From a Shattered Self to an Integrated Self: Analysing Autobiographies of People with Lived Refugee Experience

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Abstract

This paper analyzes a selection of publicly available autobiographical accounts of Canadians with lived refugee experiences to explore the idea of an integrated identity. The theory of identity in this paper draws on Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridization. The stories of youth with refugee experiences show that xenophobic and racist encounters in the host state have a shattering effect and force them to reconsider their identity. This triggered state could be, and often is, mitigated by constructing a hybridized identity in a *neo-third space*. The neo-third space is the working through of the shattered self, which involves critical self-reflection and deeply examining the place of the questioned identity marker. By moving away from binary understandings of subjectivity, the refugee engages in the decolonization of their identity. Biographical accounts provide insights as to how the neo-third space operates for refugee youth through artistic expression via storytelling and songwriting. Cultural production becomes a tangible manifestation of the neo-third space for healthier and successful Canadians with lived refugee experiences.

Key Words: Identity, Hybridity, Refugee, Crisis, Integration, Canadian

Since 2018, Canada has been one of the world's leading countries for resettlement (BBC, 2019; UNHCR, 2019). Over 40% of this refugee population is underage (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). Very little research addresses the identity formation process of this growing and diverse population of students (Parker, 2021). In this article, I explore the theoretical underpinnings of Canadian resettled refugee youth subjectivity, using the work of Homi Bhabha (1994) on hybridity to better understand identity development, especially when encountering racist and xenophobic reactions. I propose the concept of a *neo-third space* as the mental site of working through identity crisis and related questions about identity. For Canadians originating from the global south who have spoken publicly about their refugee experiences in the last few decades, this neo-third space has manifested materially in the form of personal stories and songs. I argue that it is this working through process that allows young refugees to move beyond formal recognition and participate in the forging of an affective and generative citizenship—a transformation of self that makes them participants in social transformation. This article first situates refugee subjectivity in the larger literature of identity theory as it pertains to education, before moving to an analysis of particular refugee narratives.

Identity

This article examines recent scholarly work related to the process of identity formation in relation to the psychological well-being and adjustment of refugees (Ertorer, 2014) in host states like Canada. Coulmas (2019) explains that identity can be supplemented by a list of descriptive predicates: additive, collective, dissociative, cultural, fictitious, linguistic, moral, online, political, gender, stylistic, social, racial, and professional, to name a few. Rouland (2022) introduces readers to

the concept of *academic identity*, which impacts how students navigate the school environment and effects educational outcomes. Research shows that ethnic identity (including beliefs and practices) plays a significant role in academic achievement and mental health (Hughes et al., 2009; Rivas-Drake, 2014).

Legal Status Impacts on Refugee Identity

Many of the traits and characteristics attributed to refugees result from multinational organizations and policies that impose an identity on exiled individuals. Refugees are defined by international law as individuals who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a fear of persecution for reasons such as race, religion, nationality, or political opinion (UNHCR, 1967, p. 3). The term *refugee* is socially and politically constructed based on three criteria: an identity of difference; displacement; and a perceived threat to life.[1] While Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights," such recognition is contingent on the individual belonging to a nation;[2] political entities, nationally or internationally, understand refugees or asylum seekers as *outside the norm*. These parameters force individuals outside the protection that a nation-state affords its citizens.

The media further complicates popular understandings by frequently conflating asylum seekers with humanitarian crises, portraying refugees as helpless and dependent, and connecting challenges to the individual's condition rather than to systemic inefficiencies (Tsakiris, 2021). Teachers may then inherit these deficiency perspectives (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017), leading them to hold low expectations of students who come from warzones or have different linguistic or cultural backgrounds (Milner, 2010). Asylum seekers' status, and lack of access to, or understanding of, the host country's institutions and ideologies, can quickly translate to frustration, social withdrawal, and other depressive responses. Academic research lacks theoretical frameworks able to provide coherent understanding of shifting identities and their impact on the lives of adolescent refugees.

To address this gap in the theoretical literature, I problematize the concept of the identity crisis that is attributed to adolescence (Erikson, 1968; A. Freud, 1958; Winnicott, 2005). Adolescence is the transitional life stage between childhood and adulthood, from the onset of puberty until self-sufficiency, often cited as between 11 and 20 years old. An adolescent's identity involves multiple and often shifting positions in terms of markers like legal status, gender, social class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, dis/ability, and more (Noori, 2020). Identity theory suggests that individuals organize identity meanings, enact them in social situations, and respond to identity-relevant feedback (Burke & Stets, 2009; McCall & Simmons, 1966; Stets & Serpe, 2013; Stryker & Burke, 2000). For refugees who must quickly take on adult responsibilities to survive, the adolescent life stage is cut short (Shakya et. al. 2014). This article examines biographical accounts to explore the effects that these markers have on identity formation.

Refugee Narrative Selection Criteria

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[1] Altogether, another 71.1 million are internally displaced people, who fit the definition of refugee but have not crossed a nation-state border, although many have left their homes (UNHCR, 2023). Identifying people according to such parameters is interrelated with several highly politicized questions: Who can legitimately make claims for protection? Against which dangers will protection be offered? Who provides this protection? What are the terms and conditions of the protection? And whose voice is heard in debates stirred by these questions? (Casas-Cortes et al., 2014, p. 17)
[2] In 1989, the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Its Article 7 stipulates that a child is entitled to have a legal identity by being registered, to have a name, and a nationality.

This research examined publicly available biographical accounts describing lived refugee experience over the last 50 years, authored by people originating from the global south who resettled in Canada. In order to inform educators and policy makers on the strengths and challenges related to identity formation, the accounts selected were ones that described the writer's adolescence in a Canadian context.

Methodology

In recent years, the field of critical education has experienced a growing thematic concern with the socio-cultural aspects of forced migration. While most diaspora or migration studies focus on quantitative demographic shifts, education has shown a renewed interest in qualitative methodologies. A narrative approach to migrants' lived experiences and the use of autobiographical narratives remains relatively unexplored (Avila-Tàpies & Domínguez-Mujica, 2014). Personal narratives provide insights into the emotional, relational, and socio-cultural aspects of international forced migration, and generate alternative kinds of knowledge that can more convincingly explain the dynamics of subjectivity after resettlement in Canada (Noori, 2020; Sapam & Jijina, 2020).

There is a slowly growing number of publicly available biographies of Canadians that meet this study's criteria (Noori, 2020). The three analyzed here are *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter* by Carmen Aguirre (2012), *A Thousand Farewells* by Nahlah Ayed (2013), and *Ru* by Kim Thúy (2009). To complement these memoirs, video-blogs (vlogs) from the online archives of Concordia University's *Mapping Memories* projects are analysed. These brief (three to ten minute) vlogs are less edited and more unrehearsed than the written accounts. The speakers are closer to the time of their adolescent and refugee experiences.

The life stories here were chosen to help understand young people in Canada whose families escaped modern wars. With the exception of recent Ukrainian asylum seekers, the vast majority of refugees in Canada originate from the global south. The post–World War II era was chosen as that is when the UN conventions defined the figure of the refugee beyond Europe.

Biography provides detailed information about the life experiences, thoughts, and values that shape refugee youth's understandings and choices, as well as their adjustments and personal transformative processes (Avila-Tàpies & Domínguez-Mujica, 2014; Noori, 2020). Selimos (2015) explains that a narrative methodological approach "captures the complexity of young immigrants' lives, their biographical agency, their complex social development processes and the emotional depth of their migration and settlement experiences" (p. 175). Using edited and published biographical accounts also safeguards refugees from being further triggered, allowing subjects to disclose information that they are most comfortable sharing.

With the rise of online video sharing platforms, academics are starting to engage with vlogs as a tool for creating and collecting data (Chen, Yan, & Smith, 2021; Miller, 2012). Viewers consider vlog creators to be more credible, authentic, and relatable (Audrezet, et. al. 2020). Scholars have examined their use in language learning (van den Berg, et. al. 2021) and the development of digital literacy among refugee children and youth (Kendrick, et. al, 2022). Here, the use of vlogs helps to understand the subjectivity of young war refugees.

The key questions guiding the analysis are: (1) When and how do youth with refugee experience become aware of their social identity? (2) Does questioning their social identity create a sense or feeling of *crisis* for former refugees? (3) What impact does self-questioning have on their sense of self and way of life? and (4) What meanings do they make about who they are, based on this impactful situation? Each of the accounts are read through the lenses of postcolonial theory, as outlined in the following sections.

Postcolonial Framework

The *UN Declaration* and settler colonial states like Canada generally uphold the superiority of the territorial Westphalian state over Indigenous understandings that emphasize relationships and interdependencies of various actors, including the natural and spiritual dimensions of the land (Bauder & Mueller, 2021; Deloria, 1996). The admission of immigrants into this country rests on the assumption that the settler state has the right to control who enters its territory and who can become a member of its territorial polity. Meanwhile, Indigenous communities continue to be excluded from decision-making about immigrant selection (Bauder & Breen, 2023; Noori, 2024). Resettlement involves drawing "a sharp line between those who belong and those who do not, those who have the right to determine the identity of a place and those who should accept it, adapt to it, or leave" (Coulmas, 2019, pp. 59-60). The history of colonialism and slavery in Canada informs the rhetoric of racism and xenophobia that continues to manifest in Canadian society (Austin, 2010). Decolonizing refugee identity requires centering the voices and experiences of refugees.

Postcolonial writers offer theories that challenge long-standing essentialist or dichotomous understandings of people's ethnic and cultural identities and acknowledge the diverse forms of knowledge and life journeys that inform refugee subjectivity. Bhabha (1994) introduced the notion of the *third space*—a metaphorical location where hybrid identities for individuals and cultures are constituted (p. 36). For adolescent refugees settling in Canada, hybridity requires them to navigate their native identities alongside dominant white settler identities. This can be particularly challenging for refugees originating from the global south, whose race, cultures, and ethnicities are often portrayed as oppositional to dominant Western ways (Said, 1978).

Refugees are identified as *other* by their legal status and as *outsiders* due to their foreignness. According to Bhabha (1994), "[T]he interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (p. 4). Bhabha provides an alternative to reinscribed dichotomies with his idea of hybridity—a mixing of practices between colonizers and colonized. Hybridization occurs both in the self and in society (p. 163). In other words, identity as a development process simultaneously occurs at the microlevel (newcomer refugee or settler) and at the macrolevel (Canadian nation-state). Stuart Hall (1990) presents identity formation as *production*: "never complete, always in process and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (p. 222). In a pluralist society such as Canada, decolonizing refugee subjectivity means moving away from rigid, binary understandings and requires an inward foregrounding of identity. Biographical accounts of former refugees provide a glance into this kind of deep reflection about the self.

Adolescent refugees are a unique group, whose individuality is determined not only by the transitory life stage in which they find themselves, but also by transitory living conditions. They are *in-between*: old world and new world, native and settler, childhood and adulthood. They may be part of the broader social realm of youth and may perform in similar ways to the dominant adolescent settler population, but their *newness* to Western society sets them apart.

Erikson (1965) identifies adolescence by the conflict of "identity vs. role confusion" (p. 253). On one side there are those who are "identity confused" because they cannot make a commitment and express anxiety about their uncertainty. On the other, there are those who have "identity achievement," whereby their adolescent exploration leads to strongly held norms, occupational choices, and beliefs (Erikson, 1965, p. 254). The mental manifestation of two conflicting ideas must be resolved or integrated adequately for positive mental health. A *psychosocial moratorium* allows adolescents to explore various markers before permanently settling on who they want to be (e.g., what they are associated with, occupations, fads, trends to follow). The challenges for communities who are othered is that either their identity is disregarded by the state, and/or they are given a

"negative" identity, one in opposition to the dominant identity (Erikson, 1965; Erikson, 1968; Syed & Fish, 2018).

Combining Erikson's insights with those of Bhabha, I put forth the concept of the *neo-third space* as a mental place where the integration of various aspects of self-identity or markers (i.e., race, gender, ethnicity, etc.) occurs. This *neo-* or new and modified metaphorical location takes into account the contemporary contextual complexities of forced displacement and identity crisis along the life-space journey. This *third space* is neither just inherited cultural concepts of who one ought to be, based in blood relations to ancestral lands, nor an essentialist and assimilationist adoption of the practices of the dominant culture found in the resettled society. It is rather an imaginative space in which identity is continually renegotiated, creating the strength to navigate continued challenges. Bhabha's version reifies the "world before us" and fixes "persons and cultures in essentialized time-space units" (Thomassen, 2014, p. 8; Zhou & Pilcher, 2018, p. 1). Instead, in the *neo-third space,* the subject plays an active role in negotiating identity markers, becoming comfortable with possibilities and the discourse of multiplicity as a natural part of development. This allows refugees to rid themselves of the high levels of anxiety associated with an unresolved identity crisis. And as a space for mental working through that is dynamic, complicated, messy, and tangibly evident in cultural production, this neo-third space liberates the mind and being, individually and communally, to allow more authentic engagements in exploring self and other with respect to any marker, unrestricted by expectations and norms.

Trauma Intersects Identity

A growing body of literature indicates that an identity crisis left unaddressed by the individual can result in anxiety (Erikson, 1965), distress (Berman et al., 2020), further trauma (Ertorer, 2014; Merrill et al., 2016), and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Scott et al., 2014). When trauma happens, the psyche represses a barrage of stimuli by pushing the details of the event into the unconscious to prevent its own collapse (Blum, 2001; S. Freud, 1916/1989). Caruth (2014) explains that trauma "is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (p. 4). Trauma has the potential to challenge the self and identity development.

Refugees' autobiographical accounts provide insights into the manifestation of trauma related to the question of subjectivity after resettlement, as well as methods of working through, where protective factors are developed and employed. This article works to highlight the strength and capacity of refugee adolescents to employ self-directed, inherited mechanisms of strength, making them independent of external actors for their psychosocial survival.

Data and Analysis

The following section highlights excerpts from the publicly available life stories of refugees who resettled in Canada, in order to demonstrate some of the key elements of the theoretical position of integrated identity, constructed within the neo-third space.

Life Stories

Carmen Aguirre is a refugee from Chile who travels back and forth to Canada from Latin America. She describes her alienation in both Canada and Latin America: "I understood something: I didn't exist. I didn't exist in the cousin's life, or in this country [Chile], or in the exile countries of

Bolivia or Canada. I didn't exist anywhere anymore. It was that simple" (Aguirre, 2012, p. 73). Her emotional association with statelessness is melancholic. During the years of her adolescence, Carmen does not have the opportunity—in terms of time, physical and mental space—to explore herself outside of her family's commitment to politics in Chile.[3] Since she does not feel safe in any country, her identity crisis remains and proves emotionally devastating.

Carmen turns to storytelling and performance to bring her identity crisis, her shattered sense of self and belonging, to audiences. She elaborates on working through the mental challenges: "But the creation of art is always a risk, creatively and personally, and the artist is often humiliated, and I have always felt fear while developing a project, which usually has been a sign that I'm on the right path" (Aguirre, 2012, p. 275). She employs various forms of storytelling, including writing her memoir, creating theatre productions, and engaging with the public through storytelling events.

Breakfast Culture

Thúy, a refugee from Vietnam, resettles in Montreal after living in a Malay refugee camp. From her story, readers learn that the way classmates or teachers respond to unconventional or alternative ways of being can have long-lasting repercussions. Thúy describes teachers questioning Vietnamese children about the kind of breakfasts they had; she responds: "I told her: soup, vermicelli, pork. She asked me again, more than once, miming waking up, rubbing her eyes and stretching. But my reply was the same, with a slight variation: rice instead of vermicelli" (Thúy, 2009, p. 106). The teachers compare Thúy's eating habits to other boat children[4] and find out that "The other Vietnamese children gave similar descriptions." However, the teachers distrust the children and "called home then to check the accuracy of our answers with our parents" (p. 106). Even after, the teachers do not admit to any wrongdoing or compensate in any way for making the refugee students feel self-conscious and even embarrassed of their traditional food choices. Thúy explains the long-term effect of internalizing the shattering event: "As time went on, we no longer started our day with soup and rice. To this day, I haven't found a substitute. So, it's very rare that I have breakfast" (Thúy, 2009, p. 106). After this shattering experience, the young refugee chooses to abandon her Vietnamese cultural practice of having a traditional breakfast, and does not reintegrate it into her daily routine in adulthood.

Songwriting

Another youth, Narcycist, formulates his subjectivity in light of the 9-11 attacks, using hip-hop to articulate his existential conflicts. As an Arab Muslim originating from war-torn Iraq, and a bilingual Canadian living in Montréal, his music and lyrics address his experiences and the multiplicity of his identity. In his song "Prince of Poets," Narcycist spits: "My first-hand experience/ My second-class citizen/ Third-person verse/ Fourth I'm an immigrant…" (Alsalman, 2014). Arabs and Muslims living in the global north publicly and politically symbolize living in between dichotomies, often in conflict with Orientalist perceptions (Said, 1978). Narcycist articulates the inner turmoil he felt due to this schism: "It's who am I? Where do I stand? Why do I stand here? Do

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[3] Carmen and her sister join their mother on the trip back to their native land, Chile. The family participates, supports, and strategizes with other revolutionaries to dismantle Pinochet's dictatorship in what is known as the "Return Plan". Many who participated in the Return Plan smuggled arms, plotted against military dictatorships, aided and abetted resistance fighters, and stood in solidarity with protestors against unjust authoritarian regimes – all considered criminal acts in Latin America at that time.

[4] Boat people refers to the refugees who fled Vietnam by boat or ship during and just at the end of the Vietnam war.

I really have to constantly defend my religion to people? Do I constantly have to defend my land to people?" He stresses that his music is politically driven because he is trying to rap out his frustration and his desire to link seemingly oppositional markers of his identity through his chosen art form (Alsalman, 2014).

Narcycist develops his ability to articulate his revulsion toward war in his native Iraq, racism in the Western media, and his own emotional upset. He says, "I've also learned to channel more human emotions into my music. When I went solo, I made an album about growing up as a human being" (Alsalman, 2014). His lyrics demand greater empathy and understanding from his listeners, because he taps into the core commonalities of the human experience—humanizing the refugee identity crisis, making it relatable.

The Sound of Music

Meryem, a female Algerian Muslim who came to Canada at the age of thirteen, tries to reconcile her memories of her native land ravaged by civil war, and the alienation she experiences in Montréal due to her socio-economic status, through her music. She admits, "My [musical] style is still very much influenced by where I grew up, the Oriental sounds" (Saci, 2014). She fuses these sounds from her North African roots with Western melodies: "So even if I'm singing the blues or R&B or hip-hop or I'm singing any kind of style, you still have that signature note or style that reminds you she isn't just a Canadian singer." By combining sounds, styles, and lyrics from different continents, Meryem developed a unique voice of hope and possibility (MacLellan, 2016). Through this kind of hybrid art, refugees publicly showcase the discriminatory effects of dominant representations of their identity as "desperate," while introducing a new culture that is evolving through the process of hybridization. Torn between their past and present lives, these young artists do not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; they work to renew the past, refiguring it as a contingent in-between space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present (Bhabha, 2013, p. 109).

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**Analysis of Neo-Third Space Model**

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Figure 1 presents a visualization of my neo-third space model, which amalgamates the ideas of the third space and identity crisis. This circular model of life experience provides space for the interconnection of identity and trauma that refugee subjects demonstrate. When a particular identity marker (like race, religion, or ethnicity) that the young person believes to be an undeniable part of their true self is targeted, insulted, or attacked, what I call "a shattering of the self," occurs. Take the case of Narcycist, the Arab Muslim Canadian who expresses anger for having to defend his people, religion, and ancestral land in response to media attacks in the West. For him, the shattering of the self occurs in terms of his religious and ethnic identity. Narcycist describes it as trauma: "It's not really something that you can really put into words" (Alsalman, 2014). Writing and presenting his experiences through rap allows him to work through the fragmentation caused by the mismatch of who he identifies as and what the dominant society propagates about people who share his ethnic and religious background. This work allows him to re-integrate the markers of a Muslim or an Arab.

Working through trauma's aftereffects involve dealing with the wound it creates. Faced with the shattering of the self, fragments of the survivor's psyche, personality, and other facets of subjectivity must reintegrate homogenously for generative and curative results. Adolescent refugees must decide which identity markers are worthy of what level of attention and attachment, as their beliefs about identity evolve. Here, deep reflection is needed. An integrated self suggests

an ability to trek back and forth, symbolically and pragmatically, through an often-mystifying chaos of identity markers in the neo-third space.

Figure 1

Making of an Integrated Identity
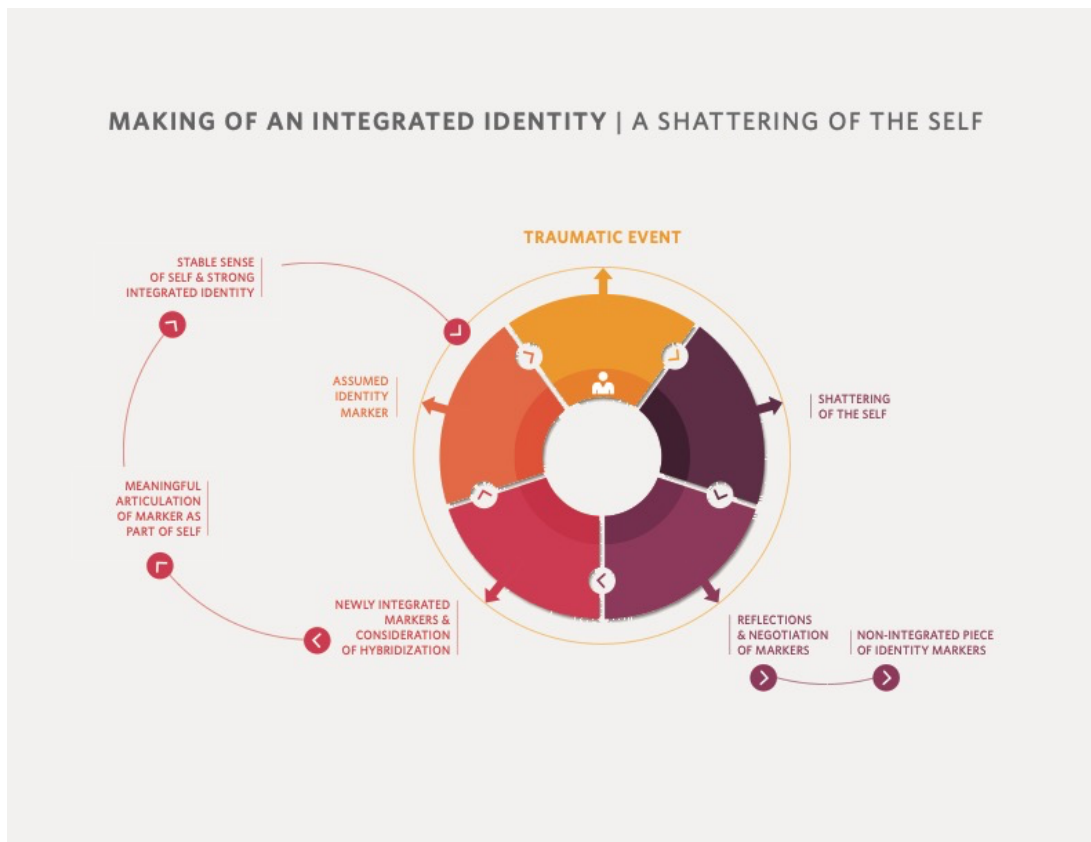
> *Note.* A visual aid to explain the development of a healthier identity after a threat to the refugee's sense of self and belonging.

      Over the decades Thúy, who was unable to find an alternative to the traditional Vietnamese breakfast, works through the pain of rejection that was inflicted on her by her teacher when her family initially arrived in Canada. She goes on to own a Vietnamese restaurant in Montréal, and writes a cookbook that includes her family's recipes (Thúy, 2019; Rogers, 2019). The identity crisis that manifested in her rejection of a traditional breakfast is resolved with a new creation, a cookbook. This collective sharing of cuisine from diverse backgrounds brings her traditional foods to the Canadian public table. A unique personal and national integration takes place.

      For Carmen, therapy, theatre school, and writing are the spaces where she eventually comes to express the most authentic version of herself. Her identity crisis is resolved in adulthood through various therapeutic practices, including scripting her memoir. Describing the response to her autobiography, Carmen expresses the success of her working through:

> … heart overflowing with the faces of those girls, the jailed men, the Chileans across the country, the readers who let me know that telling this secret story—now part of broader Canadian mythology—was worth it... And that the struggle continues. Because history is never over. And we make history. (Aguirre, 2012, p. 284)

Carmen explains the importance of her story not just to the Chilean refugee community, but to the history of people seeking asylum in Canada. Her account exposes the strengths of communities often portrayed as victims, and in the process inscribes them into the meaning of Canadian belonging.

Similarly, Meryem's songwriting invites and engages critical reflection, expressing the importance of a healthy self that requires physical and emotional well-being in a safe environment. In her song "Good Life," she says: "All the people I care for in da place/ Healthy food, healthy minds and we feelin' safe/ No more wars to be fightin' no more money to chase/ Love's the only power that we praise" (Saci, 2017).

In each case shared in this article, the integration of identity markers happened well beyond adolescence. Each individual experienced a shattering of the self earlier in life, and to have healthy resolution they made use of language tools to articulate their identity crisis, as well as the process of integrating (or not) the fragments of the shattered self.

Conclusion

For the adolescent refugee, the process of identity formation is a difficult balancing act between cultural values, depending on the particular identity markers they accumulate through their travels. Research on Canadian narratives confirms that older adolescents gain a greater sense of agency by mixing traditional and Western descriptions of self (Noori, 2020). To be resilient requires bringing painful life experiences and identity markers from the periphery to the centre; that is, making new meaning from the original trauma.

The adolescent refugee subject negotiates multiple identity markers that relate to race, ethnicity, and age. Bhabha (1994) explains that the "disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid… between mother culture and alien culture" (p. 159). The neo-third space I propose is not "simply a positive expression of cultural hybridity" (Thomassen, 2014, p. 8). Rather, it is a vigorous mental and even material condition of critical reflection, ever changing the formative re-structuring properties of identity liminalities. As a psychosocial process, a neo-third space offers a place for an encounter between a multiplicity of personal identifications of undefined and curious in-betweenness.

Researchers and practitioners can learn much from asylum seekers who voice their experiences and emotions regarding identity formation through art. Those with lived refugee experiences and who participate in cultural production, "move across, transgress and possibly erase borders," creating sounds and tales that bridge multiple identities and spaces (Lewis, 2004, p.1). In this manner, the dichotomous colonial understandings that predominate in the literature on immigrant identity can be challenged.

Forced migration impacts the psyche with contradictory ideas and identity fragments. While these markers are presented as oppositional in policy and media, they may feel harmonious and inclusive for the individual. Hyphenated identity can only partly bridge socio-political identity; the psychological integration of the refugee and their acculturation in society requires a more nuanced theory to capture the in-betweenness, messiness, and painfulness of the process toward positive and healthy integration. Figure 1 provides a visual of an individual's subjectivity when faced with questions of identity and/or a shattering of the self. Anything from a violent social encounter or

negative media representation of a group affiliation can initiate the shattering of the presumed identity. The individual may then choose to either distance themselves from such a marker or continue to hold it. If the identity marker remains, it must be reintegrated in a meaningful way to contribute to a stronger integrated subjectivity.

My emphasis on the development of identity integration from markers and shattered pieces of the self has three main theoretical implications. First, an alternative to the dichotomous subjectivity is to build a web of connections between seemingly oppositional self-identifiers that can give the individual a sense of comfort and confidence in who they are. Meaningful hybridization requires a deep reconsideration of inherited or presumed identity.

Second, this article adds to the growing body of scholarly work on the ways that education and educative practices are complicit in producing and governing citizenship, creating inequivalent power relations (Sanya, et al., 2018), and defining culturally appropriate representations of self and diversity. Because refugee students *feel* foreign, highlighting their differences, even when done by well-meaning teachers, can adversely impact their daily lives. This can promote the development of a negative academic identity and disconnection with positive engagement as Canadian citizens.

Third, it must be underscored that subjectivity is exceptionally complex for refugees, who are constantly facing varying media, legal, and political representations of their states of origin and cultures. The shattering of the self can lead to melancholic and depressive states if a young person is unable to engage in a process of critical or meaningful reframing with the identity markers that they carry. Adolescents must be given time and space to seriously reflect on and manage their shattered selves and stories. Having Canadian citizenship or a passport is not enough for these young people to feel a strong sense of belonging. Their identity as Canadian is shattered by assumptions of unbelonging, often due to ethnic and racial markers (evidenced by skin tone, eye shape, clothing, cooking, accents, etc.) (Creese, 2019). Those who are perceived to belong constitute an "imagined community" of white settlers (Anderson, 1991). Borders are delineated beyond the territorial and seep into the psyche, reproducing social, cultural and mental boundaries between "us" and "them" (Brah, 1996, p.198). Refugee stories demonstrate that borders of the nation are also discursive and imaginary, constituted through recognizing some bodies as strange and out of place (Ahmed, 2000, p.98).

Developing artistic expression and linguistic capabilities and experimenting with sound and language in safe and responsive spaces, allows for healing beyond the shattering of the self. Exploration in the neo-third space can make for a new, stronger sense of self, where the refugee story becomes part of the Canadian mosaic of history and diversity, forging a citizenship that is not merely formal but affective and generative. Refugees' discursive and imaginary expression bring the othered subject to a place of belonging to this nation-state, strengthening civic engagement and citizenship through inclusion and diversity.

Educators across all levels of schooling are encouraged to have culturally responsive teaching practices to better engage their students (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; Johnston et al., 2017), and to consider the use of non-conventional therapeutic methods of healing and self-articulation such as storytelling and songwriting. Policymakers, teachers, and other stakeholders have a vested interest in better understanding the processes of subjectivity, as research has documented that identity plays a significant role in both academic achievement and more engaged citizenship.

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