends, and years of fundamental education), my extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins), my language, my people's incredible sense of humor, and a sense of cultural identity. My losses also include the loss of family harmony, sense of safety and security, inner peace, confidence, and self-esteem. They include the loss of my parents' careers, economic security, the house they had built, and a whole way of life that we were once fortunate to have. After coming to Vancouver, my little family of four suddenly lived in a one-bedroom apartment for ten years, at times on welfare, before moving to social housing. It wasn't only the loss of our house, but all the other accompanying losses, including loss of privacy, space, freedom, dignity, pride, and belonging. I have also never been able to imagine owning my own home in this unaffordable city where too many find themselves unhoused or living month to month and struggling to keep a roof over their heads. My family moved from a place where owning one's home was a reality for many to a place where it is an unattainable dream for most, especially for immigrants and those who have had to flee their countries and start from scratch.

However, it is not only the loss of what I had but the loss of what I could have had – the support and proximity of ancestors and family, my culture all around me, and a stronger sense of who I am that comes with a belonging to a place and a people. My loss was about all my parents could have had as well

– the life they had built for themselves, the plans they had for the future, and the love between them - and its impact on me. My father's recent and sudden passing is another part of the thread that connects these losses. It is not just his death I grapple with, but also my belief that he would not and could not have died the way he did had the war never happened.

Adding to the heartache is my awareness that much of the personal, collective, and cultural loss that follows war and displacement is disenfranchised, meaning that the associated grief is not or cannot be expressed because the loss is not socially recognized, acceptable, or supported and thus cannot be openly mourned (Doka, 1989; 2002). The grieving process is then complicated, adding further stress and suffering to what already often feels unbearable. Where does the grief go when we are busy trying to survive upon arrival, when survival is believed to be good enough, and when thriving is not even within the realm of what is considered possible? Where does the grief go when it is unacknowledged by the world around us - when no one asks you about what you've lost? How does this grief find its expression when we ourselves are not aware that it is grief, whether it is because too much time has passed for us to make the connection, because no one else recognizes it as such, or because we ourselves have never understood it as such, so for all these reasons we call it something else (like depression or chronic pain)? How does it show up in our lives when it is forgotten, neglected, pathologized, or cast to the shadows? What is the impact as time passes and the silenced grief searches for expression when no one – society, researchers, health care professionals, not even us – is listening?

It is true that over time, there has been more discussion and research about the traumatic and mental health impacts of war and migration, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Grief, however, is generally only spoken of in the context of the traumatic death of loved ones. But as I searched article after article for a mention of the word 'grief' in the context of the countless non-death related losses migrants and refugees experience, I was mostly disappointed. There is so much literature on refugees and migrants, yet so little mention of loss and grief. Again, I asked myself, "Then where does it go?"

In trying to write this paper, I found one of my answers as this undigested, unmetabolized grief expressed itself through writer's block. It spilled out of my eyes as I wept for the people of Palestine and took with it my hope that my thesis could ever matter. After all this time of being unacknowledged, my grief turned into a sense that I was powerless to change anything or contribute in any meaningful way to humanity. Upon this discovery, my advisor invited me to engage in the sacred act of attending to this re-awakened grief and to rejoice at its arrival because only then could I begin to do something about it - to mourn, heal, make it meaningful, and return to hope. I had to acknowledge and hold space for my own losses and pain if I was ever to be able to offer the same for others, but I first had to ask why I hadn't fully done so. Suddenly, another option lay before me – to change my topic. Instead of writing about how to navigate grief when a beloved dies, I chose to go straight to the center of my current experience and to try to understand why this particular kind of grief has been left unacknowledged for so long.

Then, I remembered *disenfranchised grief*. My new purpose was to enfranchise it by welcoming it, naming it, and giving it a voice. My own sacred act of attending in this paper and process will extend into an invitation for you to do the same – to witness and acknowledge the losses that individuals must endure in the aftermath of occupation, oppression, wars, genocide, dispossession, and dislocation.

Dislocation

I google the term *dislocation* and the first thing I come across are First Aid instructions on www.kidshealth.org. Here, I am told that a dislocation is when two connected bones slip out of position in a joint due to a fall or hard impact. Emergency medical care is required to prevent further damage. I think about this as a metaphor for the dislocation of people, like migrants and refugees, from their homes, and how they remain connected and yet are out of position following the hard impact of violence and forced displacement. Unfortunately, the kind of emergency care that is needed is not an option, and damage cannot be avoided because the instructions to *not* move the dislocated joint or force it back into place cannot be followed. The migrant must often keep moving, and there is

sometimes no way or option to go back. The damage can not only *not* be avoided but it continues for an indefinite period. The bones can never return to their original position and relationship to one another, and, after so much damage, the joints can never properly heal. They remain swollen, bruised, hurting, and out of place. I imagine the bones as all the people hanging off their lands like limbs, unable and unwilling to let go entirely and be completely severed from home. Dislocated but forever connected.

I am then reminded of an elderly woman in Ukraine who told a reporter that she could not and would not leave the only home she has ever known, and her pet, despite risk of death. I think about the Palestinian people in Gaza right now and how so many do not *want* to leave what little land they are permitted to inhabit despite the incessant death and destruction that loom over them. I think about their olive trees. In an Aljazeera article (Amer, 2024) titled "The olive tree, symbol of Palestine and mute victim of Israel's war on Gaza," Ahlam Saqr, a 50-year-old mother, shares how she cried the day her sons began to cut off branches from her beloved trees for firewood to heat food, water, and bodies. She understood it was a matter of survival, but the branches took their beautiful memories with them.

Reading this took me back to a memory of my first post-war trip to Sarajevo. It was now 1998, I was twelve years old, and my grandmother took me to the park across her building, where I had spent many childhood days after she picked me up from kindergarten. In my pre-war memory, the park was vast, lush, and endlessly full of trees, teeter-totters, and children, but in 1998, these were gone. During the war, the trees had been cut for the same reasons Palestinians are forced to cut theirs today. Despite my gratitude, however, that park without those trees symbolized me without my childhood. It was a palpable and deep sadness I felt for what could never be reclaimed. For the Palestinian people, it is an even deeper wound, as they are forced to cut down their 'life companions' and destroy "these living, breathing witnesses to family history" (Amer, 2024, para. 7-8). Sixty-five-year-old Khaled Baraka also grieves for his many trees – guava, lemon, orange, and olive. He says, "They know my secrets. When I

was sad and worried, I would talk to the trees, take care of them…but the war killed those trees" (Amer, 2024, para. 15).

Those who are most deeply connected to their land understand the depth of such a loss. These are more than just trees. The emotional ties that tether us to our lands and the places we were born are at times beautifully acknowledged through the ceremonies of Indigenous peoples. One of my instructors told us a story that an Elder shared about Indigenous parenting practices. He said his people would bury an infant's placenta beside a young tree as a way of offering the child to the land. This practice reflects the common Indigenous worldview that the *land* owns *you,* not the other way around. Considering that war is about expansion, occupation, and ownership of other lands, these lands and their people continue to be forcibly separated from one another. People suddenly feel disconnected from *themselves* and those who believe they belong to the land know this. Indigenous people everywhere know that to be cut off from the land when you are part of it impacts one's identity and sense of place and belonging.

When people belong to the land and that land is violated, it can be experienced as a violation of one's body and it is deeply felt. In my case, as someone who was born in a city, I would feel deep pain each time I would visit Sarajevo and witness the wounds that remain on *her* buildings and homes that were once shelled by snipers and grenades. I have been referring to Sarajevo as "her" for decades for some unexplainable reason. In my heart, I sense this city as a woman who had been violated for years and who lost so many of her children. When I walk her streets, I sometimes touch her wounds with my hands and cry. Strangely, it makes me feel connected to a motherlike being that I was ripped away from, and I suddenly feel more like my Self – someone inside me that cannot be forgotten or left behind.

In Chapter 2, I describe the subtle way grief can show up following the loss of place through the lens of a 9-year-old boy placed in foster care. The boy's blanket, which he had brought with him, is missing and he threatens to run away. Though the social worker interprets his behavior as anxiety, Gitterman and Knight (2018) have a different perspective: they invite the possibility that his blanket is

not just a “thing” he lost, but a valuable extension and symbol of home and family. Through this lens, his reaction can be seen as an expression of grief – a grief left unacknowledged. This resonated with me.

When my family and I had to flee our house for safety at the beginning of the siege and leave behind most of our possessions, I left Miss Tiki, my pink alarm clock. Years later, when we arrived in Canada, I would draw my clock over and over. I would think about Miss Tiki for a long time, wondering if someone had taken her. When Google came around, it occurred to me that I could search for her, but she was nowhere to be found. It wasn’t until a few years ago, almost 30 years later, that I found a Miss Tiki online, had a family friend in Holland order it, waited for someone to bring it back to Vancouver, and placed it on my bookshelf. Though a part of me naively expected the reunion to magically heal my trauma, I now feel closer to an understanding of Miss Tiki’s potential significance. She was a contained representation of a loss too big for my 6-year-old mind to understand. I couldn’t cognitively grasp the loss of our house and all it provided. I couldn’t understand that childhood could be lost in the same way you lose a toy or your keys. Maybe if we were reunited sooner, she could indeed have been the medicine I needed. Now, I see her captivate my niece and nephew and I eagerly answer all their questions about her story – where she came from, our long separation, and how she found her way back to me.

When people migrate, and especially when they are forced to leave the life they know at a moment’s notice, they lose their homes and possessions – their houses and Miss Tikis. But that is not all. People lose and mourn landscapes and colors, sights and smells, the specific light of the sky, the familiar temperature of water and air, and the medicine of their land in the form of herbs and plants. These live inside of us, and the body remembers them well. In my own conversations with family and other immigrants in Vancouver, I have often heard it expressed that the forests are not the right shade of green, the ocean is not the right temperature or shade of blue, the sky is not as bright and warm, and the humidity brings an unfamiliar and constant cold that seeps into the bones during even mild winters. The constant rain is not simply an inconvenience – it demands a different way of showing up for life – a

lifestyle that is too different and that one may feel the need to reject. Some may adapt, of course, but the differences are a reminder for many of memories of warmth and sunshine that they have had to leave behind. It is a reminder that rarely stops telling some of us – *this* is not *that* and *you* are not *home.*

It may be more obvious that in the face of death or separation, where human bonds of love and attachment are disrupted, people's ability to adjust can affect their capacity to form new attachments. (Renzenbrink, 2021). But I wonder if we can expand this to include the loss of place, culture, and all that is familiar, and consider how this impacts the capacity of the uprooted to develop attachments to a new land and a new life. Although I left Bosnia when I was only seven years old, three decades later, I still do not feel I belong where I am. In fact, like so many immigrants I've spoken with, I don't feel like I really belong anywhere. I am still trying to discover and re-define what belonging can mean after dislocation, and how it can feel for someone like me. And now that I have a name for the pain that has lived within all these years, I wonder what life could look like once I begin to attend to my grief, digest my losses, and make space for something new that honors the past, dwells in the present, and looks to the future.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this capstone is to illuminate and acknowledge the often overlooked and disenfranchised losses and grief experienced by migrants and refugees. While studies on the impacts of war, violence, and migration predominantly focus on trauma, traumatic death of loved ones, and mental health disorders among displaced populations, this paper aims to address a significant gap in the literature surrounding the emotional and psychological impact of migration by recognizing and focusing on the profound and innumerable non-death losses that accompany the migration experience. By examining the complex and multi-layered nature of migratory grief, the hope is to validate, normalize, humanize, and enfranchise the inevitable sense of loss faced by those who have been uprooted and resettled, so they can tend to their deep wounds and have the opportunity to not only live with the

remaining scars but also with a newfound sense of empowerment, hope, purpose, and meaning. A final aim of this paper is to offer some non-pathologizing, strength-based, and life-giving ways to do this.

Research Questions

The first question guiding this paper asks: *What are the various disenfranchised non-death related losses that migrants experience?* Equally important is the second question, which asks: *Why are loss and grief generally overlooked in research and social discourse on migrants and refugees, with the exception of traumatic bereavement?*

Contributions to Migrants, to the Field, and to Humanity

By giving words to the disenfranchised and often invisible and unspeakable experience of loss and grief among migrants, individuals like me and so many others can begin to feel seen and understood, which can in itself be deeply comforting, if not healing. This is the offering to the migrant – to feel witnessed, acknowledged, and perhaps even a little more hopeful. It is only by acknowledging a loss that the grieving process can be initiated, and it is only by moving through the grief that we can find our way back to ourselves, whatever this may look like for each of us.

In addition to this, a deeper understanding of migratory grief is needed to inform more validating, compassionate, culturally sensitive, and inclusive approaches to listening to and supporting the well-being of migrants and refugees, no matter how long they have been here. Whether we are settlement workers, social workers, mental health workers, counsellors, or teachers, it is not enough to know *about* migrants and refugees. We must know them with the heart, recognize all that they have lost, and honor the courage it takes to start over without it.

A deeper understanding of migratory grief is also needed to highlight the urgency and necessity of standing up for our Earth, humanity, and innocent peoples everywhere by saying no to the conditions that perpetuate displacement and unspeakable loss, including imperialism, colonisation, capitalism,

patriarchy, war, genocide, violence, racism, hatred, and exploitation. At the root of these is not only individual and collective trauma, but also individual and collective grief. The acknowledgement and healing of this grief is an integral part of human liberation and the ending of perpetual cycles of conflict.

Situating Myself in the Paper: Positionality, Limitations, and Considerations

I have already shared with you, dear reader, my personal connection to and investment in this topic. I write this paper as someone who was displaced by war but also as someone who has never felt or seen my experience of loss acknowledged by the society that received me or fully represented in the research and literature on refugees. My own greatest struggle and most painful loss in Canada has been finding a sense of cultural identity and belonging. I am neither Yugoslavian enough, nor Bosnian enough, nor Canadian enough. Nor do I feel that hyphenating my identity gets me any closer. I have never been able to utter the words Bosnian-Canadian. I have felt a deep desire to belong to the place I was born, but it too ceased to exist. Former Yugoslavia is no longer, even if so many from my parents' generation identify with it. I have also deeply resisted being Canadian, possibly because I have never felt my former identity invited into conversation or welcomed, nor have I felt my sense of loss recognized. I continue to long for what has almost become a fictional, if not mythical, place that I have heard so much about but never got to experience. And yet, I have been told by Canadians that I must feel so grateful to have come to Canada and that I am lucky to have escaped Communism and the "Red" threat (not my family's experience). I am often asked if people in my country speak Russian, and if we were ruled by the USSR (even though Yugoslavia was and wanted to be completely independent of it). When people read my last name, they ask if I am Serbian or Croatian, and if it's OK to ask, because they know it's a touchy topic. They politely tell me I don't have to answer. Hardly anyone gives me the option to be Bosnian, and I'm still not sure why. Perhaps it's because I don't look Muslim, I wonder, after *they* remind *me* that "Bosnia is predominantly Muslim, right?"

My identity has been politicized and generally misunderstood due to ignorance or lack of curiosity. But even that is better than being corrected on where I'm from and how my name should be pronounced. I say Bosnia, and someone tells me I mean Boston. My first name has been mispronounced almost every day for 30 years – a constant reminder of my story. Not only that, but when I provide the correct pronunciation, I am sometimes corrected and told how my name is actually pronounced! This theme, however, started before Canada when I was too young to understand. It started when, after a time of relative peace and co-existence of different ethnic and religious groups in Yugoslavia, the fires of nationalism were stirred and suddenly one had to identify with a particular nationality and faith. Given that my family was neither Orthodox Serb, Catholic Croat, or Bosniak (Muslim Bosnian) and that there was no box for us to tick besides 'other', it seems that ever since, I have been and have felt like An Other. At that time, you could be persecuted for being the *wrong* thing or having the *wrong* last name. Not only that, but what was considered wrong depended on who you spoke with and what part of the neighborhood, city, or country you were from. It is difficult to put into words what this does to a person, especially a child who never had a chance to form and solidify their identity.

Therefore, even as I write this paper, I position myself as a fragmented Other who does not find belonging in any one single box. This can be difficult at a time when all I see is boxes, regardless of how fluid they may be. And while boxes can certainly be oppressive, they can also be liberating and a comfortable place for one to slip into when the world feels too big and confusing. Though I, myself, have not found my boxes, I am aware that the boxes I have been placed into without choice or input have also undeniably afforded me certain unearned privileges. For example, in both our refugee journey and life in Canada, my family's experience has been shaped by our skin color, our lack of religious identification, and the opportunities provided by our previous life, such as my parents' quality education and a basic knowledge of English. Our journey has been easier than many others', even though we left a good life for one that has never been even remotely as satisfying. This has been an invisible wound beneath the white

skin that continues to serve me with far more and better options than those provided to many of today's migrants. The notion that I am privileged living here when I feel my life has been an endless series of losses to grieve, and when I *imagine* we would have had a much happier life in our country had it not been for the war, has been an ever-present tension. Our lives have long been divided as "before the war" and "after the war", with little in common between them.

I am aware that this may not reflect the experiences of many, especially today. We are in a new era of human migration and one that is more dehumanizing than it has ever been. It is "the era of walls and fences, a situation that appears to be structural and permanent, related to the dominant economic model characterized by dehumanized globalization based on purely neoliberal economic criteria" (Achotegui, 2019, p. 253). I do not know what it is like for children and parents separated at borders, and those who can never be reunited. I do not know what it is like to live, grow up, or be born in a refugee camp. I do not know what it is like to seek asylum for years and live with that level of uncertainty about the future. I also do not know what it is like to see your mother, father, sibling, or child killed before your eyes. I do not know what it is like to have your entire people vilified and to be deemed and treated like a terrorist in the very countries whose governments and militaries have destroyed your home and forced you to flee and come to them. I also do not know what it is like to leave a life that was actually far worse than the new one, or a land where you were in danger of persecution or death due to your sexuality or gender, for instance. I do not know what it is like to be openly discriminated against in the resettlement experience and the host country due to racism. So many people have endured and lost so much more than me and face more discrimination, injustice, and oppression than I will ever know. I cannot speak for them. I can only commit to increasing my cultural awareness, humility, and sensitivity so that my own assumptions, biases, and blind sports, being embedded as I am in this culture, do not contribute to further hardship, pain, and grief.

I am also aware that those of us who have migrated to countries like Canada have become settlers. We are uninvited guests on a land that has been violently and unjustly occupied and stolen, a land whose Indigenous peoples have been living like refugees in their own home. Though this land has never felt like mine, I know it is theirs, that it lives inside them, and that their bodies remember it well. Everything about its forests, oceans, lakes, rivers, skies, and medicine is right, apart from their destruction of course. Sadly, many so called Western countries that are capable of receiving migrants and refugees have their own history of colonization, violence, and oppression.

In addition, many of us not only migrate to lands with histories of colonization, violence, and oppression, especially against Indigenous peoples, but we also come from those same lands. When we are uprooted and feel the immense loss of our familiar world, we are often uprooted from homelands that, too, have been carved out in blood. Our “homes” are often built upon the destruction and erasure of other people and their homes. While this is outside the scope of my topic, it also means my paper will be incomplete and not nearly as close to “the truth” I’ve been seeking about the migrant experience as I would like. As I speak of the grief of migrants and refugees, I leave out the stories of those whose lands continue to be settled by us, as well as the stories of those whose lands our original homes may have been built upon through violence and dispossession.

And yet, this paper is my attempt to do something. I hope it can be a source of knowledge and inspiration. What follows is but a tiny glimpse into the nuanced vastness of migrants’ grief and its subtleties. The part of me that relates to this experience of immeasurable loss protests and feels that any attempt to approach the truth is already destined to fail. Whatever is included within the page limits means that the rest must be excluded, and my own grief resists this. I realize that the following is but a drop in the sea, and for all that cannot and will not be said, I humbly apologize in advance, both to myself and to the people who I wish to see and feel themselves in my words.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge that this paper marks 30 years since my arrival to Canada. In a way, it is like a midwife helping to deliver a truer version of my Self into the world – one who finally has a name for the wound she has long carried and who wants to share it with you.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will help us understand the unique characteristics and concepts related to the loss and grief experienced due to displacement and migration.

Ambiguous Loss

Loss characterized by lack of clarity, certainty, resolution, or closure, which complicates the grieving process (Boss, 1999). Ambiguity results because there is simultaneously a presence and absence, such as when a loved one is physically absent but psychologically present and vice versa.

Continuing Bonds

Refer to the ongoing emotional connections that individuals maintain and preserve with the deceased, rather than letting go and moving on from the loss (Renzenbrink, 2021).

Cultural Bereavement

The distress and grief stemming from loss of homeland, identity, and social connectedness due to displacement, migration, and relocation (Eisenbruch, 1991; Casado et al., 2010). It also refers to the unique ways individuals and communities experience, express and cope with this grief.

Disenfranchised Grief

Describes when a person has experienced a significant loss, but their grief is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly mourned (Doka, 1989; 2002). Some reasons may be that the relationship or loss are not recognized as valid or significant; the griever may not be considered capable of grief; or the ways the individual grieves may fall outside socially accepted rules and norms.

Intersectionality

This concept acknowledges that we all live at the intersections of multiple cultural and social identities, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and socioeconomic status. These intersect and interact to create experiences of privilege and oppression for individuals.

Existentialism

A central belief is that human suffering can be made meaningful through finding purpose in life's challenges. It emphasizes the importance of taking responsibility for choices, actions, and attitude in life.

Migrant/Asylum Seeker/Refugee/Immigrant

According to Amnesty International (2023), "refugee", "asylum seeker" and "migrant" are legally distinct terms used to describe individuals who are displaced and those who have left their countries and crossed borders. Though the term 'migrant' is the broadest and may include both voluntary and involuntary migrants, for the purpose of this paper, the terms 'refugee', 'asylum seeker', 'migrant', and 'immigrant' are used interchangeably to refer to individuals who felt they had no choice but to leave their countries and migrate for political, social, and economic reasons.

Migratory Grief

A complex, multilayered, and profound form of grief related to multiple interpersonal, material, and symbolic losses taking place all at once throughout the migration process (Achotegui, 2019) Because many of these are difficult to identify and quantify, they can be even more challenging to process.

Ulysses Syndrome

Describes the extreme grief and psychological distress experienced by migrants, particularly those who have endured levels of loss, stress, and trauma throughout the migration process that exceed the human capacity to adapt (Achotegui, 2002; 2019). It presents through depression- and anxiety-related, dissociative, and somatic symptoms.

Outline of Remaining Chapters

The second chapter of this paper will expand on the current context of migration, including the specific stressors and traumatic events that take place throughout the various stages of migration, as well as their known impacts on the well-being and mental health of migrants. Chapter 2 will also include a review of the literature on existing theoretical conceptualizations of migrants' loss and grief with the goal of challenging the pathologizing of symptoms and responses that may be better understood as normal existential responses to extreme situations and traumatic experiences.

The literature review will also explore the concept of disenfranchised grief. The focus will intentionally be on non-death related losses, not because they matter more, but because they have mattered far less, leaving many of our experiences as migrants, refugees, and immigrants unknown and cast to the shadows. I will address the societal dismissal of such losses in receiving countries and communities which can complicate the grief process. In an attempt to enfranchise these tangible and intangible, cumulative losses, I will be touching on only a few examples - all ambiguous and, perhaps, unresolvable. I know I can only scratch the surface of each one, but acknowledgement begins with this, which is my primary goal - a mere beginning in fostering a more compassionate, just, and loving response to those impacted by migration and displacement - fellow members of our human family.

In Chapter 3, I will propose possible ways to attend to individual and collective migratory grief. I will explore theoretical and therapeutic approaches to grief and loss, such as continuing bonds, expressive arts therapy, and existentialism. The emphasis will be on non-pathologizing and life-giving approaches that center imagination, curiosity, storytelling, community, witnessing, ritual, beauty, hope and resilience. Grief will be seen as a potential source of self-discovery, purpose, and love, rather than a pathology in need of fixing or a problem in need of solving. It will also be presented as an opportunity to redefine what belonging can mean for those who have been uprooted. The chapter will end with a

discussion on the importance of counsellors, migrants, and members of society engaging in advocacy, activism, the struggle for freedom, and global movements for justice, equity, and human liberation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The number of people around the world experiencing peace has been decreasing steadily over the last two decades due to war and armed conflict (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022, as cited in Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023), at mid-2023, an estimated 110 million people had been forcibly displaced, a group encompassing refugees, asylum-seekers, others in need of international protection, and internally displaced people. With the recent war in Ukraine and the genocide currently taking place in Palestine, which have caught the attention of the global masses, it does not look like we are heading any closer to the possibility of a time of peace. Furthermore, the forced displacement of people is expected to continue rising significantly due to the growing ecological crisis and lack of resources. In fact, it is predicted to double by 2050 (Clement et al., 2021, as cited in Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023).

Although it is well known that war, armed conflict, poverty, and forced displacement can be extremely traumatic, there continues to be a significant gap in the literature on the migration experience. Specifically, while most research on migrants and refugees has focused on trauma and mental health disorders, loss and grief are rarely mentioned. With all this in mind, it is impossible to not ask ourselves what our role is as humans, scholars, advocates, therapists, and counsellors who are inevitably going to come across clients and families who have had to flee their homes and start their lives over. What is it that we need to acknowledge and understand about this experience?

The following is merely the beginning of an exploration of the profound and mostly unacknowledged losses and grief experienced by migrants and refugees. The aim is to humanize and normalize the grief that inevitably accompanies uprooted, displaced and resettled individuals in their new life, so that their wounds can finally be attended to with the care they need and deserve.

This chapter will explore the unique challenges and stressors that can take place during the migration process, as well as their potential impacts on migrants' well-being and mental health. It will

then highlight existing theoretical conceptualizations of migratory grief, which is understood as a normal response to immense loss, extreme situations, and traumatic experiences. Finally, there will be an in-depth exploration of the concept of disenfranchised grief and an acknowledgment of some of the common losses experienced in the context of migration. But first, we will begin by clarifying who is at the center of this exploration and whose experiences this paper hopes to give voice to.

Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants, and Immigrants: Humans

> *no one leaves home unless*
>
> *home is the mouth of a shark*
>
> — Warsan Shire (n.d., lines 1-2)

According to Amnesty International (2023), the terms "refugee", "asylum seeker" and "migrant" are used to describe individuals who are displaced and those who have left their countries and crossed borders. These terms are given distinct definitions, however. A refugee has fled their country because their safety and life are at risk due to serious human rights violations and persecution related to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular group, and political opinion (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2021). This person thus feels they have no choice but to leave and seek safety elsewhere. Because their government cannot or will not protect them, refugees have a right to international protection (Amnesty International, 2023). On the other hand, though asylum seekers flee their country for the same reasons, they have not yet been legally recognized as refugees and must await a decision for their asylum claim. Finally, though there is no internationally accepted legal definition of "migrant", this group is understood by most agencies and organizations as people staying outside of their country of origin who are considered neither asylum seekers nor refugees. Thus, although the terms "migrant" and "refugee" tend to be used interchangeably, there is a legal distinction (Amnesty International, 2023). Some migrants voluntarily choose to leave their country to work, study or join family, while others feel they have no choice but to leave due to serious circumstances that place them

in danger, such as poverty, political unrest, gang violence, and natural disasters. Though many migrants do not qualify to receive the legal status of a refugee, some may still face danger if they return home, thus blurring the lines between these categories and humanizing the complexity of hardships that lead people to leave their homes.

In this paper, I am not so much concerned with the specific names, categories and distinctions given to people, though I am aware of how perceived legitimacy and legal status can and oftentimes do significantly affect the experiences of those who have left their country. The categorization of people and the legitimacy of their seeking protection are socially constructed and can be used to justify policies of containment, marginalisation, and exclusion that do not adequately capture the complexity of political, social, and economic drivers of migration and the lived experiences of individuals on the move (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Rather than adhering to these categories and privileging one over another, my aim is to humanize the experience of those who have *felt* they had no choice but to uproot their lives and start again, losing much as a result and along the way. Therefore, I will be using the above terms, as well as the term "immigrant" interchangeably throughout, and at times my choice will highlight the additional difficulties and stressors resulting from distinct experiences and constructed categories, as needed. In addition, in this paper, I will focus on people who have resettled either semi-permanently or permanently in another country, rather than internally displaced individuals or those who have been dispossessed of their lands through settlement and colonization, though there may at times be much overlap in their experiences of displacement, loss, grief, and impact on mental health.

Migration Stressors and Traumatic Events

The process of migration can be stressful and further impacted by the type, duration, and cause of migration. It can also be described as occurring in three stages that are dynamic and generally merge into and inter-relate with one another rather than being a linear process (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023).

Pre-migration

The first stage of the migration process involves the decision and preparation to leave one's home (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). During this stage, individuals and families fleeing war and violence, in particular, face the risk of all kinds of potentially traumatic events (PTEs) (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023). In their study of PTEs experienced by Syrian refugees, which are reflective of other refugee groups, Hazer and Gredebäck (2023) listed war-related stressors like experiencing or witnessing combat and violence, experiencing shelling and bombing, being close to death, forced evacuation, death of family and friends, seeing or touching dead bodies, and experiencing or witnessing abduction or being taken hostage. Women in premigration contexts are particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses, including the weaponization of sexual exploitation, torture, and rape (Tippens et al., 2021). This stage also often involves stressors related to basic needs, including lack of food, water, and shelter, and economic impoverishment, as well as the stress of facing forced separation from family, community, support systems, homes, and the dreams and plans they once had (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023)

Peri-migration

The second stage is the migration journey itself and the physical relocation from one place to another (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). This journey is dangerous, and often lethal, for the vast majority of migrants (Bianucci et al., 2017). In the context of refugee migration, specifically, this phase commonly includes lack of safe shelter, high insecurity and lack of protection, and exploitation (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023). Some examples of PTEs that take place during the peri-migration stage are lack of necessary humanitarian aid, uncertain prospects and prolonged migration process, lack of resources, multiple relocations, detention, being forced to return across a border after crossing it, being given false and potentially life-threatening information, lost assets, negative reception in the transit or host country, and perceived loss of control (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023; Namer & Razum, 2017). During this phase, migrants

thus seem to be at the mercy of unknown structural forces. In a situation where one needs the most help, however, social support is often lacking, and even more so when faced with discrimination and hostile and dehumanizing conditions. There is also great risk of exploitation when people feel helpless and under constant threat, which may lead to commercial sexual exploitation, being trafficked, forced labor, begging, and criminalization (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023; Rai & Paul, 2020). At this stage, there is risk of further separation from family and travel companions, and often the same basic insecurities related to living conditions and sustenance. For children, in particular, this stage often involves disruption of education, exploitation, maltreatment, and exposure to the mental health challenges of parents and changing family dynamics.

Post-migration

The so-called final stage is actually the ongoing process of the migrant being absorbed into the social and cultural framework of the host society (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). The ongoing nature of the distress experienced in this stage results from considerable challenges (Draper et al., 2022). These involve transitioning to a new socio-economic system where the migrant is expected to learn and adjust to new roles and social and cultural rules. Once settled, they face various structural stressors and PTEs, such as lack of long-lasting support, language and communication difficulties, lack of medical care and psychological support, uncertainty regarding legal status, lack of control, and fear of deportation (Bianucci et al., 2017; Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023; Miller & Rasmussen, 2016; Tippens et al., 2021). Many also experience discrimination and lack of social support, as well as the impact of separation from family and changing dynamics, increased family conflicts, and fear for those who stayed behind. Refugees, in general, have difficulties finding employment and having their education accredited. Combined with having lost most of their assets and resources, they face economic challenges, downward mobility, and diminished status. This can result in food insecurity and lack of access to private or adequate accommodation, as well as a sense of failure.

This is also the stage in which Hazer and Gredebäck (2023) list the greatest number of stressors and PTEs experienced by refugee children. This may involve the continual disruption of and challenges with education, family, and peer-related challenges, including lack of family integration and social exclusion, and loneliness. Children may also experience significant changes in family relations, such as parental mental health issues and changed behaviors, impaired parent-child interactions, impaired attachment, such as through use of harsh parenting, an increase in responsibilities, and role confusion. For some, they may also be exposed to child labor or early marriage. It is important to note that all of these major life changes are occurring at very sensitive developmental periods of the child's life, which can greatly impact their present and future mental health as well as their sense of identity and safety (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023).

The Ongoing Impact of Migration

Those fleeing war, in particular experience innumerable and various stressors and potentially traumatic events that can be categorized under war trauma, social and structural trauma, interpersonal trauma, and non-interpersonal trauma (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023). These can have a snow-ball effect, making it difficult to draw boundaries between the three stages of migration and to see a definite end to the migration process. Even for those who are fortunate enough to permanently re-settle in a new country, gain some sense of stability, and expect to be safe, their nervous system carries the impact, or as Bessel Van der Kolk (2014) puts it, their body keeps the score. In other words, many traumatized individuals continue to experience the reactivation of a host of neurobiological responses alongside an inadequate memory record even long after the danger has passed. If the patterns of autonomic nervous system (ANS) activation that develop over time continue, it can impact affect regulation and predispose individuals to depression, anxiety disorders, and chronic PTSD (Fisher, 2019), the most common mental health diagnoses given to refugees.

Meanwhile, the post-migration phase is ongoing, and the nervous system must operate in a new country where the individual arrives often not speaking the local language, not knowing anyone, not having support or a job, all the while having to navigate new systems, a new culture, and for many, discrimination and racism. Studies have shown consistently that these post-migration stressors predict levels of distress as much as previous war exposure, account for greater variance in depression levels than war-related experiences, and are associated with PTSD (Miller & Rasmussen, 2016). In order to do what must be done, individuals operate from survival mode without time to process what has happened, what has been lost, and what can never be. When initial support is provided, it is often with the primary aim of meeting the basic needs of refugees – shelter, food, and job. But what of the mind, heart and spirit of a human who has endured and lost so much that defined them, including language, family and friends, familiar food and places, traditions, and social status, to name only a few elements?

The stressors, traumatic events, and losses may seem like a long list of words, and for many, it likely feels too remote from their reality and too difficult to connect with on an emotional level. Yet, in order to re-humanize these experiences and the people themselves, we must ask ourselves: what does one lose in each of these circumstances? Beyond the tangible losses of possessions and loved ones, what else is lost? What parts of oneself are lost? These losses, too, must be recognized, honoured, given the attention they so deserve, and grieved. Their impact must be tended to, though it rarely is when the priority is survival and the loss itself is unrecognized. And so, it is these losses that we will soon return to and do our best to acknowledge. But first, let us look at the mental health impacts that *have* been widely acknowledged and researched in this population.

Mental Health Impacts of Migration

It is important to note that migration belongs to the natural and shared history of humans. We are all descendants of those who at one point or another in our ancestral history had to migrate. Thus, migration itself is not a cause of mental disorder (Achotegui, 2019). Still, it is a potential risk for mental

health and well-being, especially when personal, social, and migratory circumstances are especially challenging, traumatic, and stressful, as is increasingly the case in today's world. The relationship between forced migration, specifically, and poor mental and psychosocial health is well documented (Tippens et al., 2021). Specific migrant situations carry more risk for mental health, including such variables as motivation of the migration, such as fleeing genocide; distance from host culture related to religion and language, for instance; the ability to establish mediating connections and relationships in the new environment, access support and services, and draw on cultural or community resources for assistance; and legal residential status (Carta et al., 2015). Many of these play a significant role in facilitating the integration and adjustment of immigrants into their host societies by helping them more effectively navigate social, cultural, and economic challenges. Because the nature of migration has changed and conditions are harder than ever, it can have devastating implications for mental health, leading to such problems as persistent grief disorder, depression, generalized anxiety, schizophrenia, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with comorbidity being common (Betancourt et al., 2012; Bogic et al., 2015; Carta et al., 2005; Casado et al., 2010; Hanania, 2020; McGuinness & Durand, 2015; Papageorgiou et al., 2000; Renner et al., 2024; Turrini et al., 2017).

Draper et al. (2020) argue that the literature and stories told about current migratory experiences and asylum seekers are generally connected to trauma and situated within a historical and Western cultural context that privileges pathology. It is thus now taken for granted that trauma generates PTSD and a trauma response evidenced by the symptoms of those who migrate. Research and literature are thus produced on the basis of this taken-for granted knowledge (Draper et al., 2022), which has also been my experience in researching the mental health of migrants and refugees. Though there is fortunately growing understanding and documentation of the traumatic impact of war and violence and an increase in trauma-informed mental health interventions, loss and grief are rarely mentioned. Nonetheless, more recent research suggests that the reactions of this population may have as much, if

not more, to do with loss than trauma (Gitterman & Knight, 2018). Furthermore, the two have been connected conceptually, qualitatively, and empirically even if research has focused more on trauma than loss (Vromans et al., 2018)

Though losses are such a predominant aspect of the migration experience and all that follows, they are given little attention in research, and when they are, it tends to focus on death and the traumatic loss of loved ones to the exclusion of all else (Renner et al. 2024). In order to challenge this absence in the research and understand what has been missing in conceptualizations of migration and refugee experience, we will begin by looking to scholars, researchers, and therapists who have indeed tried to acknowledge the immensity of loss and who have given it a name.

Theoretical Conceptualizations of Migrants' Loss and Grief

Migratory grief

Grief is generally considered a universal, natural, and expected response to loss that loses its intensity over time, allowing the individual to adapt to their new reality (Renner et al., 2024). The loss that leads to grief can be defined as any experience, death related or not, that involves a change in one's circumstance or perception and one where it is impossible to return to the way things previously were (Harris & Winokuer, 2021). It is considered a process of psychological, social, and somatic reactions to one's perception of loss that entails letting go of what was and preparing for what is to come (Rando, 1984, as cited in Casado et al., 2010).

Considering the scope of such definitions, it is surprising that grief is not more commonly mentioned in research on the impact of migration on refugees and, similarly, that migration is rarely mentioned in scholarly work and studies on grief and loss. Though extremely diverse and heterogenous, the experiences and stories of migration are generally characterized by various and multiple interpersonal, material, and symbolic losses that can lead to "migratory grief", a complex and often

difficult kind of mourning that is distinct from the classical concept of mourning involving the loss of a loved one (Achotegui, 2019; Renner et al., 2024). Migration is a disorienting process involving the loss of all that is familiar, including family, friends, and community ties, whether through death or physical separation, as well as homes, jobs, income, and even diet. Importantly, it also includes more abstract losses, such as the loss of status, social roles, identity, language, and the ability to communicate, previously planned future and dreams, and a sense of familiarity and belonging in one's surroundings (Carta et al., 2005; Casado et al., 2010; Renner et al., 2024). According to clinical psychologist Jorge Aroche (Blanco, 2023), individuals can also experience migratory grief related to the idealisation and fantasy of what could have been if the person had not left their homeland, even if they had to flee to survive and may be better off in the new country.

Fortunately, although grief is commonly exclusively associated with interpersonal losses, the construct of migratory grief has slowly begun to receive more attention over time because of its relation to mental health and wellbeing (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Casado et al., 2010, Draper et al., 2022; Renner et al., 2024). However, the processing of this grief is still rarely the focus of research, as is the implication of the combination of migration and grief on mental health, given that both seem to be risk factors for mental distress (Renner et al., 2024). In their systematic literature on the topic, which was limited in quality and quantity due to a "blatant" lack of research on the topic, Renner, Schmidt, and Kersting (2024) found that all five studies reported a relationship between migratory grief and psychopathology, including depression and more general emotional/mental distress.

In most of the quantitative studies in their review (Renner et al., 2024), migratory grief was operationalized through use of The Migratory Grief and Loss Questionnaire (MGLQ), a scale developed to measure the unique, yet universal experience of grief associated with immigration by capturing the theoretical dimensions of searching and yearning, idealization, and identity discontinuity associated with the grieving process (Casado et al., 2010; Renner et al., 2024). Adapted to the context of grief for a

country/homeland rather than a person, searching and yearning reflect feelings of being drawn to physical and symbolic representations of one's homeland, while idealization refers to the feeling of nostalgia, fondness, and longing, manifested as remembering and thinking of only positive aspects of one's homeland. Both dimensions were merged under the umbrella of attachment to homeland. Identity discontinuity, on the other hand, arises when individuals have given up the attempt to recover what was lost yet continue to struggle with a sense of lost self-identity (Casado et al., 2010). By capturing these dimensions, the MGLQ can be a useful tool in the assessment, acknowledgement, validation, and normalization of an individual's unique migratory grief experience and how it may be related to psychological distress. It can also help practitioners develop sensitivity to the losses that migrants face. This in and of itself can be healing and increase trust, but it can also be used to inform culturally sensitive treatment focused on the issues that are most significant to clients.

Multidimensional Loss Scale (MLS). Another promising tool that has been developed to measure loss distress in a culturally and contextually appropriate way is the Multidimensional Loss Scale (MLS) (Vromans et al., 2012, 2018). This tool can allow for more thorough psychological assessment of refugees and help to distinguish loss distress from other psychological disorders. The tool is based on the recognition that the self extends out to the environment and acknowledges that psychological distress can result from various forms of separation, including from people and material objects as well as aspects of the human condition that are more intangible yet still equally valued, such as social position, beliefs, and life dreams (Vromans et al., 2018). The dimensions of loss measured by the MLS are the loss of symbolic self, loss of home, loss of interdependence, interpersonal loss, and loss of intrapersonal integrity (Vromans et al., 2012), as well as loss of past aspirations (Vromans et al., 2018).

Cultural bereavement

Another concept related to migratory grief that explores the emotional and psychological impacts of migration and displacement is "cultural bereavement". Culture includes the beliefs and value

system of a society that are learned and passed down through generations (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). It has also been described as characteristics that are shared by people and that bind them together into community. When people, including children, leave their countries of origin and resettle, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, they experience innumerable and cumulative disruptions, ruptures and losses that can lead to cultural bereavement. This term was coined by Eisenbruch (1991; Renner et al., 2024) on the basis of his work with Cambodian refugees, which he believed could be representative of other displaced people as well. The term gave a name to the distress that follows the loss of homeland, identity, and social connectedness due to uprootedness and relocation. It involves disrupted or ruptured contact with one's social structures and norms, cultural values, sociocultural markers, and sense of cultural identity (Eisenbruch, 1991; Beauregard, 2020; Bhugra & Becker, 2005). Key components of cultural identity that may be lost or changed include religion, rites of passage, healing practices, language, dietary habits, and leisure activities, all of which serve to foster a sense of self and belonging within a group. Cultural bereavement is thus considered a reaction comparable to grief and specific to the context of migration and the experience of loss of the uprooted person (Beauregard, 2020).

The concept of cultural bereavement also refers to the unique ways that individuals and communities experience, express and cope with the grief associated with migration (Eisenbruch, 1991; Casado et al., 2010). Eisenbruch questioned the notion that the experience and expression of grief are universal (Vromans et al., 2018). Cultural bereavement recognizes that one's experience of loss, grief, and mourning are shaped by cultural factors, including cultural beliefs, rituals, practices, social support networks, and meanings attributed to death and loss (Eisenbruch, 1991). Thus, due to the complex nature of migratory grief and these cultural differences, symptoms need to be interpreted carefully. Some symptoms that are considered pathological in culturally Western views of health and commonly associated with PTSD may be understood as normal, and even constructive, existential responses to devastating traumatic experiences within refugees' cultural contexta (Eisenbruch, 1991). In working with

individuals and communities of diverse cultural backgrounds, the framework of cultural bereavement calls for culturally sensitive and collaborative approaches to interpretation, support, and intervention that also respect and validate refugees' cultural identities, experiences, and traditional practices that serve as antidotes to profound personal and communal loss and suffering. This approach may promote healing and integration far more effectively than Western therapeutic methods alone.

Ulysses Syndrome

Cultural psychiatrist Joseba Achotegui (2002, 2019) argues that millions of people in the modern migration context face levels of stress that are so intense they exceed the human capacity to adapt. His research findings, focused on the challenges faced primarily by Latin American migrants in Spain (Namer & Razum, 2017), resulted in a new perspective on the impact of the migratory experience. According to Achotegui (2002, 2019) and his team, despite having to endure extreme situations and difficult resettlement journeys, the mental-health related impacts that many forced migrants suffer from are not disorders but rather an experience of extreme migratory grief. This experience was named Chronic and Multiple Stress Syndrome, or Ulysses syndrome. Like Ulysses, the mythical Greek migrant protagonist forced to wander for ten years in the aftermath of the Trojan War, many migrants today flee their countries in search of a better and safer life only to face tumultuous and traumatic journeys exacerbated by often ambivalent or hostile, racist policy, politics, and reception that lead to cultural and social segregation. As a result, they experience little if any sense of belonging, further complicated by the many physical and symbolic losses they must endure, as well as the continuing separation from their country of origin and the pressure to survive and achieve both personally and officially set immigration goals.

The development of Ulysses syndrome occurs progressively as migrants continue to encounter obstacles throughout the migration process. Those affected by the condition present atypical depressive symptomatology, including anxiety-related, somatoform, and dissociative symptoms and migratory grief (Achotegui, 2002; Bianucci et al., 2017; Carta et al., 2015). Symptoms of depression fundamentally

include sadness and crying (Achotegui, 2019). Anxiety-related symptoms may include tension, insomnia, recurrent and intrusive thoughts, generalized worry, and irritability, while somatic symptoms present as migraines, tension headaches, fatigue, and gastric and other physical pains. Dissociative symptoms may manifest as disorientation, depersonalization and derealization. Finally, Achotegui (2019) acknowledges that the migrant's own culture is what channels how symptoms are expressed and interpreted.

Because of the growing incidence of this syndrome, Achotegui's team proposed Ulysess syndrome as an autonomous diagnostic category situated in between adjustment disorders and PTSD (Carta et al., 2015). This category was also meant to eliminate the pathologizing effect of the current diagnostic system regarding immigrants and underscore the impact of worsening circumstances and stresses faced by migrants in modern times (Achotegui, 2002; 2019). Achotegui (2019) clarifies that his use of the word syndrome is not meant to be pathologizing but to simply describe a series of socially rooted symptoms rather than a mental illness. This approach of acknowledging the extreme migratory mourning that naturally takes place under extreme conditions, accompanied by feelings of loneliness, fear and despair, challenges the psychopathologizing and dehumanizing effects of current thinking that deems immigrants to be the ones failing and characterized by deficits when, in reality, many are facing inhumane stressors that are impossible to adapt to (Achotegui, 2019). This conceptualization of migrant suffering is an attempt to prevent the inappropriate and destructive misdiagnosing of such migrants as depressed, psychotic, or antisocial, which only further contributes to the stress caused by inappropriate treatments and health care. While it is certainly not denied that these individuals are impacted psychologically and experience various symptoms, the category of Ulysses syndrome considers migrants' response to an undeniable reality as adaptive, rather than pathological (Achotegui, 2019). Still, if these symptoms are not attended to, it can further impair migrants' mental health. Ulysses syndrome has thus been gaining more attention in the context of increased refugee migration (Namer & Razum, 2017).

Disenfranchised Grief

> A significant loss can be seen like a deep wound that will heal with proper care and attention. (Harris & Winokuer, 2021, p. 29)

Proper care and attention are needed to tend to grief, and now that we have explored some of the existing conceptualizations of migratory grief and loss, it is important to look at why proper care and attention have been lacking in research and in the wider social context regarding migrants. What follows is a discussion of the type of loss that has traditionally been the focus of grief and bereavement studies, namely death-related loss, as well as the types of loss within this category that have been less recognized. As we explore disenfranchised grief, the focus will shift to both tangible and symbolic non-death related losses, which represent much of the migratory grief experience. Though death-related loss may be the ultimate and most clearly defined loss, all forms of grief require emotional adjustment to the impact of loss and perhaps the processing mechanisms needed may be similar (Casado et al., 2010). Therefore, in this paper, my discussion will focus on these types of loss with the aim of validating an experience that is rarely researched and acknowledged.

Death-related loss

Loss has predominantly been defined in the literature as the death of a loved one (Draper et al., 2020), and grief has most often been associated with this kind of loss and its implications for the individual (Gitterman & Knight, 2018). People not only grieve a death but the loss of related statuses and roles. A life partner mourns their history with the deceased as well as the opportunities and experiences that have not been realized and dreams that can no longer be pursued. A parent mourns the loss of their child, as well as all the moments and milestones they will never get to experience with them. Given that the loss of a loved one is one of the most universal losses and one that will inevitably touch most humans more than once in their lifetime, it is not surprising that much of the theoretical, empirical, and

clinical literature has developed with the aim of helping people grieve in response to this kind of attachment and loss (Gitterman & Knight, 2018; Pihkala, 2024).

However, some losses, both death and non-death related, that may be deeply meaningful to individuals and have similar implications have generally been marginalized or stigmatized and have received significantly less acknowledgement and attention due to social values, norms, and expectations (Harris & Winokuer, 2021). In this case, though an individual may be experiencing a significant reaction, their loss and grief may not be socially recognized, accepted, valued, or validated, a concept for which Doka (1989, 2002) coined the term *disenfranchised grief*. In the realm of death-related losses, some examples that tend to be disenfranchised in our society because the relationship is not as valued are the loss of a pet, a friend, and loss through miscarriage (Harris & Winouker, 2021). The loss of non-traditional relationships, such as homosexual or extra-marital relationships, is also disenfranchised (Doka, 1989). Moreover, aspects of some losses may be stigmatized, such as death from AIDS, drug overdose, suicide, or gang-related homicide, which is most commonly the context within which *disenfranchised grief* is understood and discussed (Attig, 2004; Doka, 2002; Gitterman & Knight, 2018). The growing acknowledgement of these losses is an important beginning to being able to understand their impact on the grieving individual. They have also allowed us a glimpse into the impact their disenfranchisement can have on the grief process, and how this extends to losses that are even more commonly disenfranchised, namely non-death losses. These will be explored later within the context of migratory loss and grief.

Non-death losses

The concept of *disenfranchised grief* extends beyond loss due to death and applies to significant non-death losses as well (Doka, 2002; Harris & Winouker, 2021; Gitterman & Knight, 2018; Pihkala, 2024). According to Gitterman and Knight (2018), the emotional, physical, and psychological reactions following non-death losses are typically misunderstood and misinterpreted as merely signs of stress or depression rather than grief, which is then not acknowledged. These losses that are devalued, ignored,

or minimized due to social constructions can be tangible as well as intangible (Harris & Winouker, 2021), such as the loss of hope, time, dreams, innocence, status, security, stability, and identity. These are sometimes referred to as invisible losses precisely because it is so difficult, if not impossible, to perceive them with the senses (Pihkola, 2024). Not only does the ensuing grief then go unrecognized by society, but due to the societal and communal failure to acknowledge these kinds of losses, the grief can also go unrecognized by one's own self (Schmidt, 2023).

When a meaningful loss is denied the social recognition that it deserves or needs, the person experiencing the loss is not given the opportunity to make sense of their loss and work through their grief (Gitterman & Knight, 2018; Renzenbrink, 2021). This lack of permission or invitation to engage with grief in a way that aligns with one's experience of the loss can cause individuals to get "stuck" in grief that is "stunted" in its process (Harris & Winouker, 2021), thus exacerbating reactions and impacting mental health and well-being. This is particularly relevant in the context of refugees and migrants, given the innumerable non-death losses they face. Although losses like these are a predominant aspect of migration and the sequel of experiences that follows displacement, they are given little attention in research, and even less so when they are of a more abstract, intangible, and symbolic nature (Renner et al. 2024). Given that it is well recognized in the literature that the experience of loss invokes a grief response and has considerable implications for the psychological state of individuals, we must first begin by recognizing this loss among migrants (Casado et al., 2010) and enfranchising it. This provides an opportunity for the grief experience to be expressed, which is needed in order for people to come to terms with their loss, accept it, make meaning of it, and move forward.

Intersectionality and Disenfranchisement: Who Has the Right to Grieve?

Attig (2004) argues that the right to grieve is a human right and a matter of human dignity. He even questions the term" disenfranchisement" as it suggests the denial of a conventional right or privilege that is within the power of social, political, and legal institutions to grant, leaving some

excluded, marginalized, and powerless. Being that it is a human right, its disenfranchisement is a social failure. Namely it is a failure of empathy, but also a political and ethical failure (Attig, 2004). Applied to the context of migrants and refugees, this failure is primarily rooted in *othering* due to racial, religious, cultural, and ethnic differences, which present a significant barrier to empathy and respect (Esposito, 2022). Hynie (2018) cites an Ipsos poll involving 16,040 respondents across 22 countries, 51% of whom somewhat or strongly agreed that most refugees arriving in their country were motivated by economic opportunities or take advantage of welfare services. Lack of empathy is also reflected in the media portrayal of certain refugees and asylum seekers as criminalized, pathologized and dehumanized (Azevedo et al., 2021; Goodfellow, 2020, as cited in Draper et al., 2020). For example, while the depiction of an 'identifiable victim' can elicit empathy according to social psychology, the majority of Western media images depict refugees as large, unidentifiable groups (Azevedo et al., 2021). These media portrayals and narratives influence the views of recipient communities and those who interact with migrants, including health professionals, and foster problem-saturated identities (Draper et al., 2020).

Therefore, in the context of a growing, global migration and refugee crisis, not only does the very category of refugee conjure up certain images, misconceptions, and stereotypes in the public imagination, but the destructive systems of colonization, racism, sexism, and patriarchy create a hierarchy of bodies where some are considered less valuable or human than others (McBride, 2021), and thus even less deserving of empathy. It is well-documented that different refugees are treated differently based on racialized migration controls and systems that privilege certain groups over others (Costello & Foster, 2022), such as those coming from Central American, African and Middle Eastern countries (Asia News Monitor, 2023; Esposito, 2018; Hynie, 2018; Marcelo, 2022; Schmidt, 2023; Shoichet, 2022; TCA Regional News, 2022). One study found that anti-Muslim bias was a significant reason for lower public support of refugees (Hynie, 2018). Esposito (2022) highlights the inequitable treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees, the latter being at the top of the refugee hierarchy. This difference is partially seen to

be caused by Islamophobia and an internalized othering of those who come from the Middle East and Africa. Middle Eastern refugees, for instance, are perceived as dangerous and violent terrorists (Esposito, 2022). In addition, even among Ukrainian refugees, those of color and members of ethnic minorities are not met with the same acceptance (Costello & Foster, 2022). This sends a painfully clear message to those who are excluded that they are less deserving. Therefore, despite growing sensitivity of mental health services to refugees' unique needs, post-migration environments are becoming increasingly challenging and less welcoming.

This discussion adds another layer to the complexity of the disenfranchisement of migratory grief. Not only do certain types of losses lack social acknowledgement, but certain types of people do as well based on their intersectional identities. Coined by Black feminist theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), the concept of intersectionality proposes that we all live at the intersections of multiple cultural identities. These influence how we view the world and how we are viewed by it. Originally focusing on the intersection of race and gender, the concept has since been expanded to include all aspects of identity, such as cultural, ethnic, national, and religious identities, age, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, socioeconomic status, educational level, and immigration status. These intersections impact where on the hierarchy of bodies one is placed, who and what is grievable, and who is "given" the right to grieve. "Indisputably, disenfranchisement of grief is rooted in a failure to empathize with the bereaved, i.e., to understand their suffering and hurt. It fails to appreciate either the gravity of what has happened or the resulting anguish and loss of meaning in the mourner's life" (Attig, 2004, p.201). Rather than being asked what happened, some are more likely to be asked than others, "What's wrong with you?" This is also reflected in the pathologizing of refugee mental health.

Enfranchising Migratory Grief

The love of our neighbor in all its fullness

simply means being able to say to him,

"What are you going through?"

— Simone Weil, *Waiting for* God*, 1951)*

> The singularity of the migratory experience lies in the fact that it is a psycho-social process of loss and change, which is known in the psychiatry of migration as a grief process. (Carta et al., 2005, p. 4)

Though limited, empirical research has demonstrated migratory grief among immigrants is universal (Renner et al., 2024). Loss naturally arises when people are dispossessed of the things they value (Barnett et al., 2016). This can be health, safety, sense of belonging, esteem, and relative freedom, as well as phenomena that create meaning for people and entire societies, like landscapes that are closely tied to ways of life, neighborhoods, social cohesion, and local and Indigenous cultures. Other things that may be valued and lost are related to time and space, such as personal items (e.g. photographs), symbolic material artefacts (e.g. ancestral graves), daily practices, and occupational identities (Barnett et al., 2016). Many of these losses, however, cannot be captured by standard metrics or substituted in any commensurable way. Part of enfranchising grief then involves developing an understanding of the situated, diverse, and inherently subjective nature of values and loss. What people value is constructed through a complex interaction of socio-cultural influences and worldviews, narratives meant to make meaning of places and ways of life, family, and social networks, lived experiences, relationships with the environment, memories, and aspirations (Hards, 2011, as cited in Barnett et al., 2016). Taking all this into account, it makes sense that, amidst all the changes human beings must confront throughout their lives, few are as all-encompassing and complex as those that take place in the context of migration (Carta et al., 2005). Nearly all that is valued and familiar to a person who leaves their country is likely to undergo transformation, even when they are pulled by the hope that something better may await them upon their arrival to a new country. Nevertheless, the experience of migratory grief has not been widely recognized by mental health care professionals (Renner et al., 2024).

This needs to be addressed because the very nature of disenfranchised grief isolates individuals in their experience and acts as barrier to the grieving process (Doka, 1989). In the title of this paper, I chose to enfranchise the "thousand" losses of migratory grief to simultaneously touch on the immensity and diversity of what is lost through displacement and resettlement and the impossibility of ever being able to quantify it or fully come to the truth of all that can be grieved.

Understanding Some of the Unique Elements of Migratory Grief

Ambiguous/Unresolved Loss. Many of the losses experienced by migrants are made even less obvious by their ambiguity. The concept of ambiguous loss was coined in the 1970s by Pauline Boss (1999) to describe a type of loss that lacks a clear conclusion or resolution. It was initially developed to give language to the unique experience of individuals having to cope with the unresolved physical or psychological absence of a family member or ambiguity around their loss. For instance, a loved one may be physically gone but still psychologically present, such as when a family member is deployed, kidnapped, or missing. On the other hand, sometimes a loved one may be physically present but psychologically absent or emotionally unavailable, such as if they are experiencing dementia, severe depression, or addiction. In all cases, there is a presence and an absence, which leads to ambiguity about the loss and a lack of closure that makes it particularly difficult to cope.

This type of loss defies any traditional understanding of the grieving process and can result in unresolved and prolonged grief as well as lack of acknowledgement, making it an example of disenfranchised grief. When a loss is clear and definite, and people can agree that it has occurred, there are usually rituals in place to mark it. In the case of ambiguous loss, the uncertainty around whether someone is permanently gone and when or if they will return makes it difficult to adjust, as does the lack of recognition and validation by one's community (Boss, 1999; Solheim et al., 2015). This can complicate grief, sometimes resulting in "frozen grief."

Over time, the ambiguous loss framework has been applied to other situations, beyond the loss of a loved one, where there is a lack of clarity or resolution. Some examples include loss associated with chronic illness or disability, loss of childhood due to trauma, loss of one's homeland due to displacement or forced migration, and loss of self-identity in cultural transitions. What follows is an exploration of only a few significant and ambiguous losses experienced by migrants to begin painting a picture. These losses are inter-related and overlapping and cannot be divided into neat categories, however.

Loss of Place. Grieving for the loss of place and all its familiarity is another type of ambiguous non-death loss that largely goes unacknowledged in society, as well as in grief literature and professional practice (Gitterman & Knight, 2018). However, just as we develop emotional bonds with people, we develop ties to places that are meaningful for us, including communities, land, and environment (Doka, 2002). Through our interaction and identification with the physical and cultural environment, including our home, neighbourhood, city, country, and the places that hold symbolic significance, we come to feel a sense of belonging and attachment (Achotegui, 2019; Gitterman & Knight, 2018; Grinberg & Grinberg, 1985). Attachment to a place fulfills fundamental human needs like helping us develop and maintain an individual and group identity and sense of well-being through our embeddedness in both the physical and social connections that accrue when living in the same place over time (Gitterman & Knight, 2018). Therefore, when we are uprooted, the physical and symbolic loss of these familiar and dear places that once provided comfort and a sense of self leaves us feeling adrift and untethered in our grief. All that is bound in land – ways of knowing, forms of identification, social connections, cultural practices, and a sense of place and community – is lost with it (Barnett et al., 2016). So are specific emotionally relevant elements, like landscapes, colors, light, scents, and temperature (Achotegui, 2019). This kind of loss, where one is stripped from a holding, secure environment in which to continue their life (Lijtmaer, 2022) and feel *at home*, is more difficult to see and explicitly acknowledge (Doka, 2002).

Though research and clinical attention have explored various contexts where loss is likely to occur in response to dislocation, including out-of-home placement, transition from home to care facilities for the elderly, homelessness, immigrants and refugees, and human-made and natural disasters, the resulting sense of grief has generally not been acknowledged (Gitterman & Knight, 2018). For instance, in her research on adolescents aging out of foster care, Mitchell (2017, as cited in Gitterman & Knight, 2018) found that all the participants in her study were experiencing reactions that most closely resembled grief, though they were not recognized as such by professionals. As a result, though the *traumatic* impact of removal from homes, schools, friends and family, and community is increasingly being acknowledged, these adolescents rarely had the opportunity to name and tend to the *grief* that arises out of the profound loss of place and all that it may come to signify, including reassurance, comfort, and familiarity. This research highlights the lack of others' acknowledgement of grief in response to loss of place, as well as one's own.

This is applicable to migrants and their loss of homeland. Research has shown that even adults who have lived in a new country for many years continue to grieve the loss of their native home and its familiarity (Gitterman & Knight, 2018). For example, Perez (2016) uses the ambiguous loss framework to demonstrate the chronic nature of the grief experienced by Cuban immigrants over their island. The lack of closure results from the continuing psychological presence of their homeland.

Especially in the case of refugees and asylum seekers, there exists the assumption that they are, or at least should be, relieved to find safety in their new homeland, and that this need for safety surpasses the need for attachment, relationship, and home (Schmidt, 2023). The tension between expectation and reality can result in disenfranchised grief that is not recognized by oneself nor society.

Our attachment to place is also a significant basis for the development and maintenance of our identity and sense of well-being in childhood (Gitterman & Knight, 2018). For instance, the developmental task of learning to trust is based on children's sense of secure and stable physical

arrangements and relationships. Children view their toys, clothes, rooms, homes, playgrounds, and neighborhoods, for instance, as extensions of themselves (Nicotera, 2005, as cited in Gitterman & Knight, 2018). In a case illustration, Gitterman and Knight (2018) describe the subtle way in which grief for loss of place tends to manifest through their description of a 9-year-old boy placed in a foster home. The boy's blanket, which he brought with him to the home, was missing, and he refused to use another and threatened to run away. His reaction was interpreted as anxiety by the social worker, which may be so, but equally important is the possibility that the boy's behavior was a reflection of the unacknowledged grief of leaving home and his family, which his blanket was a symbol of. His blanket was not just a "thing" that was lost, but a reflection of the loss of place.

The partial and recurring nature of migratory grief. Unlike the grief for the death of a loved one, migratory mourning is partial in that the "object" of mourning - the place of origin and everything that it includes and has come to represent - does not disappear, nor does the possibility of connection with it (Achotegui, 2019). It remains where it was left, and the possibility and hope of *eventual* return generally continues to exist for some. The separation through not only distance but time implies further loss, however. For one, both the immigrant and their country of origin inevitably change (Achotegui, 2019). This is reflected in the all-too-common story told by those who return home only to find they no longer belong. This return too is like a new migration. Not only are they seen differently by friends and family, but they see differently as well. For others, however, the separation that takes place at the emotional and psychological level may be so significant that neither contact nor return are wanted or possible, leading to the sense that the country has in fact disappeared (Achotegui, 2019).

Still, because the immigrant's homeland will always be there and the option of contact forever remains, regardless of whether they are ever able to return and even if they deny the connection, this can make the mourning process far more complex, and individuals may experience recurrences of grief throughout their life. As Achotegui (2019) beautifully states, "The reality is that the immigrant carries the

country within" (p. 255), and so though grief may diminish, it always remains somewhere in the background. It can easily re-emerge through a reawakening of ties throughout one's life, such as after a visit, a phone call, or news arriving from the country. These ties are even more easily re-activated in the context of increasing globalization, technological advances, and social media. This is the case with displaced Palestinians, for instance, whose land continues to undergo repeated and incessant occupation and destruction. This ongoing loss makes it far more difficult to resolve grief due to the psychological presence of their land, culture, people, and loved ones.

Non-Death Loss of Loved ones: The Psychological Family. When families are separated due to migration, individuals mourn the physical absence of their loved ones. Family members remain psychologically present, however, which makes the loss ambiguous and often chronic and recurring. Findings by Solheim, Zaid and Ballard (2015) support the application of the ambiguous loss framework to the understanding of the immigration experience, particularly that of immigrant workers in the U.S. and their Mexico-based families and the emotional toll of separation despite the economic benefits. I was struck by a statement made by one immigrant's wife who said, 'a gold cage is still a cage'. While these transnational families were physically absent from each other's lives, they were present psychologically in one another's thoughts and concerns. The absence was deeply grieved, while losses were endured. The latter may be easier depending on the degree of choice and agency leading the decision to separate (Solheim et al., 2015). It can thus be assumed that such losses are even more painful when the separation is traumatic and forced, such as in the case of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum, for instance (Draper et al., 2022).

In addition, considering the mental health impacts of migration addressed previously, family members who do remain together physically may experience the psychological absence or loss of a loved one who is experiencing depression, PTSD, addiction, or other mental health related problems that are closely associated with the traumatic impact of war, displacement, and migration.

Loss of Time. The loss of precious time is another type of loss often overlooked and includes all the opportunities or experiences that one never had (Gitterman & Knight, 2018). Considering the multiple phases of migration, the often long and unpredictable peri-migration stage, especially for asylum seekers, and the ongoing post-migration phase and re-settlement process, individuals and families inevitably lose time that cannot be taken back or made up for. This loss also uniquely affects children (Gitterman & Knight, 2018) at a time that is considered especially sensitive for development.

Time also further separates the migrant from their homeland and can never be regained as the psychological distance between the two grows. As Améry (1988, as cited in Boteva-Richter, 2024) writes:

> Those who know exile have learned some life answers, and even more life questions. Among the answers is the initially trivial realization that there is no return, because never the re-entry into a space is also a regaining of lost time. (p.59-60)

This helps to explain the common experience of migrants who have returned to their homelands, be it to visit or live, only to find that they no longer belong and that they have missed everything. Time has changed not only them, but also the place and people they left long ago and hoped one day to return to. They are now like strangers in their own land and among their people, surrounded by family and friends who may have little awareness of their sense of loss and pain (Lester, 2000).

Loss of Language.

> To speak a language is to appropriate its world and culture. (Fanon, 2008, p. 21, as cited in Boteva-Richter, 2024).

Language is something that is living (Boteva-Richter, 2024). It not only shapes how we view and describe the world, but also connects people and helps them know and live with one another. Boteva-Richter (2024) writes:

> When one crosses over into an alternative linguistic world, into an idiom that one has not mastered, a reductive movement is initiated, a process that shrinks the linguistic experience

> through not being able to express oneself; a process of impoverishment and withdrawal into inner experience begins. The faceting of the self, formerly so dazzling and rich, shrinks into itself and retreats into the supposedly safe interior of the personality. [….] It is here at this initial moment of migration, or more precisely at the moment of arrival in the destination country, that loneliness and singularization are most noticeable. (p. 99)

Language not only allows us to express who we are; it is also necessary for intercultural dialogue. The sense of "speechlessness" that can follow migration can thus lead to both a loss of self and a loss of connection to others (Boteva-Richter, 2024). The silencing of the migrant can make it difficult to share feelings, thoughts, history, culture, and experiences. The inability to communicate fluently and to understand can thus be experienced as a glass wall – one can see who is on the other side but there is a barrier that creates a sense of loneliness, isolation, shame, and fragmentation of Self. This can take place in both the new country, where one is a foreigner who must often learn a new language, and one's home country, where one may return having forgotten their native tongue or realizing that it, too, has changed and they are now a foreigner in their own land.

Loss of Identity. All the above aspects of the experience of migratory grief, as well as others that cannot be discussed here due to space constraints, ultimately contribute to profound changes in the identity of immigrants (Achotegui, 2019). According to Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development, identity formation takes place through a process of assimilating various elements from one's early environment within the framework of one's relationships with parents, family, and community. These elements include social roles, norms, and expectations within social contexts, as well as shared values, beliefs, and practices that contribute to a collective sense of identity. Significant identifications are, thus, incorporated throughout childhood and gradually synthesized until the end of adolescence, when identity construction is considered to be complete. Similarly, the development of the Multidimensional Scale (MLS) previously discussed was informed by James' (1980, as cited in Vromans et al., 2018)

conceptualization of self as extending out to the environment and incorporating material, social and spiritual aspects of one's identity, thus blurring the line between what is 'me' and what is 'mine'.

Displacement can therefore create a gap between home and host country identities, impacting one's sense of belonging and complicating or "fragmenting" identity (Beauregard, 2020; Petrovic, 2021). Over time, migrants may feel like they don't belong to either the culture of their home or that of the host country, which can lead to identity conflicts and psychological repercussions. This is particularly relevant for children who have not had time to develop a solid sense of identity (Beauregard, 2020). They may find themselves pulled between their family's culture and that of the host society and also impacted by their parents' now fragmented identities (Petrovic, 2021). Moreover, findings by Johansen and Varvin (2020) demonstrate the intersection of family experiences of war and conflict with experiences of marginalization in host communities, and how this may impact development of individual identity in children of refugees in cumulative and complex ways, often leading to feelings of isolation, disconnectedness, and lack of belonging.

Despite the potential impact of cultural bereavement on the mental health and identity formation of children, however, Beauregard (2020) notes that researchers have given the phenomenon relatively little attention. For me, the impact of migration on identity development is most clearly articulated and validated in a thesis written by Ljudmila Petrovic (2021). Petrovic explores how the identity of children can be fragmented over time by intergenerational trauma and conflict-generated diaspora experience. With our identities often defined by things outside of our control, such as nationality, religion, race, ethnicity, and even our last names, intense struggles around identity can be at the forefront of immigrant experience and loss.

There is still, however, a significant gap in the literature when it comes to the long-term impact of childhood or early adolescent forced displacement on identity development, and especially in the context of disenfranchised and unresolved grief.

Cumulative Grief. Though more recent research continues to reveal the nuanced nature of the grief experience and challenge the notion of phases, stages and recovery, the compounding layers of loss experienced by refugees complicate these notions even further. If ever it was thought that the grief process following the death of a loved one was linear, which of course it is not, imagining the losses that accompany war, migration and resettlement can only look like a never-ending scribble, or the messy clouds depicted as floating above the mind in illustrations of anxiety. The cumulative, ambiguous, recurring, chronic, and often traumatic, disenfranchised losses that many migrants experience can complicate not only the grieving process but also the many mental health risks associated with migration (Carta et al., 2015; Schmidt, 2023).

Conclusion

The aim of this literature review was to merely *begin* an exploration of disenfranchised migratory grief, knowing that there is no end, only pause and continuation, and that some elements of what has been shared will and should be questioned and challenged. However, it does address an important gap in the literature on the migration experience. While most of the focus of research on migrants and refugees has been on trauma and mental health disorders, often through a pathologizing lens that situates the problem within “them”, loss and grief are rarely mentioned, as is their impact on migrant health. The above is therefore an exploration of the profound and mostly unacknowledged losses experienced by migrants and refugees and serves to humanize and normalize the inevitable grief that accompanies the uprooted, displaced and resettled in their new life. When these losses are overlooked, ignored, or invalidated due to societal norms and systemic biases and discrimination, suffering cannot properly be attended to.

This disenfranchisement also leaves a significant gap in our understanding of the complexity of the migration experience. The grieving process for migrants and refugees bypasses conventional conceptualizations of bereavement due to its dynamic layers of loss that may be ambiguous, traumatic,

death and non-death related, tangible, and intangible, cumulative, and recurring, and all of these at once. Diagnoses aside, I ask myself, “How could this grief *not* be complicated?” and even more so when it continues to go unacknowledged by not only others, but oneself as well.

When there is a societal dismissal of migratory grief and cultural bereavement by receiving countries and communities, immigrants are expected to simply adjust, and immediately so (Casado et al., 2010). In my experience, we are also often expected to be grateful for “being taken in” and having escaped a reality that is conceived to be far worse. This disenfranchisement, in addition to ongoing trauma and innumerable post-migration stressors, further complicates the mourning process.

In light of all this, it is important to enfranchise migratory grief and validate the diverse and innumerable losses it encompasses, as well as the profound impact it can have on the well-being of migrants. This will allow for people’s experiences to be better understood and responded to with more compassion and humanity. As Martha Nussbaum (2013, as cited in Yam, 2021) suggests in her book *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, emotions play a pivotal role in shaping our responses to social injustice, especially when it does not directly impact us. She argues that if our emotions are somehow to be gripped by distant people and abstract principles, it is by positioning ‘them’ within ‘our’ circle of concern where they matter as parts of our collective ‘us’.

My goal and hope in the next chapter will be to reflect on ways that we can expand our circle of concern to include migrants and refugees and honor their losses and their grief. It is my belief that cultivating curiosity, conversation, connection, empathy, and love can not only heal open wounds and tend to old scars – it can also allow all of us to process our pain, reconnect with our hearts, discover our gifts, and contribute to a better world.

Chapter Three: Discussion, Recommendations, Conclusion

Sorrow makes us all children again

- destroys all differences of intellect.

The wisest know nothing.

–Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson in His Journals, 1982*

The purpose of Chapter 1 and 2 has been to recognize the often overlooked and disenfranchised non-death losses and grief experienced by migrants and refugees. I have also tried to shed light on why migratory loss and grief tend to be overlooked in research and social discourse. Through these explorations, my ultimate goal has been to normalize and enfranchise the complex and multi-layered nature of this particular kind of grief, knowing that the healing of grief begins with acknowledgement. In this final chapter, I will be sharing non-pathologizing and life-giving ways that migrants, counsellors, and society, in general, can tend to the deep wounds created by such immense loss. Instead of pushing grief to the shadows and being resigned to feelings of disconnection, powerlessness, and hopelessness, we must invite this grief into our individual and collective awareness so that we can all begin to do something about it – to witness, mourn, heal, make it meaningful, and return to connection and hope. The following chapter will be an exploration of ways that we can tend to grief and view it as a source of self-discovery, purpose, and love, rather than a pathology in need of fixing or a problem to be solved.

Personally, clinical terms, statistics, and the pathologizing of my experience of grief have never provided a sense of hope. Throughout my research, I often asked myself, what about the human experiencing unimaginable injustice and loss? My body would tense, and my gut would churn as I read about depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Is this it? Is this me? It felt so heavy and hopeless. I felt condemned and uncurable. Rather than imagining a pathology to be cured, I wanted to get to know the heart that is wounded and what it needs to heal and rejoice. What has it lost and how does it find meaning and purpose again? What might be the medicine and the gift hiding beneath the unwitnessed pain? What

can be gained and perhaps even celebrated? And what helps us start this sacred journey that is the *art* of grieving? Where do we begin?

The first section of this chapter will be an overview of therapeutic approaches that can help migrants and counsellors compassionately engage with and honor the complexity of migratory grief. These include continuing bonds theory, expressive arts therapy, and existentialism, with a focus on the power of storytelling, witnessing, ritual, beauty, meaning-making, and purpose. These are meant to nurture the resilience needed to process deep pain, reconnect with the heart, discover our gifts, and contribute them toward a better world. This chapter will also reflect on ways that we can redefine belonging in today's world. Given that displacement is a continuing reality due to ongoing war, violence, genocide, imperialism, and ecological destruction, more and more humans are likely to experience displacement and a struggle with identity and belonging. I will propose how we can redefine and reclaim belonging in ways that are healing, promote social and environmental justice, and interrupt the perpetuation of unresolved intergenerational trauma and grief. Specifically, I will reflect on the possibility of developing a deeper sense of belonging to the land, our bodies, and society.

Finally, I will discuss the role that migrants, counsellors, policymakers, and members of society can play to stop the incessant loss, destruction, and trauma caused by global politics, oppression, capitalism, and colonisation. While we certainly must acknowledge and tend to the wounds that are created daily by the systems in place, it is even more important that we stop the constant losing, taking from, and stealing away of all that makes life beautiful, worthwhile, and sustainable through advocacy and engagement in global movements towards freedom, justice, equity, and human liberation.

I admit it has been challenging for me to consider therapeutic approaches to support migrants through their grief in the current context of ongoing violence and destruction that perpetuates such grief daily. Still, I know I must find a way to be a hope-holder and share medicine for what has already been

done so we can begin to heal and help make this world safer. What follows is a discussion of non-pathologizing ways we can move through the womb of grief to re-emerge as truer versions of ourselves.

Continuing Bonds: Re-connecting to What We Lost and Loved

Though change and transformation are inherent in the journey through grief, this does not imply that people must 'recover' as if they were ill. In addition, just as the notion of 'recovery' from grief has been challenged, so has the idea that individuals must let go, move on, and sever their emotional ties to what has been lost in order to adjust in a healthy way. The maintenance of connection is now generally considered important, positive, and helpful rather than pathological, and is commonly referred to as *continuing bonds* (Neimeyer & Thompson, 2014; Renzenbrink, 2021). This model represents an important paradigm shift as grief counsellors try to help the bereaved establish and strengthen their ongoing connection to the deceased through practices like keeping mementoes and photographs, having mental conversations, and carrying out rituals to mark special dates. This is generally considered adaptive and helpful, unless it becomes problematic of course, such as if individuals see it as their duty to grieve forever, or if the lost relationship was complicated or unhealthy (Renzenbrink, 2021).

Draper, Marcellino, and Ogbonnaya (2022) have expanded the concept of continuing bonds to their work with migratory grief, emphasizing that maintaining an emotional bond with one's native culture can also be beneficial. They cite studies showing that those who find a way to assimilate their trauma and loss and integrate elements of their culture into their new life can more easily form a connection with the host culture. Rather than having to abandon their past identity and fully embrace a new one, a relational curiosity can be encouraged that enables the migrant to integrate their past identity into potential present and future ones. For instance, in their clinical work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, these authors found that continuing bonds can be a resource that supports not only the grieving process but also the incorporation of the abilities, wisdom, and support of the places and people that are no longer present into one's new life (Draper et al., 2022).

The expressive arts, which will be introduced next, can also be used to facilitate the maintenance of this ongoing bond by offering creative opportunities to 're-member,' or keep the memory and presence of what has been lost alive in meaningful and positive ways and acknowledge its ongoing influence. There is also the possibility of actively re-working or re-constructing these connections so they can become a source of comfort, strength and support in one's current life. In this way, individuals can keep the essence of what they loved and lost, rather than either having to "move on" and "let go" or clutch the past so tightly to their chest that it leaves their arms too full to embrace the present, as columnist Jan Glidewell (1989) once so poetically worded. I imagine this 're-membering' as forgotten or lost words coming back to rest on tongues, familiar songs finding comfort in ears that long to hear memories, ancestral foods bringing the land back to hungry lips, and distant scents and smells that can awaken sleeping giants, all with the purpose of re-creating the ruptured bond and helping us find harmony with the present, rather than swallowing us back into the past. The following will be a discussion of other ways the expressive arts can help migrants transform their loss and grief into hope.

Transforming Grief through the Expressive Arts

Expressive arts therapy is a holistic approach that facilitates the integration of one's body, mind, emotions, and spirit through multiple expressive modalities (Malchiodi, 2022). The integrated use of any or all of the arts – such as visual arts, dance, movement, music, drama, poetry, storytelling, creative writing and ritual – serves to deepen, amplify, and expand the range of expressive and imaginative possibility and to encourage the exploration of feelings, responses, reactions, and insights through images, sounds, and encounters with art processes (Rogers, 1999; McNiff, 2009, as cited in Thomson & Berger, 2011). The freedom to travel between the arts engages more of the senses and allows a fuller and more complete expression and transformation of feelings and the images that arise from them. Rogers (1999) calls this the 'creative connection' – a process in which one art form stimulates and fosters

expression and creativity in another and connects all the arts to our core nature, thus opening the path to a *process* of self-discovery.

Another concept in expressive arts work is *decentering*. Decentering invites clients to leave their presenting issues and concerns and enter a liminal space of creation, ritual, and discovery before returning once again to the original issues equipped with new possibilities and resources (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). This practice is informed by a fundamental concept of expressive arts work, *poiesis* - a word from the Greek meaning to know by creating (Levine, 2005, as cited in Atkins & Snyder, 2018). Through this reciprocal and interdependent process, we both shape and are shaped by the world we live in. By approaching the process of art making as well as the art created with openness, non-judgement, and curiosity, the individual is gifted with the possibility of surprise and new learning. The capacity to imagine can thus be a significant resource for envisioning new ways of being as we allow ourselves to be touched by both the beauty and ugliness of life (Atkins & Snyder, 2018).

This welcoming of both beauty and ugliness is an important element of the expressive arts and distinguishes it from traditional Western notions of *aesthetics* in response to the question of what is beautiful (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). Rather than focusing on creating a beautiful final product based on cultural norms or formal rules, the expressive arts' understanding of aesthetics is based on the Greek word *aistesis* – that which has to do with the senses – and is focused on the beauty that enlivens and intensifies our awareness of our experience. This is in contrast to the word *anesthetic*, or that which deadens and numbs us. Therefore, aesthetics in expressive arts relate to our human sensitivity to and appreciation of beauty, which may not always be pretty, as well as our capacity to respond to whatever touches us through imagination and creativity (Atkins & Snyder, 2018), known as the *aesthetic response*.

The expressive arts also acknowledge diverse ways of expressing stories and emotions that go beyond verbal communication, especially when it's difficult to find the words to accurately convey the truth of one's experience (Renzenbrink, 2021). The expressive arts invite the whole body into the

process, which is, after all, where our traumas, losses, and stories continue to live, often unbeknownst to us. When the body is invited to express itself, all that has been cast to the shadows has the chance to emerge into the light to be seen and witnessed. This is particularly relevant when working with migrants and refugees because it provides a universal avenue of expression that is available to all despite age, language barriers, cognitive capacity, and trauma. Particularly when trauma is present, which is often the case with migratory grief, the arts can be a container where emotions and experiences are externalized and held, thus helping to "reveal the unspeakable" and contain the intensity of experiences that may be too overwhelming (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005, as cited in Thomson & Berger, 2011). This can foster safety, empowerment and agency. The expressive arts can also bring playfulness, surprise, imagination, beauty, joy, awe, and possibility into the work, all of which may be dampened by trauma and grief. This allows for the process to be more than just heavy, dark, painful, and often unappealing work.

In the context of loss and grief, in particular, leading practitioners and researchers Neimeyer and Thompson (2014, as cited in Renzenbrink, 2021) have led the work of "building a durable bridge between the worlds of grief therapy and the expressive arts" (p.25) and have gathered many examples of ways that grief therapists incorporate the arts with their clients. By letting grief take shape and form through the arts, one's pain may be seen and understood more easily. What is more, one can literally and metaphorically transform their experiences of grief and loss through imagination and play. As images move between the different modalities, change is possible; images are formed, reformed, and reimagined through responsive and curious engagement with them (Thomson & Berger, 2011). *Making* images and then *sensing* them are ways of "making sense" and knowing, shaping, and storying experiences of grief and loss, so they do not stay "sense-less", silenced, unseen, immutable, or untouchable. In these ways, the expressive arts invite us to connect to our voice, but also to be silent and receptive to the wisdom of all that is created. As Shaun McNiff (1992) beautifully puts it: "When people are open to art's suggestions, they change as they watch images change" (p.56).

Healing and Re-connecting to Ourselves Through the Expressive Arts

The arts have always been a powerful way to transform lives and communities (Taylor & Murphy, 2014). In fact, not so long ago, it was normal for creative expression to be seamlessly and intricately woven into the fabric of everyday life, something that is still true in some cultures. The arts are our birthright and have always been an integral part of what it means to be human. The universality of painting, sculpting, music, dance, and storytelling indicates that artistic expression has been a fundamental way for us to communicate, connect, cope, and heal since early times. Basque-American cross-cultural anthropologist and educator Angeles Arrien (TEDx Talks, 2013) tells us that if you were feeling disheartened, dispirited, or depressed and were to go a local healer – a medicine man or shaman – among Indigenous peoples worldwide, you would essentially be asked one of four questions, or healing salves:

- When in your life did you stop singing or bringing your voice forward?
- When in your life did you stop dancing or moving in your body?
- When in your life did you stop being enchanted by stories and particularly your own life story? When did you stop telling it?
- And when in your life did you stop being comforted by the sweet territory of silence?

Arrien (TEDx Talks, 2013) shares that at whatever point in our lives we stop doing any of these is where we begin to experience loss of Soul, or Spirit. Wherever we stopped singing or bringing forth our unique voice is where we began to feel self-conscious and to doubt our own imprint or vision in life. Wherever we stopped being enchanted by our story and telling it is where we lost touch with what is believed to be the oldest teaching and healing art we have. Wherever we disconnected from the "sweet territory of silence" is where we stopped contemplating, discovering, and recalling the deepest mystery of who we are. Silence is where we realize that life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be lived. In hearing these reflections on Indigenous and ancient wisdom, my faith in the expressive arts as a way to

guide us back to Soul and Spirit, both individually and collectively, is strengthened. If these are the ways we lose ourselves, they are also the ways we can retrieve our souls and feel home in our bodies again.

Storytelling: Centering the Voices of Migrants and Refugees.

> Stories are how we get on with it, over and against all that might stop us from persevering. (Renzenbrink, 2021, p. 155)

Stories are a way to make sense of our experiences and restore coherence to our life narrative (Neimeyer, 2001, as cited in Renzenbrink, 2021). Creative writing and poetry, specifically, are one of the common ways the expressive arts are used to bring forward the voices of migrants and their stories of loss and existing between two worlds. In my search for the 'truth' of the migrant experience of loss, I sought out poems written by migrants and refugees, as well as second generation immigrants. I believe poems can be our greatest teachers and tell us far more than academic texts and research. Poetry has a way of getting to the core of it all. It can grip our hearts and do the very thing Martha Nussbaum (2012, as cited in Yam, 2021) suggested: position 'them' within 'our' circle of concern so that they matter as parts of our collective 'us'. Not only that, but poetry is powerful medicine too. It helps to integrate the disparate and fragmented parts of our lives as "poetic essences of sound, metaphor, image, feeling and rhythm act as remedies that can elegantly strengthen our whole system – physical, mental and spiritual" (Fox, 1997, p.3, as cited in Renzenbrink, 2021). It also allows us to choose the words, craft the narrative, nourish ongoing bonds with what we've lost, become enchanted with our own stories, and transform our relationship to them and our grief. Suddenly, the poet becomes the author, which is inherently empowering and healing for those who feel their lives have predominantly been written by external forces. By going within and engaging with our creative imagination, we can find solace and reconnect with the parts that continue to feel whole amid the fragmentation and brokenness (Renzenbrink, 2021).

Because it is not possible to share all the many moving poems I have come across, I will only include here fragments of a few (see Appendix A for more, as well as the authors' websites). In sharing

these pieces, I envision the creation of a mosaic of multiple, diverse, and intertwined "truths" and people that complete one other. In the words of Samira Ahmed, one of the poets included here, just as words can be daggers, they can also be balm, give hope, and let us breathe (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019). I invite you to keep this in mind and to allow your heart to be gripped by the following poems, even if their placement here might seem strange and unconventional to you:

First Light

[…]
What is it, to remember nothing, of what one loved?
To have forgotten the faces one first kissed?
They ask if I remember them, the aunts, the uncles,
& I say Yes it's coming back, I say Of course,
when it's No not at all, because when I last saw them
I was three, & the China of my first three years
Is largely make-believe, my vast invented country,
my dream before I knew the word "dream,"
[…]

– Chen Chen (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 6-8)

On Being American

You are seven years old when a grown man screams at you, spitting
knives from crooked purple lips: Go home, fucking Paki.

You are confused because the ethnic slur is inaccurate.

You realize, too young, that racists fail geography but that their
epithets and perverted patriotism can still shatter moments of
your childhood.

You are the last to know that everyone else sees you as Other.

[…]

– Samira Ahmed (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 21-23)

Talks about Race
[…]

I am "other"; it is such
an indistinguishable form, beyond the construct of the proper self.

Sometimes I am asked
if I am Indian, Middle Eastern, or Biracial;

I don't know what to say to these people
who notice the shape of the eye before its depth
the sound of the tongue before its wisdom
the openness of a palm before its reach

And what to those who call me "African"?
Don't they know I can count the years spent back home
wishing I knew I was "African"?

And how to cradle and contain the disappointment that is
Rekindled whenever someone does NOT know
my Ethiopia, my Eritrea

I don't know how to fit, adjust myself within new boundaries –
Nomads like me have no place as home, no way of belonging.

– Mahtem Shiferraw (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 85-86)

Choi Jeong Min

[…] my Korean name

is the star my mother cooks into the jjigae
to follow home when I am lost, which is always

in this gray country, this violent foster home
whose streets are paved with shame, this factory yard

riddled with bullies ready to steal your skin
& sell it back to your mother for profit

land where they stuff our throats with soil
& accuse us of gluttony when we learn to swallow it

[…]

– Franny Choi (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 33-35)

Off-Island Chamorros

And there'll be times when we'll feel adrift, without itinerary
or destination. We'll wonder: What if we stayed? What if we return?
When the undertow of these questions begins pulling you

out to sea, remember: migration flows through our blood
like the aerial roots of I trongkon nunu. Remember: our ancestors
taught us how to carry our culture in the canoes of our bodies.
Remember: our people, scattered like stars, form new constellations
when we gather. Remember: home is not simply a house,
village, or island; home is an archipelago of belonging.

– Craig Santos Perez (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 67-68)

Muslim Girlhood

I never found myself in any pink aisle. There was no box for me
with glossy cellophane like heat and a neat packet of instructions
in six languages […]
[…] Sometimes, I thought
my father was a god, I loved him that much. And the news thought
this was an impossible thing – a Muslim girl who loved her father.
But what did they know of my heart, or my father
Who drove fifty miles to buy me a doll like a Barbie
Because it looked like me […]

– Leila Chatti (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 36-37)

Immigrant

I am not buckled safely into my seat
I am watching the road unravel
behind us like a ribbon of dust.

Through the back window of my uncle's Datsun
Amman looks like a tender little place
the color of my teddy bear's fur.
Its houses crowded into one another
on its seven parched hills
are the shades of my family's skin –
almond of my mother's brow
wheat of my father's arms
tea-with-cream of my grandmother's palms

We are driving away on the only road to the airport.
We are driving away from this dollhouse town
and my storybook childhood of tree-climbing
and laughter of too many cousins to count.
We are driving away from impending war.

We are driving away

because we can leave
on the magic carpet of our navy blue
US passports that carry us
to safety and no bomb drills
to the place where the president
will make the call to send the planes
into my storybook childhood
over the seven hills
next door to neighbors who will now
become refugees.

We are driving and I
am not safe
driving away from
myself and everything I know
into the great miracle of
a country so large
wars are kept thousands of miles at bay.
My young life is coming undone
on the road behind me
where I know all the names of
trees in Arabic
rumman saru zayzafoon
and I know the spot on each hilltop
where the crimson poppies return every spring
and I know the best bakery to line up for
Ramadan pancakes before breaking the fast.

In the backseat of my uncle's Datsun
I want to float through the window
and into yesterday
when August was just late-afternoon ice cream
and late-night card games
and the crinkle of brown paper and tape
covering copybooks,
fresh as this morning's bread,
ready to receive the school year ahead –
math equations,
poems,
histories of battle.

– Lena Khalaf Tuffaha (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 3-5)

There are threads that tie each of the poets and poems to one another. There is an underlying current that connects them. Names butchered, mispronounced, and unwelcome. Skin color used to

categorize, define, and settle for the false safety of assumptions about the 'Other'. The pain of being unknown. Of one's country being invisible. The tensions between forgetting, inventing, and remembering. The pain of moving to a country that helps destroy yours. And the cumulation of all this – the struggle for a sense of identity and belonging. Poetry allows us to name and process these experiences, to make them beautiful, and, if anything, to belong to the page that always welcomes us. In many cultures around the world, it has been a trusted healer and friend in times of grief.

Culture as Resource

A culturally informed approach to expressive arts therapy invites the incorporation of cultural and spiritual beliefs, practices, and traditions into the work, viewing culture as a potential source of strength, wisdom, and healing. Because expressive arts therapy is adaptable to diverse cultural backgrounds and does not simply impose modalities that are valued and prized from a Eurocentric lens, it can be considered decolonizing. By demonstrating cultural sensitivity and humility, those working with migrants can explore and incorporate different cultural norms for expression and healing that are personally meaningful and appropriate. For instance, Hanania (2020) describes an art therapy group program for Syrian refugee women who explored loss and hope through storytelling and embroidery (*Tatriz)*. These women were asked what they had left behind when they moved to Canada and invited to create an image reflecting their greatest loss. They were also asked to create an image representing their hopes and dreams for the future. By engaging with the tradition of needlework and creating wall hangings that represented the stories of their lives, this group of women was able to experience a sense of pride, mastery, and connection to their homeland and culture. In addition, by sharing in the experience together, they were also able to develop friendships and a sense of community to counter the isolation and loneliness that tend to characterize the lives of many refugees.

Healing and Arts in Community: Witnessing and Being Witnessed

Despite the universal nature of grief, and the common experience of disruption, distress, and wounding of the body, mind, and spirit that accompanies it (Renzenbrink, 2021), it may be one of life's most complex phenomena because it is unique to every individual (Turner & Stauffer, 2023). Whether it be due to age, gender, personality, cultural background, history of trauma and loss, the circumstances of loss, or any number of factors, no two people experience grief in quite the same way. And yet, though various grief models emphasize different aspects of the grieving process, the one undisputed element is the Importance of connection and emotional support to process, integrate, and heal grief's many wounds. Research has consistently shown that social isolation, disconnection, and a lack of adequate support systems have a negative impact on outcomes (Turner & Stauffer, 2023).

According to Hynie (2018), group-based interventions that build and strengthen collective identities, social connections, and support networks may be particularly helpful for refugees, who often face social isolation. I would add that using the arts to connect, take up space, give and receive, and carry stories together in community can be deeply healing as well. The arts strengthen human connection across cultural, religious, socioeconomic and generational divides and bring down the walls that prevent us from knowing one another (Taylor & Murphy, 2014). The arts also help us develop empathy as we witness one another's authentic expressions of love and loss through poetry, music, movement, and other arts. The power of witnessing, being witnessed, and collectively honoring loss and grief can make people feel seen, understood, and appreciated and foster a sense of safety and belonging that is foundational for healing, risk-taking, and building confidence to move through obstacles toward community, purpose, and meaning. This can be done through group-based interventions as well as opportunities for migrants to display their creations and stories, such us through public exhibitions of paintings, community poetry readings, and even cooking together and sharing traditional food.

(Re-)Discovering Purpose and Meaning

He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, 1889*

There is no script for how to navigate grief or guide one through it. Ultimately, it is one of the most intimate journeys one can take with oneself. At best, it can be an opportunity to meet oneself more fully, choose how to dance with one's grief, and perhaps even witness the flowering of purpose and meaning from the seeds of loss.

Angeles Arrien (TEDx Talks, 2013) has worked to conserve and preserve Indigenous wisdom worldwide and tells us that, from the time we are born to the time we die, we have two companions – death and destiny. Death asks us every single day, "are you using the great gift of life well?" Destiny, understood as destination rather than fate, asks at every age if we are doing what we've come here to do. It reminds us to heed the call as we move through the mysteries of life – the search and struggle, the breakthrough and return – and fulfill our purpose. And what is this purpose? According to Arrien (TEDx Talks, 2013), we the human species are here to learn about love and to express it, and we are here to create, serve, and contribute. Her encounters with Indigenous peoples have revealed a similar notion that we are all the "original medicine", each with our own unique calling, life dream, vision, and imprint – every voice original, every eye unique in coloration and perspective, every fingerprint different from the other. And so, each one of us has something special to offer our community and our world.

I believe individuals are naturally guided by an inner knowing toward their purpose. However, people may need the space and opportunity to reconnect with this part of themselves and bring their gifts to life. Host societies, for one, should encourage those who have arrived and re-settled to contribute their skills and talents to the collective in meaningful ways. This is also something that counsellors are beautifully positioned to facilitate as 'midwives of the soul', a phrase used by one of my instructors that inspired how I want to show up in this work. When people are immersed in the story

others tell about them, it is hard to find a space to re-compose, revise, make sense, re-tell in new and different ways, and experience some agency regarding the "possibilities of becoming" (Estefan & Roughley, 2018). Estefan and Roughley see the therapeutic relationship as a space for this to happen, as long as the therapist is willing to listen, understand, and collaborate. If our descriptions of ourselves depend on dominant narratives within our socio-cultural context, which determine whether we are viewed as healthy, normal, or pathological, or which reduce us to the primary identity of 'other', 'refugee' or 'migrant', it is important to find spaces where we can re-author these descriptions based on what we want to say about ourselves, our experience, who we can become, and what our life can mean.

In his memoir *Man's Search for Meaning,* Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl (1985) proposed that the inner desire to find purpose and meaning in life is our primary motivation. He did not mean by this the pursuit of the ultimate meaning of life, which he believes to be unknowable by our finite intellectual capacities, but rather the personal and unique meaning and mission of our own lives. Inspired by his own experiences in the Auschwitz concentration camps, he also proposed that humans can discover and experience meaning under any and every circumstance. Even in the worst of conditions, he held steadfastly to the belief that an individual's most fundamental freedom lies in their ability to choose their attitude and response. Just as, according to Indigenous wisdom, death and destiny ask us if we are using the gift of life well and doing what we've come to do (TEDx Talks, 2013), Frankl believed we need to think of ourselves as being questioned by life at every moment and asked to respond in right attitude, action and conduct (Madeson, 2024). These were some of the fundamental tenets of his existential approach to psychotherapy called *logotherapy* (Frankl, 1985), which I believe can be a profound way to work with migratory grief and make meaning out of so much loss.

Redefining and Reclaiming Belonging

Someone I loved once gave me a box of darkness

It took me years to understand that this too

Was a gift

— Mary Oliver, from "The Uses of Sorrow", *Thirst, 2006*

Making meaning out of migratory loss can simultaneously be one of the greatest challenges and gifts. Loss represents a change of circumstance where it is impossible to return to the way things were before (Harris, 2020, as cited in Renzenbrink, 2021). This is the reality of migration – the leaving of the known for the unknown. One of the most fundamental losses that migrants experience and struggle to make meaning of is a sense of belonging. According to Melzak and McClatchey (2018), the experience of belonging is one of two vital contributing mechanisms in the development of resilience (the other is having an empathic listener). This next section will reflect on ways that migration can be an opportunity to redefine and reclaim a sense of belonging for those who no longer feel they belong anywhere. After all, the quest for belonging has been established as a primary human motivation in psychological literature and a crucial component of mental health (Namer & Razum, 2017). Amid all the other changes that migrants experience and that impact their sense of belonging, the fundamental change that takes place in their physical reality may easily threaten what Huntington (1981, as cited in Renzenbrink, 2021) refers to as their 'psycho-somatic integrity':

> Migration from one place to another that is different in climate, tomography, flora, fauna, seasons, diurnal light and temperature patterns imposes a massive change in physical life experience, the experience of the senses. Migration puts us in a different place or space: it looks different, sounds different, feels different and tastes different. (p. 156)

Michelle Aung Thin (2013, as cited in Renzenbrink, 2021) beautifully describes the impact of this experience:

> Displaced, I must change the way I see, touch, smell, taste, and hear the world around me. My mother tongue is made strange. Because I see the light falls at a distinctive angle that changes depending on where I am. Because I realize it is I who has moved and not the sun. (p. 157)

The torn sense of belonging created from this change in the physical experience of life can occur even when there are no significant differences in language, food, spirituality, and culture. Being separated from one's familiar physical environment and transplanted to a new place is enough to create a lifelong tension between 'home' and 'homeland.' Over time, this becomes the reality of the migrant – "to be forever torn in this way" from both (Renzenbrink, p. 159, 2021), not belonging fully to either place.

And if this is so – if belonging is a transitory experience – how might it be redefined so that it is not simply an eternal loss and longing that cannot be undone and unmade. Could it not also become an opportunity to access something that is only truly available to those who find themselves in the liminal space of in-betweenness, situated between two places and between a past life and a future without it? Could this liminal space not be a chance for old ways of thinking to be challenged and for new possibilities to emerge? For example, what if we could stop belonging to places bound by imagined, constructed and political borders that invent differences where there are far more similarities? What if the process of replanting oneself in a new and strange land and becoming an immigrant have at their center the experience of meeting ourselves and making ourselves at home in the foreign and in our foreignness (Beltsiou, 2016, as cited in Lijtmaer, 2022). How can this help us re-negotiate what belonging could mean in the context of our world today – a world where we are bound to encounter people from different places and cultures and where we will all more than likely experience migration ourselves at some point, whether due to war, natural disasters, or the ecological crisis? What if migration could be much more than a psychologically painful process? What if it could be *far more* than trauma, loss, and grief, without denying of course that these are very real as well? What if migration could also reveal the gifts that we need to co-exist with one other in an increasingly divided world and a planet that needs our immediate attention and care? The experience of migration can carry the seeds we need to lead a change of direction – seeds of humility, flexibility, adventure, resilience, complexity,

compassion, and love (Lijtmaer, 2022). It can teach us to belong with everyone, everywhere, to everything – perhaps the only thing that can save this world.

Belonging to the Land and the Earth

What if we could expand the notion of belonging beyond particular places, borders and socio-cultural constructs towards a belonging to the land and our entire planet? As Maya Angelou (Elliot, 1989) said, "You are only free when you realize you belong no place – you belong every place – no place at all." According to Indigenous understandings of living, we are meant to be in relation with all. This extends far beyond living humans and includes our creators, ancestors, the land, the trees and plants, the water, the stars, the animals and everything that surrounds us. While it is true that our earliest memories and experiences in the physical environment have shaped us and provided an important imprint, perhaps we are here to learn how to love the whole world. Just as our first loves are meant to be our mothers and fathers, just as these relationships bring their own inevitable losses and pain, and just as we learn to love others, we can also be born from a land, torn from a land, and learn to love other lands. We may be born to olive trees, torn from them, overtaken by grief, and then challenged to love new trees. I believe it is those who best know the depth of such loss that are most capable of the depth of such love. And what if we could allow these new lands that have accepted us, even as uninvited guests, to own us? What if we could find a way to belong to them and learn to love and care for them *too* (their landscapes and colors, sights and smells, the specific light of their sky, their temperature, and their medicine) without letting go of the places that first captured our hearts? Nature-based expressive arts therapy is perhaps one of the more profound ways we can do this.

Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy. Nature-based expressive arts therapy integrates the intermodal use of the arts with the natural world, emphasizing our inherent and reciprocal connection to the Earth. This approach honors our art materials as gifts from the Earth, whether it's clay, stone, paint, animal skin, instruments of music, or the body itself. In the words of Atkins and Snyder (2018):

> When we hold a flute, we know that it is a gift from the tree. We know that the skin of our drums is a gift from the animal kingdom. From this perspective we see our connection and remember our belonging. This awareness of interdependence informs our art. We are touched by, and moved to respond to, this web of interconnection. (p. 60)

Atkins and Snyder's (2018) approach to nature-based expressive arts is embedded within a story of belonging to the Earth and thus proposes that we harness our human creative capacity to care for and contribute to personal and planetary wellbeing.

In "Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind," Roszak, Gomes, and Kanner (1995) explore the inseparable connection between the psychological health of humanity and the Earth's wellbeing (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). They, like many of today's environmental thinkers, argue that the current state of personal and planetary dis-ease is not merely due to collective apathy and ignorance, but also due to the Western industrialized world's narrative of humans' separation from the Earth. A cornerstone of nature-based expressive arts therapy, ecotherapy recognizes that many psychological disorders that pathologize the individual are, in fact, rooted in ultimately unsustainable ways of thinking and living. It thus expands the definition of psychological health beyond a focus on individual autonomy towards the capacity to experience reciprocal and mutually enhancing relationships with nature based on a deep respect. This includes a recognition of the inherent worth of other non-human beings and the understanding that we are all part of the living Earth and that we can learn much from nature.

As it relates to navigating loss and grief, we can observe the natural world and draw on its processes of renewal and resilience. For instance, "the Earth reminds us that we are subject to the same rhythms of birth, growth, decay and death found in the cycles of nature. Witnessing the renewal and resilience of nature connects us to our own storehouses of strength to navigate threat, stress and change" (Atkins & Snyder, 2018, p. 55). An example of this is a story shared by professor Dr. Liz Rose in an expressive arts retreat. Concerned about the survival of the pink lady slipper flower, which makes its

home under the hemlock trees that are increasingly getting sick and dying in the Appalachian Mountains due to an invasion of insects, she went looking for them but could not find them. Her grief then transformed into wonder and praise as she noticed that the beautiful flower had danced its way to the shade of a rhododendron nearby. “This delicate, rare and endangered flower was adapting to change in its environment, finding a new home when the old one was no longer able to sustain life” (Atkins & Snyder, 2018, p.120). I found this story and its lesson deeply moving. If the flowers that found shelter beneath dying trees can find a new home and continue to bloom, why couldn’t we?

In Chapter 1, I described an Indigenous ceremony shared by an Elder that beautifully honors the emotional ties tethering us to our lands. His people would bury the placenta beside a young tree as a way of offering the child to the land and acknowledging the worldview that *we belong to the land,* not the other way around. This beautiful ceremony inspired me to imagine a nature-based expressive arts ritual that can initiate a respectful relationship between migrants and refugees and the land where they now live. The individual can be invited to move mindfully through a forest, park, or beach, and gather materials from nature that attract them and represent aspects of their identity (past, present, and future). They should experience a felt connection to the items they collect, taking time to observe, touch, and smell each one. The individual can then find a tree and here they can take their time to intentionally arrange the items into a small installation piece that represents the uprooted Self being re-planted. They can do this on the ground or, if possible and if they so wish, they can dig a hole in the earth and bury their creation. This ritual can be self-led by the migrant or facilitated by a therapist as a way for one to offer themselves to the land as a humble guest, initiate an openness to belonging to more than one place, and re-connect to themselves within the earth’s embrace (See also Appendix B for ‘The Pen and the Path’, a nature-based expressive arts therapy activity designed by Melia Snyder to connect with the wisdom of nature to move through life’s challenges, such as walking through the “ravaging storms of loss” “through crippling grief” (Atkins & Snyder, 2018, p. 149)).

Finding Our Way Back to Ourselves

Perhaps the capacity to belong to a new land implies that we can also come to find a home in our own bodies again. I was struck by an idea that my instructor Dawn Percher shared in class, told to her by her supervisor: “What if we treated our bodies as a place where we live?” I was equally inspired by the words of Sonya Renee Taylor, a poet, activist, and author known for speaking on issues related to body empowerment, social justice, and radical self-love. In one of her live Instagram videos, she asked herself how we can prevent these ongoing cycles of violence in our world and wondered about the possibility of home being first and foremost a place within. That is, if we could somehow find a sense of home in the center of our being - the true Self - we wouldn’t need to fight for or in the name of an external sense of home, whether it be a nation or a sports team that divides us.

Being loyal to an ‘external’ identity and sense of belonging can quickly turn us against one another. It reminds me of the 2011 Vancouver Stanley Cup riot. It was 20 years after I heard the first grenades and bombs drop on my city, and yet the sensations and feelings I experienced were so similar. I could feel the hatred and violence take over in the streets. I was terrified of the idea that people can identify so strongly with something outside themselves and be propelled to inflict destruction in the name of an artificial “us” versus “them”. This is what we do. In the words of Tunisian American poet Leila Chatti (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019), “hatred is often the failure to see a stranger as fully human” (p. 153). But what if, instead of continuing to “other” in an attempt for “us” to feel a sense of home, we could find a strong enough sense of home within that would put a stop to the ongoing cycles of destruction? I believe that re-connecting with our authentic self will always lead us back to love and help us remember the humanity we share with one another.

The Political is Personal: How Can We Belong When the Body is Not Safe?

It should be emphasized that, although finding a safe home and sense of belonging within ourselves is a beautiful vision, and one that I whole-heartedly believe is worth pursuing, it is certainly not the whole story. Because the problem of not belonging is socially and systemically rooted, it is not located within the individual, and so neither is the entire solution. The solution requires much more. We need to understand that the personal is political (Hanisch, 1970). These bodies that *could* be our homes are deeply impacted by the sociopolitical realities and injustices that surround us and within which we are embedded. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a home and a sense of belonging in one's body when the body is continually excluded, harmed, and violated at its many intersections by historic and evolving systems of oppression. How does one feel at home in a body that is threatened by violence, genocide, colonialism, militarism, racism, sexism, ableism, capitalism, poverty, houselessness, daily microaggressions, marginalization, and injustice in all its forms?

The sociopolitical realities that directly undermine our sense of belonging in society also impact our ability to safely belong to ourselves. This too must be acknowledged, grieved, and transformed. In the contexts of refugees and asylum seekers, in particular, Namer and Razum (2017) urge for policies in host countries to first and foremost facilitate a sense of belonging for migrants, which is partly created when one is valued by their social environment and experiences inclusion and congruency with others. This includes the ability to access healthcare, employment, residency, and public life without barriers and to the same degree as all members of the host community. While mental health research and interventions have historically focused on the impacts of pre-migration trauma on refugees and asylum seekers, settlement context and post-migration material and social conditions can be an equally powerful determinant of refugee mental health (Hynie, 2019). Host societies must work to counter the dehumanization that frames refugees and migrants as burdens or security threats, on the one hand, and as resources to be used for the benefit of the host country, on the other (Weima, 2021). They must

recognize migrants' "right for homecoming", paralleling the myth of Ulysses (Namer & Razum, 2017) (see Chapter 2 for a description of Ulysses Syndrome). While going "home" may not be possible for many, and even if this loss is to be mourned forever, we are reminded that "what eventually instilled in Ulysses the sense of homecoming was not coming home *per se* […], but the eventual recognition and reassertion of his dignity" (Namer & Razum, 2017, p.295).

We all have a role to play in this, on a micro- and macro-level. Even though, according to Hynie (2019), most refugees who have resettled permanently show remarkable resilience and do not develop mental health disorders, this resilience can be supported or weakened by national and local policies, as well as public attitudes towards migrants. We must all strive to challenge our own explicit and implicit biases and tendencies to dehumanize those who are different from us by acknowledging one another's inherent value as human beings. By committing to treating migrants with respect and dignity, we can help them experience more safety and belonging in their bodies, so they can move beyond merely surviving and perhaps embrace the possibility that their life was meant to be so much more than that.

Grief in Action

In addition to facilitating a sense of belonging in host communities, we must also work in solidarity with all those who have been othered to stop war, inequality, and oppression, and to create a safer world. We are all implicated and have a responsibly for the conditions that lead to, create, and follow today's migration experience. The trauma and the losses, the darkness and the pain belong to each of us, as does the responsibility for the protection and healing of our human family. It is not enough to understand what displacement takes from those who have been uprooted. It is not enough to know *about* it or to help them grieve and heal. We must also act and do what is in our power to stop the forces that make people feel they have no choice but to leave.

Politicized Therapists

I believe mental health professionals working with migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees cannot be politically neutral. Beyond acknowledging and attending to individuals' grief and normalizing the complexity of their pain, we must also continue developing a willingness to stand up against the injustices that harm our clients, even if this may come at a cost to us. We are not separate from our clients, and harm done to them is harm done to us. Our fates are intertwined, as the world continues to show. While we can do our very best in our offices and spaces to provide support, empathy, and therapeutic interventions, this is made all the more powerful when clients feel that we are not only acknowledging their reality and experiences, but that we care enough to take a stand and advocate for peace and justice and challenge the social roots, external forces, and structural oppression that impact their lives and well-being.

Activist and therapist Vikki Reynolds (2020) has been dedicated to bridging the worlds of social justice activism with her therapeutic work in the community. She considers it the practitioner's responsibility to not only work from an anti-oppressive lens but to also take an overt ethical stance of justice-doing and decolonizing in our work. For one, this means resisting the neutrality and objectivity of psychology, which conceals contexts of structural oppression that promote suffering (Reynolds, 2020). Instead, we are called to take a witnessing approach by situating personal suffering in its sociopolitical context and resisting the individualization and medicalization that locates problems, deficiencies, and responsibility for healing within the individual.

While those of us who are settler and non-Indigenous practitioners cannot ever entirely distance ourselves from the project of psychology, which Frantz Fanon (1963, Reynolds, 2020) refers to as a euro-centric force used to pathologize the colonized, and which sustains our privileges, we must do our best to liberate psychology (Martín-Baró, 1990, as cited in Reynolds, 2020), resist its colonial practices, and "center our inquiry [instead] on the mental unwellness of the colonizer" (Fanon, 1963, as cited in

Reynolds, 2020, p.348). Though we certainly invite individuals to take responsibility and make changes where actual choices and access to power are available to them, the responsibility for the oppression, violence, and marginalization they've experienced and for the social context that perpetuates their suffering is handed back to its rightful source in the spirit of justice (Reynolds, 2020).

Justice-doing also requires us to use our social locations and access to power to take actions towards transforming the conditions that promote and sustain injustice, oppression, suffering, and limited life choices (Reynolds, 2020). This includes holding governments and other bodies responsible and accountable for their abuses of power. It also includes holding ourselves and our field accountable, repairing the consequences of our mistakes, and striving to de-colonize our theories and practice.

Future Considerations: Mobilizing the Grief of Migrants

People around the world are feeling a deep sense of helplessness, hopelessness, sorrow, rage, and despair at the current local and global realities. While many are finding ways to engage in meaningful actions, such as protests, for migrants who have already survived unimaginable trauma and loss, it can be especially difficult to engage and get involved. Personally, when my lifelong, undigested grief re-emerges, I feel immobilized. I don't know what to do that could make a difference, and I fear what else it will cost me when I've already lost so much and when I continually witness the active and ongoing state repression, suppression, and oppression of those who are willing to stand up against injustice. Sometimes, I just want a little oasis of peace, and the only way to get it is to hide from the world, take refuge in my bed, and dream. This has been a way for me to survive. Perhaps this is how my wise younger self found peace in war. And yet, knowing all I do about the consequences of war and suffering, I also feel immense guilt, shame, and restlessness. I know I must act. I know it will help me heal. The question is, how can people like me – who sometimes feel powerless, terrified, demoralized, hopeless, and without a sense of agency and capacity to act – engage in activism while also caring for ourselves and acknowledging this profound and common response to our stress and sorrow? In

addition, how can mental health professionals engage and help mobilize those who feel frozen or stuck in their grief so they can develop a sense of political agency and take action towards empowering themselves in the struggle against the forces and dynamics in which grief proliferates? How can we ensure that the therapeutic work we do and the socio-political struggle against the forces that cause so much loss and destruction can inform and enrich one another? How can we employ the personal experiences and wisdom of those so deeply impacted in service of the political and vice versa? These are questions for us all to ponder, answer, and act on, even if imperfectly.

Conclusion

What oxygen is to the lungs,

such is hope to the meaning of life.

— Emil Brunner (in Attig, 2004, p. 210)

More and more people are being displaced due to human-made disasters like war, violence, genocide, and poverty, as well as climate change and natural disasters. In fact, most humans will, at some point in their lives, be forced to leave their homes and experience loss of place as competition for land, resources, and a sense of security continue to increase and go unchecked. While I know that it is not possible for me to do justice to all the diverse stories of displacement, loss, grief, survival, mourning, and overcoming, and all the ways loss and grief are conceived, understood, experienced, resisted, lived and danced with, and honored, my hope is that the acknowledgment and exploration of migratory grief in this paper helps migrants feel seen, understood, and validated in their experience of immense loss and sorrow.

I also hope it contributes to the field of counselling through insight into the experience of migrants and refugees and potential therapeutic approaches to working with migratory grief. I also hope that the urgent call for the humanization of those who have been displaced and have had to leave their worlds behind is one way to reach the hearts and minds of policy makers and the public so that we can

collectively move towards co-creating environments where everyone will feel more deeply accepted, cared for and welcome. We must find ways to belong to each other so that we can find a way back to ourselves and to the land. This also requires acknowledgement by governments of their responsibility for atrocities and injustices committed at home and abroad that lead to perpetual cycles of loss, displacement, and intergenerational trauma and grief.

It is now commonly accepted that the cumulative effects of trauma are passed down across generations as children consciously and unconsciously absorb their parents' experiences, a phenomenon referred to as intergenerational trauma (Denov et al., 2019). Cumulative, unacknowledged, and unresolved migratory grief similarly impacts the future. According to Achotegui (2019), the children of immigrants tend to have an even more complex experience of migratory grief than their parents, even if they are born in the host country and raised in its culture. If we are ever to have peace in this world, we must therefore begin by both acknowledging and healing this grief *and* by doing everything in our power to put a stop to its perpetuation through unresolved grief and trauma and the destruction of human life and our Earth. We must immediately stop violence and war so that the generations to come do not have to bear the emotional and psychological impact of our own wounds and lack of action and foresight. We must stand up for peace, for love, and for everyone's right to belong to this world. Perhaps our grief is the only thing that can reveal the seeds of the change and transformation that are needed. Maybe on the other side of what we have lost lies our great calling to create something new – and better – for all.

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Appendix A: Poetry Centering the Voices of Migrants and Refugees

The poems included below are from the book *Ink Knows No Borders: Poems of the Immigrant and Refugee Experience* (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019). Some are complete, and others are excerpts I have selected to draw attention to the themes of loss, grief, and injustice discussed in this paper. As previously mentioned, in sharing these pieces, I envision the creation of a mosaic of multiple, diverse, and intertwined "truths" and people that complete one other.

First Light

[…]
What is it, to remember nothing, of what one loved?
To have forgotten the faces one first kissed?
They ask if I remember them, the aunts, the uncles,
& I say Yes it's coming back, I say Of course,
when it's No not at all, because when I last saw them
I was three, & the China of my first three years
Is largely make-believe, my vast invented country,
my dream before I knew the word "dream,"
[…]

– Chen Chen (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 6-8)

On Being American

You are seven years old when a grown man screams at you, spitting
knives from crooked purple lips: Go home, fucking Paki.

You are confused because the ethnic slur is inaccurate.

You realize, too young, that racists fail geography but that their
epithets and perverted patriotism can still shatter moments of
your childhood.

You are the last to know that everyone else sees you as Other.

[…]

– Samira Ahmed (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 21-23)

Talks about Race

[…]

I am “other”; it is such
an indistinguishable form, beyond the construct of the proper self.

Sometimes I am asked
if I am Indian, Middle Eastern, or Biracial;

I don’t know what to say to these people
who notice the shape of the eye before its depth
the sound of the tongue before its wisdom
the openness of a palm before its reach

And what to those who call me “African”?
Don’t they know I can count the years spent back home
wishing I knew I was “African”?

And how to cradle and contain the disappointment that is
Rekindled whenever someone does NOT know
my Ethiopia, my Eritrea

I don’t know how to fit, adjust myself within new boundaries –
Nomads like me have no place as home, no way of belonging.

– Mahtem Shiferraw (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 85-86)

Choi Jeong Min

in the first grade i asked my mother permission
to go by frances at school. at seven years old,

i already knew the exhaustion of hearing my name
butchered by hammerhead tongues. already knew

to let my salty gook name drag behind me
in the sand, safely out of sight. in fourth grade

i wanted to be a write & worried
about how to escape my surname – choi

is nothing if not Korean, if not garlic breath,
if not seaweed & sesame & food stamps

during the lean years – could i go by f.j.c.? could i be
paper thin & raceless? Dust jacket & coffee stain,

boneless rumor smoldering behind the curtain
& speaking through an ink-stained puppet?

my father ran through all his possible rechristenings –
ian, isaac, ivan – and we laughed at each one,

knowing his accent would always give him away.
you can hear the pride in my mother's voice

when she answers the phone *this is grace*, & it is
some kind of strange grace she's spun herself,

some lightning made of chain mail, grace is not
her pseudonym, though everyone in my family is a poet.

these are the shields for the names we speak in the dark
to remember our darkness, savage death rites

we still practice in the new world, myths we whisper
to each other to keep warm. my Korean name

is the star my mother cooks into the jjigae
to follow home when I am lost, which is always

in this gray country, this violent foster home
whose streets are paved with shame, this factory yard

riddled with bullies ready to steal your skin
& sell it back to your mother for profit

land where they stuff our throats with soil
& accuse us of gluttony when we learn to swallow it

[…]

– by Franny Choi (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 33-35)

Off-Island Chamorros

My family migrated to California when I was 15 years old.
During the first day at my new high school, the homeroom
teacher asked me where I was from. "The Mariana Islands,"
I answered. He replied: "I've never heard of that place.
Prove it exists." And when I stepped in front of the world map
on the wall, it transformed into a mirror: the Pacific Ocean,
like my body, was split in two and flayed to the margins. I
found Australia, then the Philippines, then Japan. I pointed
to an empty space between them and said: "I'm from this
invisible archipelago." Everyone laughed. And even though
I descend from oceanic navigators, I felt so lost, shipwrecked

on the coast of a strange continent. "Are you a citizen?"

he probed. “Yes. My island, Guam, is a U.S. territory.”
We attend American schools, eat American food, listen
to American music, watch American movies and television,
play American sports, learn American history, dream
American dreams, and die in American wars. “You
speak English well,” he proclaimed, “with almost no
accent.” And isn’t that what it means to be a diasporic
Chamorro: to feel *foreign in a domestic sense.*

Over the last 50 years, Chamorros have migrated to
escape the violent memories of war; to seek jobs, schools,
hospitals, adventure, and love; but most of all, we’ve migrated
for military service, deployed and stationed to bases around
the world. According to the 2010 census, 44,000 Chamorros
live in California, 15,000 in Washington, 10,1000 in Texas,
7,000 in Hawaii, and 70,000 more in every other state
and even Puerto Rico. We are the most “geographically
dispersed” Pacific Islander population within the United
States, and off-island Chamorros now outnumber
our on-island kin, with generations having been born
away from our ancestral homelands, including my daughter.

Some of us will be able to return home for holidays, weddings,
and funerals; others won’t be able to afford the expensive plane
ticket to the Western Pacific. Years and even decades might pass
between trips, and each visit will feel too short. We’ll lose contact
with family and friends, and the island will continue to change
until it becomes unfamiliar to us. And isn’t that, too, what it means
to be a diasporic Chamorro: to feel foreign in your own homeland.

And there’ll be times when we’ll feel adrift, without itinerary
or destination. We’ll wonder: What if we stayed? What if we return?
When the undertow of these questions begins pulling you
out to sea, remember: migration flows through our blood
like the aerial roots of I trongkon nunu. Remember: our ancestors
taught us how to carry our culture in the canoes of our bodies.
Remember: our people, scattered like stars, form new constellations
when we gather. Remember: home is not simply a house,
village, or island; home is an archipelago of belonging.

– Craig Santos Perez (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 67-68)

Muslim Girlhood

I never found myself in any pink aisle. There was no box for me
with glossy cellophane like heat and a neat packet of instructions

in six languages […]
[…] Sometimes, I thought
my father was a god, I loved him that much. And the news thought
this was an impossible thing – a Muslim girl who loved her father.
But what did they know of my heart, or my father
Who drove fifty miles to buy me a doll like a Barbie
Because it looked like me […]

– Leila Chatti (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 36-37)

Immigrant

I am not buckled safely into my seat
I am watching the road unravel
behind us like a ribbon of dust.

Through the back window of my uncle's Datsun
Amman looks like a tender little place
the color of my teddy bear's fur.
Its houses crowded into one another
on its seven parched hills
are the shades of my family's skin –
almond of my mother's brow
wheat of my father's arms
tea-with-cream of my grandmother's palms

We are driving away on the only road to the airport.
We are driving away from this dollhouse town
and my storybook childhood of tree-climbing
and laughter of too many cousins to count.
We are driving away from impending war.

We are driving away
because we can leave
on the magic carpet of our navy blue
US passports that carry us
to safety and no bomb drills
to the place where the president
will make the call to send the planes
into my storybook childhood
over the seven hills
next door to neighbors who will now
become refugees.

We are driving and I
am not safe
driving away from
myself and everything I know

into the great miracle of
a country so large
wars are kept thousands of miles at bay.
My young life is coming undone
on the road behind me
where I know all the names of
trees in Arabic
rumman saru zayzafoon
and I know the spot on each hilltop
where the crimson poppies return every spring
and I know the best bakery to line up for
Ramadan pancakes before breaking the fast.

In the backseat of my uncle's Datsun
I want to float through the window
and into yesterday
when August was just late-afternoon ice cream
and late-night card games
and the crinkle of brown paper and tape
covering copybooks,
fresh as this morning's bread,
ready to receive the school year ahead –
math equations,
poems,
histories of battle.

– Lena Khalaf Tuffaha (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 3-5)

Ethnic Studies

In college, I sit at the back with all the other students of color
and listen as our white peers theorize the hell
out of the oppression that we were born from.
Buzzwords like institutionalized racism class warfare
are sugar on their tongues – sweet and comfortable:
words from a language my community
doesn't even know exists because we're too busy
living the realities of them.

It's one thing to major in Ethnic Studies,
it's another to be the reason
for its existence.
For the white students in my major,
Ethnic Studies is like a free study abroad program
that doesn't require that they bring their baggage with them.
A privilege that is easy for them to close in their textbook
At the end of class.

But study my racial profile until
it exhausts you.
Study how Black looks a lot like
the green light for “stop and frisk.”
How Brown has been made
to look like a much-needed check stop
for any given border. Ask me
what it’s like to have your skin be made to
feel like the nuclear missile we all know
is coming.
And you still won’t know how to sit in the back of a class
and be studied because of how tragic your history is,
as if we weren’t brought in to be dissected,
as if Frogs, Rats and People of Color
can only be understood when you cut them open.

When ethnics study Ethnic Studies it’s not school anymore.
It’s a lesson in survival.
And I’m tired of playing teacher with my oppression.
If I’m not doing it on stage, I’m doing it from the margins of a classroom.
I’m doing it from the margins in my notebook.
Always on the margin of something never the core.
Never asked to be more than what makes me easy
to feel sorry for.

It’s easy to avoid confronting the things that make us
uncomfortable. The things that make us feel guilty.
Who chooses to walk through the warzone
If you were told that you don’t have to?
If you grew up believing that there isn’t one?
If what you don’t know won’t kill you?
Race is the rent I pay for this skin.
But the belief that racism doesn’t exist anymore
is when I feel the foreclosure of this home taking my knees
from right under me.
You can’t claim that racism doesn’t exist
when you’ve never known what it means to survive it.
When you keep looking at the warzone like a teaching moment
you’re not ready to learn the lesson from.
A comfort zone you’re not willing to sacrifice.

It’s easy to avoid confronting the things that make us
uncomfortable. The things that make us feel guilty.
But comfort is what kills us in the long run.
Comfort is sitting down when you should be on your feet.
It’s staying quiet when you should be speaking up.
It’s speaking too much, when you should be listening.

It's putting up borders for safety, and not
bridges for healing.
Comfort is celebrating diversity, but
never discussing it.
As if a black president is enough.
As if a heritage month is enough.
As if Ethnic Studies is enough.
As if this poem is enough.

Comfort is sitting in the front of the class
forgetting that we're sitting right behind you.
Wanting to tell you that the warzone still exists.
Wanting to tell you that
this isn't comfortable
for any of us.

– Terisa Siagatonu (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 99-101)

self-portrait with no flag

i pledge allegiance to my
homies to my mother's
small & cool palms to
the gap between my brother's
two front teeth & to
my grandmother's good brown
hands gathering my bare feet
in her lap

i pledge allegiance to the
group text i pledge allegiance
to laughter & to all the boys
i have a crush on i pledge
allegiance to my spearmint plant
to my split ends to my grandmother's
brain & gray left eye

i come from two failed countries
& i give them back i pledge
allegiance to no land no border
cut by force to draw blood i pledge
allegiance to no government no
collection of white men carving up
the map with their pens

i choose the table at the waffle house
with all my loved ones crowded

into the booth i choose the shining
dark of our faces through a thin sheet
of smoke glowing dark of our faces
slick under layers of sweat i choose
the world we make with our living
refusing to be unmade by what surrounds
us i choose us gathered at the lakeside
the light glinting off the water & our
laughing teeth & along the living
dark of our hair & this is my only country

– Safia Elhillo (Vecchione & Raymond, 2019, pp. 138-139)

Websites of Poets (in order of poems)

chenchenwrites.com

samiraahmed.com

mahtem-shiferraw.com

frannychoi.com

craigsantosperez.com

leilachatti.com

lenakhalaftuffaha.com

terisasiagatonu.com

safia-mafia.com

Appendix B: Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy Activity - The Pen and the Path

(Atkins & Snyder, 2018, pp. 145-150)

Purpose and goals of the activity

To connect with nature as a way of knowing and as a source of wisdom for moving through challenges that arise in personal and professional life.

Materials needed

- Journal
- Writing instrument
- Access to the outdoors
- Printed writing prompts and poetic structure

Time and space requirements

This session can be completed within 1.5 hours but may be expanded or contracted as desired.

Appropriate clientele

This activity requires abstract thinking and therefore is not developmentally appropriate for young children. It may be used in therapeutic settings with adolescents or adults in individual, group or couples work. It would also be appropriate to use for the purposes of professional or organizational development.

Appropriate timing

This activity is appropriate to support clients during any challenge but is especially potent in times of conflict, ambiguity, stagnation, transition or change.

Step-by-step description of the activity

The following process is referred to as the GRACE model (Snyder 2014) and has been successfully utilized in expressive arts work in both therapeutic and organizational settings. Modify as needed to accommodate differences in ability.

- Grounding (5 min.)
    - Beginning inside, support clients in making connections between their physical being and the natural world.
    - Example:
        - Welcome and brief orientation (introductions if needed).
        - Ring a chime or singing bowl.
        - Opening poem: *When I Am Among the Trees* by Mary Oliver.
        - Grounding breath and embodiment: “Like the trees, imagine taking in nutrients from the earth beneath you through the soles of your feet. With each inhale, scoop these resources up your body with your hands, extending your arms overhead. Imagine these resources filling you from your toes, through your feet and ankles, up your calves and thighs, your hips and stomach, your chest, neck, and head, your arms and fingertips extended above you now like the branches of a tree. With each exhale, imagine that the wind comes and takes away what is no longer needed.” (Continue breathing, movement and visualization for the

remainder of the five minutes.) Encourage participants to add their own silent language in the form of an affirmation (e.g., "I have everything I need," "I am rooted but flexible").

- Reflection (15 min.)
    - (3 min.) Instruct participants to find a comfortable place to sit with their journal and writing instruments.
    - (10 min.) Provide the following prompt: "For the next ten minutes, I invite you to write continuously about the challenge that is most present in your life. Use rich, descriptive language to describe the challenge, its context and its impact on your whole being and the world around you. No one will see your writing. Be as honest as possible. All thoughts and feelings are welcome on the canvas of your journal. When you hear the bell, bring your writing to a close, and I will provide your next prompt."
    - (2 min.) After ten minutes of writing is up, ring the chime, bell or bowl and remind participants to bring their writing to a close. Then, provide the following prompt: "Ask a question, that if answered, would help you to navigate your challenge in the way that you wish."
- Art and nature immersion (25 min.)
    - (5 min.) Transition from inside to outside, providing the following prompt: "Now we will go for a walk with our questions. As we move from inside to outside, carry your journal in a different way than you normally would. Go slowly and pay attention to both your physical being and to the environment. We will gather at (name a close-by place/ landmark—e.g., the big oak tree)."
    - (20 min.) Once participants are gathered, provide the following instructions: "For the next 20 minutes, I invite you to continue walking slowly in nature. Pay attention to the phenomenal world around you. Just be present and if, in the spirit of Mary Oliver, you wish to 'stay awhile' in one place or with a certain nature being you encounter, please do so. When you hear the drum (or other way of calling the group back), please return to this tree. You may leave your journals here while you go on your walk or take them with you, but this is a time for walking and paying attention, not for writing."
- Connection (15 min.)
    - After all participants have returned to the meeting place, instruct them to find a comfortable place within hearing distance of you to write for the next 10–15 minutes.
    - Provide the following prompts one by one (or have typed and give to participants). Allow about two minutes per prompt:
        - "What stood out most to you on your walk? Describe this using rich descriptive sensory-based language."
        - "What surprised you on your walk?"
        - "What challenges, obstacles or choices did you face on your walk? How did you navigate them?"
        - "Who or what did you meet on your walk that felt like a resource or an ally?"
        - "How was this walk different from your normal walk?"
        - "What does your walk and experience on the path have to say to your initial challenge or question?"
- Expression (30 min.)
    - (15 min) Poetic response: Instruct participants that the next 15 minutes will be used for giving expression to their experience through poetry.
    - Example poetry prompt:
        - "Underline words or phrases in your poetry that are most meaningful for you."

- "Using your own language from your walk, create a poem of your own structure or use the following 'I am' format" (have pre-printed for participants).
    - Line 1: I am… Include a color.
        - Example: "I am the blue sky behind the clouds."
    - Line 2: I am… Include a texture.
        - Example: "I am the bark of the sturdy oak."
    - Line 3: I am… Include a sound.
        - Example: "I am the leaves crunching underfoot."
    - Line 4: I am… Include a smell.
        - Example: "I am the smell of sweet grass and coming spring."
    - Line 5: Connect back to challenge.
        - Example: "I am here through the ravaging storm of my loss."
    - Line 6: Refer back to question.
        - "You ask how to walk now, through crippling grief."
    - Line 7: Bring in resource or ally.
        - "I am the caterpillar whom you saw only when you allowed yourself to crawl."
    - Line 8: Bring in surprise.
        - "You gasped when we met, knowing that wings wait inside me."
- (15 min.) Sharing: Invite participants to share their poem with you or with the group and the action they wish to take moving forward.

Processing suggestions

As time allows, invite participants into a discussion of the process outlined above. What did they learn about themselves and how they have been approaching their challenge? What, if anything, do they wish to do differently? What help, support or resource do they need for making this shift?

Personal commentary

Often in response to life's challenges we bring our logical minds and our strong efforts to overcome them. When our attempts fail, we can feel weary, demoralized and at a loss as to how to move forward. This activity acknowledges and contextualizes our challenges, but, in the spirit of decentering, moves us into a new space where we contact the phenomenal world around us through our senses and by moving through space in a way different from how we usually do. Through this process, we shift our attention from our internal problem-centered world and stagnated thinking to the natural environment, a living example of creativity. In doing so, we may be returned to knowing and mobilizing our own resources for navigating the challenges we face.