Crossing Borders:

A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of International Graduate Students

by

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Abstract

In response to the global needs for nursing faculty, and nurses at leadership and advanced clinical practice roles, aspiring students from different countries come to Canada for their graduate nursing education because of the positive reputation and the numerous perceived advantages of the education system. However, many international students come from different social, historical, political, cultural, and educational backgrounds that deeply influence their learning experiences in Canada. Working from a space of the inquirer's personal experience, the aim of this inquiry was to understand the experiences of international graduate nursing students across time, place, and social contexts. The focus was to unravel the following puzzles: What stories across social, historical, political, cultural, and educational borders shaped our identities? How did our experience in Canada shift our lived stories? Four participants were invited from a Master of Nursing program at a university in Western Canada. Attending to relational ethics, I lived relationally in series of conversations alongside participants on a virtual platform for over a year. Conversations were recorded and transcribed verbatim. My narrative beginnings, participants' conversations, artifacts shared, and my detailed field notes formed the basis for our narrative accounts. Multiplicity of borders and identity making, border making, border crossing, and border dwelling were the four sustaining threads that resonated across our accounts. These four threads provided insights into our lived experience and our shifting identities across borders. Our stories offered insights into the tensions and the day-to-day challenges that international students face during their learning in Canada. Being aware and acknowledging these experiences could be a step towards addressing the issues of inequity and exclusion in higher education institutions.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Olabisi Oluremi Oyelana. No part of this thesis has been previously published. The inquiry project of which this thesis is a part received ethics approval from the University Research Ethics Review Board, “A narrative inquiry into the experiences of international graduate students at a Western Canadian University,” No. Pro00101623, July 23, 2020

Dedication

To all those living the story of the margin.

Acknowledgement

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I extend my deepest appreciation to the inquiry participants for their time and for sharing their stories with me. They helped me see my own experiences in profoundly new ways. Finally, I acknowledge the support of my family and friends, particularly my father, whose word have been the force that encouraged me to cross borders.

Table of Contents

Figures

Prologue

Curiosity, Initiative, and Learning in a Hard Way

I live in relational stories, and thinking with identity making relationally, my grandmother, *Yeye* was fundamental to many of my life lessons which often took place in her kitchen[1]. She was never tired of addressing my endless questions and curiosity. She seemed to have answers to my queries but on some occasions, she would guide me to find answers to my puzzles. *Yeye* usually cooked with her black clay pot, and I can still smell the delicious aroma of her foods as I reminisce. I was amazed that she never used or relied on any recipe, yet the food would usually taste perfect. She seemed to know the exact measure and the order in which to add the ingredients. *Yeye's* savory okro soup was my favorite of all. It had a special flavor that usually emerged from a blend of the several ingredients, and I still crave the flavor of my *Yeye's* soup. However, eating this could be a very tricky, messy, and frustrating task for someone who is not experienced in handling the soup because of its slippery and spicy nature.

I remember one of the many lessons in my *Yeye's* kitchen as she cooked my favorite okro soup mixture. We had been chatting for a while as she cooked in her kitchen that day, and since she was usually mindful of the food she was preparing, at a point she got up to check the soup. As she stirred the soup briefly, she scooped a small amount to her palm to check if the taste was okay. She seemed to be absorbed in thoughts as she processed the taste. Looking back, I recall her different facial expressions and I wondered what was going on in her mind. Was there too much or too little of any of the items? I was curious to know how the soup tasted and not by asking but by tasting it too. Since it was customary for me to imitate my *Yeye*, I wanted to find

[1] My grandmother shared many happy moments with me in her kitchen. Before I started school, this was where many of my early learnings happened. I grew to love and see the kitchen not only as a safe place to share but a brave place to learn.

out what she was feeling at that moment. Dewey (1938) recognized curiosity as a key ingredient in experiences that help us navigate the worlds yet unknown. He wrote:

> If an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future, continuity works in a very different way [a way which does not limit later capacity for growth]. Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into. (p. 38)

Curiosity got the best of me that day, instead of asking her questions about how the soup tasted or what she was feeling, I stretched forward my hand without saying a word, indicating my desire to taste the soup, just like she did. *Yeye* was silent for a while, as if she was deliberating a puzzle. I was ignorant of what was coming. She confirmed my desire to have a taste of the soup and I nodded in the affirmative. Looking very calm, she adjusted her wrapper[2] as if she was preparing to carry out an important task. She then held my outstretched hand firmly while she scooped a small amount of the hot soup on my palm. I realized immediately that I was in trouble as the hot slimy soup burned into my palm, but she did not give me a chance to change my mind.

I recall the pain, as the soup burned into my palm. I struggled helplessly to set my hand free, but *Yeye* would not let my hand go. She finally released her grip after I had wrestled with her for a while. I quickly shook the slimy stuff out of my palm. My appetite for soup had disappeared. Looking back, I recall my sense of relief when *Yeye* quickly moved me from the spot and dipped my scalded hand in cold water. I also recall my sense of confusion because I knew that my grandmother would not hurt me. For an explanation of this experience and after my hand has been treated, *Yeye* had a conversation with me about what I was eager to know. She told me that it was unsafe for a child to play around with hot soup. Thinking back to that experience, I am grateful to my grandmother. She taught me a lesson about safety and the power

[2] Yoruba women dress in traditional wrapper and blouse (*iro and buba*).

of wise curiosity. Her action was meant to keep me away from danger, but she gave me the opportunity to learn as well. She explained the risk of getting hurt more than what I just experienced if I was left unsupervised. She pointed out to me the possibility of falling into the pot or spilling a larger amount of hot soup on my body. A pot full of slippery, spicy, and hot soup is a potentially deadly border for a four-year-old child to navigate. One could say that it was a border that bumped against my childish curiosity, a border between the known and the unknown. My loving relationship with *Yeye* provided protection from more severe consequences of my endless curiosity. I have lived with this story for over five decades now. As I desperately searched for a platform on which to situate this inquiry, I was prompted to think back to my first learning experience, and what came to mind was my grandmother's pot of okro soup. The slippery, spicy, and hot okro soup became a metaphor with which to describe my experience of the borderland.

Figure 1: Pot of okro soup (photo shared by Bisi)

Chapter One

Narrative Beginnings

I turned to my narrative beginnings and the metaphor of my *Yeye's* okro soup to lend coherence to my lived stories of tensions and the complexities of the borderland of Canadian education. As savory as my Yeye's okro soup, Canadian education is desirable, but it is grounded in colonial structure that makes it slippery and difficult for me to negotiate. Throughout my over ten years in practice as an instructor and a student in the Canadian education system, I have witnessed and experienced ways in which international students, particularly students of color, struggle. I have also seen some of them drop out of programs, and some fall ill due to stress and large workloads. At the same time, I have seen white students fast-tracked in programs and receiving rewards and awards. It seemed to be a common story. When I thought about my own experiences, I could not but wonder how an environment storied as welcoming and friendly could be so tension-filled. How do we thrive in a space marked by oppression? The pain of my grandmother's soup is not comparable to the emotional pain caused by being marginalized on a daily basis at the borderland. The dissonance is astounding, especially when people contributing to the oppression are the same ones smiling and asking, 'how may I help you?'. To comprehend my situation, I drew on Tajeda (2008) that, "the present is unintelligible without a reading of the past" (p. 27). It was also on that notion that I drew from Dewey (1938) that:

> We use a foresight of the future to refine the present and this requires us to wrest the maimed present from the deeply sunk talons of a vicious past. The future toward which we are driving is however, in an attenuated and inconspicuous form, always somewhat of a piece with the present through which we are moving (p. 215).

Similarly, I was reminded by Colapietro (2011), to be "mindful of the past, solicitous about the future and to be attuned to the present" (p. 161). It was from these reflective standpoints that I

called forward the origin of my journey. I thought that a deep inquiry into my past might possibly offer some insights to the story of my tension-filled lived experiences across the borders of learning. I thought that I might be able to gain a new understanding about the past and its relevance to the present and the future anticipated.

My Identity, My Stories to Live by

Thinking about identity and shifting of identities, I have often wondered about the multiple identities that I carry and the nested stories of those identities. Clandinin (2013) spoke of the multiplicity of each of our lives, the lives composed, lived out and told around multiple plotlines, over time, in different relationships and on different landscapes. Riggins (1997) wrote that "the Self in its discourse of identity is continually negotiating several identities simultaneously" (p. 4). Riggins' and Clanidinin's words are true for me, and I am cognizant of the multiplicity of identities that I am constantly negotiating, which sometimes create tension for me. I am a doctoral student, a nurse, a mother, a daughter, a granddaughter, an instructor, an immigrant, a woman of color, and a Christian believer. Yet, I am called to be wakeful to the possibility of a shift in some aspects of these multiple identities. At a point, I was a leader in my church organization, a coordinator of a community health program.

Drawing on McAdams Josselson, and Lieblich (2006) that our identity is anchored in the narrative constructions that make our lives. Okri (1997) also helped me to understand in a new way, the interconnectedness of stories and identity. According to him, "We live by stories. We also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted knowingly or unknowingly in us early in life, the stories that give our lives meaning" (p. 46). Each of my composed identities is nested in stories, the stories that I live in, the stories to live by.

It was also said that composing the stories of identity is not done by us alone but is "co-authored" in dialogue with others who affirm and validate our personal qualities or challenge who we are (Gelech & Desjardins, 2011; McAdams, et al., 2006; Scott, 2009). Witherell and Noddings (1991) further expanded my understanding that the stories we live by do not only shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage but they also "attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, and offer advice on what we might do with our lives" (p. 1). To me, these words provided a way of thinking about the interconnectedness of the nested stories that shaped my identity and the context in which the stories were composed.

In this inquiry, the metaphor of 'landscape'[3] (Green, 1995) was what I came to associate with the contexts of my identity making. 'Landscape' as described by Clandinin and Connelly (1995), is the locating of contexts of lived stories in terms of space, place, and time. As life narratives do not occur in a vacuum but within the cultural and social contexts as well as institutional contexts. In this inquiry, traveling across contexts was what I came to understand as one form of crossing borders (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

I turned to the metaphor of 'crossing borders' to help me navigate the interwoven stories and the significant landscapes attached to my identity, who I have ever been and who I am becoming. I drew on Clandinin (2013) for me to be wakeful to my cultural, familial, and institutional stories. I began by unpacking the landscapes that nested these stories.

I was born into the Yoruba ethnic group in the western part of Nigeria. According to the Yoruba culture, my learning began the moment I was born. When a child is born in Yoruba culture, it is the responsibility of every member of the household to educate the child. Usually,

[3] I use context and landscape interchangeably from now on.

the birth of a child is a great occasion and naming the child is a special ceremony performed at the gathering of all members of the extended family, friends, and all well-wishers (Fafunwa, 1974).

Names that Tell Stories

Depending on the family traditions, special rites and ceremonies usually accompany the birth of a child, and the child may be given as many names as possible (Fafunwa, 1974). The special ceremony may involve consulting an oracle because the Yorubas believe that naming a child is a way of pronouncing the child's destiny. We believe and associate names with special significance and meanings. A name may represent a specific event, period or special circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. The conceptualization of identity as "stories to live by" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4) resonates with the Yoruba cultural belief that our identity and character are embodied in our name.

Naming Runs Deep

Calling forward my birth story and naming, my parents told me that each of my three names has specific meanings. According to them, I was named 'Olabisi' by my paternal grandfather who was a rich merchant during his time. In Yoruba language, 'Ola' means wealth or riches, and my people believe that wealth or riches include both human and material resources. I was named 'Olabisi' because my birth was an additional blessing of wealth to my extended family. My maternal grandmother gave me the name *Abike (*Born to be cherished). I was called *Omowaye* by my parents, which translates to 'a child who came back'. I learned that they lost a three-year old son shortly before my birth. A son who looked like a split image of my father. I learned that my father loved the boy so much, and my astounding resemblance to him gave the impression that it was the same child who came back as a girl. Giving me the name

Omowaye was my father's way of living by the story of a son that could have been. This was the story that I also continued to live in relationship with my father and in the way I was raised. This relational story that I lived alongside my father caused me to violate borders, but it shaped my identity by removing the boundaries of places I should or should not travel to as a woman.

I returned to my name *Omowaye* as a nested story of my identity in relation to my father during his life[4]. I remembered him as a strong feminist activist who empowered me[5] to cross the border of gender[6]

I came to understand that the 'name-giving' aspect of our culture runs deep, and it resonates with my desire to resist the several attempts to rename or change my name[7] at the borderland. As I inquired into my resistance at a renaming, I began to think about Muna who wrote:

> My name holds countless roots, giving a sense of personal, familial, cultural, religious, social, and linguistic stories living within me. My name roots and places me. It continues to teach me about my multiple selves and positionings in the different worlds I inhabit and have inhabited growing up. (Saleh, Menon, & Kubota, 2018, p. 333)

In this doctoral work, I had the time to inquire into my name. I came to understand how my name has been influential to my identity making. My name continues to teach me and offer meanings to the force that drove me across multiple borders.

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[4] Now deceased.

[5] While some of my father's friends did not endorse female education, my father clearly asserted his confidence in sending me to school.

[6] Friends often comment that I behave more like a man and more at ease in the company of men. I attended a mix-school, and I remember that I was the only girl in my class during my senior years of high school because I was a pure science student. Living in a boarding school, I recall sneaking out with classmates (who were all boys) on several occasions to attend Physics classes in a neighboring school because we had no teacher for the subject.

[7] My names influence my world view and my approach to life. With the name 'Abike', I expect to be treated with respect and dignity. With the name "Ola," it is difficult for me to accept being storied as a poor African student.

Education Tells Stories

In the Yoruba society, education is an integrative and formative lifelong process aimed at developing the intellectual, physical, and spiritual abilities of the learner so that they can function productively in the society. Our mode of education is multilateral and intricately interwoven with our cultural belief system. The Yoruba people inculcate the value of interpersonal relations and communal spirit. The Yoruba worldview of education is not an exclusive, individualistic formal undertaking, but rather an inclusive, functional, and systematic process of developing innate potentialities. One may say that the principles that informed traditional Yoruba education are functionalism, progressivism, and moralism.

There is an element of social and communal responsibility whereby the educated are expected to contribute to the common good of society. The Yoruba notion of education is guided by moral obligation and unwritten norms whereby people teach through examples, direct instructions, proverbs, moon light folktales, songs, and several other means. My early childhood learning experiences were influenced by these principles, which were impacted by the people around me, particularly my grandmother whom I affectionately called *Yeye*[8].

Educating a child is not only the responsibility of the immediate family, but that of the community at large. We have a proverb that, 'it takes two parents to bear a child, but it takes an entire village to raise the child'. This proverb was true for me. Growing up in an extended family home, my early learning experiences were influenced by many people. As a child I remember receiving familial lessons and guidance from various kinsmen[9] and older members of my family. I was taught cultural, moral, and social lessons about life. *Yeye* was fundamental to my moral lessons, several of which I experienced in her kitchen or while working with her in her garden.

[8] *Yeye* means grandmother in my Ekiti (subdivision of Yoruba) ethnic dialect.
[9] Blood relations.

Yeye helped me to understand that learning requires the freedom to explore and the courage to take the risk. Those lessons in my *Yeye's* kitchen shaped my world view in a profound way. I have come to understand that optimal learning occurs in an environment of support even in the face of difficulties. *Yeye* taught me what it means to be courageous, she taught me empathy and to stand up for what is right. *Yeye* not only taught me morality, but also how to live it. She taught me about endurance and devotion to duty. She showed me by examples how to exhibit these values. Those lessons during my formative years became fundamental to my development as a learner and as a teacher later in life. I could say that they served as a launching pad for my formal education and my career as a teacher.

My Early Experience of Formal Education

Thinking about the interconnectedness of the nested stories in which I live (Clandinin, 2013), I returned to the words of Okri (1997) that "we live by stories and also live in them" (p. 46). I came to know that for the most part of my life, I lived by institutional narratives. Clandinin (2013) described institutional stories as the stories of school. According to her, institutional stories shape our lives in ways that indelibly mark our stories and identity over time.

My institutional stories of school have a profound impact on my identity and my ways of knowing. Moving forward and backward between places and attending to all that I came to know as landscapes, I called forward the contexts in which my school stories nested, the different landscapes of my formal education.

Being a Nigerian, I came to know that the Nigerians have insatiable appetite for formal education (Fafunwa, 1974). Yoruba indigenes have a particular passion for formal education. To my people, formal education is the most valuable inheritance a parent can give to a child. Our notion of formal education in Nigeria was largely shaped by the colonial system which has over

time become a part of our value system, and way of knowing. Nduka (1964) described the indoctrination of the Nigerians into Western education and the embrace of Western culture. He wrote, "on the part of the Nigerians themselves, there was an avid demand for Western cultural innovations. They wanted more and not less of Western education" (p. 49). Western education is seen as a matter of prestige and a passport to a better life.

Thinking about my father who himself was a product of colonial formal education, I often feel that my school story was a relational extension of my father's. I saw this in my father's shared dreams about education and the same narratives reverberated through his pep talks with me. I recall that long before I started school, his aspiration for me was to have a university education abroad (in the 'land of the kings'[10]as he named it). I came to understand that this dream as one of those "stories planted" in me, a "story to live by" (Okri, 1997, p. 46). It became a part of me and a driving force in my school stories over the years.

As a child who lived in a grand story of colonial heritage, my stories of school were less comfortable. I started school at the age of five, but I had already learned a few things at home. My father who had his own experience of colonial education was the one who taught me how to write. I could write all alphabets in cursive before I started going to school. I also learned from my sister how to read. I remember reading stories such as 'Snow White' (Barthelme, 1967), 'The Sleeping Beauty' (Perrault, 1880), and 'Christmas Carol' (Dickens, 1963). I also read books written by indigenous authors such as Alawiye (Ọdúnjọ, 1956). I read fables about animal characters such as the tortoise and the monkey. I often wondered how animals could talk and reason like human beings. The stories were so fascinating that I often felt like I was a part of the

[10] Nigeria was colonized by Britain and because we held allegiance to the King (or the queen) of England at the time, Britain was referred to as the land of the kings (queens). The rest of the Western World was also referred to as the land of the kings. My father believed that European and North American universities offer the best education and he wanted me to go to school in one of the universities.

stories and imagining myself to be one of the characters. Sometimes, I felt like I was on an adventure in multiple worlds: the worlds of snow, fairies, animals, and yet living in the reality of my own world[11]. These childhood wonderments profoundly whetted my desire for school. They called me to travel to imagined worlds that I was yet to discover, the worlds that were difficult to reconcile at a much later time in life when I indeed started to cross borders[12] and enter the land of the kings.

On my first day of school crossing the borders to formal education, I remember dressing in my new blue uniform. It was a week after the new-year's celebration. I remember my mother patiently waiting for me to finish a bowl of porridge that she had prepared for breakfast, but I was too excited to eat. She eventually conceded after trying all means, without success, to get me to eat. We set out to walk to my new school, which was only about a kilometer away from our house. It was a Christian Mission school named God's Grace. My mother[13] stopped briefly to chat with a few of her friends that we met on our way. She did not conceal her joy and pride about her young daughter starting school. While she was very happy to "show off her daughter," I was feeling shy and uncomfortable about the publicity.

Arriving at the school, my mother and I went to the headmaster's office to complete some paperwork about my enrolment. I was introduced to my teacher, Mrs. Adewumi. She was a tall, fair complexioned lady about my mother's age. She took me to my class and introduced me to the students. The bell rang for the morning devotion shortly after, and the school band started playing. I recall that students were moving from all directions to an open place called the

[11] I had a better understanding as I grew older, that the stories were formulated from the authors' imagination.
[12] Connelly and Clandinin (1999) use the metaphor to describe situations or events "[b]orders that mark the dividing places. Borders that say that something different is about to begin" (p. 104).
[13] This was one of my few memories of my mother.

assembly ground. Within a short time, we (students) had fallen-in-line according to our grades, and the teachers took positions in between the lines to keep us in order.

One teacher coordinated the morning devotion (prayers) and made the announcements. I remember that while we remained in line, the headmaster inspected our nails and uniforms. I also remember that while the devotion was in progress, one student from the senior grade was catching the late comers at the gate of the school asking them to kneel on the hard floor. He later marched them to the assembly ground and a teacher gave six strokes of the cane to each late comer. This experience quickly shifted my perception about school. I found that there were many strict rules and regulations that were reinforced by punishment. I also noted that there was a timekeeper in one of the classrooms who was ringing the bell every hour and announcing loudly "change of lesson."

Contrary to my home environment, I often felt like the classroom environment was highly structured and there was timing for every activity. I found the environment intimidating and not as safe as my *Yeye*'s kitchen. I could talk with my family members freely at home but the teachers at school were very distant, formal, and authoritative. Calling forward the carefree experiences in my *yeye's* kitchen at that point, I felt a strong yearning for home.

The memory of my first learning experience in school was during an arithmetic[14] lesson. The whole class was made to stand and recite the multiplication table in unison, which made us seem like we were a group of singers chanting a boring song. Then we took turns to recite the table alone[15]. This was a typical teaching method for most of the school subjects while there was much pressure placed on students about academic performance. Learning was reinforced with

[14] Mathematics.
[15] Students who were unable to recite correctly would remain standing while successful ones would be allowed to sit down.

grades and different kinds of inducements[16]. Failure was unacceptable and often called forth corporal punishment such as caning. I remember that between my first and third grades, there were specific rows created to segregate the "brilliant" students from the "dull" students in the classroom. This facilitated a lot of competition among students. Those considered to be dull students were often treated with no respect and they were often shamed by teachers and peers, while the brilliant students carried a sense of ego around them.

Calling forward memories, a profound moment for me was a day during my elementary school when I was instructed to cane a classmate. I was given this responsibility because he performed poorly in a class assignment in which I got the highest grade. I knew that being caned by a classmate was bad and for the boy, being caned by a female classmate was a terrible humiliation. I was hesitant in carrying out the teacher's instruction because I did not like being given this kind of authority over my fellow students. At a point, my teacher got angry with me and caned me mercilessly to demonstrate what he expected me to do. I was not happy about the experience, but I felt powerless to do anything about it. It was when I told my father about what happened in my class that day that I learned about his own experience of being educated in a colonial school system[17].

Family members at home took responsibilities in asserting children to strive for academic excellence and they did this in several ways. Apart from receiving corporal punishment in the school, those who performed poorly were often disciplined at home by their parents. The end of

[16] I remember how happy I was receiving the huge pink colored checkmark on my slate for the first class assignment. This was a significant hallmark in the life of a pupil because it would determine the seat row to which he or she would be assigned.

[17] My father went to school during the colonial era. He described the system as a subservient system of education. According to him, the teacher-student relationship was that of master-servant relationship which continued to exist after Nigeria gained independence.

the school year was a time of anxiety for many students because of the fear of failing and the chance of not being promoted to the next class (grade).

Being raised in an extended family, I remember a cousin who was not performing well academically. He used to cry for being ridiculed for poor performance and being labeled a failure. At some points, he became resistant to these labels and instead of crying he composed a song. He would sing this song and dance to entertain the household. Although his song was entitled *Dance of failure*, the lyrics described strengths and what he was good at. Thinking back to my cousin, I feel like he had the potential for a creativity that was not recognized by the people around him, and he was communicating this through his song. What people could see at the time was his poor performance in school and an inability to meet expectations and what was recognized as the standards of education at the time.

An important lesson that I have learned through personal experiences is that what is the best standard of education today could become unacceptable at another time. It has been pointed out that the traditional use of test performance cannot be considered as an adequate measure of intelligence (Atkinson & Pelfrey, 2006). This called me to wonder about the big check marks that I often received across my slate in those days during my elementary education. Could the check mark be considered an emblem of excellence? Were they sufficient in composing one's identity? With the big check mark written with colored chalk on my wooden slate, I identified as a brilliant student. I remember that this make-shift symbol of excellence was what stratified me into the desired seat row in my class. Being considered a brilliant student, I was made to separate myself from students who were less brilliant.

Critics further argued that students who may have performed well on tests, for example, may have brought a certain kind of intelligence that may not be the only type relevant to

academic excellence, achievement, leadership, and/or creativity (Pink, 2006; Sternberg & Grigorenco, 2000). In the same vein, the idea of limiting students' potentials by prescriptive narratives was opposed vehemently by Giroux (2011), who stated:

> The politics of educated hope, responsive to the need to think beyond established narratives of power, prevailing "commonsense" approaches to educational policy and practice, widening culture of punishment, and the banal script of using mathematical performance measures as benchmarks for academic success. (p. 9)

Thinking back to my early school days, I wondered if our teachers ever thought of the possibility for students like my cousin to step outside the box, or that his creativity could be nurtured to help him accomplish his potentials. I wondered why teachers seemed so focused on rules and routines that there were no other ways acceptable for students to learn. I wondered how it was easier to blame students for poor performance rather than taking responsibilities for defective methods of instruction. During my elementary school, learning activities were focused on repetitions, memorization (reciting multiplication tables and psalms[18] every morning). One can imagine an interesting scenario watching a student read aloud from the blackboard while the rest of class chorused after.

I loved going to school and participating in school activities during my elementary school days, but I did not like the way we were taught. I found recitations and memorization boring but for the most part, rote learning was a convenient way of getting the highest grade. I learned to be a bit comfortable by following the rules. I learned to reproduce what I was taught as expected by my teachers. Looking back, I have come to understand that people learn things that could be difficult to unlearn later in life. Following instructions without challenging authority was one of

[18] A Psalm is a biblical book chapter which pupils had to recite during the bible knowledge lesson. Bible knowledge was mandatory because the school was a Christian school.

them. My learned ways of knowing in my early years lived with me as I moved to secondary and post-secondary education.

Crossing the Borders of College Education

I learned to be comfortable, and I kept myself on the edge of dominant stories of school during my college years. My learning centred around listening to lectures, writing notes dictated by teachers, and staying long hours at night to keep up with study. I used to spend long hours studying in the library to make sense of all the materials covered during the lectures. I remember my experiences in nursing school struggling hard to memorize dictated lecture notes. For me to understand[19] concepts in anatomy, physiology, and pharmacology, I used to formulate mnemonics. I used to commit abstract ideas into memory. I wondered why evaluation was all about the students' ability to reproduce the same information dictated by the teachers. I remember what Beckman et al. (2004) described as "teaching to the test". Teachers preferred "teaching to the test" instead of encouraging new ideas[20].

Teaching to the test, as I came to understand, keeps learners in a box. It is a traditional practice that evaluates students in ways that do not accommodate new ideas or different ways of knowing (Beckman et al., 2004). Alt and Itzkovich (2016) identified the inherent characteristics of this approach, which include uncontestable authority, teaching knowledge as a set of static principles, suppression of creativity and freedom of expression, cultivation of individuality, a lack of learning through experience, and acquisition of isolated skills without context.

Teaching to the test and learning by memorization continued to be my lived stories of learning in the university. During my entire higher education in Nigeria, my perception of

[19] I doubt if I understood the information that I memorized at the time, since I often forgot soon after writing my tests.

[20] Teaching to the test requires the teacher to set the test and the marking scheme for the expected answers, any answer not included in the marking scheme is considered wrong.

academic success was the ability to reproduce what had been taught and keeping to stipulated standards. I learned in a system built on the notion that I could do nothing more than to gobble information fed to me and regurgitate back when requested. Calling forth these memories, I have come to understand how my experiences and my ways of knowing were shaped by the system.

Living in the Centre yet Learning at the Margin

I have often lived in tension-filled school stories. As I wondered about my passion for school in spite of uncomfortable experiences, I returned to the words of Okri (1997), that "we are living in the stories planted in us early" (p. 46). These words help me understand the power of my father's words, the stories that were planted in me early, the stories that called me to cross the cultural and geographical borders of education. My first crossing of the national border for education was when I got admission for my Master of Public Health program in the U.S.A. in 2004[21]. That was when I saw teaching and learning in different light. I was fascinated by the relational aspect and all the learning activities that I experienced. For once, I found learning engaging and less stressful. I liked the way we were respected by the teachers. It was a different learning experience for me. I took many courses in the program, but biostatistics was my best of all. Biostatistics classes were particularly engaging. The positive relational atmosphere and the safe space created by the professor gave me the courage to approach him for conversations. I learned more from him about his teaching styles. I told him that I was becoming a nurse educator and that I would like to develop my teaching skills.

Another crossing of national border for me was when I came to Canada three years later. However, my experience was far different from that of my Public Health Program. Coming to

[21] I first encountered learner-centred teaching at Loma Linda University in USA where I had my Master of Public Health Education between 2000 and 2004. I learned more about the term "learner-centred teaching" 8 years later during my Master of Nursing Education in Canada.

Canada in 2007, I had expected to be able to work as a nurse instructor in an academic institution, since I have been working for ten years as a nurse faculty prior to the time. However, I was denied this opportunity on several occasions based on limited Canadian teaching experience. For me to be able to provide for my family, I worked as a practicing nurse in the hospital for some time before applying for a PhD.

As much as I negotiated this landscape, it was another uncomfortable story of school for me. I often wondered why I needed to have three master's degrees[22] before gaining an admission for a PhD, but over time, I learned about the different ways by which a system of oppression operates. I have heard stories about applicants being rejected for 'poor credentials' or 'sub-standard education'. In my case the rejection was not because of poor credentials. The reason given for denying me an admission for the PhD program at the time was that my credentials were old and obsolete[23], and I was persuaded to complete another master's before I could proceed with a PhD. There were four streams in the program: education, nurse practitioner, research, and clinical practice. Since I already had a master's degree in clinical nursing in Nigeria, I was offered an admission into the nursing education stream, with the promise that there would be job opportunities for me in the faculty after graduation. I had the thesis based or course-based capstone project options, but I chose to follow the thesis-based stream because of my plan to apply for a PhD after the program.

My journey through the Master of Nursing program was not an easy one. Graduating from the program, my being denied a space as a teaching faculty (even though there was a promise) reverberated a series of losses during the program: I spent over four years instead of

[22] I was required to apply for another master in Canada regardless of my two previous degrees (MPH from Loma Linda University USA and MSc Nursing from the Obafemi Awolowo University Nigeria).
[23] My previous master's were six years old at the time of my application for PhD.

two, which was a significant loss of my time. It was during the program that I experienced the loss of important individuals in my life, and a loss of a home. In the middle of it all, I was negotiating working as a registered nurse and going to school as a full time student. Reflecting on those experiences, I could say that my personal stories were remarkably different from the school story. While my narrative was that of resilience and tenacity, the school story was that of a mediocre international student with poor writing skill, who was advised to drop out of school. I was reminded of Chimamanda Adichie's warning about the danger of singular story (Adichie's TED Talk, 2010). My school story at the time was a singular story. To me, it was a dangerous story, a story that was damaging in a profound way. A story that was damaging to my self-esteem, psychological health, and my identity.

Taking a reflective turn on my experience as a newcomer in Canada for the master's in nursing education, I remember my first day of class in the graduate program. I was expecting to receive a lecture in a big auditorium, but the class was only a group of 12 students. The class began with casual conversations and introductions. I remember my overwhelming 'out-of-place' feelings. I soon realized that my ideas and thought process did not align with my new environment. As I tried to introduce myself when it was my turn to do so, it became clear to me that I was 'different' in many ways. Neither my Nigerian accent nor my Yoruba name was comprehensible to the group as I tried desperately to spell out my name. Instead of 'Olabisi' people repeated my name as 'Oleybusy'[24]. I never realized until that moment that the language so natural to me could be so difficult for others. I began to understand the reality of crossing borders of difference, and the imperative to accept and not to judge the strangeness of other cultures through my own values.

[24] I later shortened my name to 'Bisi' to make it easier, but people still called me 'BC', "British Colombia" they would say and laugh. Attempt to rename me in several different ways for convenience.

Moreover, I was predisposed to some deep-rooted notions of classroom etiquettes and expectations which I had mastered through many years of being educated in Nigerian culture. However, I realized that these etiquettes did not align with the ethos of my new learning environment. One of such etiquettes was showing respect to elders and people in authority. This involved addressing my professors the proper way by using their academic title with the last name when corresponding with them. I found it strange that students addressed their professors by first names[25]. I also noted that it was usual for students to eat and drink freely during class whereas this was contrary to the academic culture in my homeland.

I was disappointed that we spent three hours of class just talking without a lecture or note taking. I wanted to participate in the discussions, but I did not know how or when to do so. I had been taught during my elementary education that it was inappropriate and disrespectful to interrupt another person's speech[26]. I felt frustrated waiting for a chance to speak but conversations kept going without a pause. I felt a sense of being eliminated from the discussion as my fellow students coherently asserted their ideas and I gave up on trying to share mine. I felt like I was not capable of participating in academic discussions. I resorted to taking notes when I saw that it was useless to try and participate in the discussions. Calling forward this first experience, my most difficult experience that day was the feeling of being 'out of place'.

My tensions became more profound as the weeks continued to unfold and as I struggled to meet assignment deadlines. I spent several hours in the library studying and trying to catch up on the topics that were discussed in class. I wished I could discuss my concerns or talk about assignments with colleagues, but I was uncomfortable doing so. My understanding of the

[25] I realized that people described me as 'timid' or unassertive' because of my etiquette.
[26] During my early education, I was taught that it was rude to interrupt other people and to always seek the approval of the teacher if I wanted to talk.

university policy[27] was that asking questions or working with other students to complete assignments was an act of academic dishonesty.

My greatest shock and disappointment came when I received the grade on my first assignment. I had spent many hours and sleepless nights working on this assignment and thinking that I have put in all my efforts to do a good job. I could not believe what I saw, as I read through the comments at the back of my paper which stated 'This is a poorly written paper and unfortunately D is not a passing grade for this program. I wonder why you could not ask for help'. There were no other comments in the body of the paper except for a suggestion for me to schedule an appointment if I would like to discuss concerns about my performance with the professor. I felt a rush of several emotions. I felt sad, angry, guilty and terrified. I could hear the loud pounding of my heartbeat. I felt very sick and tired. It felt like my world had suddenly crumbled and all my dreams shattered. I felt like I failed my family who had invested all the means to fund my graduate education.

Some classmates must have noticed my embarrassment, as they inquired, 'are you okay?'[28] Of course, I was not 'okay', I said to myself as I hurried out of the classroom and trying hard to hold back my tears. It is still a puzzle to me how I managed to drive to pick my daughter from school that day. The little girl was not fooled by my façade when she joined me in the car at the parking lot. She was curious to know what was wrong with mummy. I remember both of us crying together in the car at the parking lot in her school that day. She hugged me and cried with me even though she did not understand why I was crying.

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[27] As stated in the course outlines.

[28] Two other colleagues (one from India and the other, an Indigenous student) shared with me that they had a similar experience. Instead of dropping out of the program, we became friends and formed a discussion group. Although labeled "at risk," and other students were reluctant having in their groups, the three of us found strength in our common experience and in supporting each other.

In response to the suggestions on my paper, I made an appointment with the professor the following morning. It was like being arraigned in a court of law. I was accused of violating several writing rules in the assignment that justified a 'D' grade. The professor ended the meeting with a statement about her willingness to "help," that I should have asked for help. While my purpose of attending that meeting was to address my confusion and puzzlement, I left the meeting more puzzled than ever. What does it mean to ask for help? To what extent can I ask for help without being accused of violating the rules of academic integrity? How can I express my ideas without being questioned about the source? How can I express my idea without a suspicion of stealing other people's idea? The professor expressed a concern that I was "at risk" of not being successful due to poor writing skills and my lack of participation in class discussions. I remember some "well-meaning" colleagues felt that I might be suffering from a learning disability and advised me to seek counselling services. For me, these experiences were highly disturbing at visceral level.

McAdams et al. (2006) reminded me that we construct our identity from the stories we are told by people around us, but we are called to reject those stories if they disrupt our expected. I saw being "at risk" as a story of disruption which I desired to resist. I thought of how being storied as such would shift my journey. For me, settling with "at risk" and "learning disability" stories would affect the dreams that I have nurtured for many years. It would not only affect my hope, but it would also affect the future envisioned for my children. I felt that settling on being storied as "at risk" would shift my personal and professional identity in several significant ways.

These thoughts called me to start working hard to get past the stories of passivity and silence in the class. I reflected on what I could do well. I remembered the story of my cousin and how he turned the story of failure into a song and a dance of success. I reflected on those factors

that made class participation awkward and difficult for me. I began to confront the intimidations that have been preventing my participation in class activities.

At first, joining in class discussions was very challenging. For me, it was not only about talking, but it was also about finding the correct and appropriate words, it was about organizing my thoughts in such a way that I could communicate coherently for people to understand. I learned to talk across the border of differences. I often felt lost when people referred to certain experiences or events of their past or in their communities[29]. I often wondered why my own ideas and past experiences were easily discarded as irrelevant whenever I tried to share them in class. I wondered if I was not making sense to others or if I was not capable of participating in academic discussions. I also experienced the tensions of keeping up with intensive course readings and the struggle of meeting assignment deadlines. I often spent a great deal of time searching for the meanings of words and appropriate vocabularies to use.

I usually enjoyed working on group projects and assignments, but I realized that my Canadian classmates preferred working with fellow Canadians. This gave me the impression that they did not want to work with me because they thought I would rely on them for my success. On occasions when I was made to work in group with Canadian students, I often felt patronized and marginalized by colleagues during group assignments[30]. On such instances, I used to feel like a problematic learner whose ideas did not count and whose experiences were irrelevant. I thought that I would probably be able to 'fit-in' if I had been able to talk with a Western (American, Canadian, or British) accent, or if I had been able to think like a Canadian. Over time, I have come to understand that my accent and ways of thinking were a part of my identity

[29] On such occasions, if I felt these were relevant to my learning, I would sometime make notes and search for more details later, and sometimes I found some ideas irrelevant.
[30] I realized that some students had prejudice and would complete group assignments without involving the international students in the group.

that I cannot change. I decided to make peace with the 'self' that lives within me. I have come to forgive myself for being who I am as I remembered the words of Karach (1992) that,

> We bring with us valuable knowledge and skills gained from our experiences of works, political activities, personal, and multicultural backgrounds from which we can all share and learn. The experiences that constitute the dimensions of who we are. The experiences that form our identities, consciousness, our whole living beings. The experiences that influence us in how we relate to other beings, nature, and society. And yet, we find our knowledge continued to be devalued … and excluded from the shallow academic definition of what constitutes worthy knowledge. (p. 309)

Reflecting on my experiences of the overwhelming tensions and struggles in higher education in Canada, I felt a lack of belonging and a sense of exclusion during those classes. I felt like my confidence and self-esteem had shifted, and I wondered if there could be a way to make a change. I lived with these experiences during my master's education, and I often wrestled with the feeling of confusion about my identity as a learner. Through my interaction with other international students, I learned that they were having similar experiences.

Research Puzzles

I learned that our narrative beginnings often shape our research puzzles and help us define the personal, practical, and social justifications for an inquiry. Critical to my inquiry was Clandinin's (2013) metaphor of a person's identity as their 'stories to live by', and I have come to understand that the stories we live and tell embody who we are and who we are becoming. My narrative beginnings caused me to uncover memories of tensions and struggles - tensions and struggles that shaped who I am and who I was becoming. Witherell and Noddings (1991) wrote that the stories that people tell about us offer advice on what we might do with our lives. These words made me wonder, what advice would the story of "at risk" offer? Or what outcome should one expect from a "learning disability" story? I have usually believed in myself as a confident and successful learner but being "at risk" has never been a part of my story. This doctoral work

was aimed at a deeper understanding of both the individual and larger social and institutional narratives that shaped our experiences as international graduate students and the ways in which we act in the world.

I drew on an understanding that narrative inquiry is composed of puzzles and wonderments that are often situated within narrative beginnings and that the inquirer frames these puzzles "with a sense of search, research, a search again, and a sense of continual reformulation" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 42). It was this understanding that called me to reflect on my experiences of being silenced and learning at the margins during my Master of Nursing in Canada. A reflective turn on those experiences shaped my curiosity about the experiences of other students who have crossed borders for graduate education in Canada, and I wanted to find answer to the following research puzzles: What stories are we living by and living in? What stories across different cultural, social, familial, and institutional landscapes shaped our storied identity? How do we understand what it means to cross borders? How did our experience in Canada shape, transform our lived stories? The aim of this inquiry was to unravel these puzzles alongside participants.

Chapter Two

> The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants… Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element. The "alien" element has become familiar - never comfortable, but home. (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 3)

In this chapter, I inquired into the historical context of internationalization of education, the past works on the experiences of international students in the Global North (Western countries)[31]. I also attended to the theoretical underpinnings for this inquiry. It is said that people traverse the border of their homeland for several reasons and for ages, it has been essential for people to leave their homes to explore opportunities abroad (Olaniran, 1993), international students are no exception of this necessity. A range of factors shapes individual decisions to cross borders for education.

People are increasingly going across borders for educational purposes, in particular to earn a foreign credential as a means to improve their social and economic conditions (Kim & Kwak, 2018). Motivations for crossing the border of education include academic quality and reputation, academic benefits, employment experience, and perceptions within the home country of the prestige and value of an overseas education; for some, the possibility of permanent migration is an added incentive (Kim & Kwak, 2018). Yet for some individuals, crossing borders is to fulfil family obligation. In Man and Chou (2018), middle-class Asian families see internationalization of Canadian education as an open door to better education and social development. To these families, education migration is a viable strategy to facilitate the social reproduction of their class identity in their own children.

[31] Global North is used interchangeably with the West. The rich and powerful regions such as North America, Europe, and Australia. Global South is used interchangeably with the developing countries or the Third Worlds.

For many graduate students in nursing, seeking education in western countries has been a necessary response to a global need for health professionals at faculty, leadership, and advanced clinical roles, and the quality of education makes Canada an attractive destination for them (Walton-Robert & Henneberry, 2018).

Historical Context

Several narratives about internationalization of education present a long-standing history associated to slavery, exploitation, colonialism, and domination. The matrix of domination recognizes racism and imperialism as mutually constitutive in nature. History shows that practices which prey and profit from international education is not new. Internationalization dated back to the early days of the incipient empire when the education in the United Kingdom of students from West African nations was regarded as an important support of British diplomatic and commercial interests (Walker, 2014). According to this narrative, students from developing worlds have for generations been preyed on principally for the income they engender in western countries.

There was a story about the King of Annamaboe (present day Ghana) who entrusted a British captain (trafficking on the West African coast) with his son and another youth to be taken to England for education in 1749 (Chambers 1864, as cited in Walker, 2014). According to this narrative, the captain then sold them on into slavery. The youths were liberated when the captain died on the voyage and one of his officers alerted the British government. The young men were subsequently ransomed by the British government who brought them to England and placed the under the care of the relevant portfolio holder, the head of the Board of Trade. Appropriately clothed and educated they were subsequently received by George II (Cunningham, 2005). Dr. Samuel Johnson publicly criticized the treachery of captains of the slaving vessels saying, “In

our own time Princes have been sold, by wretches to whose care they were entrusted, that they might have a European education" (Boswell, 1791as cited in Walker, 2014, p. 329).

In another narrative, Rodney (2011) wrote that during the age of imperial domination the colonial powers were able to impose their ideas by force through their direct control over the sources and transmission of knowledge within the colonies such as schools and universities. The process of colonial domination often involved the subordination and even destruction of indigenous culture and forms of knowledge which form their 'universe of meaning' (Berger, 1973).

During the colonial era, indigenous scholars and intellectuals were dominated and socialized into the ideas and epistemologies of the colonizers, and by the time they gained independence, many colonies remained stuck in this mind-set, often seeing their own cultures as inferior to that of their former colonial masters (Boronski, 2021). The consequences were catastrophic for indigenous cultural and intellectual development leaving the people in a state of 'captivity of mind' (Boronski, 2021).

Pietsch (2012) traced back the variants of contemporary internationalization of education to the 19th century, "when the expanding routes of British trade and empire were creating new kinds of global connections and different forms of educational entanglement" (p. 45). History also indicates an early form of international education franchise in India in 1857. This narrative describes a subtle shade of imperialism, when the colonial government essentially outsourced the British model of tertiary education by recruiting British professors to run existing institutions in India (Walker, 2014). According to this narrative, the colonial masters educated Anglicized Indian elite to loyally serve the Raj, at minimum expense because many of these institutions were privately run.

According to Walker (2014), the desirability of a British education later became institutionalized when the colonial government adopted the policy of mandating a British university education for all positions in the Indian Civil Service. This was to raise the prestige of British credential in India. In 1858, the requirement that mandated students to attend classes only in approved centres of the University of London was abolished, and students could be awarded a London degree on the basis of exam success alone. By the turn of the 20th century students from across the empire were studying for a London degree, in Jamaica, Ceylon, Sierra Leone, and Hong Kong (Walker, 2014).

It was said that during the post-colonial era, as the British colonies began to yearn for independence, education became a mimicry of that of Britain. It became a means for the British capitalists to control and dominate colonies on the one hand, and on the other, it was used as a tool of emancipation by some colonies to promote nationalism and in bid for independence (Walker, 2014). Rather than the academic imperialism of the colonial period, education has been replaced by academic neocolonialism in higher education, in which control over the production, flow and transmission of academic knowledge is exercised by the Global North through the structures, organization and curricula of the universities of the now politically independent former colonies (Stein & Andreotti, 2015).

In Britain, the establishment was keen to continue to patronize as the newly independent nations emerged. Trade and diplomacy arguments strengthened the purpose of encouraging students from these new nations to come to British universities (Walker, 2014). Aspiring scholars were attracted from the former colonies, particularly sons of the ruling elites in Africa, Asia, South America, and West Indies (Lee & Rice, 2007; Walker, 2014). The narrative indicated that students that were not from ruling elites had to finance their studies themselves,

and many from India lived on the edge of poverty, some having to be repatriated because of financial difficulty, and many students committed suicide (Niven, 1988). It is very sad that this deep history of international education continues to shape the experiences of international students today as they pursue their learning by crossing borders.

There is limited literature about the historical background of internationalization of education in Canada. However, the establishment of a national organization called 'Friendly Relations with Overseas Students' in 1950 in Toronto was an implicit recognition of the growing importance of international students in the post-war era. Canada saw the need to help international students successfully integrate into their chosen college or university and into Canadian society (Cameron, 2006).

According to Kwak and Kim (2018), prior to the international education branding campaign in 2008, the Canadian government's involvement in higher education has been limited to indirect support through grants, and loans to individuals, contributions to federal research-funding bodies, and social transfers to provinces to support higher education institutions (Kwak & Kim, 2018). The nation-building approach has been the major aspect of immigration policy (Simmons 2010), with no explicit inclusion of education within the immigration package. Immigration in connection to education was generally limited to the issuance of study and work permits, without active recruitment of international students for economic goals (Kwak & Kim, 2018). Ever since Canada joined other advanced countries in a global competition to meet the demand for international education, highly educated and highly skilled immigrants have been attracted from developing nations, seeking an international education as a means to obtaining permanent residence in Canada (Kwak & Kim, 2018).

One manifestation of the development of internationalization in Canada is the increasing enrolment of international students in Canadian institutions of higher education (CBIE, 2014). In 2014 ninety-five percent of Canadian universities have included internationalization in their strategic plans, with 135, 000 full time international students from 186 nations only a decade after the Edu-Canada pilot project was launched (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, [AUCC], 2014; CBIE, 2018). The number of international students has been growing exponentially in Canada more than in any other country, and more than 450,000 students enrollment was projected for 2022 (Trilokekar & Masri, 2018).

International students are considered an important migration category and their contributions to knowledge are significant. The national economy is widely acknowledged but what is perhaps less openly acknowledged is the financial incentive for individual institutions to recruit international students (Altbach, 2015; Altbach & De Wit, 2015; CBIE, 2018; Guo & Chase, 2011; Sá & Sabzalieva 2016; Scott et al., 2015). For instance, in 2010 international students contributed an estimated $8 billion through tuition, living expenses, discretionary spending, and in additional tourism-related benefits (Government of Canada 2020; Walton-Roberts & Hennebry, 2018). In addition to serving as sources of direct income, international graduate students offer more indirect economic contribution through research and innovation in their host institutions as post-doctorates and ‘ideal’ immigrants (Stein & Andereotti, 2016; Chellaraj et al., 2008; Guo & Jamal, 2007).

Recruitment of graduate nursing students is unique as it often takes the student-to-labor-market pathway and a “quick fix” to curtail the effects of nursing shortages and to increase labor market flexibility (Valiani, 2012). Since a bachelor’s degree in nursing is part of the admission criteria to most graduate nursing programs, most students often come with the (foreign)

registered nurse (RN) license with which they could be assessed for practice in Canada. However, the licensing process in Canada is a different story. Walton-Roberts and Hennebry (2018) highlight the challenges international graduate nursing students face on the bumpy road to professional practice. The process of assessment of credentials (evaluation of education equivalent and skill qualifications) is often cited as the most common barrier keeping many students from completing licensure process (Kolawole, 2009). As the pathways to practice are highly constrained, entry to practice RNs are often advised to pursue lower-skilled positions such as unregulated personal support worker or housekeeping positions. This has raised ethical concerns that the practice of using RNs trained as personal support workers in the Global North must be carefully assessed (Walton-Roberts & Hennebry, 2018).

Contemporary Context

Studies often focus on adaptation and transitional challenges that international students experience but less in connection with the intersections of hegemonic systems and practices that perpetuate those experiences (Huang & Klinger, 2006; Ryan & Viete 2009; Rasmi, Safdar, & Lews, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wang 2009). Scholars documented that despite the presence of multicultural centres, diversity education offices, bridge, or mentoring programs, the campuses themselves remain unwelcoming and hostile environments for international students (Guo & Chase, 2011).

The high levels of racism operating on Canadian campuses is also documented (Henry & Tator 2007, Nakhaie 2004). For instance, research highlights the microaggressions and acts of racism that international students face on a daily basis, often causing them psychological fatigue (Calder et al. 2016; Guo & Chase, 2011; Rasmi et al., 2010; Su & Harrison 2016; Thompson & Esses 2016). Lee and Rice (2007) found that students from Asia, Africa, South America, and the

Middle East experienced neo-racism and often felt unwelcome, including in the classroom. For some students, their limited English skills are often a proxy for race-based marginalization (Chira, 2017).

The profound impact and reciprocal effects on the mental health of some students manifested as anxiety, depression, poor academic performance, and the stress of stereotype threat (Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Scott, Safdar, Desai Trilokekar, & El Masri, 2015; Wang, 2009). Much discussion of international students has focused on stereotypes such as a presumed reluctance to talk in class, a preference for rote learning and an apparent lack of critical thinking skills (Chira, 2017). Implied within this stereotyping is a view of international students as people who perhaps lack the desirable qualities for succeeding in higher education and specifically within graduate programs (Chira, 2017).

Learning styles and behaviors such as questioning and challenging professors are unfamiliar to many international students but their inability to adapt to these behaviors is often a justification for academic despotism (Huang & Klinger, 2006). Financial stress often presents as a major source of tension for international students. For instance, Walton-Roberts and Hennebry (2018) found in their study that the majority of international students borrowed in excess of 60 percent of the funds needed to live and study in Canada. The pressure of debt load and lack of financial support often increases the length of time to complete graduate programs or cause them to drop out altogether (Walton-Roberts & Hennebry, 2018).

At the Intersection of Border Crossing and Shifting of Identity

Theoretical perspectives developed by the communities of scholars on border crossing, specifically in the context of domination, race, and colonization provides the cornerstones for

this inquiry. Bringing these concepts together with a critical pedagogy framework allowed for an exploration of the experiences and shifting identities of international graduate nursing students. The concept of border[32] or borderland can present different meanings to different people. According to Anzaldua (1999), any discussion about border is about the story of the 'self':

> Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.

Anzaldual's conceptualization of borders expand further to include the invisible boundaries of relationships, psyche, beliefs and the social aspects of 'self'.

> The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands. In fact, the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of differ in races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (Anzaldua, 1999, p. iv).

Similarly, Giroux (2005) uses border as a discursive tool to articulate different contexts. The concept of borders is used as a metaphor for understanding the multiple cultures, languages, literacies, histories, sexualities, and identities. According to him, thinking in terms of borders allows one to critically engage the struggle over those territories, spaces, and contact zones where power operates to either expand or to shrink the distance and connectedness among individuals, groups, and places. (Giroux, 2005).

Clandinin and Huber (2010) defined border as "a space that exists in between, where one encounters something, an event, a person, or an object, which dislocates our 'stories to live by'" (p. 438). Lugones (1987) referred to crossing of borders as "travelling across worlds" or "world

[32] Border and borderland are used interchangeably in this study, but the concepts are used as metaphor for a place away from homeland.

travelling" (p. 3) and as something that can shift a person's identity. The reality of world traveling, and the shifting of identity is well articulated in the following statement:

> The shift from being one person to, being a different person is what I call "travel." This shift may not be willful or even conscious, and one may be completely unaware of being different than one is in a different "world," and may not recognize that one is in a different "world." Even though the shift can be done willfully, it is not a matter of acting. One does not pose as someone else, one does not pretend to be, for example, someone of a different personality or character or someone who uses space or language differently than the other person. (p. 11)

Also, the description of border in terms of space offers an important understanding about border crossing and a potential change to the narrative identity of someone who is faced with the need to cross borders. Working from this understanding that border crossing is interwoven with shifting of identities, I turned to the work of scholars focused on border/lands. Turning to these scholars, helped me to come to terms with the complexities of international students' experience.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) further expanded my understanding of border as a place of identity making when they wrote that, "borders say that something different is about to begin. Things pass across the borders and different things happen to them" (p. 104). Clandinin (2013) asserted that "our lives unfold as we travel into and between multiple worlds […,] constructing images of who we are and what we are about as well as images of who others are and what they are about" (p. 59). Huber, Caine, Huber, and Steeves (2013) believed that our "identities are inextricably linked with our experiences in a place or in places and with the stories we tell of these experiences" (p. 37).

I drew on Kerby (1991) for an understanding of how borderland experiences work to shift a person's identity. In other words, what happens to us in the worlds that we travel constitute our lived experience and our stories, from which we develop the sense of who we are, how we act and how we come to be recognized as certain kinds of people. Stories of borderlands are those

stereotype narratives, which often disrupt how we have come to know or be in our worlds. Steedman (1986) spoke eloquently to the tension and unease that mark the experience of borderland:

> Stories from the borderlands are stories of "disruption and essential counterpoint… [t]hey are stories of tension and ambiguity, the stories that serve to interrupt and dislocate one's life's continuity […] the stories that have the potential to shift long-held beliefs, assumed notions, and long-standing opinions. (p. 22)

In this inquiry, framing my theoretical understanding of borders and the shifting of identity was important to me. Participants were invited to share their experiences of crossing multiple borders, including the borders of their homelands, of socio-cultural landscapes, and the literal border of Canadian graduate education.

The works of Freire (1984) and Giroux (2005) on critical pedagogy provided the much-needed lens to examine and interrogate the nuanced and slippery slope on which oppression works in tandem with other systems of domination in higher education. In this work, critical pedagogy served as a lynchpin to inquire into the experiences of international graduate students within the context of their homeland and at the Canadian higher education landscape.

Critical pedagogy borrowed significantly from postmodernism, feminism, literary theory, cultural studies, and psychoanalysis. Freire saw the educational system as one of the main instruments of maintaining silence and oppression. From his perspective, the basic purpose of education is to achieve critical awareness which enables individuals to create a space for progress (Freire, 1984). He argued that in such a progress, concepts such as gender, age, race, and social and political limitations are not considered. Freire stressed on the belief that individuals should not see their surrounding structures as a fixed reality where there is no hope to escape from it. Freire asserted that critical pedagogy can be used by students to rewrite their own histories, identities, learning, and a possibility to change their conditions (Freire, 1984).

As practiced by Freire in third world countries, the doctrines of critical pedagogy were used by colonized citizens to analyze their roles in relations of oppression and to devise programs for revolutionary change (Freire, 1984). For him, critical pedagogy is about creating the conditions for people to govern rather than just be governed. To him, education should be used for individuals to become capable of mobilizing social movements against the oppressive economic, racial, and sexist practices put into place by colonization, global capitalism, and other oppressive structures of power (Freire, 1984).

Freire asserted that through the complex production of experience within multilayered registers of power and culture, people can recognize, narrate, and transform their place in the world. In this case he considered experience a starting point and an object of inquiry that can be affirmed, critically interrogated, and used as a resource to engage broader modes of knowledge and understanding. This means that personal experience can be used as a valuable resource for students to relate their own narratives, social relations, and histories to what they are learning. Critical pedagogy recognizes experience as a valuable resource to help students locate themselves in the concrete conditions of their daily lives while furthering their understanding of the limits often imposed by such conditions. On this note, critical pedagogy was deemed a firm cornerstone underpinning this inquiry.

Similarly, Giroux (1992) used spatial metaphor offered by post-colonial and postmodern theories to interrogate the cultural, epistemological, racial, and gendered borders which are constituted, consigned, and contested by individuals and group. Giroux (2005) used critical pedagogy to interrogate "power imbalances in a world that is rapidly redefining relations between its centres and margins and questioning the legitimacy of master narratives" (p.124). He draws on his early work to articulate how power works through the production, distribution, and

consumption of knowledge within institutional contexts and seeks to constitute students as informed subjects and social agents (Giroux, 2011). In this instance, he illuminated how identities, values, and desires are shaped in the classroom context as the ground for politics. Giroux pointed out the danger of critical pedagogy ideology and what makes it so dangerous to fundamentalists, the ruling elites, religious extremists. Central to critical pedagogy is the task of educating students to become critical agents who actively question and negotiate the relationships between theory and practice, critical analysis and common sense, learning and social change.

Returning to my personal experience, I remember how my experiences were systemically silenced and rendered invisible within institutional discourse. To me, the borderland is a space of vulnerability, and I came to know that the claim of being open to diversity, inclusiveness and equity for international students is nothing but an illusion. Freire (1970) helped me understand what it means to be learner-centred. He asserted that rather than standing apart from students, educators should create collaborative partnerships, becoming a 'guide on the side, not a sage on the stage'. To like-minded scholars as Freire, critical approaches to education in the context of anti-racism and anti-oppression require what Henry and Tator (2009) described as "teaching against the grain" (p. 41). It calls for emphasis on the historical inequality that [has] been deeply embedded in social structures and to facilitate the radicalization of students" (Ng, Staton, & Scane, 1995, p. 131).

I saw this inquiry as a way of making visible the invisible experiences of international graduate nursing students in Canada, including my own. I have learned that our story as a lived experience is something that cannot be adequately represented by an outsider. Contrary to an outsider-within standpoint of many inquiries, this inquiry created a space for me to share and

document voice alongside other international students. Because I had access to international students in a way that outsider researchers might not, I used that place of privilege to hear, reflect and understand their stories alongside mine. hooks (1994) offered a way to think about personal experience, “a way of knowing that is often expressed through the body, what it knows, what has been deeply inscribed on it through experience. This complexity of experience can rarely be voiced and named from a distance” (p.91). This narrative inquiry created a new way of thinking about the storied lives of international graduate students, for a better understanding of how they experienced learning at the borderland of Canadian higher education and how those experiences shaped their identity.

Chapter Three

In this narrative inquiry I explored the experiences of international graduate nursing students at the borderland of Canadian education. In my narrative beginnings, I narrated my life and experiences across the multiple borders of education. As I puzzled narratively over the nuance and complexities of my experiences and the role that my early experiences with formal education played in shaping my ways of knowing, I attended to my sense of connections between the past and present as well as understandings of relationship and place, as shaped by colonialism. I found that narrative inquiry was an appropriate methodology for inquiring into the experiences of other international students who might provide further insights into my research puzzles.

Methodology

Broadly speaking, narrative inquiry is a research methodology that allows people to share their experiences through storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described, "human beings are storytelling organisms who individually and collectively lead storied lives … and tell stories of those lives" (p. 5). Specifically, narrative inquiry works as a way of helping people gain understanding and make sense of experiences (Clandinin, Huber, & Murphy, 2011). Narrative is a primary mode of meaning-making through which human beings make meaning in retrospect, of their past experiences and describe themselves and their places in the world (Chase, 2005). Through narratives, people communicate their point of view, as well as emotions, thoughts, and the interpretations that help them make sense of their experiences.

Clandinin (2013) asserted that narrative inquiry serves as a source of knowledge in understanding human lives and the wholeness of each individual. Narrative inquiry focuses on both the participants' and inquirer's experiences. Narrative inquiry methodology works to open a

relational space for participants and inquirer to explore their past and present experiences and contexts that shape these experiences. Narratives teach us where we come from and where we are going and offer meanings to our lives (Charon, 2006). As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) described, "the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals' experience but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (p. 42). Therefore, narrative inquiry was employed in this study as a methodology to inquire into how the experiences of international graduate students are shaped by history of colonization and the systems of domination within the notions of borderlands of higher education. Narrative inquiry, as developed by Clandinin and Connelly (1990) over decades of practice, is relational and a "deeply ethical project" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 30). It is a research methodology informed by the works of Clandinin and Connelly (1986, 1988, 1991, 1998, 2000) and over the years, it has earned a unique reputation in educational research.

The Philosophical Assumptions of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is shaped by Dewey's (1938) pragmatic ontology of experience. Experience, for Dewey, is central - through experience, individuals' lives are composed and re-composed alongside others who are also living storied lives. Dewey (1938) writes that meaning and human's way of knowing is found in experience. According to him, human experiences are shaped by two criteria: interaction and continuity as he wrote:

> Because every experience is constituted by interaction between the 'subject' and 'object', between self and its world, it is not itself neither merely physical nor merely mental, no matter how much one factor or the other predominates... experiences are the product of discrimination, and hence can be understood only as we take into account the total normal experience in which both inner and outer factors are so incorporated that each has lost its special character. In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously external to it. (p. 251)

Dewey's criteria of interaction acknowledge human's experiences in the world as well as the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which the experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted.

Dewey's criterion of interaction informs narrative inquiry in relation to narrative inquirers' attention to sociality as a dimension of storied experience. As such, sociality focuses on the relationships involved in the inquiry process, the interconnectedness of social influence, people's inner life, their environment, and their unique personal history. Dewey believed that inquiry not only presents a way of understanding people's experience through collaboration between an inquirer and the inquired over time but does so in a place or series of places. In other words, apart from creating a way of exploring individuals' experiences, narrative inquiry creates a space for an inquirer to inquire into the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which the experiences occur (Dewey, 1938). Clandinin (2013) further expands my understanding about Dewey's ontology and its relational implications in narrative inquiry when she wrote:

> The regulative ideal for inquiry is not to generate an exclusive faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower. The regulative ideal for inquiry is to generate a new relation between human being and her environment-her life, community, world-one that makes possible a new way of dealing with them and thus eventually creates a new kind of experienced object, not more real than those which preceded but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive. (p.14-15)

Dewey's interaction criterion calls the inquirer to attend to the relational ontology, which is fundamental to narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). This dimension considers narrative inquiry as an exploration of the stories that people live and tell, and in this exploration, people engage and are engaged by both themselves and others. The emphasis on the relational commitment creates a space for an inquirer and participants to share life stories which shape their ways of knowing and being known. The relational understanding also reflects the ontology commitment that calls inquirers to attend to the importance of relational ethics (Clandinin et al., 2018).

Clandinin (2013) helped me to understand that narrative inquiry is relational across time, space, and relationship. I was made to understand that thinking relationally is fundamental to narrative inquiry and thinking relationally calls an inquirer to attend to multiple relationships as Clandinin (2013) wrote:

> The relational between person and his/her world; a temporal understanding of the relational between past, present, and future, including the relational in the intergenerational; the relational between person and place; the relation between events and feelings; the relational between us as people; the relational between the physical world and people; the relational in our cultural, institutional, linguistics, and familial narratives and so on. (p. 23)

Dewey's criterion of continuity called me to attend to temporality of knowledge generation, the connectedness of the interaction involved and the situation under which it occurs, to the unity of an individual's life (Dewey, 1938). Working from a space of temporality and continuity allowed me to attend to our experience as it unfolded over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In other words, experiences are not discreet entities, but they grow out of other experiences, extending to the realms of personal, aesthetic, and social meanings and experiences leading to further experiences (Dewey & Boydston, 1981). Continuity demands an inquiry into the present and the past, but to also anticipate what lies in the future. Dewey's dual criteria of interaction and continuity of experience is linked to temporality (time), place (locating oneself) and sociality (social interactions) or the three-dimensional space in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Dewey (1938) also emphasized thinking and logic as a reflective reconstruction of experience and its centrality to inquiry. According to him, "the [m]emory of the past, observation of the present, foresight of the future is indispensable. But they are indispensable to a present liberation, an enriching growth of action" unfolding in the here and now (p. 182). Dewey (1938) further asserted that, "this foresight is in turn dependent upon an organized survey of past

experiences of present conditions, a recollection of former experiences" (p.184). Working from Dewey's understanding of experience as transactional and continuous, I began to reflect on the past, and the ongoing transactional experiences alongside the participants during the inquiry process and the contexts in which the experiences they shared occurred.

Why Narrative Inquiry?

Narrative inquiry was employed in this study as it helped the participants and me to understand our stories as we shared them with each other. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) narrative inquiry often begins with an interest in the experience of the participants and with a curiosity about how people are living. A narrative inquirer then attends to the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative inquiry, "we try to understand the stories under or on the edges of stories lived and told, as no story stands on its own but rather in relation to many others" (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 387). It is narrative inquiry that helps us make sense of the stories that make up our lives, both individually and socially. Simply stated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 20), "narrative inquiry is stories lived and told." Li (2006) also wrote about narrative inquiry as a powerful methodology to inquire into the complexity and interconnectedness of experience within specific contexts and individual lives. Connelly and Clandinin (1994) helped me understand that we "by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives" (p. 416). Witherall and Noddings (1991) also wrote about the importance of stories in exploring people's experience. According to them:

> Stories are powerful research tools. They provided us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems... They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect [...]. Most important, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning, and researching to improve the human condition. (p. 280)

Narrative inquiry draws on its strength and ability to inform educational research. I was made to understand that narrative inquiry lends a voice to the stories of those on the margin, those whose experience is generally silenced (Griffiths & MacLeod, 2008). Through telling of stories and inquiring into painful memories of experiences, people have found strength to resist the power of dominant narratives shaping their social contexts. Through telling stories the status quo scripts shaping spaces of normalization, or the suppression of alternative life histories can be disrupted, which creates the possibility to re-imagine stories to 'live by' in relation with others (Anzaldua, 1999; Cortés, & Pagden, 1986; hooks, 1990; Nelson, 1995). It can work to "reveal the stranglehold of oppressive metanarratives (and) help to open up possibilities for social change" (Chase, 2005, p. 668). I also worked from an understanding by Menon and Saleh (2018) that narrative creates a space to rewrite the dominant story of borderland. According to them:

> by telling of personal stories and sharing experiences of borders, border-making, border-dwelling, and border-crossing across heterogeneous social education contexts, diverse peoples can disrupt, interrupt, and rewrite dominant border narratives . . . connecting with others who, too, are composing lives in the midst of multiplicities and complexities (Menon & Saleh, 2018, p.62).

It was for these reasons that I engaged in narrative inquiry as a research methodology to inquire into the lived experience of international graduate nursing students. While seeking to understand the stories that international students lived and told about themselves might not be sufficient in making a change to their experience, I saw this inquiry as a beginning point for us to name and interrogate the processes and practices that perpetuate the experiences of oppression, racism, and marginalization for international students within Canadian higher education institutions.

Inquiry Context

This inquiry was conducted at a research-intensive university in Western Canada. This institution is one of the top research-intensive universities that attracts international students to

Canada, therefore it offered a rich context for inquiring into the experiences of international students. The university enrolled over 7,200 international students from 148 countries in 2022 (source: The institution's website). The Faculty of Nursing's statements of values and missions (nested in that of the university), indicate that it is welcoming to diversity and recognizes the importance of equity and inclusion at all levels (Source: Institution's website). The Master of Nursing program is run by the faculty, to prepare nurses for advanced nursing roles in academic, clinical settings, and health care research, leadership and management, clinical nurse practitioner roles, and emerging roles in health care organizations.

Participants

The four participants in this inquiry were men and women from African and Asian countries, two of which were from Africa, one from Nepal and another one from Pakistan. These countries are categorized among the Global South or the developing countries. Participants were in the second or the final year in the Master of Nursing program. All four of them were in the education and thesis-based study streams. All the participants have practiced as registered nurses in their home countries before coming to Canada, and two were nursing faculty members in their countries of origin; one worked as an educator in the clinical setting, and one worked as a factory nurse.

The Three-dimensional Narrative Inquiry Spaces

Engaging in narrative inquiry entails thinking within the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote that "a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and the ambiguity implied, remind us to be aware of where we and our participants are placed at any particular moment-temporally, spatially, and in terms of the personal and the social" (p. 89). An understanding of temporal dimension, from the

perspectives of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refers to the past, present and future, which allowed both the participants and me to travel backward to our past lives, forward to the future we envisioned for ourselves, while attending to the ongoing experience during the research process. It was said that the personal and social dimension has inward, and outward directions and that inward is related to "the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions and so on," while the outward refers to "the existential conditions, that is, the environment" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 417).

As a narrative inquirer, I was cognizant of these commonplaces. This inquiry has a sense of temporal dimension to it because it was framed within the participants' childhood and present experiences, as well as their envisioned future. The inquiry attended to all three-dimensional commonplaces through the process of moving from the midst, to engagement with participants in the field, to field texts, to interim research texts, to research texts and constructing texts with participants.

Returning to Narrative Beginnings

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) wrote that our autobiography offers an insight into how our individual life stories shape an inquiry. According to them, the autobiography is a portion of narrative beginnings that helps an inquirer to shape the research puzzle and the justifications for the inquiry. By writing my narrative beginnings with a focus on my past learning experiences, I was able to come into terms with coherent research puzzles and the justification for the inquiry.

As a part of my narrative beginnings, I have carefully engaged in reflection and autobiographical writing of my early life experiences and the context of those experiences. According to Charon (2006), autobiography is a useful way to come to grips with the process of telling of the self, "for it is as we tell of our self that we put into action the knowledge of oneself"

(p. 70). As I situated myself in my narrative beginnings, I began to contemplate myself amid possible lives of potential participants, and in so doing, I was attentive to the imagined temporality, sociality, and places of participants' lives (Clandinin, 2013). As I contemplated the time, place, and the space where we would come together to negotiate the ways of being together (Clandinin, 2013), I also imagined narratively the negotiating of entry to the midst, the relational living alongside with participants, the spaces of telling of stories, and as well as the research texts.

Ethical Considerations

My ethical commitments of this inquiry were guided by the institutional Research Ethics Board approval and Guidelines at the University. At the start of the study, I applied to the board through the Research Ethics and Management Online [REMO] system for approval. Throughout the research process, alongside attending to relational ethics, I also carefully attended to the requirements outlined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human and University's Policy, in addition to any local, provincial, federal legislations and regulations. As this inquiry was conducted during the COVID pandemic, I also submitted amendments with the REMO system to approve amendments to approaches to participants' conversations including the use of virtual platforms.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) sharpened my thinking about ethical commitment in narrative inquiry as they wrote:

> Ethical matters need to be narrated over the entire narrative inquiry process. They are not dealt with once and for all, as might seem to happen, when ethical review forms are filled out and university approval is sought for our inquiries. They are never far from the heart of our inquiries no matter where we are in the inquiry process. (p. 170)

Clandinin and Caine (2008) asserted that ethical requirements go beyond the usual pledge of privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent and that it involves consideration for how every

stage of the inquiry process impacts the lives of participants. To Connelly and Clandinin (2006), ethics in narrative inquiry goes beyond a legalistic and rights orientation of institutional ethical protocols, "ethical considerations permeate narrative inquiries from start to finish at the outset as ends-in-view are imagined; as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts" (p. 483).

Clandinin et al. (2018) further expanded my understanding on what it meant to be engaged in relational ethics and wakefulness to include attentiveness, curiosity, and emotions when they wrote:

> Coming through "being alive, awake, curious, and often furious," drawing our attention to the importance of passion and curiosity in our work as narrative inquirers and to the ways we tell and listen to our own and participants' stories of experience. (p. 60)

Working with this understanding, I applied for ethics clearance at the University. As a matter of responsibility, I built respectful and trustworthy relationships with 4 participants based on the ethics of everyday life and through informal interactions with each of them before the commencement of our conversations.

Turning to the Details of the Inquiry

Following approval from the University Research Ethics Review Board, a recruitment email describing the study (Appendix A: Information letter and consent) was sent through the university email system. The four participants who participated in the inquiry were recruited through an international student's network. They identified that they had been enrolled for over two years in the program. Participants were graduate students enrolled at a Master of Nursing program at a Canadian university. They were willing to share their stories by responding to my invitations through personal contact, international graduate nursing students' network, phone, email, and through the Nursing Graduate Students Association (NGSA) network (Appendix B:

Email message and poster). Conversations were negotiated with individual participants based on their schedules.

Conversation sessions ranged between 3-10 conversations per participant. Each conversation took about one hour for a period of a year. I lived alongside each participant in conversations for me to learn more detail, not only about the complexity of their stories of border crossing, but also the larger sociocultural narratives that shape their lived experience of border (Clandinin, 2013). In addition to these conversations, I wrote personal reflective journals and field notes about conversation sessions. Returning to these range of field texts (journals, photos, and symbols shared by participants) was helpful for me to understand who we were and were becoming in the inquiry process (Clandinin, 2013). It was necessary to write a follow up letter to the participants on certain occasions, to clarify and request for more details about stories shared. Participants were encouraged to bring artifacts and relevant cultural items to share during conversations. Video-recorded conversations were transcribed. An honorarium of $20 was provided for each tape-recorded conversation as a way of honoring the time spent by the participants.

Relational Negotiations

Engaging in narrative inquiry calls forth long-term, day to day responsibilities and relational commitments between the participant and inquirer. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), entering the field usually begins with the negotiation of relationships and the research puzzles. This commitment was maintained as I negotiated purpose, transitions, intentions, and texts throughout the inquiry. They recommended that an inquirer should spend ample time with participants, and prolonged engagement with participants in the community (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Keeping this in mind, I followed what Clandinin (2013) said:

> inquiry begins when participants and inquirer enter into the midst of each other's lives […] all the experiences are deeply imbued in ethics, and we need to remain as wakeful as we can be to who we are in the inquiry space and how our presence shapes spaces between us and participants. Living alongside participants within the three-dimensional space throughout the inquiry, the inquirer is wakeful to issues of relational ethics even though the lives of participants and the inquirer meet in the midst as they engage in the inquiry together, they will both leave the midst at the end of the inquiry when the final research texts are composed, and they both acknowledge the possibility that neither will walk away from the inquiry unchanged. (p. 119)

Entering in the Midst

Relationships are central to narrative inquiry and the inquirers often enter research relationships in the midst[33]. The turn away from the realist perspective of objectivity in the researcher-researched relationship (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) and the relational commitment endorsed by narrative inquiry (Clandinin et al., 2018) made it an appropriate methodology to inquire into the lives of international graduate students. A narrative inquirer does not 'bracket' the self from the participants, rather it is assumed that "human interaction and humans are embedded in context, people, cultures, and events that have histories that affect the present, findings of inquiry cannot be decontextualized" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 11).

For me, being in the midst implied my need to pay attention to the experience of participants within Canadian higher education systems that were shaped by political, ethical, linguistics, and cultural narratives (Craig & Huber, 2007). Paying attention in this sense involved engaging with participants, being attuned to their stories, the silences, metaphors, and allusions (Charon, 2006). Entering in the midst and being in the field required me to negotiate and engage in a relationship with participants, attending to our past, present, and future unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). As a beginning narrative inquirer, I searched for myself "in the middle of the nested set of stories,"

[33] The term used by Clandinin (2004) to represent the "dimensions of time, place, the personal and the social, also a nested set of stories" (p. 43).

my stories and those of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). This helped me locate my space as a researcher within the narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2008).

From Field to Field Texts

Narrative inquiry involves being in the field whereby the researcher negotiates relational spaces with participants on an ongoing basis (Clandinin (2013). According to Clandinin, Caine, and Lessard (2018), relational spaces are "spaces characterized by mutuality and possibility, where embodied, lived tensions become resources or triggers for telling and retelling of stories" (p. 42). During the time in the field, I engaged in an ongoing conversation with participants to attend to these relational and mutually negotiated spaces where it felt safe to share their stories. I was attentive to the internal conditions of participants as well as myself within the inquiry.

The personal and social dimension allowed me to explore participants' internal conditions such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions, as well as to what they experienced in multiple borders that they travelled in time and from place to place. This called for what Clandinin (2013) described as "living alongside participants and settling into the temporal unfolding of lives" and living along participants' stories involves inquirers "going wherever the participants take them, meeting participants' families or friends and entering into places relevant to the participants" (p. 45). Working with this idea of living alongside participants during the inquiry, I inquired into the familial, institutional, and cultural contexts that shaped who they are and their ways of knowing.

The third dimension of place refers to "the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry space" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 51) or an environment where it is safe for people to think about how their experiences are shaped by places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this inquiry, securing a physical space became a tension-filled endeavor because of an

unprecedented case of living amidst a pandemic. This called me to travel with participants through their stories and engage with where they have been and were at in their academic journey virtually. Clandinin et al. (2018) help me to understand that wakefulness and relational ethics are interwoven and central to narrative inquiry as they wrote:

> As we consider what it means to live in a relationally ethical way, we see that wide-awakeness or wakefulness is of necessity part of the process of engaging in narrative inquiry. We cannot be fully engaged in our own lives and our lives alongside others without working toward wide-awakeness, that awareness of what it is to be in the world, not in some abstract way but in the particulars of the lives being lived by researcher and participants. (p. 60)

Working with this understanding, living alongside participants called me to be wakeful to who my participants and I were and were becoming, as well as to the changes in the relational space that we negotiated with each other, both in the times we spent, the imagined future as well as the possible consequence of our living alongside each other in this inquiry.

To initiate conversations with the participants, I followed what Clandinin and Caine (2008) suggested, that one should listen to participants tell their stories or live alongside as they live their stories. Keeping in mind the words by Clandinin (2004), that narrative inquiry is not intended to provide therapeutic answers to questions, or resolve issues, instead of using a predetermined question or interview with my participants, I engaged in conversations with them using a set of guiding questions (Appendix C).

Taylor (2007) asserted that the use of historical artifacts in inquiry is appropriate because it creates a space for a coherent composition of the stories of both the participants and inquirer. On some occasions, I initiated conversations by sharing my personal experiences and encouraging participants to share their backgrounds, memories, or artifacts. I was attentive to how participants lived and told their stories. Field texts constitute a significant aspect of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). As part of this study, a diversity of field texts such as field

notes, journals, transcripts of conversations, email communications, and the use of artifacts were negotiated with participants.

Field Text to Interim Research Texts

Clandinin (2013) suggested writing interim texts as a way to understand experience as narrative construction (methodology) and how the experience (phenomenon) is understood in a way that could be studied. Using this suggestion and working carefully within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, I began to shape field texts to compose interim research texts, and I did this in collaboration with participants, with attention to temporality, sociality, and place. Clandinin (2013) suggested that:

> As narrative inquirers, we need to hold open and to make visible the ways that participants, and we, struggle for coherence, sometimes successful, sometimes not. We must, in composing, and co-composing, and negotiation of interim and final research texts, make visible the multiplicity as well as the narrative coherence and lack of narrative coherence, of our lives, the lives of participants, and the lives we co-compose in the midst of our narrative inquiries.

Working with this idea, and to make sense of our conversations and experiences during this phase, I wrote the narrative accounts of each participant at a time, beginning with a tentative sketch of what needed to be included in the accounts.

I met with each participant to share their narrative account and to ensure that their stories represented their experience and reflected our relationship. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) warned us that one of the poignant moments in narrative inquiry is usually the moment when research texts are shared with participants. Negotiating the narrative accounts with one of the participants was an ethical and a tension-filled experience. As Clandinin (2013) described,

> It is only as we attend simultaneously to all three dimensions that we can come to understand in deeper and more complex ways the experiences are relevant to our research puzzles. Only through attending to all dimensions can we see the disruptions, interruptions, silences, gaps, and incoherence in participants' and our shared experiences. (p. 50)

It was through dialogue and a series of virtual conversations that I was able to see the disruptions, interruptions, silences, gaps, and incoherence that mark participants' and my own lived experience and storied lives at the borderland. It was from these virtual conversations that I co-constructed interim research texts in conversation with participants.

Our stories offered an insight not only into the ways that we make meaning of our lives, but also into the experiences that shape our ways of knowing. While this work focused on the lived experience of international graduate nursing students, it also made visible the practices and systems that silence and marginalize minority students. It is anticipated that this dissertation will truly contribute to movements for equity and inclusion within and beyond the Canadian higher education landscape.

Chapter Four

Participants' Narrative Accounts

I was reminded by Clandinin and Connelly (1991), that "a researcher's narrative account of an educational event may constitute a retelling of the event, and to that extent it is on a continuum with the processes of reflective retelling that go on in each of our educational lives" (p. 259). The narrative accounts presented in this chapter and the next three chapters are the accounts of storied identities of four participants who are sons, daughters, uncles, aunts, cousins, community members, and students from four different nationalities. Each participant came with unique experiences, dreams, values, and hopes that shaped their identity.

Narrative Account 1: Mohammed's Story

Living Alongside Mohammed

I decided to inquire into the experiences of international students, despite not really knowing what to expect in the field. I was nervous, particularly at a time when things seemed so uncertain. Since the beginning of the year, it seemed like the world had been turned upside down by unprecedented cases of people who were ill or dying, due to the COVID 19 pandemic. I learned that many international students returned to their countries as public health measures took effect. Those who stayed back often were living in social isolation. I was unsure, given all the turmoil and uncertainty created by the pandemic and its implications, that there would be any response to my invitation to participate in this study. I was ambivalent. On one hand I was excited and eager to begin my field work, on the other hand I was nervous because I had no idea how to engage in my fieldwork. It was my very first narrative inquiry study. Despite the uncertainty, I received a response from one person who was interested to share his story. Mohammed was introduced to me by a colleague who taught him in an undergraduate nursing

program at a University in Uganda. Despite the virtual nature of our meeting, my first encounter with Mohammed felt warm and friendly to me. He appeared calm and relaxed, and it felt like we have known each other for many years. The combination of his soft voice and accent obscured my self-consciousness and nervousness. I wondered what form or shape our research relationship would take. What turns would this journey take? How long would it be? What would our living alongside each other's stories be like? As at the time, little did I know that our journey would take us four months of living and learning alongside each other and sharing our stories of borderlands. Our meetings stretched from the beginning of September to the end of December 2020. I remembered the emphasis by Clandinin (2013), for narrative inquirers to be mindful of the relational aspect of inquiry. I was reminded of possible ethical matters, tension, and the complexities during the relationship. I also kept in mind the words of Dewey (1938), that called us to look back into our past to make sense of our present experience and to imagine the possibilities in our future. As a beginning point in living alongside Mohammed and a way of starting our unfolding meaning making of experience, I asked if he could begin by sharing the events of his early beginnings.

Mohammed chose to take up this question in relation to his nursing studies. He described his journey as a learner and his passion to do nursing even though his family had wanted him to study medicine. I listened attentively as he worked me through his journey in the nursing program.

> *I started my nursing in 1999 and, you know, I started with a three-year diploma program. I completed my diploma in 2002, and my graduation was also the same year. And then I worked for some years. Initially when I was studying, you know, I, thought that it would be my last…my foundation, and this will continue to be my source of earning. But later on in 2006, I realize that there was introduction of a degree in my country, it also started the same time I was in diploma program. But it was not for people like me, you know, it was for a cohort of students. (Mohammed's Conversation, September 9, 2020)*

I listened carefully to Mohammed and noted the many details he shared with me. Yet, as I was listening, I thought about how much I would have loved to know about his early beginnings, his experience growing up as a child. What was his relationship with his family? Did he live in an extended family? Had he brothers and sisters, uncles and aunties or elders? Were there family members who influenced his early experiences? What was his story about who and what shaped the person he has become? I wished to learn about his culture and Ugandans' traditional way of knowing.

I could only wonder whether Mohammed chose not to share these aspects of his experience for a good reason. As I deliberated the puzzles, I was reminded of the words by Witherell and Noddings (1991), that the decision as to which stories will be told and which will be suppressed serve as a form of power to the narrator. I was aware that as an inquirer, it was not my place to determine what Mohammed should share. Keeping in mind that relational ethic is at the heart of narrative inquiry, I was reminded of my relational commitment to be wakeful to participants' stories (Clandinnin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018) and "be more deeply attentive to the other" (p. 22). I was also reminded that it matters "how we […] listen to others' stories in narrative inquiry […] and how we listen can influence or shape the lives of both listeners and tellers" (Clandinnin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018, p. 2). With these words echoing in my mind, I decided to keep attuned to what Mohammed was sharing.

> *But later, when I had finished studying and started working, then I got courage, ok? (Mohammed paused briefly). One of my colleagues told me that they also want to study, and they were going to do degree. I said, oh! If they can go study, let me also think about it. And then eventually I was now thinking which university will I go? But at the same time, you know, as I was also trying to look for means and struggle in terms of meeting my standard of living. I looked at options of which program would be flexible to accommodate studying while working. I came to find out that there were only two or three universities which were offering degree nursing program, and two of them had*

> *direct entry for those who have completed an advanced program[34] and wanted a degree. It was a full-time study, unfortunately, and I only had an ordinary level. (Mohammed's Conversation, September 9, 2020)*

I continued to listen as Mohammed unpacked his story about the need for him to further his education, the search for a university that could best fulfil his educational goal, and his struggles while going to school and working to support himself financially. I was attentive to the similarity of his story to my own experience. He went into more details about his decision to go for a program that could accommodate his work schedule.

> *I learned about one private university which offered a program that has a flexible schedule. I went to explore about this university, and I learned that there were two days of classes, and I could work the rest of the week. So, I said, aha (Mohammed smiled). So, this is a program that would accommodate my schedule. So, I applied to the university, and I was admitted (he smiled more) in 2006. It was a two-year program and I completed in 2008. I had my graduation in 2009 and I went back to work full time where I was still working then. (Mohammed's conversation, September 9, 2020)*

Mohammed looked so happy as he proudly described his motivation and the determination to go for his graduate education.

> *And again, (beaming with more smiles) also there's a need for me to go back to do my masters. Now, one of the pushes … for my Master (Mohammed laughed loud) was that I wanted to advance my career. (Mohammed's Conversation, September 9, 2020)*

Mohammed shared his story of motivation and why he chose to come for his master's program in Canada. He acknowledged the poor quality of his education in Uganda, and he wanted an exposure to better education. So, he decided to seek admission in a Canadian university knowing the possible challenges of studying abroad.

> *I came from where the way we were taught…(he stuttered inaudibly). I used to think that better education system stemmed from the foundation, and I knew that I had a problem in terms of what we call the culture. I used to have a culture of reading whereby, you give me just one page article to read and I see that to be too much. I think it is just the anxiety*

[34] The system of education in Uganda is 7 years elementary school, followed by 4 years lower secondary (high school) education, after which there are two options: ordinary certificate (2-3 years) or advanced certificate education (2 years). Degree nursing was introduced in Uganda in 1993, those who complete advanced certificate program could have direct admission to a university, but those with ordinary level certificate need to complete diploma program before they could gain admission into a university.

> *that affected my culture of reading. I decided to attend other universities at a level where the culture of reading is built at a very young age. I asked myself, 'if I get admission, will I really be able to manage it?' and I said, 'I'm just going to be a failure there'. When I applied, I realized that many students also who applied but I was selected based on merit. So, I said to myself, 'you see, do not worry about failing, that failing is part of learning, so long as you learn when you fail. (Mohammed's Conversation, September 9, 2020)*

Reflecting on my Own Experience Alongside Mohammed

Listening to Mohammed's story, I heard a story of passion and determination. It was like reliving my own story. Taking a reflective turn on my experience throughout my university education, it sounded incredible having to work a full-time job and go to school full-time. I remember that during my undergraduate nursing, I was a full-time student, raising two young children, and working full time (permanent night shift) job. Friends often wondered how that was possible for me and I often responded with a smile, that my passion was my drive. Perhaps my value for education was the reason why I invest so much into it. Thinking about my own experience, some questions came to my mind that I wanted to ask Mohammed. I wondered if he too was raising his own family at the time. Did he have children? Did he have aged parents or dependents that he was expected to support? I wished Mohammed could unpack these questions, but I felt that I should not interrupt him as he shared his stories. Since we ran out of (the one hour scheduled) time, I felt it was a good idea to write him a letter. I wanted to see if we could explore those questions at our next meeting.

> *Dear Mohammed,*
>
> *Thanks for sharing your story with me regarding your earlier educational journey in your country prior to your coming to Canada. I have learned that our lives are full of stories, and it is by telling our stories that we can make sense of our lived experience. As I began to think with your story, I wondered what it meant to you becoming a nurse instead of going by your family's wish to be a*

> *medical doctor. I wondered if there was any way in which this decision might have impacted your journey so far. I would have loved to know your early beginnings, your experience growing up as a child, your family members, if you had brothers and sisters, uncles and aunties or elders who contributed to your early learning experience to shape the kind of person you are today as a learner. I would have loved to learn about your culture and the traditional methods by which your people educate their children. I would have loved to learn about the system of education in Uganda. I am wondering if we could make these the launching pad for our next conversation. I am looking forward to our next meeting. Let me know what time works best for you. Thanks, Bisi.*
> (Letter to Mohammed, September 10, 2020)

Impacts of Colonization

Clandinin and Connelly (1986) helped me to understand the significance of staying engaged with people's stories. Through their words, I have come to understand that "we tell stories about ourselves that are historical, explanatory, and foretelling of the future" (p. 377). It was with this understanding that I encouraged Mohammed to share the origin of formal education in his country.

> *So, the African traditional education was there before the colonization, and this was on the context of culture and language, and it was passed from generation to generation, from family to family. And it is only … (he stuttered a bit) it was the informal. So, there was no specified time … (he stuttered) any time members in the community or the young ones were able to learn. And then later, after the colonization, we had … (he stuttered) the educational system we have is what they call the European education system. And when I talk about this a little bit, this is true because this history has really impacted my educational journey. As we are going to discuss you, you'll see that it has some connection with the history of my country colonization.*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, September 15, 2020)*

Mohammed talked about the traditional way of knowing in Uganda, a form of education that was unstructured, informal, generational, and based on oral tradition. This was a form of education

that was in existence prior to colonization in Uganda. Rodney (2011) made it clear, the uniqueness and outstanding features of African indigenous education:

> Its close links with social life, both in a material and spiritual sense; its collective nature; its many-sidedness; and its progressive development in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child. There was no separation of education and productive activity or any division between manual and intellectual education. Altogether, through mainly informal means, pre-colonial African education matched the realities of pre-colonial African society and produced well-rounded personalities to fit into African society. (p. 380)

Mohammed talked about the European system of education and its connection to the history of colonization in Uganda, and its impacts on his educational journey. As I listened, I reflected on the impact of colonization not only on education but on all aspects of our lives in Africa: our language, religion, traditional belief system, and economy. I also wondered about the extent to which colonialism affected the lives of the Ugandans. Did it obliterate their traditional education? Was there any aspect of their culture that they still hold on to? What traditional way of knowing did Mohammed learn from his parents, grandparents, or extended family members prior to starting formal education? This conversation called forward a rush of emotion as I reflected on the aftermath of colonial domination and its reflection of unequal power in our educational system. Mohammed elaborated more on the origin of formal education, particularly the origin of nursing in Uganda.

> *Because the missionary who came were military, and some were missionaries, from Christian faith. The kind of relationship between the missionary nurses and their local maids at that time was that of master-servant relationship. It was based on loyalty. It was not about learning but much more but about serving. (Mohammed's Conversation, September 15, 2020)*

Mohammed shared a story about a particular experience while in nursing school during his diploma program. It was interesting to see how his face lit up with excitement as he described the experiences. He talked about his people's beliefs and wonderment about the Western medical

practice. As I listened to him, I wondered about the distortions that came with being stripped of one's beliefs and having a foreign one established.

> *So, my friend came to me with another colleague of mine and asked if I heard the news? I said, no. They told me that it was in the radio, that one man was describing someone who looked like me. So, I said, what happened? They told me that the person thought that his relative was bewitched and when he took the patients for an ultrasound, that his condition changed. So, he felt that the spirits bewitching the patient might have been extraordinarily strong because all medical personnel were unable to help. According to him, the spirit seemed so strong that the ultrasound could not be done. Until one man (Mohammed now referring to himself) who was brown in color came and after talking politely to the patient, he then did his miracle. He was able to put an intravenous line on the patient, which gave the impression that the brown man had a spirit that was stronger than that of the patient. It was interesting to hear all about it. And even the journalists were surprised, wondering how can a human being manage the spirits? So, you know, in my country … when people talk about spirits, some people in the family … believe that they do exist. (Mohammed's Conversation, September 15, 2020)*

I tried to stay with Mohammed's story as he talked about this experience with pride and excitement. I found myself engrossed in the wonderment on how some African traditional beliefs intersect with Western beliefs. Listening to this story, I became curious about Mohammed's own personal beliefs as a nurse, about the existence of supernatural powers. How did these beliefs intersect with his professional practice? Other aspect that he associated with colonization was the attention to people's skin color. He looked very proud of his light skin color. I was amused as he looked at his bare arms with admiration.

> *...because among the students, I was the only one who was a little bit brown from collaterally. They used to call me 'Muzungu' and Muzungu means white, Caucasian. So, if I tell people that, I'm a Ugandan man, honestly, they don't believe me ...they think I am a foreigner or somebody from another country and not an indigenous person. (Mohammed's Conversation, September 15, 2020)*

Listening to Mohammed describe his people's reactions to his skin color, I was wondering what they make of people with lighter skin color. Do they earn more respect than dark skinned individuals? Are they considered strangers who do not belong? Do people associate their lighter skin with special power of civilization? I wondered what his own belief about his lighter skin

color was. Did he believe (like his friends) that his successful insertion of the infusion for the patient had something to do with light skin? Another puzzling piece was the belief about gender roles and its influence on their perception about the nursing profession.

> *…and because, again, of the stereotyping, which is heavily influenced by the colonial system in my country, know that a man cannot do nursing work…that is not for all for men that nursing is mainly a predominantly women profession. Even me. I find it a hard thing to explain to people that I am a nurse, even to some family members, whenever I tell them that, they don't believe. (Mohammed's Conversation, September 15, 2020)*

I could feel his struggle to express himself as he described what the system of education is like in his country and his experience with nursing education. As I listened to Mohammed, it became more visible that language has a hidden power. It helped me understand his narratives about colonialism and its effects on his education. It helped me understand what it meant to be stripped of one's culture (and language). It became more visible how easy for a vulnerable person to be silenced by the power of language. I wondered how many fights one might have given up because of not being able to express oneself coherently, and the tensions that come with that. I had several questions swirling in my head that day. I wondered what was the primary language for Mohammed, and what it was like for him being educated in English. I would have loved to learn about his indigenous language. How did he learn to speak and write English? What was it like when he started formal education? Also, I could not help but wonder if his decisions to become a nurse and his choice to come to Canada for his graduate education were influenced by some beliefs about Western education. He mentioned a lot of things in his discussion that we did not have enough time to discuss, so the meeting ended with several puzzles to be unpacked at our next meeting. I remembered that Mohammed was dismissive when I suggested that I would be sending him a letter. Yet, at the end I negotiated the idea of sending the letter. I wrote about the puzzles that stayed with me. Here is an excerpt of my letter to Mohammed:

Dear Mohammed,

It was nice meeting again yesterday. It was fascinating for me listening to your stories about the indigenous form of education in Uganda and about your traditional belief system. I think what you shared about your experience caring for a patient who was believed to be possessed with a spirit was interesting. It is a wonder how traditional beliefs and Western civilization often intersect. I remember a few things mentioned in the conversation that I would like us to unpack more at our next meeting. For instance, I would like to learn about your primary indigenous language of communication and what it was like for you being educated in English. I would like us to talk about your experience when you started formal education. Also, I want us to talk about your decisions to become a nurse and your choice to come to Canada for your graduate education. I am wondering if these decisions have anything to do with your beliefs about the Western civilization. I wish to know how it made you feel to be referred to as a "Muzungu." It would be great if we could unpack all these aspects of our conversation at our next meeting. I look forward to meeting you again.

Thanks. Bisi (A letter to Mohammed, September 16, 2020)

A Culture of Reading

It was not easy for Mohammed and me to follow a regular meeting schedule. He worked a casual job and we had to cancel our meeting on several occasions because he was called to work on a short notice. He was visibly excited at this meeting, and he expressed that he was looking forward to our meeting. He also expressed his perspective about learning. To him, learning can occur in different situations, and one could learn from any experience even those experiences considered to be a culture shock. For him, the meeting was another opportunity to learn some new things, so he made it clear that he was opened to learning from our conversation.

I found this ironic because I expected to be the one learning from him through his stories. I have told myself earlier that I would try to be a good listener and not dominate the conversation, therefore, I must be cautious and wakeful to my tendency to jump into conversations quickly. I saw this open attitude (on Mohammed's part) as a reminder that our relationship was a journey in which our learning was unfolding.

As a way of getting him to lead in the conversation, I reminded him about the letter that I sent him some weeks earlier. This created an opportunity for us to pick up from where our conversation ended the last time. The "culture of reading" was a phrase that came up several times when Mohammed was talking about his experience in Canada. Since I was not familiar with this phrase, I asked if he could expatiate more on what he meant:

> *And I think before I go to looking at the culture of reading, I think it will make sense…I feel it is better to understand…if I could take you to…or share a little bit about our education system back in my country so that you'll understand… maybe all of what I talked about…about the culture of reading or maybe poor culture of reading. Er…in my country, which is also a developing country, the education system was built through the colonial system of education and talking in emphasis with the education in nursing. But what I came to realize is that if I look at both history between developing country and the types of nursing education, they share the same common history in terms of, um, in terms of the system which was started like…it was started by through the religious…like faith-based…which promoted education in nursing. (Mohammed's Conversation, October 1, 2020).*

As I tried to stay with Mohammed's story at this point, I was wondering if the "culture of reading" that he was trying to explain was a system of education or a kind of culture introduced during the colonial era. I remembered how colonialism has deeply impacted the system of education in my country and the status of the school system today. I was keenly interested in learning from Mohammed about the history of education in Uganda, and particularly the nursing education. So, with keen interest, I listened to him shared the history of nursing education in his country.

> *Er…like in my country the first nursing school which started around 1936, and it was started by a doctor called Dr Paul Albert Cook. But Albert Cook had a wife called Margaret. She was a nurse and in need of… what they call a nurse attendant, it means the local people who can help with auxiliary work. So, she thought the…because she found that most local people at that time in Uganda had no Western education. So, she felt that…she could recruit people to work like auxiliary nurses. And then she thought that those who were already working for her as maids could be trained on the job as auxiliary nurses. (Mohammed's Conversation, October 1, 2020)*

I found it interesting that generally, there were some similarities between the origin of Western education in Uganda and Nigeria. Like in Uganda, the founders of Western education in Nigeria were the missionaries. According to historical records, the first mission schools in Nigeria were established in Badagry and Abeokuta in 1842 by a Wesleyan Methodist missionary named Rev. T. B. Freeman (Nduka, 1964). The first midwifery school was established in Abeokuta about a century later, by the Roman Catholic missionaries. While the wives of the Methodist missionaries undertook the responsibility of teaching young female servants how to read and write, the Roman Catholic nuns were responsible for the delivery of babies. Over time, the nuns too started teaching the maids working for them how to take deliveries and perform hygiene related tasks (Nduka, 1964). The school later became a school of nursing and is still functional today. I could see that even though Mohammed and I had our initial nursing education at different times and in different countries, that there is a commonality of experience. My entire elementary, secondary and university education bore a similarity to the authoritarian kind of education described in Mohammed's story.

> *Now, when I look at the education system back in my country, it is more of teacher centered learning. And the characteristics. There are some characteristics that facilitate rote learning, it is more of recall, whereby you must memorize the information and then you regurgitate the information just to pass…eh? But there is no room…no flexibility for questioning the information that they share. So, it's a matter of rote learning…and this rote learning, which is characteristic of teacher centered learning…the instructor is…more of an authoritarian…whereby he is unquestioned. It means that students cannot ask the instructors if the information is reliable. What is the basis?*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, October 1, 2020)*

As Mohammed continued to share his experience about rote learning, I remembered my own struggles with rote learning. It was exceedingly difficult for me. I often forgot or became confused whenever I tried to memorize concepts. While rote learning might be convenient for some learners, it was not the case for me. So, rather than memorizing, I learned to read and understand ideas. Because of the similarity to my own story, I tried to be wakeful as Mohammed continued his story because there were many similarities between his school story and mine.

> *The teacher is seen as the master of knowledge and…the person being the master of knowledge must be fully respected without criticism. Now also…that the instructor come to study…only they perceive the instructor as the source of knowledge, so the students… are not motivated to go and do their own inquiry, investigation, or research. The students can come…they don't bother to read more…to have different perspectives. They only are interested in what the instructor will tell them. If the instructor says "you must write" …that's what they know…that they don't have much to write.*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, October 1, 2020)*

There was a lot to unpack about what he was sharing. Listening to him reminded me of my own earlier experience of education in my country. It felt like retelling my story. The question in my mind was 'what was the origin of this authoritarian system of education?' 'What was the origin of this mediocrity?' As I engaged with this question, I began to find sense in what Nduka (1964) wrote about the Western education in Nigeria and its original purpose. I asked myself, 'What if it was true that the aim was to train subordinates to serve the colonial masters' agenda?' 'What if it were true that the aim was to produce clerks and artisans who should not work independently but under supervision? What if it were true that the original purpose was to provide the minimum level of literacy just enough for individuals to work as technical assistants, court interpreters, and dispensers? Sheared (1992) explained that when people are marginalized, adequate resources are not given to ensuring their success. Western education was not designed for Africans to produce professionals, instead it was to produce subservient individuals. It was by design that the

colonized were stripped of their culture, education, economy, and religions so all aspects of their livelihood became undesirable.

Rodney (2011) wrote about the essence of colonial education in Africa:

> The main purpose of the colonial school system was to train Africans to help man the local administration at the lowest ranks and to staff the private capitalist firms owned by Europeans. In effect, that meant selecting a few Africans to participate in the domination and exploitation of the continent as a whole. (p. 379-380)

Even though Mohammed did not include much detail about the origin of the Western education in his country, I found a resonant thread in his story and my account. Historically, formal education in Nigeria started with the colonizers. The early schools were managed by the British masters, "It is they (colonizers) who, by the stimulus of living example, will set the standard of the school" (Nduka, 1964, p. 35). This called forth a question of where did the authoritarian culture come from? As I pondered on this puzzle, I could not but think about what Rodney (2011) wrote that, "colonial schooling was education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment" (p. 380).

If the indigenous teachers have been taught by their colonial masters, could it be that this culture was inherited and continued to generations until the modern day? As I continued to deliberate, the answer to my puzzles was made visible in Mohammed's story.

> *And as you know…I think there's a school of thought which says that the world in certain times…the way you were taught…it will impact how you will be teaching students. It will also influence how you will teach these students in the future. So, for example, if you were taught in that kind of…where students do not have an opportunity to have critical thinking…you again…you'll be just teaching students the same way you have being taught. So now the issue that I was telling…it comes back to what we call the culture of reading, as you see here. (Mohammed's Conversation, October 1, 2020)*

When I asked him to share his experience on how he managed learning within such an authoritarian system, I noted that Mohammed narrated in second person 'you', and instead of talking about himself he talked about 'students'. I wondered if there was a reason for choosing to

position himself as an observer in this case. Could this be his personal experience as a learner or what he observed in his students when he was working as a teacher? Could it be that he was talking from a general point of view? These were the wonderments that I wished Mohammed could unpack as I listened to his story. I learned that people often talk in third person when they do not wish to associate with an unpleasant situation. I wondered if this was what Mohammed was doing. Did he consider authoritarian teaching as something bad? He described how he managed his learning during his school days, for instance, by not challenging his teachers, being obedient, and doing what he could do, to avoid being punished.

> *Because of the teacher-centred learning…the other additional nursing education…it was based on loyalty. So, students must be obedient to their instructors or whoever has the knowledge. So, it was based on loyalty and just to being loyal and being loyal (Mohammed was now pounding on his desk to emphasize), it means they do not question. (Mohammed's Conversation, October 1, 2020)*

As Mohammed carried on with this conversation, I was wondering what being loyal meant in this case. Does being loyal entail agreeing with whatever a teacher said or did? Does it mean not questioning or challenging the instructor's idea? Listening to Mohammed felt like re-living my experience of what student-teacher relationship was when I was going to school in my country. Not being loyal connotes different interpretations. I remember that questioning a teacher's idea could be interpreted as an attitude of disrespect. Simply requesting an explanation from a teacher could put the teacher in an awkward position. In my view, this is a legacy that was passed down from previous generations. For instance, if someone has been taught to internalize ideas without questioning, the person is probably not in the best position to explain due to a lack of adequate understanding of such ideas. I continued to deliberate these thoughts as our meeting came to an end and we had to reschedule for another time.

Living in Relational Engagement with Mohammed

According to Witherell and Noddings (1991), "Stories invite us to come to know the world and our place in it" (p. 13). This statement was what I was reflecting on when I was planning this meeting. I was looking forward to exploring Mohammed's world and to see if there was a place where our worlds intersect.

During this meeting, I was far away up North on a remote Island working. There had been no electricity for over a week. On top of it all, it was the peak of the Covid19 pandemic. I had to keep in touch with my family. They needed to know that I was doing okay, and I needed to know they were doing well too. The power outage affected many activities because there was no water supply, no phone or internet connections. We could only attend to emergency cases. It felt like we were cut off from the rest of the world. It reminded me of when I was in Nigeria when there could be power outage for weeks. It also brought to my consciousness, our level of dependence on technology. The power outage affected not only official duties but daily life activities. I could not cook, shower, or communicate with my family. It was a very scary situation for me.

I had scheduled the meeting with Mohammed before I left the city and I let him know that I would be meeting on Zoom from outside the city. I was worried that I might not be able to communicate with him, at least to let him know that our meeting might not be possible. As if by miracle, electricity was restored a few hours prior to this meeting. I was delighted but I was not sure what to expect. I was not sure if the electricity would be stable or there would be another outage soon. I tried to call Mohamed to warn him of the possibility of an interruption of connectivity during our meeting and see if we could schedule the meeting for another time. Good enough he was available to take my call.

So, we were able to have the meeting that evening. The Internet connection was extremely poor with several episodes of interruption in our conversation. Eventually, we were able to connect, and I expressed my appreciation for Mohammed's patience regarding this experience. When asked to provide a chronologic account of his experience going to school in his country, Mohammed described an interesting educational system. He first walked me through the different levels of education that he experienced.

> *I want to take a little bit back to give you a background of my education before even joining the diploma, I started with the pre-primary. It depends on terminology; some people call it nursery. Well, it is for three years, there is level one, level two, and then there is the third level when you graduate and then you go to primary one. So also, in the primary, we have seven years in primary. Then when you have done seven years in primary and then you go to post primary, which is also called secondary school. Now, in secondary, we have ordinary level, which is four years, and then we have advanced level, which is two years. And then from there we have what we call post-secondary or tertiary education. (Mohammed's Conversation, October 15, 2020)*

He then gave an account of the nature of the teaching and learning environment in Uganda and the major challenges. He began by talking at length about the disproportion between student population and the classroom capacity.

> *The classes I've been attending since I started from primary, we have been attending a class with many students and in some classes, we used to have what we call streams like, like maybe primary one. There is A, B, C, D, E, they use either letters or the names of animals or color just to name a stream. Even some classrooms used to have up to 100 students. (Mohammed's Conversation, October 15, 2020)*

What Mohammed narrated about the students population is not peculiar. I remember that in my primary school and high school, there were many streams in which each class usually had up to thirty students. This might be related to the government policy, or fact that many parents who did not experience formal education felt compelled to send their children to school. This seemed the best way to fill the gap. Mohamed spoke with emphasis about English being the official language of instruction. I was expecting him to elaborate on that, but he quickly switched to talk about a

common pattern and curriculum he experienced going through primary, secondary, and even through the university education.

> *Now, you know. In any society, the people would say that the teacher is an important person. A teacher has groomed a doctor, a teacher has groomed the pilot, a teacher has groomed all sorts of people and professional in the society. So, looking back to my experience, my worldview about the teachers is what I want to share with you, because this really impacted the way I see our education system. Before I forget, I want to share with you that the curriculum in Uganda is old. Though there have been some little changes, the curriculum is what they have been using since 1962 and with little or no changes since the colonial time. There have not been enough changes to meet the expectations of today's world. (Mohammed's Conversation, October 15, 2020)*

I found it unbelievable that a system could continue using the same curriculum for over half a century. As I was keenly interested to learn more, I encouraged him to expatiate more on this pattern of school curriculum and how it was relevant to his reality.

> *And when I got to secondary, things even became more funny. I remember very well in my geography class, we used to study about the glaciers, the alpine mountains, and the Prairie. Imagine being taught things from another world, yet in my own world, I had no idea what these things meant. So now, when it comes again to history, it was about the history of America and Europe. It was about America or French revolution. So, the curriculum, which was designed according to the British education during the colonial era was what we implemented in my country. I felt like I was a victim to such system of education. (Mohammed's Conversation, October 15, 2020)*

I could see Mohammed's point as he vehemently defended that the education curriculum in his country was obsolete and could not prepare students to meet challenges or to function effectively in today's world. At this point, he used his own situation in Canada as an example. I felt like my request for him to expand on the school curriculum pattern was a trigger unearthing some painful memories. I noted that his voice was escalating as he was gesticulating vigorously.

> *The curriculum, which is being taught from the primary up to even secondary, it doesn't prepare even students to, um, it doesn't prepare the students to meet the demands of the global society. It only teaches…it's only like emphasizing on how they can survive in today's situation. And I think we are moving to 21st centuries. It is a lot of changes and innovation which has happened. Like technology is one of them.*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, October 15, 2020)*

According to Mohammed, another challenge for him and his peers was the limited access to basic amenities and resources. He described a situation whereby many students (and teachers) must scramble for resources such as textbooks. He described a situation whereby the teaching instruction was primarily based on outdated textbooks. Some of which have been there for the last 20 to 50 years and ten students had to share one textbook. He described some instances when the teacher would call a student to stand in front of the class and read the textbook aloud to the class and expect that all students would be listening. According to him the teacher just wanted someone to read a textbook in front of the rest of the class, whether it was right or wrong, *"Sometimes the teacher would ask another student to write what first student has read"* (Mohammed's Conversation, October 15, 2020).

I found the experience that Mohammed described familiar as it reminded me of a story that I read several years ago as a child. The story was entitled "An Illiterate School Master," in which the teacher would ask his pupil to write something, and another pupil to copy it, and yet another one to read it. Finally, he would ask the whole class to repeat after the reader. All these activities were facilitated by the teacher without any assessment of what was right or wrong. It was an interesting and funny story which might pass for a fiction, yet I felt like it was a perfect illustration of Mohammed's experience in this case.

The experience that Mohammed described here was not limited to Uganda. I remember during my degree nursing program some years ago when we (students) used to huddle around limited old journals and outdated textbooks to complete assignments. Some colleagues used to hoard textbooks from the library. They had some strategies that they used with the librarians. The students who did not know these strategies were at a disadvantage. I was one of them, and I could relate to Mohammed's experience. Another factor related to resource access was the

location of the learning environment. For instance, whether the learning environment is in a rural or in an urban area.

Mohammed disclosed that he had no idea what a library was until after his primary education when he left his village to attend school in the city. I felt like Mohammed, and I did not have a great scholarly experience. This kept me wondering if other students from developing countries had similar issue of access to resources and study material. Listening to him as he described the poignant situation of things in his school broke my heart. A lack of a lunch program and the basic sanitation facility such as toilet were some major challenges mentioned by Mohammed.

> *You see, imagine one toilet in the whole school of 700 students. Yeah. And then together with the teachers. We used to make a very long line and people passing would be wondering if we were lined up to get money. Unknown to them was the fact that we were not going to get money, but we were there to use the washroom! (He leaned forward to emphasize his point). (Mohammed's Conversation, October 15, 2020)*

I continued to think with Mohammed's story as our meeting came to an end. It was sad to imagine the condition under which students learned.

We just came here to pass: A slogan of Voicelessness

At this meeting, Mohammed unpacked more of his school stories. Apart from the limited access to resources, Mohammed also talked about his teachers. According to him, the teachers were underpaid, poorly prepared, and overloaded with heavy teaching assignments. For instance, the teacher-students ratio was too high that they did not care if students showed up in school or not or if they learned or not. Mohammed provided a poignant account about the use of power among the teachers. For instance, teachers often used grades as punishment for students and some instructors would wait till the practical (clinical) exam so that they could get back at the student that they had a grudge with.

> *Um, students, another thing is that students didn't have the opportunity to have their own voice. For example, if you can be in class and a teacher will say that this is the information. If a student comes and say, OK, I also have another alternative information and it says this… this... Certain times the…the facilitator...may feel offended. That is…like…this student wants to show me that he knows more than me! And…certain times…students who by nature…who are a little bit er…who were trying to create like assertiveness and again, they are branded…they are branded…as if these are the notorious students…and certain times these students…they face repercussion. So, when they hear that, if you keep on challenging your instructor, you just know you'll never finished the course. So there used to be a slogan that we had that "we had just come here to pass, and we leave the program." So, if somebody ask if…we…what we gained from the program, we will say that we just finished the program. It ended so long as I didn't have any clashing with the instructors…something like that.*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, November 6, 2020)*

I could relate with Mohammed that what he described as the culture of reading neither promotes independence nor critical thinking. It not only suppresses both independent learning and critical thinking, but it also closes the avenue for curiosity.

No room for questions, no room for sharing, source of learning are the nursing sisters

Picking up from where we left off in the last meeting, Mohammed also provided more details about his experience in the nursing program in Uganda.

> *Um, now. And I think back to my…nursing school days, based on what we call a hospital-based teaching or based teaching and, you know, it is…the teaching instruction materials are still…I can say…they are not up to date. There is no room for question (itemizing on his fingers). There is no room for sharing. There is no room for General Club…whereby nurses come together to share knowledge or discuss what they do. Because of this course-based teaching, students are instructed to go to the wards. Their source of learning are the nursing sisters… the staff who work in the hospital. Students are told to be respectful and follow instructions so they could learn from the nursing sisters.*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

I found this story quite interesting because it sounded like what I experience during my basic (diploma) nursing education in my country. I remember that we used to go to the hospital for clinical experience for about six weeks to practice clinical skills under the supervision of the staff nurses and nursing sisters. Our clinical instructors used to visit, not to instruct but to evaluate our practice. Mohammed's story was a trigger of memories for me.

> *We were asked to do whatever they told us to do, because it was considered a part of our learning. I told myself that learning can be in many forms, but I remember, at one point when I was in the third year of the program, I started asking questions. I asked myself if running errands was part of learning. The sisters in charge used to send us on errands…you know… and one could walk almost a kilometer or two to go and collect IV fluid or pick up medications…eh? And being a senior student, I expected better responsibilities than running petty errands*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

As I continued to listen to Mohammed's description of his experience in the hospital, I remembered the attitude of some nursing staff and how they used to treat us when I was a student. Some of them did not see us as learners, but rather, as extra hands on the ward. What made our situation more complex at the time was that we (students) were on pay roll as salary earners. To them, we were part of the workforce, and we were at the lowest level of the hospital hierarchical organization's structure. Running errands was part of our clinical experience. However, it was the responsibility of the students to make sense of any experience they encounter in the process of running errands.

> *The nursing sister often picked the time scheduled for ward rounds for us to run errands. It seemed like it was deliberate because while the medical students and other Allied Health students*[35] *would be present at the ward round, the nursing students were always absent, and running errands. There would always be a need to get something… a sister would say, 'can you go and bring… extra blanket'…or 'we need more IV fluid'. So, when a student had to walk many kilometers to get these items, you could imagine the amount of learning the student would miss from the ward round*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020).*

I could relate to Mohammed's agony as he reflected on his learning experience, and I wondered what factors could be responsible. Could it be that there was lack of qualified professionals, or no structured curriculum? As I deliberated on this puzzle Mohammed continued with his story.

> *Sometimes the student may reach the location and finds that there are already other people in line…the student must wait on the line for his turn. So, that was how much time could be wasted running errands. With the hospital-based education…students were usually sent to the ward without any objectives or learning outcome to be accomplished.*

[35] Allied Health include Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Radiology, Medical record, Occupational therapy, and so on.

> *We were only instructed to work in the hospital and to learn whatever we could learn if we could have the time…eh? (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

I used to criticize our nursing education in Nigeria as substandard, but I was astonished listening to Mohammed's story regarding his clinical experience. It kept me wondering if the standard of nursing education in Uganda is more critical than in Nigeria. I remember that our clinical curriculum when I was in the nursing school was well structured and our learning experience was adequately supervised. While we were taught to respect the doctors, we were not discouraged from learning with them. I remember some of my instructors would challenge us to do presentations of case studies during the grand round. In his story, Mohammed narrated a point where he started questioning his experience and considering some possible interventions to make a change.

> *So, you see…eh? Some of these things raised a question in me…why…if the students are the customers…if they are the resource users of information…why are they being denied this kind of opportunity? Yes. Collecting these materials…whatever. These things could be done…maybe it could be organized in a way that it could be done earlier. The sister in charge should at least order the ancillary office to do so, to give an opportunity to students to learn. For me, that kind of experience to me…honestly…I didn't like it. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

Listening to Mohammed's story and calling to mind what Daiute (2018) said, that there is usually a high point to our story, a climax, conflict or turning point in which, we realize a call for a paradigm shift, I felt like we all have a turning point in our "story we live by" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999. P. 4; Okri, 1997, p. 46).

Mohammed expressed his dislike for his clinical education experience and according to him, things got to a point when he started challenging the situation and negotiating with the nursing sister in charge.

> *So, I remember one time when I had a clash with a sister in-charge and she told me, 'whenever you come, what are you supposed to do?' And I knew what she wanted me to*

> *say…to please her. So, I said, 'whenever I come, I must do damp-dusting'. And she said, 'Eh!!! That is good' 'and what else are you supposed to do?' I said, 'when I come….so that the ward is organized…I must do what I have to do to attend the ward round!' And she said, 'what's wrong? 'Ward round is for professors! It's only for consultants!' I thought in my mind, 'so this is it?' And I said, honestly, if I had the opportunity to teach, maybe I would not teach this way…I would not use this kind of way for students to learn. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

A Return to Early Culture of Reading

When I asked Mohammed to explain how his experience of education in his home country shaped his current experience in Canada, he expanded more on what he described as a poor culture of reading that was cultivated along his early education:

> *So, when you look at…when you talk about culture of reading…I think the centrepiece of culture of reading as I look at…is critical thinking. That you read information and you have a discussion in your mind. You have a deeper learning or questioning, you know, for example, you look at the source…is there any evidence? Given the situation…is it up to date? Is there any limitation to this information… how else can I look at it…? That kind of thinking. Is there other alternative to this information? Something like that! Or is there any evidence to support it? What are the critical factors to consider? So! All these are the aspect of critical thinking, so in this sense…teacher-centred learning, which is more predominant in my country, students don't have a voice…they are not being driven or being encouraged or nurtured for critical thinking. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

Mohammed also expressed his opinion about the current condition of the education system in his country and explained what learning should look like.

> *To me, when you have the culture of reading, the more you read, the more you understand…you know, understanding all about the information and questioning. The way I look at critical thinking, it's not about answers. But it is about having a deeper analysis of what you are learning. Because if a student…comes to class with questions…eh? I feel that this is a student who really has the thirst…the desire…the desire for learning. But when a student would say, this is what I know, or this is what I found…and he does not have the confidence to share… or challenge the information he's having, that a student is unable to take responsibility for what he has learned. You know what he will say if he is questioned later in life? As a defense, he will say… 'this is what I was taught'. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

While Mohammed might have experienced what he described as a system of teacher-centred education, he clearly described his expectations of an ideal teaching situation and how one can

promote good 'culture of reading' and critical thinking. It was interesting that Mohammed had an expectation of an ideal situation, but I wondered how he came to know the ideal teaching and learning situation. As I took a reflective turn about his words, I also thought about the people who surrounded him as he went on:

> *But now, if students are being taught about critical thinking, students can learn how to have their rationale …thinking about how they think about them. Because, as you know, when students come to classes, these are not students, and they are not like empty containers where just you just put knowledge and they fill the knowledge. But students have…people come…students…They have their reasoning, and they have their perspectives…and they also have their…the way they are learning. So. I was thinking that…the core thing…since it was lacking and when it's lacking, it also has…it creates issues about poor…what we call poor culture of reading.*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

I could see the point Mohammed was trying to make about the impact of his past learning experience on his way of knowing. I wish everyone could share Mohammed's view and see things deeper, beyond the obvious, when constructing stories about international students. I wondered just how differently our experiences would be and how this in turn would shape the care we would provide to others. I think so much about how these experiences shape not only our way of knowing but the way we relate to those who are privileged.

> *Because what I've seen is that in the developed country, I think this culture of reading is inculcated. It is nurtured when they are still at infancy. Even well under five years of age, they have that culture of reading. But as they continue advancing in their age, they are taught what and how to read…the act of reading. Umhun? And because of the act of reading… which is also lacking in most students who are coming from developing countries. So, because of their previous education system, they see reading like, it is a burden. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

I was wondering if what Mohammed described was common to all students from developing countries. Like he explained, I think it was a culture of teaching (or reading) that was inculcated. I think it is a burdensome culture that students dislike, and when they attempt to get out of it, they meet resistance. For instance, Mohammed described his attempt to overcome this 'poor

culture of reading' through personal efforts but as explained in his story, one could expect to see different forms of resistance being manifested by people.

> *When I used to read a book of medical surgical nursing by Brunner and Suddarth…a very huge book like this (Mohammed now demonstrating with his hands) …like almost…maybe almost between five to 10 kg…the book itself. Some of my fellow students and some instructors would ask, 'why are you reading this heavy book?' 'Why are you always reading these whatever…?' Eh? So, I saw that reading was like…er…it seemed like er… a burden. Because for them, the instructors were the ones who should prepare the notes. And if you look at the instructors' notes, these are the notes which were passed on from other instructors to them. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

Mohammed also mentioned something that reminded me of my experience during my first year at the university in Nigeria. I remember one physiology professor who used the same notes for several generations of students. She probably never changed or updated her notes since the beginning of her teaching career till her retirement. I found it interesting that she would dictate her notes without missing any word or punctuation. It was possible to get a class note from an old student without attending classes, but the weekly attendance was mandatory. This kept me wondering if there was any sense to the mundane nature of our education.

> *So, you can imagine…if instructors come with these notes…then how will students have the culture of reading? And again, if the student…if the instructor…even though he just needs to go and read more…I am just wondering if himself does not read…if a student gets another information, which is contrary to what he has…then it may end up in the form of clashing. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

This was the kind of education that Mohammed experienced in his country, and it was when he came to Canada that he saw that things were different. He saw that things were different in the sense that teachers do not impose ideas on students. That in fact, teachers are open to being critiqued by their students.

> *Like, I was very surprised when I went…when I came to do my master's. I think…when I was doing philosophy of education…oh! There were some philosophers? But also, these philosophers had critics! …Eh? (He exclaimed with a look of disbelief on his face). They have critics! And then I said, if philosophers could have critics and some of their critics were their former students…then what? They were the former students of the*

> *philosophers, eh? They could disagree with ideas if they were not relevant to the moment. They could point out mistakes or flaws in previously accepted theories! So, I said to myself, if philosophers have critics, why were we taught not to challenge our instructor's ideas. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020).*

As we concluded our meeting, I continued to think with Mohammed's story. He explained that a big part of his challenges in Canada was the writing skill and accent.

> *Now in Canada, one of my biggest challenges was the accent. I came to realize that with my accent, some instructors have assumptions, they judged students based on their accents. If you don't speak with Canadian accent, you are victimized in terms of the work you do. I am not saying that all of them, but there are some who are like that. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

He tied this problem of writing skill and accent to his early education preparation back in his country.

> *I realized my issue, I told you, my problem is the culture of reading. Then you will also know the art of writing. You, see? Even at a PhD… (directing his question to me) you doing your dissertation? (I nodded, so he could continue). The supervisor will always emphasize that you need to go and read more. So, there is a reason why they tell you to read more. Maybe that reading more will also shape the way you will start writing down. But in a situation where there's a poor culture of reading and lack of critical thinking from the past, and you tell students to go and write, they find it hard. Because they never had an opportunity to explore or see how people write, they don't know the techniques or the mechanics of writing. They lack the systematic way and all the dimensions of writing. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 12, 2020)*

This was where we ended the meeting. For our next meeting I was looking forward to exploring Mohammed's early education and to learn about those who contributed to his learning prior to starting school. I found this an important part of my own journey.

Living Alongside Stories and Going Where Stories Take Us

Narrative inquiry calls us to live alongside participant stories. According to Clandinin (2013), living alongside participants' stories begins by situating the inquiry in the stories and by going wherever the participants take us, to meet participants' families or friends and enter places relevant to the participants. Due to an ongoing travel restriction because of the COVID 19

pandemic, physical travel was not permissible. I could only travel vicariously with Mohammed as he walked me through an interesting journey of his early life before he began his formal education. I reminisced as he shared the story of what it was like for him as a child learning from his family members. He did not say if he grew up in a big extended family home like me but what I found familiar were the nested lessons in the story. The whole community is the 'school', and parents and other responsible members of the community constitute the teachers. The elders willingly impact knowledge through different means. According to Mohammed, by learning from family and community members, he has been taught some great moral lessons, this included to respect his elders and to listen to their counsel. As Mohammed further unpacked what it was like learning from the elders, he suddenly looked very serious and assumed an 'I told you so' stance, with head tilted to one side and arms akimbo, as if to emphasize the importance of elders' wisdom:

> *If you don't listen to the elders, as some people say, it may end up in repercussion. My grandparents used to tell me that, 'when a person doesn't listen to his elder, the world would teach him a lesson'. So, the consequence that comes with disobedience is what is meant by 'the world teaching you a lesson'. That way of learning is to show that the elders' teaching is based on wisdom and experience. But also, the issue in today's context is that there are certain times, from the way children look at the elders when they offer them advice, one would think that they know better than the elders. But as I told you, elders' sharing of wisdom was an informal way of learning. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 18, 2020)*

It was interesting listening to Mohammed's story as he took me back to the time when he became conscious about learning. What I was not able to unpack was the language of instruction. I wondered what language his family used to teach him. I remember during one of our meetings when he was narrating a story his mother told him about 'Mr. Rabbit'. When I asked if the story was told in English, he quickly explained that it was told in his native language. He further clarified that native Ugandan word for 'Mr. Rabbit' was 'Sungura'. I have heard about people

thinking in their native language and translating their thoughts into English when they speak. I wondered if this was the case with Mohammed as he went to give an account of his early learning about household items. I was fascinated by the way he started pointing randomly to imaginary items as he identified them.

> *For me, as a child, they could tell me 'This is a chair, this is a spoon'... But... It happened in a kind of haphazard way and that's why I said it happened in an informal... There was no curriculum to get this form of learning. But that was the time I felt I was certain I was becoming a learner. And you know, as a child, normally at the age of six is when you are becoming very inquisitive. I said, mummy what is this, why is this, why is this happening? so those kinds of questions? So, I felt I had a lot of curiosity of knowing what is happening around. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 18, 2020)*

Again, I was wondering how the items were identified for Mohammed by his family. Was it done in English, or did he translate his story for me? Did he usually address his mother as 'mummy' or this was an English translation of his indigenous language for mother? I felt like this was a complex intersection of language, culture, and learning yet to be unraveled. However, it was a nostalgic experience for me listening to Mohammed's stories of his childhood and curiosity. I wondered if it was coincidental that I had similar experience when I was a child. I remember my endless questions to my grandmother when I was at that age. Most of my early learning experiences took place in her kitchen. Pondering on this seemingly connection of childhood experience, I remember what Witherell and Noddings (1991) wrote:

> Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are normally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known. (p.1)

I agree with Witherell and Noddings on these words. Many of the stories we were told when we were young provided our lives with meanings and a sense of belonging. They formed the core of our beliefs and shaped us into the adults we have become. Those stories sometimes left some

indelible imprints on our character that cannot be erased. Mohammed talked about the use of stories and proverbs that taught moral lessons. Talking about animal stories was a trigger down my memory lane. I was reminded of those moonlight stories when we would gather at my grandfather's courtyard listening to stories not only about animals, but stories of famous African warriors and sometimes queens leading out in wars. I could see that Mohammed's face lit up with happiness as he reflected on his learning experience with his grandfather too, but the happy face soon faded into a somber expression as he recounted how much he misses those days.

> *My grandfather could not say that today we are going to learn this, but the learning is haphazard maybe something an event or maybe telling me a story or maybe he's telling a proverb or when a scenario has happened, that's when we are able to learn about that event. So that is an aspect where I was missing back, my informal learning, where I was learning from only my parents and my grandparents and even from elderly people. So those are the aspect of informal education that I felt I was missing. The aspect that they valued and thought I should have. But I myself wanted to have formal education but I was too young to make decisions, so my parents did that on my behalf. So, what I can say for myself is that the informal education, which I had before starting the elementary was a part of the merit of my life. They really played a role in as far as my personal and professional development is concerned.*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, November 18, 2020)*

Different Stories

While my learning through storytelling and moral lessons was largely from my grandmother, my early encounter about formal education started with my father and my older sister. That was prior to being enrolled in school. In Mohammed's case, his learning experience of storytelling started with his mother. I encouraged Mohammed to share what he could call forth from his memory of learning from storytelling.

> *One scenario that I can recall was when my mother used to tell me stories, and most stories were based on animals. In Uganda, Sungura is the African name for rabbit. And so, she told the story of Sungura the rabbit who was a very clever animal. And at one time he met Fessey on his way. Fessey is what we call hyena in my language. So, then Fessey told Sungura the rabbit 'you like passing here? Today, I will eat you up', so Sungura had to look for a way to trick Fessey out of the way. She told Fessey 'before you eat me, you have to do this....' I had no idea what the moral of the story was because I*

> *was too young to understand. I just wanted to hear the account of what happened to Sungura. Yes, so these were the same stories my mother was told by her parents. (Mohammed's Conversation, November 19, 2020)*

I wondered alongside Mohammed what the moral of this story was, but I remembered that storytelling used to be a powerful teaching tool by the elders in my culture. Just like he explained, the main purpose of storytelling is to teach moral lessons. However, people tell different stories to teach the same lesson and people tell the same stories in different ways. What was nostalgic was the context in which the stories were told. The stories were told in an environment of belonging and acceptance. The narrator would often guide the children (or the listeners) to identify the moral lessons and many of those stories usually became more meaningful in adult life.

> *Also, we used to sit around when we had our grass. They would start telling us stories and these stories could either be about their lives or they could be (again) in a context of animals or other people's experience. And then at the end, they could ask us what lesson we learned from the stories. So, they would just ask us some questions and then ask us if we could figure it out. So, what we believe is that this kind of narrative stories was like an instructional way of passing the knowledge because they were where we could ask questions of the event and the meaning.*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, November 19, 2020)*

Listening to Mohammed, I found myself comparing this method of education with the experience he had with formal education, whereby a learner could not ask for clarification or question the teacher without the fear of consequences. I found that, contrary to the popular narratives of 'uneducated' Africans by the colonizers, and the claim of their 'civilizing' agenda (Fayemi & Macaulay-Adeyelure, 2009), our indigenous education was designed to nurture the inherent inquisitive and critical attitudes in the learner. I saw that Mohammed also shared similar notion about African indigenous education when he stated, "*I still acknowledge, that while this is an informal education, it is a way of knowing or another way of teaching through storytelling" (Mohammed's Conversation, November 19, 2020).* Reflecting on my personal experience and the

stories that Mohammed has shared about his early educational experience, one could unpack some similarities in our stories: our indigenous education was 'unstructured' and 'primitive', it was designed to facilitate critical thinking. Mohammed framed the story of formal education in relation to restrictive and authoritative space. For him, formal education conflicted with indigenous education.

As Mohammed talked about the use of proverbs in his country, I was wondering if the use of proverbs is a common practice in all African countries because we use proverbs for teaching in my culture too. He explained how his learning was enriched with the use of proverbs by the elders,

> *We also have the use of proverbs and sometimes when a child does not understand what the proverb means. The child could ask the grandparents to explain. So, proverbs also played a role in addition to storytelling.*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, November 19, 2020)*

Mohammed explained the value of formal education in Uganda, and his parents respect for it According to him, his parent made the decision to educate him in formal education so he could integrate and function well in society.

> *My parents, though they themselves were not educated much, felt that it was time for me to go for formal education because for them, they value formal education, because there was one of the proverbs which says, in my language, 'Akili nimali', it means 'wisdom is wealth'. To my parents, I needed to have formal education whereby I would spend most of my time being educated for how to survive, how to interact with other people in the society. (Mohammed's conversation, November 19, 2020)*

I wrote in my narrative beginning that formal (or Western) education is a big part of our value system. In the Yoruba tradition, education is one of the most cherished values that shaped our thinking patterns and behavioral dispositions. This seems to be a typical value in many African countries. History indicated that African people embraced the idea of formal education because

they believed that it was a road to civilization (Nduka, 1964). I was not surprised that Mohammed and I had similar experiences.

It seemed like the blueprint of our educational journey was already established by our parents since early in our lives. This called me to return to Okri (1997) who reminded me of the profound power of personal stories that were planted knowingly or unknowingly in us early in life, the stories that give our lives meaning, and if we change the stories, "quite possibly we change our lives" (p. 46). Reflecting on Okri's words and on several of my father's pep talks with me when I was a child, I now understand that all his efforts to educate me were meant to give meaning to my life.

I Saw My Mother Leaving Me: I was Left in a Strange Place

Mohammed worked me through his first experience in formal education. It reminded me of what I read from Heilbrun (1999) that "every era and stage in human history has considered itself to be a state of transition" (p. 3). I listened with keen interest as Mohammed reflected on his experience of being away from his home environment for the first time.

> *Now, I remember very well a scenario when my mother took me to a school. My first school was just like a day care, yeah a kindergarten, because what I could remember ... It was like my parents took me to a certain house, to the big house. And she introduced me to the person who was in that house. And then because you know, I was young, I didn't know. I remember I was around five years, and then I saw my mother leaving me. And for me, I was a kind of person that when I was left in a strange place, I used to really feel uncomfortable. So I was very much ... With my mother now ... I thought we came together ... now she's leaving me. And I really felt some emotion, but I suddenly felt like crying but not crying too much. (Mohammed's conversation, December 24, 2020)*

As I tried to stay wakeful to Mohammed, I found that his story of school was framed around being *in a strange place*. It sounded like a call to cross borders, a call to venture on a journey to the unknown, the unfamiliar, a place of difference. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1999), "borders say that something different is about to begin. Things pass across the borders and

different things happen to them" (p. 104). As I heard Mohammed told his school story, I wondered if it was a sort of transition or a state of liminality. It was said that "to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another" (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 3). I thought about what Lugones (1987) refers to as "travelling across worlds" (p. 3). Mohammed sounded like his experience of first day in school was the beginning of world travelling. World travelling calls us to cross borders. As he continued with his story, I could see a surge of emotions on him. He looked terrified as he was vigorously gesticulating.

> *Now remember that I was taken to that place. I think that was my first place of the so-called formal education. But one surprising thing is that in that house, there was no any other child apart from me. I was there, and then the person who hosted me in that house, she started playing like ... There were toys. But not for me!*
> *(Mohammed's conversation, December 24, 2020)*

I was greatly moved by his story as he searched for words with which to describe this experience, and I felt like he was made to travel to an unknown world, a world that bore no resemblance to his home environment, a world of loneliness and strangeness, a world full of uncertainties.

> *I was just feeling that I was missing my mother. I think that time I hated those ... You know ... It was more of being industrial, like giving you some challenge with the toys and they'll give you those ... they called Legos. They would ask you to build things with the Legos, like a house and whatever you could. For me, I just felt like ... 'This place is very strange!' Because the house was too big!! I was the only one!! And she was there!!!*
> *(Mohammed's conversation, December 24, 2020)*

As Mohammed continued to describe this experience his emotions gradually became intense. At a point, I felt like he was going to break down in tears. I felt like I was not well prepared to handle the situation. However, after he showed his emotions, he remained calm and quiet. I too remained silent because I wanted to give him a space to recover before carrying on with the conversation. Thinking back to my own first day away from my home, I would admit that my

experience was different. Probably because I was well informed and was looking forward to starting school or because I did not have to go to a day care or kindergarten.

I also remember that I had been to the school on several occasions as my mother used to take me along when attending the parent-teachers' association meetings on behalf of my sister. So, I had some familiarity with the school environment. In Nigeria, school enrollment is usually at the beginning of the school year. So, there were many other new students the day I was enrolled in school, and I remember I made new friends that day.

As I reflected on Mohammed's story and the impact the experience had on him, I wondered about the extent to which an African parent could go to ensure that their child (children) receive Western education. I was wondering if Mohammed's mother thought about the psychological impact of being in an unfamiliar place with a stranger. I also wondered about her own experience being away from her child. These are some of the things I could not clarify with Mohammed because I felt they were sensitive matters. However, I could see the changes in his facial expression as he talked more about how he was able to make sense of the experience as he grew older.

Changes Happen Across Borders

I could see the sense of satisfaction on his face as he seemed compensated for his difficult experience. This made me wonder if learning could be defined based on this experience. Learning is about an experience that brings new growth in knowledge, skill, values, attitude, or behavior.

> *Now I came to realize that the reason why I was taken there was because I was too young to go to the nursery, where a child starts before the age of six. They say that the child at the age of six should be able to read and write his name and at least be able to count some numbers. And I think that time at the age of five, I could say my name, but I was not able to write numbers. During my time going to the elementary, a child must be a certain level to have known, like a milestone to have known this and plus the age. So, I thought*

> *mother was advised by her friend for me to go for a tutorial or coaching...And then I may learn something. The one who hosted me was a teacher at a certain school at the time, I think she was on her holiday. And my mother at that time was just used to work. So maybe she never had time...To spend a little time with me teaching me. So, I think my mother thought it was better now to take me to that place. But now, the issue was me because I was used to my mother. (Mohammed's conversation, December 24, 2020)*

The metaphor of border crossing and Mohammed's story reminded me that changes do take place when we cross borders. Despite some difficult experiences, the way we perceive the world tends to change when we travel across borders, and our identity tends to shift as well. According to Clandinin (2013), "our lives unfold as we travel into and between multiple worlds […,] constructing images of who we are and what we are about as well as images of who others are and what they are about" (p. 59). I felt like despite Mohammed's initial difficulties, as time went by, the experience was to serve as a pedestal or a launching pad for his formal education.

> *Now what I could remember was ... After going to what I could call residential school ... I call it residential school because I was away from home, but I was the only student. The reason why I was the only student I don't know, but I remember very well that I was alone, and a lot to learn. I didn't have the opportunity to play ... Like a peer, but nevertheless, it was part of part of my learning. I could count using an apparatus which had some marbles. She would push each marble and counting with me by saying 'this is one', 'two', 'three' ... Like that. She also taught me to identify different colors … at a point she asked me to write. (Mohammed's conversation, December 24, 2020)*

Learning to Write Within the Lines

At a point, Mohammed and I started learning how to write. While we might be learning the same thing, we had our differences in the way we started. I remember that my writing started with my father teaching me to write the alphabets with a piece of chalk on a cardboard slate. Mohammed learned from a stranger who taught him how to write within the lines. According to him:

> *She would draw a line in a piece of paper and ask me to write the letters, and to make sure that the alphabets did not go beyond the lines. She seemed to be teaching two things at a go ... Teaching me the alphabet, but at the same time teaching me to keep within the*

> *lines. I had to make sure to write within those lines. Eventually she asked me to write my name within the lines. (Mohammed's conversation, December 24, 2020)*

I realized that I experienced some of the learning activities that Mohammed described. However, I did not leave home to learn how to read and write but Mohammed had his first experience of border crossing to an unfamiliar place to learn how to read and write.

Embracing a colonial version of formal education

Mohammed also talked about another experience when he started elementary school. One could say that for him, it was another challenging experience. The pattern that I found in his stories related to being left in unfamiliar places and uncertainties.

> *I remember at the age of six and a half … that my mother took me to the headmistress and then they talked. Then suddenly I realized that my mother had brought me for enrollment in school. Since we left the house[36] that morning, I have been thinking that I was just taking a walk with my mother, just passing the time ... that's what I was thinking. And then suddenly my mother was telling me ... Bye ... that she was leaving. And then I sensed that feeling, that devastated unusual feeling that my mother has gone! I remember places that used to create fear for me were unfamiliar strange places such as the hospital. (Mohammed's conversation, December 30, 2020)*

In his story, I could see that Mohammed made a connection between the school and the hospital and I wondered what was in the story that made him remember the hospital at the time. He explained that the similarity was the anxiety he usually experienced in both places. To him, apart from his feeling of being in a strange place while in the hospital, he also associated hospitals with suffering and pain. He explained that whenever he was in the hospital that he often thought of not just about injections, but also about those big glass syringes and metal needles with which the injections were administered. So just thinking about the sight alone was enough to raise his anxiety. According to him, being left in unfamiliar places with the presence of a threatening situation such as injection caused him pain and suffering, *"if my mother decided to leave me*

[36] Mohammed's own home.

there, it also made me anxious. So those were the similarities" (*Mohammed's conversation, December 30, 2020).*

Listening to Mohammed made me wonder if he had a sense of being vulnerable when in those two environments (the school and hospital). He explained the similarities and what was different in the sense that both were places of vulnerability for him because of the experience of fear and pain.

> *But my mother couldn't just leave me because she's the only one who could handle me for me to be injected. But in this school, my mother was leaving me now. I will say now ... 'Is she coming?' 'Where has my mother gone?*
> *(Mohammed's conversation, December 30, 2020)*

I also wondered if being in unfamiliar places usually caused him fear, anxiety, and pain, then what might it be like for him as an adult to travel to another country. I did not ask him about this because I felt like I needed to stay with his current story. As Mohammed further reflected on his experiences in the primary (elementary) school, he talked about when they used to have an assembly (parade) where they would line up and the headmaster would show up with the list of students and a set of canes. According to Mohammed, the list could be of those who may have had a misconduct.

> *I don't know whether this culture of caning students in front of assembly was a common thing across schools, or if that was a part of the curriculum. I don't know if they usually cane students in front of the assembly parade so that students would experience physical pain from the cane as well as psychological pain from the humiliation and the embarrassment. (Mohammed's conversation, December 30, 2020).*

Mohammed gave a list of what counted as misconduct which ranged from noisemaking in class, not dressing properly in the Western way, not following the rules about hygiene, or not performing well on tests and assignments.

> *I am talking about the predominant power influencing our ways of life. We were forced to dress in certain ways, had to go to the school in uniform with ties. We had to dress in*

> *cardigans, in socks, our black shoes had to be polished and shinning. To me, this was a new culture shaped by Western policy. (Mohammed's conversation, December 30, 2020)*

Taking the time to engage with Mohammed's story, I felt like punishment such as caning was a common practice across schools and across African countries as I had similar experiences in my school too.

> *I did not know all the rules. But for me ... by the time they call you to the headmaster's office, that's trouble! I remembered that he himself was the one teaching mathematics ... So for him, if you get one wrong, that is a cane ... So, the stigmatization and the fear ... So, learning was pushed by force, whether we like it or not ... by what we call hegemony. It was based on power, and the power was with the headmaster.*
> *(Mohammed's conversation, December 30, 2020)*

In listening to Mohammed's story, I found a resonant echo of when I was in elementary school. I remember we had several rules in school that were reinforced with punishment. The nature of punishment depended on the severity of the 'misconduct' and on the creativity by the individual meting out the punishment. Surprisingly, parents and family members also reinforced the rules in some ways. I remember one morning when one of my cousins refused to take his bath and went to school disregarding the threats of punishment. Not quite long after we got to the school assembly that morning, I saw one of my aunts showed up with a bucket of water, soap, and a sponge. I could not imagine the terrible embarrassment for my cousin to be stripped naked and bathed publicly in front of everyone. So, I could relate to Mohammed's story and how intimidating the situations in school could be in those days. I asked if those experiences made him afraid and anxious about school.

> *Yes, as I told you, our way of education ... it was based on ... you see, is just like putting a gun on your head and they tell you, OK, this is the exam. I remember when the headmaster would say ... by defending ... he would say that ... he did not want to spare the rod to spoil the child or he would say, 'the African child's ear is on the buttocks ... a child only hears (or follows instructions) when he is caned.*
> *(Mohammed's conversation, December 30, 2020)*

Listening to this version of Mohammed's experience and reflecting on my own experience of early school years, I felt like we experienced a form of education designed to keep the learners 'within the line' and 'within the box' in which there is no room to evolve or metamorphose . I pondered on what Balogun (2008) wrote that "the values attached to the Western supposed conception have made Africans embrace and extol formal education beyond normalcy at the total expense of other qualities that an individual learner may have" (p. 42). This called back to mind the story about my cousin that I shared in my narrative beginning and I continued to wonder about the purpose of our contemporary African educational system. Was it meant to build or to break? Could it be storied as supportive or destructive? Those were the questions that I pondered as Mohammed further explained the influence of colonialism on education and how it is embedded in all other systems in Uganda.

> *There were certain institutions that have been established under the control of the colonial masters. Education was one of them. And I think somehow the health sector as well. Education for example, because they knew that education is the foundation ... so how you teach the people is how they would turn out. So, the emphasis was on obedience and loyalty. Not about curiosity, not about what we could contribute to bring civilization. In a context of fear, in the context of knowing that there are rules and regulations that they should abide by. However, these rules and regulations were established by and in favor of the colonial masters. (Mohammed's conversation, December 30, 2020)*

When English Accent Became a Matter of Class

Mohammed also explained the Western influence on his language construction. According to him, while the native language was the language of instruction at home, he found that English speaking was enforced in school when he started formal education.

> *I had to learn English because it was an important language to learn. I remember very well my first interview for the elementary school, the question for my parents was 'can this child speak English?' So, they told my parent that 'if your child doesn't know English or doesn't know how to write his name in English and how to count in English that we cannot admit him'. So, as I advanced to primary education, the emphasis on English became more intense. (Mohammed's conversation, December 30, 2020)*

When asked how this experience has impacted his life, Mohammed described his struggles from childhood to his current experience in Canada.

> *I became more detached from the oral tradition, the only occasion I was allowed to speak my native language was when communicating with my grandparents as they did not understand English. Not only were we forced to speak English, but we had to speak in British accent. I remember one of the teachers teaching us how to open our mouth when pronouncing certain words. We were made to say a word many times until we got the right accent. We were told to speak like the English people. I remember we had some students in my class who came from well-to-do families and had the opportunity to travel abroad on vacation, whenever they returned, they would be speaking in different accent. To me, it was like they were saying, 'look, I have acquired a new culture, if you are unable to speak English like us, then you are not fit for this kind of society'. So, you see ... this is what I call hegemony. Now in Canada, at certain times when I was given the opportunity to speak in class, I would be thinking, 'now the accent! I will have problem with the accent'. (Mohammed's conversation, December 30, 2020)*

Listening to Mohammed, I could not but think with the words of Rodney (2011) which continued to echo in my mind that:

> Colonial education (out of which our current system of education was produced) was not an educational system designed to give young people confidence and pride as members of African societies, but one which sought to instill a sense of deference towards all that was European and capitalist. Education in Europe was dominated by the capitalist class. The same class bias was automatically transferred to Africa; and to make matters worse the racism and cultural boastfulness harbored by capitalism were also included in the package of colonial education. (p. 380)

Thinking About Teaching

According to Mohammed, the teachers often used poor feedback techniques on academic performance with no room for clarification or questioning. If a student asked the teacher to repeat what has been said, the student could be ridiculed with sarcasm. He narrated an occasion when he was ridiculed in class for asking for clarification on an idea that was unclear to him

> *There was a time I wanted clarification and said to a teacher 'pardon?' and he responded by saying "why are you asking for Panadol?*[37]*' This caused the whole class to laugh at me. If a student critiqued information or offered opinion, such student would be*

[37] Usually we could say "Pardon" when we want a statement repeated. Panadol is a pain medication like Tylenol. Pardon and Panadol probably sounded the similar for the teacher, and he was being sarcastic with the student's request to repeat himself.

> *labeled a rebel and could face a disciplinary action for being disrespectful. This kind of violation could cause the student to be suspended for weeks or even months. The teachers had the power to fail a student out of a grudge, they will just say that this student failed! (Mohammed's Conversation, December 30, 2020)*

According to him, several factors affected the quality of education that he experienced in his country, and he made the decision to seek the opportunity to study abroad so he could return to his country to make a change. He shared some experiences of how he tried to make a change to the status quo when he was doing his teaching practice.

> *I was assigned to teach a class for my teaching practice. So, I approached the teacher teaching the course to see if she could direct me to where I could find the course material in the library. She responded "yeah, what? No! Don't bother!" She gave me her old handwritten note to use. She said "oh! This is the note I have and that's what I use." I thanked her and went to look for the library, I went and picked the different books, but I asked myself, how am I going to teach these students? I told myself. I should not teach the way I was taught. This time I am going to do something different. So, I had to design a series of active learning activities to engage student and in the end, it was a great experience for them. (Mohammed's Conversation, December 30, 2020)*

In response to my question on why Mohammed decided to study in Canada he explained that his reason was to make a change and he had a high expectation for the Canadian education system.

> *I decided to come and study here, because of what I went through, I said to myself, "now let me try to support myself by all means so that I can go to another country, and I see how education is delivered over there.*
> *(Mohammed's Conversation, December 30, 2020)*

As I listened to Mohammed, I wondered if this was the turning point or the climax where his experience of education in Uganda reached the peak and where he began to explore other strategies. What resonated with me was his effort to do something different. He was dissatisfied with the way he was taught, and he did not want to continue teaching the same way. For Mohammed, this was a strong driving force which called him to cross borders, both geographically and metaphorically, and to venture into an unfamiliar world.

Chapter Five

Narrative Account 2: Rita's Story

Living Alongside Rita[38]

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that narrative inquiry is "always strongly autobiographical" (p. 121). That our research interests often come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plot lines. For me, it was the experience of those moments of challenges across borders that called me to this path of inquiry. I remember that the first time I met Rita was in a course in the fall term a couple of years ago. The class size was rather small, consisting of about 8 students which I believe was typical of many of my classes at the time. The number of PhD students taking this course was very few which made it seem like more students had to be recruited from the master's program to make the course run that term. So, about half of the class were students from the master's program and the majority were international students.

Rita was a quiet student in class, a type of student who would not volunteer her opinions unless she was asked to do so. However, whenever she talked, she often had an important and interesting point to share. Initially I was wondering if this might be due to shyness. I gradually became interested in this quiet and timid individual because I saw some similarities in our personalities. I remember one particular day when the professor entered the class to give feedback on an assignment that we had submitted a week earlier. I remember the palpable silence as the professor entered the class and cleared her throat to begin her speech:

> I just want you to know that I am really going to be blunt with you today. First and foremost, I am a tenured professor, and I am close to the end of my career. My retirement is in a few months" *(*Professor's words paraphrased*)* [39].

[38] Pseudonym but participant used a name that is common in their country.
[39] Professor's words paraphrased in different font to differentiate from participants' quote or citation.

In response to this in my mind, I whispered ‘congratulations! She continued:

> So, your evaluation of my teaching has no effect on me!” I need to be honest with you. For someone who identified as a graduate student, one would expect such individual to be able to write good English. I admit that I was brutal in grading this assignment because my grading was not focused only on the content (or the concepts) of the assignment but on the presentation. I marked down on your grammar, punctuation, syntax, and everything. I know I have stepped on many toes, but I do not care! (Professor’s words paraphrased)

The silence in the room was very intense, with all heads bowed down, and some colleagues pretended to be writing. My heart was pounding vigorously as if it would pop out of my chest. I felt light-headed and nauseous. I wanted to excuse myself to go to the bathroom, but I felt it was not a good idea, as going out of the room at that moment would draw people’s attention to me. So, I decided to stay, and I watched my classmates as they received their assignment papers with shaky hands. I got my own script, bracing for the worst, but I found that I got a high grade on the assignment and an excellent remark. It was a gloomy and tension-filled atmosphere for the rest of that day. My colleagues approached me after the class to see if I would be interested in joining them to organize a petition about the incident. They were disappointed when I declined and tried to convince them that the professor was right on her point that we needed to work harder. I felt like we needed to do better to meet with the university’s standard for graduate education, but I did not like the experience that day. When I declined joining my colleagues in the petition, I heard one of them make a comment that “*oh! She is not bothered since she got the highest grade. So, she is not affected*.” No. That was not true. I was very unhappy about the incident. I could not be more affected than when one of my international classmates called me on phone later that evening for emotional support. To me, the whole experience was like the metaphorical ‘elephant in the room’. There are certain circumstances or situations that significantly affect our lives, but we have no courage to talk openly about them and thus remain silent. We experience

stereotyping, labeling, condescending, and degrading behaviors on daily basis, some of which come in very subtle ways. We pretend to happy, yet we grumble privately. I saw it as one of those situations that Riggins (1997) referred to in *The Rhetoric of Othering,* "Others may be practically invisible if they conform outwardly and rebel inwardly" (p. 5).

One of the important lessons that I learned very early in my life was not to look the other way when justice is at stake. My father taught me to fight for what is right, yet my grandmother told me to pick my battle carefully. I saw the general stereotype of international students beyond a battle for grades. To me, it is matter of the use of power, it is hegemonic, and it called for a strategic approach. Daiute (2018) referred to narrative inquiry as a cultural research tool for interacting socially (with and for others) and personally (with and for self) to make a difference in the world.

Moreover, I have learned that through telling of personal stories and inquiring into painful memories of personal experiences, people have found strength to resist the power of dominant narratives shaping their social contexts (Anzaldua, 1999; hooks, 1990). Thinking about the overall class experience, what I overheard my fellow students saying, the phone call from that colleague, and my personal experience with grades during my master's program in Canada, called me to revisit my initial interest in this narrative inquiry. I felt that telling our stories would at least nudge at the metaphoric elephant. Afterall, it was said that, through storytelling, the status quo scripts shaping spaces of normalization, or the suppression of alternative life stories can be disrupted (Cortés, & Pagden, 1986; Nelson, 1995). Stories can also be revised to open opportunities for a resistance and radical response to injustice and oppression. These thoughts reverberated the words of Edwards (2014, p. 25) who urged that, "Radicalism and love apart

from narrated life stories is impotent." I also drew on the words of Noddings and Witherall (1991), that

> stories provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems ... stories invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect ... Most important, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning, and researching to improve the human condition. (p. 280)

It was on these notes that I reached out to those affected by the experience of that day two years after. I wanted to see if they would want to voice their stories. Surprisingly, many of them declined out of fear. One colleague even expressed concern about the consequence of not completing their program as participating could mean 'stepping on toes' of some powerful individuals. I ventured into this narrative inquiry being cognizant of consequences. Henry and Tator (2022) eloquently contended the danger of challenging a status quo of oppression that, "those of us who name and object to our oppression, or who stand in solidarity with marginalized others, are transformed by our stance into the oppressors of those whose privilege we challenge" (p. 34).

However, when I reached out to Rita a couple of years after that class experience[40], she cautiously[41] agreed to participate in this research. I was so happy and excited. I wanted a more personal, collaborative, and interactive relationship with Rita, as suggested by Ellis and Bochner (2003). I wanted to listen to her tell her story on her terms. I wanted this inquiry to lend a voice to her educational journey experience and how she got to where she is today. I sent out an invitation to Rita about a couple of months prior to our first meeting. We spent some time to

[40] Both master's and PhD students were enrolled in this course. Those colleagues who declined my invitation were in the PhD program. I reached out to them individually at different times. Right after the class incident, I asked if they would be interested in participating in my proposed study, but they declined. I was not sure if my participants would include both the PhD and master's students until two years later when it was decided that I should focus on the master's students (based on my master's program experience that motivated the inquiry). This decision automatically excluded the colleagues in the PhD program. Being a master's student, Rita was the only class member in that course who participated in this inquiry.

[41] Rita expressed concern about possible backlash or consequences but was assured of anonymity.

attend to ethical protocols and negotiate the virtual meetings. We carefully negotiated meeting schedules to avoid causing any tensions with her schoolwork and our personal schedules.

Our first meeting was on November 9, 2020. This was a cold winter evening at the peak of the global pandemic and a lot of uncertainties. The weather was at its low point of minus 20 degrees Celsius, but I felt like our online meeting created a warm environment to connect both socially and psychologically. There had been restrictions on activities and physical social interactions for the past six months. We both had no idea the direction in which our conversation would take us. However, we started by introducing ourselves.

Rita came from Nepal. She was born in Gorkha, but she had the most part of her early education in Dhungedhara, and university education in one of the reputable universities in Nepal.

Figure 2: *Dhungedhara Community, Nepal (Picture shared by Rita)*

Our conversation took us to her childhood days as she recalled who she was as a child. According to her, even as a young child she valued education and usually wanted to study.

> *As a child, I always have a passion about studying, learning different things. So, I think as a child, because of that mindset during my childhood and all those things was influenced by my family and the way they placed value on education. I remember one particular moment where my sister would be crying, not wanting to go to school, and I would be the one crying that I wanted to go to school, that was the first instances where I realized that education is important to me (nodding vigorously in affirmation). (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

Rita described herself as an inquisitive learner who likes to understand the rationale behind an action and who wants to know how and why things happen. She saw herself as a kind of learner who would try to understand the link between concepts and experience and how they connect to form a particular outcome. Like Mohammed and me, she had the value of education planted in her as a young child.

> *My family would always say that it is important to study because without having a good education, you never would be able to get good opportunities. And most importantly, you will not be able to earn a good amount of money (giving a slight chuckle) because for a middle-class family in a developing country like Nepal, I think that is very important. My mother used to say that I need to study because anytime I could not get good grade, she used to cry all the time. She would be like…'I invested so much money into your education, but you are not getting good grade!' Yeah, I used to feel sad at that time. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

Rita had no recollection of what life was like prior to starting school. According to her, no one invested time to teach her how to read or write prior to starting school. However, she described what her first day in school was like.

> *I can only remember that I was lined up for a national anthem and we used to have one principal that was very, very fat and he used to have a long stick. So, whoever is naughty while singing the national anthem and who is not in line, he used to beat that particular student on the head with his long cane. It was kind of a normal part of the routine for all of the teachers doing that. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

Rita described how she had to change schools very often during her early school days due to the nature of her parents' jobs, and she had to adjust to the routines of a new environment each time she moved.

> *I changed three schools from nursery to my 10th class[42]. Then I started from one to five in another school[43] because my parents used to live in one particular place but then we*

[42] Prior to the first grade in Nepal, there is the nursery, lower kindergarten, and upper kindergarten. Then there is 1-10 grades (equivalent of elementary or primary school, junior high, and high school), after which a school leaving certificate examination is written to enter college or university.

[43] This meant that Rita had her nursery and kindergarten education in one school, first to the fifth grades (elementary or primary school and junior high school) in another school, and sixth to ten grades (high school) in yet another school.

> *shifted to another place my parents put me in the school which was near to the place where we lived. I remember we used to have separate boys and girls rows in the class when we sit on the bench. So we were not allowed to mingle with each other in the class. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

Rita also experienced a system of education in which corporal punishment was used to reinforce learning.

> *I remember I was kind of a studious student, because at that time, if you do not study well, if you fail in one particular subject or if you do not answer questions in class, we used to get sticks on our hands. We used to get beaten on our hands with bamboo sticks or sometimes they used to slap us on our thighs everywhere (she shrugged indifferently and adjusted her glasses). They were like, I mean there was a period where we were scared to ask questions. We are scared that we would say something wrong. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

I noted that Rita switched to second person 'you' and first-person plural 'we' when describing her experience about corporal punishment in the school. I also noted her indifferent shrug when she was describing how the punishment was applied. I wondered if this was her way of distancing herself from the situation. I noted that Rita described herself as outspoken and inquisitive child who liked to ask questions, I wondered at what point did she become the timid quiet student I met in that class two years ago. Could it be that she experienced a gradual process of silencing until she became accustomed to silence? She also disclosed her initial dislike for teaching. She did not want to be a teacher because of her experience with one of her teachers in elementary school. According to her, this teacher was having trouble controlling his class like other teachers were and because he was not able to set boundaries, his students bullied and disrespected him.

> *In my 9th class (grade), there was one teacher who was so good at teaching, but he was not good at controlling his class. And he was good at teaching, but nobody respected him. He was very, very … How would you describe it? (Rita was searching for the right words). Like, he would not care whether the student is eating in class or whether the student is talking. So, he would just be coming and writing in blackboard and saying whatever there is in the textbook. When I saw that teacher was being bullied, at that point in time I was like, I would not like to be a teacher in the future at all, teaching is not a*

> *good job. The teacher was investing so much hard work in the way he taught, but then he was not getting the outcome that he would expect or the respect. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

Rita shared her childhood dream and her goal for the type of a teacher she wanted to be. The story that she shared above kept me wondering if working hard and investing so much energy into one's teaching should warrant being bullied by students. Could it be that the students were so accustomed to authoritarian teaching that they fail to treat a laissez faire teacher with respect?

> *But there was one particular teacher who was very different from other, like there was one science teacher. He was like going with the students. He was like so much into helping students understand things. And he was like not the traditional kind of teacher. And I think at that point in time I was like, maybe I would want to be like this particular teacher when I, you know, if at some point in time I take teaching as a career in my life … So that was the first instance where I was like, okay, this is the good way to make students understand not only about the things that are written in books, but also about other things of life that as a person, as a human being, you need to incorporate. So that was kind of a teaching style that I would say that inspired me at that time. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

I used to be a Bubbly Child, but I hit a Turning Point

Rita attended a boarding school during her high school education. To her, this was a completely different experience from when she was in the primary school. Going to a high school and moving into a boarding school could be considered a border crossing experience. According to her, it was moving from a small and supportive community where she was surrounded by friends to a big and unfamiliar place.

> *I used to know everybody in the class. It used to be like 10 to 11 students in a class and four to five classes altogether. Most of them were from middle class backgrounds like me. So we used to know each other's sorrows. We used to know if somebody is in pain. We could relate to each other. So. Up to five, I was like a bubbly kind of a child, I used to speak to everyone, I used to go out and play. But then I was starting my education in a boarding school that was a highly expensive school where most of the people were very, very rich people. That was a kind of turning point for me. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

Moving from primary to high school and being in a boarding school was a life-changing experience for Rita.

> *But when I went to that school, you know, at that time because there were lots of students in one section of one class, there were like four or five sections. So, in one section it would be like twenty or twenty-five, thirty students. And to see those large number of students. And to see that they are not from the similar background, in terms of economic background … yeah, I was scared to speak. So, I was turned into a silent student in that school … who would not speak to other people. Like I used to have a small close group of friends. But then I stayed silent. I stopped asking questions. I was not involved in discussions. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

Rita framed her story of school around some social class issues in the boarding school, which depleted her self-esteem. According to her, she was given a scholarship to go to a wealthy school, but she had a hard time integrating into the social environment.

> *You know, we feel proud that we get a scholarship, but at that point, people thought that you get a scholarship award if you are poor or if you are economically backward. Back at that time, they used to say that if you are very poor, that's when you get scholarship (shrugged). You know that kind of labeling that go with it? (I wasn't sure if she was directing the question to me, but I nodded in affirmative). (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

I asked about her understanding and her personal belief about the scholarship at the time.

> *For me as a child, it is not a good tag to have. I was like, it's not good to be poor and it is not good to be from a middle-class background. It's not good to get money from other people, that would be like, somebody is giving you because they are so … (Rita was searching for words) … sympathetic about you, not empathetic, but they have sympathy over your condition. So, because of that stigma, I did not tell my friends. I used to have six girls, group gang. I didn't tell them that I got a scholarship, and I came to that school. I didn't tell anybody. And because now I realize how important it is to have scholarship and how it should be a moment of pride for you to have to receive it. But, you know, I did not enjoy receiving scholarship at that time because of the stigma! (Rita was now gesticulating and pushing aside an imaginary object). (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

When I asked Rita if she experienced actual confrontation regarding her status in the school she responded:

> *Yeah, I think I feared being scrutinized by other people or I feared being judged by other people. Because my thinking was not that broad (Rita was now gesticulating to*

> *emphasize the range of her thinking) enough to think, you know, that would be OK or that's OK. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

I asked if her belief about the scholarship and the fact that she was on scholarship affected her academic performance in that school.

> *I would say yes, because of that, I was not able to communicate wholeheartedly with my classmates, you know, I would not get involved in discussions. And that kind of a thing hampered my grades. In my primary school I used to secure good grades. But then after that, my grades deteriorated, and there were a lot of bullying at that time. That really impacted me. But the funny part was that I love to participate in sports. By hook or crook, I used to participate, but then I was so shy and so not speaking to other people. That kind of hampered that participation as well. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

I encouraged Rita to share a specific experience of bullying and how it affected her learning. I noted that her tone of voice changed as she cleared her throat to reflect. I was touched by the way she described the experience with somber emotions.

> *I remember there was one girl, I think she was from a wealthy family, the bully. I gave my name to participate in a poem competition. She came into the class, and she was like, "you can't participate in poem competition. You know nothing and you can't win. You can't do it at all. Look at you!" (Rita demonstrated a disgusted face) … something like that. And that also kind of ingrained that these people do not belong to me and I'm different from these people because of my background. So, I think that also impacted my education and how I learned things, that impacted my interactions. And, yeah, that was the bullying and the teasing I used to get in the school. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

I asked if the teachers were aware of the bullying going on at the time and if there were any interventions to address the situation. Rita gave an account of an educational system that divided students and teachers.

> *We have education system back home that will say like whatever teacher says, students must follow and, you know, they just come and teach. They'll not have that concern to be involved in your problems or to say, hey, do you have any problem or all those sorts of things. And we have a very distant relationship between teacher and student. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

Rita also explained the 'culture of teaching' during her high school days

> *There were a lot of students at that time and teachers did not care if a student participated in class discussions or not, all they cared about was what they wanted to teach. I don't think that discussion was even a part of the teaching culture at the time. I don't know if things have changed. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

Another learning experience that Rita shared was about learning to speak English. According to her, because Nepal was colonized by the British, English was enforced as the language of instruction. This was different in Nigeria or Uganda.

> *There is so much influence by Western policies and Western things, like we needed to speak in English in class. OK. And if you do not speak in English, there used to be a captain and vice-captain of the class. If the captain or the vice heard you not speaking English and speaking Nepali languages or other kind of language, they would charge you five Nepali rupees. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

In sharing her experience with nursing education, Rita started by describing what the nursing program looked like in her country.

> *Nursing education is not structured in my country because a lot of nursing schools are mushrooming. There are lots of nursing schools in one small space like you find one nursing school at 10 minutes after one another. There is no standard of nursing education because there are three main universities in Nepal running nursing programs and they have different nursing curriculum. The university where I studied is one prestigious university in Nepal. It has a structured and standardized curriculum. Another university also runs the same level of programs like basic nursing or proficiency and certificate level nursing, but with a totally different curriculum. The third university also runs a different curriculum. Because of these differences, when students graduate, there is no uniformity in their practice. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

She provided a detailed account of what learning was like for her going to school as a nursing student in Nepal. She described the teaching methods used as traditional and *"a banking concept."*

> *Because most of the detail would be like, you know, kind of a banking concept of teaching, there would be like whatever there is in textbooks, they read out or they will say something and then not be there. Although the teachers were very experienced in their field, but they did not know how to teach students. They would not research the content. Curriculum was not up to the standard considered for a degree program. There was no emphasis on grammar structures. For them, if you would write something, then that would be OK. They will not be like, OK, here's your article. The mistake you made … is that you have not read an article properly or a pronoun was misplaced, or you did not*

> *include a noun or a verb. They did not focus on all those things. And because of that (self-conscious chuckles) … we did not focus on them either. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

She went on to explain how her learning experience in Nepal affected her graduate education in Canada

> *What we learned in our secondary or primary education about grammar was all the basic skill we forgot all those things when we came to graduate education. Now you realize how important. Had we been taught in that way, then it would have been much, much better in later years. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

I listened attentively as Rita shared her experience about the ways she was taught in Nepal. It was interesting the similarities in the teaching methods used in nursing programs across different countries: Nepal, Nigeria, and Uganda.

> *I think the experience counts more than your ability to teach and nobody would focus on how you are teaching, whether the students are being able to grasp the important concept or how they are putting it on paper. We have a formative evaluation at the end of our year, or we used to have midterm examination. We were not used to having discussions. We did not have any other form of teaching and learning apart from lecture and that was it. Students just sit in the seat and listen to them. It would be all lecture except your clinical, practical, the way that you must do it in hospital, the demonstrations. We used to write notes as they talk, whatever we thought would be important. We must memorize everything that we did over the whole year. So, it was kind of testing your ability to recall all those information that was for the written examination. For the clinical we had to perform the procedures on patients in hospital. So that was for the clinical part. But for the theory, you must memorize everything that was prior to the mid-term. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

As I continued to listen to Rita in this conversation, I felt like Mohammed, and I were not the only ones who experienced a system of education where memorization was the rule of learning. A system that positions the teacher as the master of knowledge. Rita also shared an experience of a situation where she faced the consequence for trying new ideas during her undergraduate nursing in Nepal.

> *I remember one time in my research project. I had written a definition based on my own understanding of the concept of my topic, but I got zero mark for not writing the exact definition provided by the instructor. In another course (community health nursing which*

> *involved designing a program for public presentation), I also got a very low mark on a paper I wrote based on that field experience. And the teacher was saying to me, "you didn't do anything" (Rita laughed) … because I wrote what was different from what she gave in lecture. Yeah. I think many of them wanted us to write exactly what they have provided us in there. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

For Rita, the drive to obtain her graduate education was the demand that existed in her country in terms of the standard of nursing education.

> *The system does not motivate nursing faculty in terms of the resources needed to make their student better. The lack of resources, the lack of motivation in terms of research and career building were important factors that feed into how we teach students. When I started teaching undergraduate students back then, I remember I used to speak out for truth and for the students. But I landed nowhere at that time because nobody listened. You know, the management does not value nursing. Here at this time of covid-19, you are respecting healthcare professionals. But back home, nurses are the victims of hatred, they are marginalized and are being accused of spreading covid-19. Nursing education is in a very poor state. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

She thought of what she could contribute to improve the profession. I was reminded of Mohammed's story as Rita gave an account of the substandard nature of her undergraduate education. According to her, she felt she had something to contribute to improve the system, but she needed to acquire a graduate degree outside of her country so she could be in a position to do so. She admitted that a change might not be instant, but she was optimistic.

> *There may not be a drastic change now. I think, first, I'd limit the number of nursing colleges in Nepal, and then I would standardize a uniform curriculum for nursing education. That would be one way. Then, providing license only to those colleges that have the resources to motivate and educate nursing students, because there are colleges that do not have quality hospitals to take students for practicum. Some do not have library resources, even though their programs are accredited. Such programs will not be accredited. Yeah. That would be the first order, to uplift the standard of nursing, but that would take a long time. (Rita's conversation, November 9, 2020)*

Taking charge of my story

This was the second meeting with Rita, and I could see that she was looking forward to it. She had sent a text message to me earlier in the day as a reminder of the meeting. I felt like she was taking responsibility for her role in our relationship. This made me feel good about our

relationship. It was a kind of relationship that I had expected with other participants but some of them would want me to take the lead. I remembered one participant who requested to know what I expected him to share in the conversation, but I encouraged him to determine what stories to share. The situation was different with Rita, she saw herself as a co-inquirer who should be actively involved in the inquiry process. Following an exchange of pleasantries, we took our conversation from where we left off the last time. Rita further reflected on who she was as a child.

> *So, I think as a child, because of the influence of my family and the value they placed on education and because of my peers who were competitive in class in answering questions, education was really ingrained as an important aspect of my life. So that is how I never left my education, despite any circumstances. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

When asked to describe the kind of character she would be if she was to write a story about her education journey, Rita described herself as an inquisitive individual. According to her, she often questioned situations to understand the rationale behind things and she was isually curious to know how and why things happen. She saw herself as a kind of a learner who tried to make connections between learning and personal experiences and how they bring about a particular outcome. However, she soon felt discouraged because an inquiry attitude was not welcomed during her early school days. She realized that teachers were not in the habit of answering questions or guiding students to find answers.

> *Every time I asked questions, the usual response from the teacher was 'go and look through the books or go and find about it yourself'. She would not involve me in discussion or try to explain from her perspective. So after continuously getting those kinds of feedback, after getting responses that the teacher is not interested in explaining and involving you in discussion I stopped asking. I would not ask many questions after that, most of my class presence would be like not asking questions, just listening. And many of my friends were like that. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

Rita described in more details her experiences as a nursing student. She described the attitudes of some teachers as very intimidating. The intimidation created fear in students to the extent that they were not confident enough to ask questions or clarify issues that they did not understand.

> *The teachers at that time, if you don't answer correctly at first instance, they will not take you in the list of a good student. And after that, you stop asking question or stop even inquiring about certain things. I remember when I was giving medication to a patient and I forgot to ask if he had his meal, my teacher kind of beat me on my head. And she was like, 'why didn't you ask him whether he had food or not?' She was so angry and so aggressive at that time. I could not cry, but I was holding my tears in my eyes, it was an embarrassing moment in the corridor of the hospital. There were a lot of embarrassing moments. So, you fear to ask question. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

As I listened to this aspect of Rita's story, I felt it was not right for a teacher to hit a student in the head to correct a mistake that has already occurred. I remembered Mohammed's story about his headmaster who believed that "an African child's ear is on the buttocks … a child only hears (or follows instructions) when he is caned (on the buttocks)." I wondered if Rita's teacher also believed that a student's ear is on the head and by hitting her on the head, she will not make mistakes again. I know that sounded sarcastic, but on a serious note, I feel like some of us (international students) have experienced abusive situations that have shaped us into the passive and timid learners that people see in us today.

Rita also talked about the limited resources and lack of exposure to technology during her undergraduate nursing.

> *We were not encouraged to research information. When I did undergrad, we did not have access to many databases. We just had access to Google or HINARI [44]and that limited our research skill as well. So, most of the nursing related classes were social aspect emphasized[45]. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

[44] Electronic data bases
[45] I wished Rita could elaborate on this.

We Do Not Talk About Failure

Rita also explained that failing a course was an unacceptable thing during her (primary, secondary, and undergraduate) school days. She recalled a time when she failed a mid-term examination and the comment she received from her teacher.

> *And then the teacher was like, 'you failed because you are a bad student'. So, I had to re-sit the test but that was not a problem, it was how it was executed and how you were made to feel guilty about the situation, like the blame game that was of all time. And there was another thing, voicing your opinions or raising your voice for your right. That was also not accepted. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

When asked to explain why Rita felt guilty about failing a course, she went into more details about how failing is perceived among her people and the extent to which it could affect a person's morale.

> *It is so stigmatized in terms of getting low marks, it's not a good thing! (*Rita said, leaning forward to emphasize*). I remember when I was teaching undergrad students and one of the students failed and we called her to have a discussion and counsel her. She cried because she perceived it as a bad thing. The general conception among my people is that you should not fail at all! We do not include failure as a way of conversations. We do not talk about failures. We used to have a country-level board exam; some people who failed used to do suicide because it is very stigmatized. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

As I continued to listen to Rita's story, I remembered that there were some things we were unable to unpack during our last meeting so I asked if we could talk about them. I reminded her that in our last meeting we did not have enough time to talk about the values, dreams, desire, and hope that motivated her to study in Canada. Exploring with Rita, I encouraged her to unpack those opportunities that she was looking forward to coming to Canada and for choosing her current university among others.

> *Yeah. I say because this is a research-intensive university, so that was the first consideration that I had when I thought to come to Canada for my graduate education in nursing. I think the value for me to come to Canada was related to the university and how the university was efficient in terms of research and the position of the university in terms*

> *of providing good education and opportunities it had. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

As she explained, I could see some similarities in her expectations and mine. I have chosen to apply to this university because I wanted to expand my research skill. Although I was reluctant at first when my daughter suggested that I should apply. I thought that I might not be selected because of the high competitiveness with admission. I am a type of person who does not manage well with rejection, and I was happy when I got admitted.

When Border Crossing Became an Escape from Family

So, I asked Rita if she could talk about her expectations and what she was looking forward to, coming to Canada. I was attentive to Rita as she described her expectations and why she applied for admission in this university.

> *It has in terms of scholarships and the opportunity it has in terms of working with supervisors that are very research oriented. So that was the value that I hold in terms of education and in terms of coming to Canada to pursue my graduate degree. Besides, I was tired working in that college at the time, and in order for me to get promotion or any other opportunity, I have to get a graduate degree. And another was I wanted to escape (she laughed) from my family. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

Oh! '*Escape*'? I wondered why Rita would want to escape from her family. So, I asked if she could say more. She went on to explain the cultural obligation in Nepal and the pressure for a woman who is of age to get married and start a family.

> *In our culture, when you are a female, and you are above the age of twenty-five, you need to get married. So, my mother was always like, 'you need to get married', 'married', married!'* (Rita said repeatedly and banging on her desk for an emphasis). *And I was like, 'no! I want to study, 'you cannot get married to just anyone or any person that you meet'. So, I was like, 'I need to finish my study'. But she was kind of worried about, you know, all those aspects? So, I was like, I need to get a break from all those things. I think it's human nature that when you are with someone, you are bound to think that that person would bother you in terms of both happiness and sadness, but when the person is not with you, it would not bother you. So, it was like that. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

This aspect of Rita's story caught my attention and kept me wondering how cultural obligations often conflict with personal values and dreams. Taking a reflective turn, I recalled having a similar experience after I graduated from the nursing diploma program in 1986 and I wanted to proceed to a degree program at the university. I recalled my feeling of tension when my aunt[46] was very opposed to the idea. Ironically, my father had no problem with me furthering my education, but to my aunt, I have got a career into which I should be settled. I was expected to get married and be raising children. I quite understood my aunt's point because the general belief in my culture at the time was that women were not expected to or should not be highly educated. It would be difficult for a highly educated woman to find a man. The reason? Many men are insecure in the company of highly educated women because they believed that such women cannot be controlled. According to them, 'two sailors cannot master a ship'. Although, those gendered expectations have shifted now, it was a big struggle for me to proceed with my dream at the time. I recalled my resistance, of course. I got married and started a family before I could continue to actualize my dream. I thought about the tensions and my resistance at the time, and I wondered how different it must have been for Rita.

When It Rains, It Pours: It was Scary at the Beginning

I asked if the current university was the only university Rita applied to or if Canada was the only country she explored. She explained that she applied for admission in the same university the previous year but was not successful as she did not have research experience. She shared the discouraging attitude of her supervisor at the time.

> *I applied, but I was rejected because I did not have any research experience at that time. When I asked for a recommendation letter from my then supervisor, she told me that the university where I applied is a very good university and they will not take me, that I do not have that capability. So, I applied again the following year to the same university. I*

[46] My aunt was a mother figure to me at the time, and she had a significant influence in my identity making.

> *thought of applying to the University of New Zealand. But then I got admitted here. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

I was curious to know what it was like for Rita to come to a new country. I asked if she could share her experience when she arrived in Canada.

> *I was scared when I first came to Canada because I knew no one. I did not have a particular place to stay because I requested to stay with one supervisor initially. It was scary in the beginning. I came a week late so, I missed the orientation, I missed the first week of class. Because of jet lag, I was not able to concentrate in my study or on assignments. Living far away from the university, I had to take two buses and a train to get to school at 9:30 and usually getting back home late at night to complete assignments. That impacted a lot of things, and I did not get good grade at that time. Not a good experience when I started. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

She went into more details about the situations she encountered when she came.

> *I would say that when I started was all rush time. Not being oriented to the grading system and all those, so I had to adjust to everything and that impacted my attention in class. But then there was the fear about supervisor related issues. It has been a rollercoaster ride when I started. (Rita's conversation, November 16, 2020)*

I felt emotional as I listened to Rita's story and reflecting on the experience that we had in that class two years ago, and several of such experience that I witnessed with international students. I wished that they (graduate students in particular) could be treated with more respect and dignity as adult learners. I felt like being where they are today was not just a matter of chance but through a lot of struggles. The struggles to accomplish their dreams. The struggles to hold onto the values implanted in them early in life.

Life as Lived at the Borderland

This was the third meeting with Rita. As technology would have it, we spent a large portion of the time troubleshooting internet connection. The zoom video kept freezing, but after several attempts, we eventually got connected. The week had been busy for both of us. Rita just got a job as a research assistant, and she had been working on a research project with her supervisor.

I had been working on a paper for publication. So, despite the pandemic lockdown restrictions, we were still busy working on projects. Rita was enthusiastic about our meeting as usual. Following up with our last conversation, I asked if she could share her experience of when she arrived in Canada, especially those initial experiences when she started school. Rita received her admission letter late and this caused a series of ripple effects on her travel process. According to her, because of the delay in visa and other immigration processes, she missed the initial orientation and the first week of class. However, she described her experience in Canada as both exciting and challenging.

> *Wonderful experience in terms of supervisors and professors. They were very proficient in what they do. I would say I have been exposed to the methodological rigor and how it is important when you conduct research, and that has been a very important part if I had to relate that to my experience of education. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

She spoke positively about her exposure to research experience as one of those advantages of coming to Canada and particularly at her university.

> *The exposure in terms of learning the methodologies and understanding how theory and those methods are connected. The professors are quite focused on rigor in terms of undertaking research. So that has been a bigger part of my advantage in terms of education in Canada. Other than that, there were difficulties, I mean, like nothing comes easy, there are darker days and there are brighter days. I always believe that to get those brighter days, you must go through the darker days. So that doesn't feel nice sometimes. But then it is what makes life worth living, you know. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

As hard as things were for Rita, I felt like she found it helpful sharing her experience with friends. According to her, it was reassuring to her to know that she was not the only one experiencing the difficulties.

> *I used to say to my friends that, 'this is really hard and I'm really having difficulty in understanding all these things'. I found that my friends were experiencing the same thing. It was difficult for all of us. Knowing that other people are also in the same boat and understanding their perspective. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

When asked to elaborate on the things that she found challenging, she talked about the difficulties in getting acquainted to the system and the way things are done in Canada. She talked about how communication between students and professors differs in Canada from how it is in Nepal.

> *So, the beginning was difficult in terms of understanding how to approach your supervisor. Back home, the student-supervisor relationship is very formal. Here, you pronounce your supervisor by the name. But back home, it would be like 'sir' or 'ma'am'. So, there is a difference in relationship between a student and the supervisor, what to say and what not to say, the limitation, the boundaries were the difficult part. I think I struggled with that in the beginning with my own supervisor. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

Rita described how she struggled with the communication aspect of student-professor relationship. According to her, the struggle was not just how to address professors, but she felt unsafe disclosing her difficulties or asking for help. She shared some instances where she felt she was judged based on her struggles and the need of help. I asked if she could share one of such instances when she felt like she was being judged.

> *I think the situation was like…they judged me based on maybe she…the student does not know the things that are really essential or fundamental to the graduate program. For instance, I was given graduate research assistant job when I first came. I was not oriented about how to approach a supervisor or email communications and I was not familiar with all that stuff. I got the GRA task to correct a paper, but I was denied access to an electronic version of the paper where I could easily do the job on a computer. I think I did the best I could, but when I gave the paper back, I was told that it was not nicely done. I later realized that nothing that I did after that was ever good enough. The presumption was that there would always be mistakes in my work, even when there were no mistakes. It seemed like the judgement was based on my initial performance and no consideration for the context or the circumstances. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

She narrated her experiences with her supervisor, and she concluded that the issues of communication between her and her supervisor was not normal.

> *And there was always a very minimal dialogue opportunity, maybe because my supervisor only visited office once a week for one or two hours, and she would say, 'I'm here in the office, if you want, you can come to discuss about things'. For me, we have*

> *not met for weeks and weeks, the half hour would be like, too short to discuss anything meaningful.15 minutes of the time would be like saying 'hi, hello'. I thought that was same for other students until I talked with some friends, and they said they had a regular meeting with their supervisors. Then I realized that it's not normal. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

Rita explained that there were times when she wondered what her purpose of coming to Canada was and feeling like she was not making any progress.

> *I was nearly finishing my first year but it's not coming along. So, I was frustrated, wondering what I would do in this country where I have my sole thing to come here and study. But then there is nothing happening relating to that, then that was not advantageous for me. I was kind of stressed. But the good thing about that was it allowed me to reach out to people. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

According to Rita, her expectation was the freedom to discuss issues with her supervisor, but somehow, she was unable to do so. I asked her what the barriers were.

> *I would relate that to differences in culture, in terms of understanding things or the way people speak here. I also think she did not have any trust in me because of the initial encounter about that paper, since I was not able to deliver a good outcome for all the jobs she assigned to me. I think she was really irritated by me that I am not good in doing all these things. In other words, the lack of opportunity to meet her in terms of informal kind of meeting, sharing my stories like, asking me to talk about how to plan my thesis. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

I asked if Rita ever tried to engage with her supervisor to discuss expectations or she was expecting her supervisor to initiate the conversation.

> *I tried to initiate. There was one occasion when she asked me to do some GRA[47] work. She wasn't satisfied with that. So, there were two to four emails between me and her. And I was requesting her to meet or talk over phone or any other means so that we could dialogue regarding the issue, but she was never available. I don't know why she avoided the communication. So, I tried two or three times, but she avoided it, and after that, I was tired of it all. Also, thinking about my colleagues with whom I started and who have moved so far in terms of progress. But here I was not even able to finalize my topic. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

I was curious to know what was going on in Rita's mind at this point and how she felt about the experience. So, I asked if she could share.

[47] Graduate Research Assistant.

> *I felt dejected, I felt frustrated that at one point I cried, you see? Usually, I'm not a kind of person that would break easily. I was like, I'm here to study. But then I'm not... You know, when you feel like you are in the middle of a situation, but you can't get out of it. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

As I listened to Rita describe how she felt about being *"in the middle of a situation but cannot get out*," I asked if she made any effort to reach out for help. I noted that she lowered her voice at this point and almost whispered. I felt like she was reluctant sharing this aspect of her experience and I reassured her that it was okay if she did not want to talk about it. Although Rita was reluctant sharing this aspect of her experience, she narrated an incident that changed the story. According to Daiute (2018), there is often a high point to every story, a climax, conflict or turning point in which there is a call for a paradigm shift.

> *There was one day when she was very angry. I don't know for what reason. So, she came to our space, and she was so angry. I could see anger on her face. The tone of her voice was so intense. I was shocked to see that. And there was another incident as well which added up. That was the point when I thought, okay, now it's going nowhere. If you do not have a healthy relationship with your supervisor, then how would you progress? I'm like, who wants to linger when you have this much going on? So that was a particular point in time when I decided we needed to talk. I made an appointment with her. I wrote a reflection of when and why I came to Canada, what happened on all those details, all the nitty gritty. After that, I emailed her, saying that it's all ended. She said she was fine with it, but I think she had that anger in her. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

Having described her supervisor-student relationship, I was curious to know Rita's classroom experience. She said she did not know how or where to begin her story because a lot of things have happened since she came to Canada, so, I asked if she could begin with her first day of class. She narrated her story about the classroom culture, discussions, and participation and I was wondering if what she described was a form of culture shock or self-doubt. According to her, she was yet to catch up with her class schedules and class activities because she arrived late. All these affected her participation and particularly the discussion of the assigned readings for classes.

> *I did not participate in discussion because I had not read any of the articles. At that time, you know, nobody told me that 'you need to speak anything that relates to that conversation'. I was like, maybe you need to read all those things and you need to be specific in terms of speaking. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

Apart from the struggle trying to catch up with class activities, being a new student in a new environment, she was yet to get familiar with her environment and understand how the system runs. All these challenges affected her class participation.

> *Maybe I do not know the specific things, so I shouldn't speak. So, I didn't speak at all the whole time. I felt like nobody wanted me in the group because I had nothing to contribute. Whenever I was in a group, I realized that if there were other three people, those three people would be talking to each other and expressing their opinions, but you will be set aside! There were many instances during those initial discussion when people would not even ask … 'oh! Hi … you came from far away?'. That was not even the conversation. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

As I listened to Rita describe her experience with group work, I was saying in mind, '*I have been through that too*'. I was wondering how she was feeling at the time. I remember the feeling of isolation and loneliness during my first class. The feeling of being left out, the feeling of being irrelevant in discussions. Those were very uncomfortable feelings. I remember my inner struggles to fit in. Rita described how she felt too.

> *They would just put you aside and doing all the discussions. There was one instance where I was sitting on one side and other three members were facing the other side … talking this and that …, and all theory related things. I was wondering if we were in the same group. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

In describing this experience, Rita again lowered her voice as if this aspect of her story was very confidential. This kept me wondering if she was afraid to share the experience or if she felt like she would be betraying someone's confidentiality by sharing the story. I wanted to verify but I felt that this might be a vulnerable moment for her and interrupting her might make her to be self-conscious. So, I decided to keep silent and let her continue with her story.

> *And that point in time, I felt so … bad, and I started to devalue myself. But I reminded myself that 'I'm not that bad!' 'I have some opinion that I could share, but it's just that I didn't know how to …', there was something ... because of something I was not able to speak. But nobody wants to listen to me. You know, the silence that you feel, even though there are people … you feel silenced. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

As I continued to listen to Rita's story, I recalled my initial class experiences during my master's program. I remember using self-talks similar to what Rita described as my coping strategies and I wondered how many students find them helpful too. However, I felt like self-blame was a common part of such experience – I could hear this in Rita's stories as well.

> *I felt left out, but I think a large part of it was because of me, because I did not initiate the conversation. Maybe people did not want to make me feel hurt or something like that by asking and if I do not answer. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

I asked if Rita made any attempt to join the conversation, but she explained that she saw that other members were actively engaged, and she did not want to interrupt. According to her, she wanted them to complete what they were saying but it seemed there was no chance for that. In addition, she felt like her opinion did not count.

> *No, I did not, I'm like they'll be talking within themselves and that would finish. I did not attempt to contribute because I would think, like my opinion would not be valued or they might not understand because of the language differences, because of the way I speak. And because of that, I did not make any offer and they also did not make any effort, but I think it's not on their part, but on the part of me. There were a lot of things going on at the time, and the relationship with supervisor was also taking negative turn and having a cumulative effect on me. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

It was not only in small group discussions that Rita did not actively engage, she said that she rarely participated in class at the time except for class presentations, which were unavoidable. When asked if there was a time when things changed, she explained the turning point when things began to change.

> *Later, I started making contributions by asking questions and answering, because when you are in a situation like you need scholarship, you need support for your study because you have come here with very small amount of money that you need to survive. Here, the*

> *scholarship award is based on grade. So, that was the turn that was a very big punch on my face, and I started getting involved. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

Rita was now smiling as she described another turning point in her story and the first time she tried to step out. According to her, she started by reaching out to a trusted friend.

> *I remember talking to one of my friends from Nepal. When you do not speak, nobody knows what is going on inside of you. Maybe my perspective would be a different one from other people and that would be very valued. I would not know unless I speak. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

She described an empowering moment when her friend assisted her to discover her true self. As I listened to the story, I felt like many international students need a moment like this when someone could remind them of who they are.

> *She said to me, 'you are not like that, you used to speak up but you are not speaking in class. That is not you … you need to … that is not you'. So, that was the conversation that really put me on the spot and made me think about who I am. She told me, 'until you are confident, until you start having an opinion, you are not heard, you are not valued, you are not counted as an important part of the class'. Based on that, I started reading articles and the things that have been assigned in class. I started making contribution in terms of how I understood the reading and sharing my perspective and I saw I was making a step ahead. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

Rita also shared her opinion about what could be helpful for international students to get through their challenges and what she expected a student-supervisor relationship to be like.

> *Being in a different country and being in a different education system is challenging. But then there are people who have overcome those challenges. So, I think it's all about believing in yourself. I think the support and particularly for the international students would be needed. A support system in this case would be a group of friends who have already been through that phase, good supervisors that understand your situation, and maybe a group of faculty members who could serve as counsellors during the initial phases. Those who would listen to your worries and say, OK, let's work on this, we have been through that, and we have overcome. Kindness to students is important. Sometimes we try being so right that we forget to be kind. (Rita's conversation, November 23, 2020)*

Listening to Rita's story called me to reflect on the personal challenges that people live with and are not so visible to others around them. It made me wonder how many students are in similar situation as Rita, who are looking to be seen and seeking to be heard. I quite agreed with what

she said that it takes a bit of empathy and kindness to recognize the needs in those who struggle in silence.

It was interesting that Rita did not count assignments as significant aspects of her learning. According to her, because there was so much emphasis on research, she did not pay much attention to assignments and classroom works. However, she expressed her disappointment when she received feedback on her first assignment. According to her, she did not expect that much emphasis would be placed on grades or the quality of her English grammar. To her, the feedback she received was a shock since she never experienced such emphasis during her previous education in Nepal.

> *I think initially I devalued the assignment, because I felt like there's more focus on research rather than assignments. Little did I know that the assignment was a major part in the course base pattern. I remember the first assignment with the marks were heavily focused on grammar, structure, and punctuation. So that was a time when I felt a bit disheartened by the grading because more marks were lost due to APA, grammar, and structures. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

She explained how this experience affected her and other international students.

> *Back home, I remember, we do not need to focus on grammar and structures. If it makes sense then it's OK. So, that was the first it hit me a bit hard because of that, I lost marks. So, I think it was more on structure and grammar rather than the content. It kind of hampers international students. Those who are not that strong in using grammars and structures. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

She also shared a particular situation where she felt there was unfairness in the grading of assignments.

> *One thing that I felt really bad about was one of my presentations. There were three of us involved and we invested so much time on the assignment. Even though our poster was nice compared to others, we lost eight marks on that poster, so that was a bit hard. The more disheartening part was when we emailed the professor asking where we lost mark, he did not reply to that email. He basically said it was the university system. He did not address the question properly, we wanted to know if we lost marks in introduction, we wanted to know what we did not write correctly. We did not also receive a reason or rationale. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

Rita also felt that the grading of assignments was sometimes done with prejudice and bias based on class participation and students' demonstration of confidence. She shared an instance when a professor adjusted a grade for a Canadian colleague because she felt that the student deserved more than a C since she was outspoken in class[48].

> *Reflecting on that experience, I would think that everything you do in class is judged based on how confidently you speak in the beginning. So, that was my strong feeling when I compare all my assignments, I feel like some professors decide that … this student deserves this, and I will not give more than this because this student doesn't speak in class or she doesn't express it nicely, all those things. I do not know whether that's true or not (she laughed) but I think all of those patterns made me believe that. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

As I listened to Rita, I wondered if our conversation was an opportunity to vent her pent-up feelings. Although she was waving away her hands dismissively and smiling, I wondered if that could be her way of minimizing her emotions about her experience.

> *So that kind of … makes you makes feel bad, you know, I mean … you invest a lot of hard work while doing presentation because you know that it is important. But then when you hear people saying that … it's like, what's the use of doing all those things when you know what will happen? When the outcome would not be nice, it kind of hurts you in some ways. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

Listening to Rita narrating her story, I wondered what it would be like to listen to the professor'(s) in question. Their stories might be different. I also wondered what Rita would do or how would she treat the situation if she was the professor in question? I explored further how she felt generally about the experience with assignments and grades.

> *It didn't feel nice, but that's how it is when, you can't change it, when you hear people speaking about all those things. I have seen a professor speaking to a student who received a scholarship grant in a totally different tone in comparison to those who have not received anything, and who do not speak in class … who do not voice their opinion in class. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

[48] In Rita's own words, this was disclosed by the (said) student when she was trying to encourage Rita to appeal for a better grade. But Rita did not appeal because she did not have the courage to do so.

When Rita talked about a professor speaking to an award-winning student in a different tone of voice, I was curious to know what it sounded like. So, I asked if she could say more and of what tone of voice she used for a student.

> *I've seen how they speak or relate to such students in a positive tone … with respect. I think that signifies that the professor has put the student at a higher level because she got the grant or awards. That matters because that would be the main point for any supervisor to evaluate their students. You will now be eligible to apply. There are many grants that have a minimum grade point average. Some conditions might have affected a student outcome, but people will not look at those. It would be all the worst that they will evaluate you on. So, yeah, I felt that initially. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

She explained further that this aspect of her story was based on her personal experience and its impact on her.

> *It is not like blaming other people, but it's just my perception based on the situation that I've been through. I might be wrong, and the other person might be right. Each individual perception differs, and people act differently in different situation because of different influencing factors. So, we should be understanding of all those aspects. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

I asked Rita if she could share how she was able to identify that she was being treated differently and how she felt about herself on such occasion.

> *You kind of feel a sense that … when you see a different behavior or when you feel a different kind of way in which a particular person is saying or approaching or assigning anything to you, you sense that. I have experienced that in my undergrad so badly in terms of supervisor behaving not nicely with me without any reason. You know, it's not the end of the world when people judge you based on that. I feel a lot of self-doubt was there when you experience those things. You are not able to put yourself in the scenario or you are not able to understand yourself. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

Rita shared an example of a situation when she felt she was treated differently based on being judged by class participation and her academic performance.

> *There was an instance when I asked a friend to speak with her supervisor for a research assistant job for me. The supervisor's reply was, 'I have many students that are all in line' (made a wiggly movement), that kind of make you feel bad you know? I felt like it should have been stated in different way, like … I will keep it in mind and let you know. Maybe because it is very competitive, supervisors are really, really, only focusing on*

> *students with good grades and students who can speak. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

I asked her how she felt about herself on such occasions when she felt like she was treated based on her academic performance. Prodding with the example she gave about the professor who had many students 'lined-up' for a research assistant job, I asked her where she pictured herself in the 'line-up' at the time.

> *To be honest, that didn't matter to me because I have already been through a lot. So, it was like, OK, that's fine, in my mind people will only select the best ones without me. I have been at the front in certain situations, but on this journey, I have found myself mostly at the back. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

To Rita, it is part of human nature to feel valued and appreciated. According to her, genuine appreciation was lacking, particularly in her relationship with her former supervisor in the graduate program.

> *It is of human nature to feel good when people say, 'oh, that's nice and you did it well'. It makes you feel motivated and it's kind of a reward. You know, you are a human, you need rewards and motivation. Like, for example, if you are taking all these interviews and your supervisor is like, 'this one is such a nice … like you did it so nicely, then you feel motivated. Now you feel like, yeah, that's an appreciation. And everybody needs appreciation, not like a fake or a false appreciation, but genuine appreciation. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

Rita once again reflected on her initial experience with her former supervisor in the graduate program and how it affected her progress in the graduate nursing program. According to her, it was difficult agreeing on a topic for her research and every time she saw her colleagues working on their research topics, she used to feel bad because she has not come up with one of her own. All her effort to talk it over with her supervisor did not work. According to her, the supervisor was usually reassuring her that she was doing okay and should not worry whenever she expressed concern about her lack of progress.

> *When I talked about all of this with my supervisor, she was like, no, you are good, you're fine. It's just your first year. Don't compare yourself with other people. You are good.*

> *You're fine. Those were her statements for the entire year. I think that was a false appreciation just to, kind of make you feel good but did not have any advantage. Had it been like a situation where I was involved in specifying those things at the beginning, the story would have been different. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

I asked Rita to share at what point did she realize that she was not making progress and needed to intervene.

> *I was kind of occupied with assignments and all those kind of logistics at the beginning. I had to change apartment buildings three times the first term so, I did not have the chance to talk with friends. I think it was when I started talking that I saw that they have already started writing their thesis. When you kind of see your friends that you started the same journey at the same time making progress, but you are not. That was when I realized. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

I asked her to describe how she felt and how she responded to the situation.

> *I felt bad, I thought maybe it was me who was not speaking of things quickly to initiate the process. I started specifying or writing the concepts so that it would be easier for me to discuss with a supervisor. I did that, but that did not help because she was like, that's okay, just leave. The main reaction or emotion at that time was maybe I was the one because I think we do a lot of self-blame. So, reaction was maybe I am the one not being so diligent or not being so good. It took one and a half years for all those things, then it was too much for me. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

I asked if Rita could describe the turning point when she started doing something about her situation.

> *When I became supersaturated, and there were many triggers at that time. Because you have to work, you have to earn money, you have to continue to fulfill the financial requirements of your program and on top of that, you have to focus on research but then it was not going well. I think I was really, really super saturated with all those things. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

There is often a limit to endurance and breaking point. Rita also got the support of her friends when she reached out to them.

> *One of my true friends also suggested that 'you need to take action'. So, kind of my own self-realization and some of my friends saying that you need to act, you need to change supervisor. If you have to spend four years with a supervisor and you're not happy. I think those were the things that kind of triggered and that was a turning point for me to. And that was enough for me, and I needed to move forward. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

I was very quiet and attentive as Rita made the gravity of her situation more visible in her story.

> *Yeah, it's kind of scary thing, because you have a limited time here in Canada to finish your study. You have a year or two years for courses. So, only two years would be left for actual research, for most of the smart people, they'll have their research ready within the first year so that they can move forward and finish it in four years. I think all these things matter, the limited time durations. I think they are really a precise point for international students who do not have or know anyone in this country. If something happens, then who will they ask for anymore? (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

I asked Rita if she had an experience or incident that made her think that something could happen to her. She narrated an experience that she said was very scary to her during her first year in Canada.

> *So I used to live with one of my friends about one hour and half from the university. So I used to take a train and a bus to get home. So this particular night the bus came late and there was no one at the bus stop or on the street and it was dark. With no phone or GPS, you cannot call anyone or find your way. There was no other passenger in the bus. We got off at a wrong bus stop because we missed our bus stop. It was so dark and cold. We were basically lost, just walking on the street and no one in sight. After moving in a circle for one and a half hour, we came across a couple who were maybe taking a walk but they did not help us. The thought on my mind was, what if something happens? Then if somebody comes and kills you, then nobody would know because you have no one to look for you. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

Rita concluded this aspect of her story, with a relief expression on her face. She described how help eventually came.

> *I think God sent someone to help us. There was one lady who were walking her dog. She came and she was like, I can drive you? So, she kind of helped us to reach the house, you know, and she was nice to us. So, it was that time when I was completely shocked. As soon as I entered the house, I cried. I cried so much, thinking that anything could have happened, you know. It was 11pm in the night. No one, no mobile phone to call for help. Just so scary. It was dark. Cold. So, it was kind of scary when I started. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

As our relationship continued to unfold, Rita made more visible her identity, her feelings, fears, hope, and the sacrifice made coming to Canada to study.

I wondered about sentiments of guilt as Rita described the response by her 94-year-old grandmother with whom she shares a relational bond. Rita being the primary caregiver, has maintained a close bond with her grandmother. It was very touching listening to her described the emotional impact of her departure.

> *When I was coming here, my grandmother was crying unconsolably like a small baby. She did not even speak to me. You know, I was standing down the gate and I could see her through the window crying and covering her face. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

I felt like Rita was reliving the experience. I was shocked at how her emotion quickly shifted from the initial calmness to deep sadness. I could see her eyes filled with tears. There was a momentary tension at that point as I found myself searching for the right thing to say. I negotiated if we should end our conversation for the day. The uncomfortable silence was broken when she recollected herself and then she spoke.

> *So that was all those things going on in my mind at that time. I have left people behind back home. Now I'm going to a strange country with the hope that I'll have a good time in terms of education and in terms of maybe making some friends. Yeah, it kind of rings a bit of sadness, a bit of scared and scared. Yeah, scary news because you do not know who to trust and who not. I am like I trust people so easily and so quickly. So it's like if somebody say this is this, then I like I believe them, you know, so that is a lot of disadvantaging and I'm honest about everything. (Rita's conversation, December 7, 2020)*

Chapter Six

Narrative Account 3: Sadiat's Story

Living Alongside Sadiat

This was my first meeting with Sadiat on December 29, 2020. There had been some mix-up in communication. I received her response to my invitation some weeks earlier and I sent the details of the inquiry including the consent form for her to sign. I had been waiting to receive the signed consent form but when I did not receive this in my email, I decided to send a text message. I was surprised that she too has been waiting for me to communicate. Somehow, she must have missed my email in which I have attached the consent form. While I was wondering if she had changed her mind about participating in the inquiry, she had concluded that I might have possibly got another participant in her place. I was happy that I followed up with the text message. She notified me (through a text message) that she was able to retrieve my message in her email and that she would get back to me as soon as possible. So, I started checking my email more frequently to avoid missing her message. It was unbelievable that the same problem could occur again. After sending another text message to confirm that she had sent the consent form, it was a great relief when I found Sadiat's message in my junk mail, with the attached consent form.

With the consent signed and forwarded back to me, I scheduled a meeting with her. We were supposed to meet on December 28, but we had to reschedule for the following day because Sadiat was not feeling well. Finally, we were able to meet on December 29, just a couple of days before the new year. I was happy that we were able to meet. After introducing myself and giving more details about the inquiry, I asked if Sadiat could give a brief introduction of herself. According to her, she came from Pakistan. She received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from

the University Hospital affiliated with a renowned university. It was a form of joint education and hospital-based institution. She started working in a cardiovascular and pulmonology unit, which later became an internal medicine unit, at the same university hospital soon after completing her undergraduate course work. After obtaining a practice license, she continued in a position of registered nurse.

In addition to her primary role as a registered nurse, she was given the responsibility of mentoring new staff and students. It was during her experience on this unit that she realized her potential and the skills she had to teach. She later secured a nurse instructor position. She worked in other different roles for six years before considering a master's degree in nursing education. Sadiat came to Canada for her master's degree in the Fall of 2019. I have never met her in person, but we have been communicating through email, phone, and text messages. According to her, she was directed to my invitation by her mentor[49]. I asked if Sadiat could tell me more about herself and what motivated her to come for graduate studies in Canada.

> *I pursued a master's degree here in Canada. And the reason for choosing this university was that it's a very research-intensive university and it is very renowned. Since my bachelor's was also from the renowned university that has many links with other universities and institutions, I really wanted to make myself prominent, like I really wanted to grow in this nursing field. The reason for choosing teaching was that I had interest for going to pursue a degree in like a dual specialization as a nurse practitioner. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020).*

A Remarkable Experience Living and Learning Alone

After our introduction and exchange of pleasantries, I asked if Sadiat could share her experience and educational journey. I could see that she was excited and willing to share because she was talking so fast, and I found myself leaning forward with great attention so I would not miss a word of what she was saying.

[49] Not the same as her supervisor or advisor, but a fellow graduate student from Pakistan who served as a support system for Sadiat.

> *I really had learned a lot, and this has been a very remarkable journey living here alone in Canada, because I have never lived alone. So, this really give me a rich experience. I became so independent here and I have a lot of things to share. Once you keep asking me questions, I can provide you some accounts on that. A very rich experience, and I cannot forget these two years and like I'm graduating and thinking, oh my God, it's finished so soon. So, yeah, this is all about my journey. If you really want, I can repeat those landmarks and events with dates if you want me to. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020).*

I felt like I was caught off guard when she challenged me to keep asking her questions, so I asked if she could walk me through her first day of school in Canada and what it was like for her.

> *I remember as far as it was September 4th, Monday, I was having my nature of nursing knowledge class. The professor had sent the timelines and the discussion points that we would be discussing. I wasn't even able to concentrate in that class because see, that was my first day. I landed one week before but for four to five days, I lived with my friends living in the city and nearby. But I started actually living alone that day. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020).*

I was wondering if Sadiat could explain how her living alone affected her learning and the classroom experience. It was as if she could read my mind to know my next question as she started unpacking the connections between her circumstances.

> *So that was a very anxiety full movement. I had to cook for myself. I was so much occupied. Well, I wasn't well-prepared for my first day of the class. I saw too many students. But the most thing that gave me satisfaction was that I saw many international students in my class. At least I am not alone, because if I would have been alone in that class, I might not be able to perform confidently and participate well in class. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020).*

I continued to listen to Sadiat as she talked about the class expectations and what she was feeling during that first day in class. I was fascinated listening to her as she shared this aspect of her experience.

> *My professor had so many expectations with us. She wanted us to participate in class regularly and in the discussions and every time. Her class was designed so that we had to participate somehow, every individual and every day. I was confident because I had taught many classes and have even been involved with many professionals. But still, I wasn't confident that day. I was scared of speaking in front of others because the language was another issue. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020).*

Sadiat expressed her initial struggles with communication, how it affected her participation in class, and her concern and fear about grades.

> *I wasn't able to speak like fluently, though I had a high score in IELTS, still, I don't know, I wasn't feeling that confident. I remember that it was difficult for me to speak up, though I had to, but that was like I had to force myself to speak up in front of others. I was scared of the marks. You know, the second thing that, I have always been a good student and a high achiever in my undergraduate degree and throughout my career. I am very ambitious and concerned about the grading as well. I was really scared. Will I be able to score well or not? And the reason for being so much concerned was I wanted to get some scholarship. I had to apply for some scholarships. So that was the thing. And I have other issues like finances. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020).*

Sadiat shared how she engaged in self-talk as a way of self-motivating. I remember when I used to do that when I first came to Canada.

> *I saw the scholarship was so significant for me. So, I started working hard. I tried to push myself, 'Sadiat you have to do this, you have to achieve good marks so that you can make your position', 'you can go growing your career'. There are things that really make someone prominent just because of the marks. You get good opportunities if you participate in class, you get noticed by professors who may hire you for research jobs or for teaching assistant job. I was so anxious; those were my feelings that day. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

When comparing her undergraduate education experience back in her country to the situation in the Canadian setting, she identified several differences.

> *It was very different from my undergraduate experience because I was studying with friends whose faces were familiar to me, and most of them have my culture, my religion and even the ethnic background, the language was the same, everything was same, so all experiences were all the same. So, there was nothing new. We had a few like two to three international students, but it was like just supporting them. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

I asked Sadiat if she could share her typical daily experience in the graduate program in Canada compared to her undergraduate experience in Pakistan.

> *I used to spend most of my time studying, I was a studious kind of person. I used to attend lectures. I used to teach my fellow students. I used to concentrate more in class. If I compare here, my typical day was like I was not actually able to concentrate on the content. It was as though these things were running over my head. All these feelings that will I be able to make a transition to my second year? Will I be able to score good? Will I*

> *be able to mingle, or will I be able to speak up in front of them? All these were challenges and I completely wasn't able to concentrate, and I had to review all those things. I was just writing down what people were saying so that I can revise it later. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

I asked Sadiat to describe her experience with the teacher-professor relationship in Canada compared to Pakistan.

> *In Pakistan, teachers are in central position as the sole decision makers. Classes were designed like auditorium and sometimes teacher had to stand before the class. So that really showed us the authoritative figure. Secondly, in terms of the assignment, I would say, though, they used to pretend that the relationship is good, but assignment submission was made so strict that students never ask for an extension. But here in Canada, I see that faculties do consider decision is on us, they are so flexible. The policies and the relationship are designed that students can speak freely in front of the faculties. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

I asked if Sadiat could share more details about her experience with in-class learning activities.

> *Sometimes we have online discussion and it's totally on us what kind of stuff we need to discuss with our peers and what are significant to us. We are the one to decide. So, it gets difficult sometimes. You know, it was tricky, that responsibility is kind of challenging. We had to spend a lot of time reading articles. Back home, teachers used to bombard us with a lot of information, but things were already prescribed. For instance, the MCQ[50] sets were already developed. But here in Canada, we had to make efforts, time and energy were spent reading the articles, probing the appropriate questions in the class, and getting answers to it, that was one of the challenges that I faced here. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

She also talked about her experience with group activities.

> *Secondly, the teachers make decisions regarding assignments and the group activities back home but here, we are the ones in charge, and I need to be able to make a good decision. Sometimes faculty says that 'this assignment needs to be done in group, are you willing to work in pairs or are you willing to work in a group of five individuals?' It was very difficult because I didn't know people here in Canada. How do they work here? What kind of responsibilities? How much responsibility does one hold? You are in group work, with whom will I be assigned in the group activity? There are so many Canadians, and I am the only international student, so that was the biggest challenge[51]. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

[50] MCQ according to Sadiat, stands for multiple choice questions used in standardized tests.
[51] According to Sadiat, this was a different class from the one described earlier where she saw many international students.

I asked if Sadiat could say more on how being the only international student impacted her group participation.

> *Whenever a faculty asked, 'do you need to work in pairs or group?*[52] *' I used to be silent at that time because I was afraid that I might take a wrong decision and that might impact my performance in the group activity or and ultimately my scores. If I compare it to my undergrad, teachers used to say that it is a good idea to work in pairs, but we could spontaneously make decisions because we already had our friends with us who we know, then I'm definitely going to choose my friend. But here, I do not have mine! (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

I was fascinated by the enthusiasm and the energy demonstrated by Sadiat and her willingness to share her experience. She even asked me what else would I want to hear from her and that I should let her know if she was missing something. This called me to re-evaluate our relationship in the inquiry. I was wondering what I could do or say to let her know that she was considered a co-inquirer. So, I reassured her that I was willing to go along with her whatever she was comfortable to share about her experience. I asked if she could share specific instances of working with classmates on assignments.

> *I have two examples, one working with peers and one working group, so it was my nature of nursing knowledge when I was assigned with my peers. She was Canadian. I was glad that at least I have some female partner to work with. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

As I listened to Sadiat, I felt like she was preparing me for an interesting story, so I tried to be more attentive.

> *I didn't have any issues working with male because I've worked a lot with male and female. But still, I didn't have any idea of what are they like? I wasn't sure about the relationships they hold. I was glad that there was someone female who at least I could talk comfortably to, but she was Canadian. I was basically anxious. I was thinking that she already knows, and she had already done her undergrad degree in Canada. She's in the nurse practitioner track and I'm from teaching and learning. There were a lot of differences. She was so fluent in English language thing, and I would say she knew more about Canadian context than me. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

[52] Listening to this aspect of Sadiat's story, I wondered whether she was given the option of working in a group but was having difficulty in making a choice.

As I continue to listen to Sadiat, I wondered if she was taking time to explain the kind of person she is or who she used to be. At that point, I wanted to verify with her if she was trying to describe herself and what she felt has changed about her in her new learning environment, but I chose not to interrupt as she continued with her story.

> *Back home, I remember, with the group work, people used to choose me as a leader for the group, like sole responsibility given to me every time. I used to perform very well. I used to participate and contribute more than other group members, that's the perception of others about me. I also feel like I was a good contributor. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

I had many questions in my mind as Sadiat continued with her story. I wondered if she felt like something had changed in her and if so, what she felt it was. Although I deliberated on these puzzles, I decided not to interrupt as Sadiat went on with her story.

> *Then I was assigned a new member who I wasn't a friend with, and we didn't talk much in class. It was difficult to work with her because she was too quick in her work. She was better than me. Whenever I wanted to share an idea, she was all done with the work. It was a good experience, but I thought that I was lagging behind somewhere that give me a little of a feeling of like I am backward. She is much better than me. I started comparing myself. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

Invitational Spaces: Border crossing or Isolation enhancing?

I wondered if what Sadiat described was a usual experience for many international students. She explained that the experience was not different even when she was working in a group.

> *Same situation when I worked with … in my quantitative course when we were supposed to do a group presentation. All the members were Canadians, and I was the only international student. They have a lot of similarities between them, and I was the only different one. I had really difficult moments in mingling with them. I didn't have much to talk about, such kind of gossips so that I could make our relationship better. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

Sadiat described her experience in another class (not quantitative course), where fellow students were friendly and wanted to interact with her. According to her, she found it difficult to mingle or interact socially, even with other international students in the class.

> *Whatever I was assigned the task to do so, that was a kind of like I thought they were really friendly and try to mingle with me, but I used to sit quiet with them. I would say that that was a major barrier I faced. There were a few international students in our class who knew each other, but I was left alone. I didn't know who to work with. So that was the biggest challenge. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

She reflected on her experience back in Pakistan and how international students were treated. I could relate to what she was narrating as I had been through such experience too. Listening to her, and thinking back to my own experience, I felt like being on the other side of the border provides a great opportunity for us to grow in terms of empathy.

> *That used to happen back home with international students, and the same situation happened with me here. We used to welcome international students in our group. But here, Canadian was choosing their Canadian partners who they usually work or have worked with in other courses. I and other international students felt left alone. Just because other people didn't know our capabilities, our potentials, so I would say that really impacted my learning here in Canada. I would say that my personality has also changed here. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

Just Accepting Everything: My Self-esteem got Low

I asked Sadiat if she could say more on how and in what way her personality changed in Canada. Using her experience with the nurse practitioner student partner as an example, she explained that under normal circumstances, she would have initiated a meeting with her partner to clarify roles and responsibilities regarding the assignment. She would have sought clarification about working styles and verified some flexibilities about schedules, instead, she found herself tagging along with her partner who often made unilateral decisions.

> *It was like, OK. I was accepting everything, kept on accepting things. I was unhappy. My situation was to stick to our objectives. There wasn't any kind of friendly relation. When you correct someone directly instead of giving feedback. It made me so uncomfortable. And I would say that I felt my self-esteem got low. If I was in her place and if I might*

> *have done any mistake or I didn't like her style of working, I might have given a kind of feedback in a sandwich approach so that she feels comfortable that this is the way we follow and the good way. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

Sadiat narrated an incident when her partner dismissively ignored her opinion while they were working on an assignment.

> *One thing that also comes up in my mind is that I've shared one thing that was mentioned in the rubrics, and I informed my partner that I think we should change this. But she didn't listen to me, she said it's OK, we don't have to worry about it. But you know what? We lost marks - five marks was deducted on that component. See, if I was in her place, I might have listened to her. I might have gone back to check the rubrics and I might have changed that thing. I'm kind of receptive, I do respect others, so, I might have made the situation better. If I was in my country, I would have confidently approached the professor to let her know what happened. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

According to Sadiat, this was a painful experience, and it was a turning point for her.

> *When we received the marks, the feedback, that was the point when I emphasized to myself "there, you lost marks!" That point made me think, "you also have some kind of knowledge," "you also have potential to do something rather than agreeing to every situation." That really boosted my confidence. I would say that this little thing had an impact on my confidence, and I started reflecting on those things to make thing better in my life. That was the beginning. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

My Motivations When Things Were Hard

I asked if Sadiat could share the source of her motivation during the difficult times in her graduate education. She explained that her supervisor and her fellow international students were very supportive, and in addition to that was her personal resilience and persistence.

> *It was very difficult. I really used to cry a lot but as I mentioned, I was ambitious and a high achiever. Seeing people working really motivated me. I met some other international students who were struggling, who told me that they haven't got a job. But I said, there is no harm in applying for opportunities and as soon as I started digging more, I got a job. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

She provided more details on how her supervisor in the graduate nursing program worked closely with her to apply for scholarship and the success of their efforts.

> *My advisor was also encouraging. I met her and I started talking that I need to apply for scholarships. Could you please help me? I came to know about more opportunities, to the*

> *support of my supervisor, she really helped me to apply for scholarship. I receive a huge amount that I have never had in my life. This really encouraged me to move forward. Second motivation point was international students. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

Sadiat also reached out to her fellow international students with whom she found support.

> *I started consulting with those who were actually doing the job among my friends. I don't have a license yet*[53]*, and then when I talk to my advisor, I felt like she was concerned about my settlement here. I had to prove myself somehow. I kept on consulting with my international colleague, not only those from my country and asking them, "How did you apply for those positions?" "How did you manage your job and everything?" So, talking to them and listening to their experiences also motivated me somehow. I had got a graduate research assistant position and I'll be able to finally get a position as well. So, I'm so happy. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

Now I Want to Be a Support to Others

Sadiat shared how she has turned her experience around to help other international students.

> *And meanwhile, I would say that I wanted to be a support to other international students. Once I received that job, I thought 'yes Sadiat, you need to play your part!'. There are very few people who understand others' perspectives. So being a human being, I also supported a few of the students from other countries and talked to them that this is how … and somehow, we all got a job that was the most happy moment. (Sadiat's conversation, December 29, 2020)*

It was interesting listening to Sadiat sharing her stories but because we ran out of time, we had to continue our conversation at our next meeting. There were a lot of things that I was eager to learn about Sadiat that we were not able to discuss during this meeting. For instance, I wanted to know about her early life and her experiences of growing up as a child. I would like to know about her family members, if she had brothers and sisters, uncles and aunties, elders, or teachers who contributed to her early learning experience to shape her learning style. I would love to learn about her culture and the traditional methods used to educate children in her country. I

[53] Despite that Sadiat was a registered nurse in Pakistan, she needed a Canadian license to practice as a nurse in Canada. She could work as a graduate research assistant or teaching assistant without the license requirement.

would love to learn about the system of education in Pakistan. Thinking about all these aspects of her experience, I decided to write a letter to Sadiat to see if she could unpack them during our next meeting.

> *Dear Sadiat,*
>
> *Thanks for sharing your story with me regarding your experience when you first came to Canada, and how you turned it around to assist others. I have learned that our lives are full of stories, and it is by telling our stories that we can make sense of our lived experience. As I began to think with your story, I wondered what it meant to you choosing to come to Canada for your graduate education instead of studying in Pakistan where you have family and friends around you, where you are well familiar with the culture and environment. I wondered if there was any way in which this decision might have impacted your journey so far. I also found in your story that you are an intelligent, high achieving, and independent learner. I would love to know your early beginnings, your experience growing up as a child, your family members, if you had brothers and sisters, uncles and aunties, elders, or teachers who contributed to your early learning experience to shape the kind of person you are today as a learner. I would love to learn about your culture and the traditional methods by which your people educate their children. I would love to learn about the system of education in Pakistan. I am wondering if we could talk about these in our next conversation sessions. Feel free to share with me any memorable artifact or those nostalgic moments. I am looking forward to our next meeting. Let me know what time works best for you. Thanks, Bisi.* (A letter to Sadiat, December 31, 2020).

Early Beginnings in Learning

This was my second virtual meeting with Sadiat. Although we had not met in person, it seemed like we had known each other for many years. She sounded friendly, soft-spoken, and engaging. Although we had to reschedule the meeting several times because of conflicting schedules, it was easy for us to pick up our conversation from where we left of the last time. I really wanted to know more about Sadiat, so I asked her if she could talk about her childhood and her school days. She began with a description of the experience of her early education. She talked about her experience in the nursery school where she was exposed to formal learning such the English alphabets and numbers, and where she learned how to read and write.

> *I attended the nursery. Between the ages of two to three, parents send their children to nursery. Those were located within the community and run by the local people. They are not well qualified people, but it is between baby sitting and exposing children to learn some beginning in English proficiency. So we used to learn the alphabets and rhymes. I haven't started learning ABCD until when I went to nursery to learn English, that's where I started learning a language, but my elder sister was exposed to the formal education before me. She made me learn those things, children learn from their environment, you know. (Sadiat's conversation, February 6, 2021)*

It was difficult for Sadiat to remember details about her learning experience before she started formal education, but she shared her memory of what learning looked like during the initial days in elementary school and what she could remember about her interaction with family members at home.

> *Teacher used to stand before students just communicating the information, we students mostly were used to sit in the classrooms and there was no concept about active engagement of students in the classroom. (Sadiat's conversation, February 6, 2021)*

Sadiat described herself as a very inquisitive person who used to ask questions about almost everything while at home. Yet, she was also a very shy student who used to sit quietly in class. According to her, she rarely participated unless the teacher initiated some creative activities. She disclosed that she was more interested in doing artwork, than sitting and listening in class. She

reflected on how she used to be one person at home and a different person in school. She began to laugh when she reflected on a family joke about her habit of questioning. I was very attentive to Sadiat as she talked more about her childhood experiences and her motivation to engage in school. I felt like she developed her value for education from personal experiences as a child. She disclosed that being born and raised in a poor family, watching her parents struggle was a strong motivation for her. To her, being educated was a way out of poverty to a better life.

> *I belong to a poor family and, I had seen a lot of struggles in my life. I would say I didn't have to struggle much as compared to my parents but looking at their struggles and the struggles of my friends' family as well because they were from poor family too, there was a lot of encouragement among us that we needed to do something. We wanted to get more education to uplift our standards of life. Our parents never forced us but just experiencing those struggles motivated me to do something to concentrate more over my studies. (Sadiat's conversation, February 6, 2021)*

Sadiat also talked about the role of her parents in funding her education. According to her, while her parents may have not received a formal education, they invested a lot into her education.

> *Then I started my undergraduate studies. I was totally dependent on my family. I'm not going to pay, of course, because that was a trend in my country that, yes, once I get my license or once I complete my undergraduate degree, I can work as a nurse and then I can start earning. (Sadiat's conversation, February 6, 2021)*

Culture of Tuition

Sadiat also talked about the 'culture of tuition' which was a common practice during her school days. This was an equivalent of an after-school preparatory class that was organized for elementary school students up to the 8th grade. According to Sadiat, usually parents pay extra fees to community tutors to assist students with homework, projects, and to prepare them for tests. Sadiat laughed as she expressed her opinion about the 'culture of tuition' program. To her, the program made no sense, she thought that it offered no advantages to students as it was neither engaging nor promoting critical thinking. To her, it was a waste of money because everything was based on rote learning. As I listened, I felt like Sadiat was right. It was difficult to

understand how the ‘culture of tuition’ worked. Like Sadiat, I could not see how this approach could facilitate independence or foster confidence in students. She laughed again as she reflected on her experiences.

> *I remember myself, I used to memorize the entire 2 pages and then my tutor used to ask me to verbalize everything, and I use to laugh whenever I think about all those days. So yeah, in traditional school system we had the rote learning aspect and if I compare it to when I moved forward to higher education or postsecondary education, the institutions where I studied really had great impact on my development. (Sadiat’s conversation, February 6, 2021)*

Sadiat provided more details about her learning experience in college, and how the kind of institution she attended and the teaching/learning approach she experienced impacted her.

> *I studied from a private university that has collaboration and partnership with international institutions. This was how I got some idea how to improve my learning experience. So, from a passive student to becoming an active student. During my college days, we were taught by some faculties that emphasized critical thinking, that was when I started questioning the concepts that I was learning. (Sadiat’s conversation, February 6, 2021)*

Sadiat reflected on her experience writing a board examination in Pakistan. According to her, despite her exposure to teaching and learning that facilitated critical thinking, the method of evaluation used in the Board examination was not analytic or critical.

> *Even though it was a board system education, everything was rote learning. There was no question related to critical thinking in the board exam. Course works were mostly focused on memorizing all those things, so we didn’t have time to think much about the concepts that we were learning. (Sadiat’s conversation, February 6, 2021)*

According to Sadiat, compared to her experience in the graduate program in Canada, she disclosed that her exposure to technology during her education in Pakistan was limited to the use of a projector.

> *The education system remained the same throughout my college days, the board examination questions were more related to rote learning. We were tested based on our memorization skills but when I entered my graduate studies that’s where there was emphasis to rationalize concepts. In my first year we used the projectors, I remember that there was not much emphasis on technological things, but the advancement of technology*

> *and its integration into education is much these days. I see that there is much difference in the education that I experienced here at my university. (Sadiat's conversation, February 6, 2021)*

I asked if Sadiat could share what it meant to her, choosing to come to Canada for her graduate education instead of studying in Pakistan where there were family and friends and familiar learning environment. She explained that some of her faculty members during her undergraduate nursing program had their graduate education abroad and seeing them progress and share their achievement on social media was a great motivation.

> *I saw that these faculty members who taught us in first year are now working abroad and attending international conferences and being recognized. Those who did not go abroad are studying hard and even attending summer online classes, attending conferences and participating in community development programs so I was much motivated. These faculties are now serving as professors and conducting research at international level and getting awards. (Sadiat's conversation, February 6, 2021)*

She also explained that she wanted to make a change and going abroad for graduate education was meant to gain exposures to rich experiences that would help her contribute to the development of education in her country.

> *Once I graduate with new experience, I could have something different to offer rather than just repeating those things that already are there in our country. Besides, I would have a rich experience to help my country. I have started thinking about how I can contribute or serve my alma mater so those were the influential factors. I would say those things influenced and compelled me to decide. (Sadiat's conversation, February 6, 2021)*

Negotiating a Bumpy Landscape

During our last two meetings I learned a lot about Sadiat. Although she speaks very fast, she is soft-spoken and usually smiling when sharing her story, even when she was talking about some difficult experiences. However, I noted that she was not smiling this time. I was wondering if something happened and if we needed to reschedule the meeting. I also wondered if I had done something wrong that upset her. As I mentally ran through the events around our last meeting and our communication between then and the current meeting, I could not identify what could

have gone wrong. Yet, I was feeling guilty about the situation. I decided to point out my observation about her. It was then she disclosed that she had expected me to send her the honorarium that I was supposed to give her as a participant. I felt very badly. I realized that there has been a miscommunication. The first two participants have requested to send their honorarium as a lump-sum at the conclusion of our conversations. Somehow, I had failed to check with Sadiat if she wanted to go with that option as well. Learning about this miscommunication, I apologized to her, and I sent her the total amount right before we commenced our conversation. This was a serious oversight on my part. Having addressed this issue, we began our meeting as usual.

Taking our conversation from where we stopped the last meeting, I asked if Sadiat could walk me through the system of education in her country. I listened carefully as she explained the system of education in Pakistan. Basically, two systems of education are prevalent in Pakistan. The indigenous religion-based education system and the modern formal education system. The indigenous religion-based system of education was inspired by Islamic principles that emphasized maintaining equality in access to education for both boys and girls.

According to Sadiat, indigenous religion-based systems, schools, or learning centres are attached to mosques, where children are initiated into religious instruction early in their education.

> *It is more of religious education, we have another source where they give religious kind of teachings where they discuss about Quranic teachings, laws, and Islamic principles. I won't say that there is a gender equality but at least people know that it is the right of both men and women or girls or boys to get equally educated. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

The emphasis is on rote learning of the verses in the holy Quran. Those who complete elementary education are awarded certificates depending on their proficiency in reading and

memorization, and recitation of the Quran. For those who complete the equivalent of secondary level education, the award of the *Tahmani* certificate is based on the successful completion of that level of education, passing the final examination on Arabic language and literature, Islamic law and jurisprudence, and translation of some chapters of the Quran. At all levels of the traditional system, secular subjects such as math and science are not considered.

The formal or Western education system was instituted under the British colonial rule and continued after the country's independence in 1947. According to Sadiat, the formal educational system comprises 6 levels. A pre-primary or preparatory class, called kachi or nursery for children 2 to 5 years old. The primary stage for children from 5 to 9 years-old, lasting for five years. A middle stage for children 10- to 12-years-old, covering grades six through eight and lasting for three years. A two-year secondary stage for the 13- and 14-years-old, covering grades nine and ten. A two-year higher secondary, or "intermediate college," leading to a diploma in arts or science, and a fifth stage covering college and university programs leading to baccalaureate, professional, and master's and doctorate degrees.

I asked Sadiat if she could talk about the language of instruction. It was interesting that there are more than 70 languages spoken in Pakistan, but the official languages are Urdu and English. English was introduced by the British. According to her, it has been the main language of instruction at the elementary and secondary levels since colonial times. It remains the predominant language of instruction in private schools but has been increasingly replaced with Urdu in public schools.

Sadiat also talked about different languages she was exposed to when she was growing up and her ability to switch languages while communicating with her people. She explained that

the two languages she learned in school were Urdu and English. According to her, she received her education in both languages, and both are official languages in Pakistan.

> *During my school days we used English as the medium which was more inspired by the British system and that wasn't as much adopted by government schools as Urdu. Urdu was the primary language which was prevalent in government schools and was used as a medium of instruction. If I talk about my institution, though it was English language school, most of the time the medium of instruction remained Urdu. Students and instructors are mostly encouraged to communicate in English. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

Expanding more on the languages of instruction, Sadiat explained how people rate the quality of schools based on the type, and their adherence to English as the language of instruction. According to her, private schools are considered to be of higher standard and of better quality than the government schools. *"If I compare these government schools to the schools that I attended which was a private school that had British, they used to encourage students and instructors to use English in our days to maintain their status". (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021).*

I wondered why students moved from school to school, could it be that they were not able to cope with the use of English language in their school? As I was not sure of her point, I asked Sadiat if she could expand more on that.

> *I remember there were a few students of my class who switched school and when we asked why? They said they had got admission in English speaking school that's more advanced. Like the school was considered as low standard and they used to consider British system as more advanced where they used to give superiority over those schools. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

It became clearer as she explained the reason why some students decided to change schools. Sadiat mentioned that children from low socio-economic classes felt that funding might have been a contributor to the substandard of the government schools.

> *So there was a distinction between other schools and I would also like to highlight one thing, that those who could afford to go to those private schools that had A level British*

> *system where most people who belong to higher class families so there was a distinction and still that's prevalent. Those who belong to low or middle-class family mostly preferred government schools to these private schools. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

Sadiat explained that despite attending a bilingual private school where both English and Urdu were used as the languages of instruction, students were discouraged from writing their tests or board exams in Urdu even when they had the option to do so.

> *My school was a private and bilingual school, so we had the option to write in English or Urdu, but we were not encouraged to write in Urdu. There was a form we had to fill when writing the board exam. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

As I listened to Sadiat, I wondered that despite being an official language, English was not enforced as a language of instruction in Pakistan, and I became more puzzled that they use one language for instruction and expect student to write exams in another language. I was confused, but I felt like there was a reason for it. I asked if Sadiat could expand more on that.

> *In our school, because we were being prepared to study abroad, we were encouraged to write exams in English because English is considered an international language. When I was in the 10th standard, my school was a part of a student exchange program based in the U S. This program created opportunity for students to complete their 11th and 12th grade in the US and the option to study in their specialty of interest for two years and return home with a diploma. Because of that kind of partnership, they wanted us to write our tests in English to maintain that international network. The goal was to prepare us to be able to compete with students from other countries. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

I was curious to learn if Sadiat was part of the exchange program in her school. If so, I wanted to know if that had any connection to her coming to Canada. In response to my wonderment, she talked in more details about the exchange program and Canada being among the countries involved. She also talked about her experience with the selection process.

> *There are countries such as European countries but if you talk about Malaysia, people don't usually choose those countries to pursue higher education because they are not considered advanced. Most students prefer studying in the USA, Australia, Canada and few of the European countries like Sweden, Spain, Germany, and sometimes China.*

> *Yeah, I was selected for that program, but I remember that there was a selection criterion for that. There were three students from our class who were selected based on their academic performance and I was one of them. I remember that I scored big grade in English subject but there were other students who scored better than me of course, he was given, but still that was the case. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

I asked if Sadiat applied for admission in other countries apart from Canada. According to her, her first choice was the U.S., while her second choice was Canada, because she felt that she would have better exposure and quality education compared to other countries.

> *I applied to the U.S. because I thought the education is better than Canada or Australia but then I didn't get a visa. The second choice was for Canada because these are the two countries that are dominant and their health care system, their education systems are well established. They also offer scholarships though it is difficult and very competitive. But I still chose Canada because I heard from people that the living standard is good here. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

She expanded more on the reasons why she chose to have her graduate education in Canada. To her, there are several opportunities for her to settle down in Canada after completing her program.

> *There are lots of opportunities like free or subsidized healthcare. The system is really nice, like if I compared to Pakistan, living standard is excellent. There was one thing in my mind that I might have to choose to live in a country where I finish my higher education. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

I could see Sadiat looked very happy. She was smiling and rubbing both hands together. I asked if she could share her accomplishments and growth during her graduate education here in Canada. She identified several accomplishments and significant growth

> *I came here with the goal to learn something different that I had not been exposed to previously. I would say that I have developed my research skills as well as confidence in facilitating discussion, so also are my presentation and communication skills. I have built network. By the grace of the Almighty, looking back to the way I was two years ago, I see more difference and more development professionally. I have done everything to complete those goals. I am on a journey to accomplishing other goals, so I feel motivated because achievement brings motivation. I don't regret being here alone as far as things turned out. It is hard to struggle, it is hard to bear with all these struggles, but I am happy as far as I am getting what I wanted. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

It was nice to know that Sadiat was able to overcome her initial challenges. I noted that she was smiling and adjusting her glasses. So, I asked if she could share the contributing factors to her success and any advice, she might have for other international students to overcome challenges and help them accomplish their goals.

> *Networking is more important than anything else. Even if you are a high achiever and if you don't have good networking or communication skills or if you are a shy person then you won't be able to meet your goals or even be able to achieve anything else than your degree. (Sadiat's conversation, February 28, 2021)*

As I listened to Sadiat, I heard a story of triumph and contentment. She looked very happy and accomplished. She demonstrated such positive energy and great outlook to life[54]. As this meeting was our last, I negotiated the possibility of sharing narrative account with Sadiat but she expressed uncertainty about her availability because she was planning to return to her home country as soon as COVID travel restrictions were lifted. We have not been able to connect since.

[54] Sadiat was not available to read her narrative account. After several attempts to schedule the meeting, I learned that she completed her program and returned to her country.

Chapter Seven

Narrative Account 4: Kofi's Story

Living Alongside Kofi

There was an interesting conversation between my daughter and I some years ago. It was about how we can initiate an interaction with people we have never met before. I found a helpful strategy at a professional development workshop two years ago. It was 5-day activities-ladened workshop organized by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in my institution. I realized that by the last day of this workshop, that I had connected with many graduate students from various backgrounds, young and old, and not only in health sciences but from various schools and disciplines. I have also formed a network with many international students and Kofi was among those students with whom I exchanged contact information.

Thinking back to that day, I remember that we (participants in the workshop) had been engaged in several group activities. During those activities, there were occasions when one group member would be appointed to present the group work to the audience. I was selected as a presenter for my group on one such occasions. Kofi and I never worked in the same group that day, so we did not know each other. I felt that he might have become aware of my presence when I was presenting for my group. I remember that at the end of the day as he approached me to introduce himself, he stood out among the crowed that I wondered what lay behind his choice to dress differently. My response when he told me that he was from Ghana was, "I know." Kofi must have been wondering how I knew he was from Ghana, but he did not have to introduce himself for me to recognize him. Everything about him told the story. His gestures, the dignity and confidence with which he carried himself, the Ghanian *Kente*[55] top he was wearing, his

[55] The Ashanti people from Ghana dye and weave colorful strips of cotton fabric, about three yards long, to make wearable cloth. Single strips are sewn together to make large pieces of fabric. Colors are made from natural dyes

humble mannerism as he approached me (bowing slightly when speaking to me). All these communicated a lot about Kofi. My conjecture was confirmed when he started talking. The Ghanian accent was so distinct that I could not miss it.

Figure 3: Ghanaian Kente top (artifact shared by Kofi)

On a couple of occasions after that workshop, Kofi and I have met at bus stops and the train station. On those occasions, we have stopped to exchange casual pleasantries, and we exchanged phone numbers. Little did I know that I would be learning more about him a few years later. All the while, I felt like there was something unique about Kofi that made him stand out among other African students that I have interacted with. He was usually polite and respectful. I noted that unlike many African youths, he never addressed me by my first name, it was either ‘Ma’am or Sister Bisi’.

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produced by various plants, minerals, and foods. Inspired by nature, many of the designs represent important social and religious values and give visual form to the essence of their culture. Colors also carry significant meaning: gold is said to symbolize royalty or preciousness; green represents growth and prosperity; maroon represents the color of the Earth and is the symbol for healing. Myth links Kente cloth to nature's weaver, Ananse the spider, who symbolizes wisdom and the trickster in Ashanti culture.

In the middle of the pandemic in 2020, I made it a habit to check on my family regularly since we all live in different places, and due to the lock-down, we could not travel to see each other. There was a day when I called to check on my son who lives in another province. I was surprised when an unfamiliar voice responded on the other end. It was Kofi, and his usual "Hello Sister Bisi" explained the puzzle. I have absent-mindedly dialed his number because I had saved his number with his English name, which is the same as my son's. I was so embarrassed by the mistake, and I expressed my apology to him. However, this incident seemed to be an opening for me to re-connect with Kofi. This was the time I was reaching out to invite participants for my narrative inquiry, and I was wondering if he would be interested in participating. So, I reached out to him, and he indicated his interest.

It was at the end of the year, when many students were under the pressure for assignment deadlines, and making travel plans to join family and friends for the holidays. Kofi told me that he would be traveling to the United States. However, he reassured me that he would keep in touch with me during the time to see if we could schedule an online meeting. We were not able to schedule any meeting while he was away because his phone had an issue. We were only able to re-connect in the new year when he came back to Canada.

Following the ethical protocols of signing consent forms, we had our first virtual meeting on January 30, 2021. This was at the peak of Winter when the temperature was at minus 30 degrees Celsius and below, but I was glad we were able to meet eventually. Despite the cold weather, our interaction was warm and cordial. Kofi looked happy and excited. He asked about my family, especially about my son. Although they have never met, he seemed to have formed a bond with him because they have the same English name, and probably are within the same age group.

After giving more details about the inquiry, I asked if Kofi could tell me more about himself. As mentioned earlier, he was born and raised in Ghana, but he went into more details by telling me his full name and his tribe in Ghana. I wondered why he decided to go into such details, but he explained that he was very proud of his Ghanian heritage and that he often looked for the opportunity to tell people about it.

According to Kofi, he is from the Akan ethnic group and precisely from the Ashanti kingdom. The Ashantis are the most powerful tribe in Ghana. They have a very rich culture and a strong belief system. Like in many African cultures, the Ashantis believe in extended family system. A highly remarkable aspect of their culture is the matrilineal system of inheritance. They have the belief that a child is related to the mother by blood, through the umbilical cord and to the father by spirit. Kofi explained that he was given his name because he was born on Friday. As I listened to Kofi proudly sharing his story, I became more interested, and I wanted to learn more about his people. He talked about the meaning of his name and some other cultural items. For instance, he showed me a traditional outfit that he brought with him to Canada. He also showed me some symbols that are very significant among his people. I asked if there was a reason for keeping these items, he explained that he brought them with him so he could maintain connection with his homeland.

Names Have Meanings

In a typical African culture, names have meanings, and the meanings of our names define us and the stories that we live. Among the Akans, day names are known to be derived from deities, so people born on certain days are supposed to exhibit the characteristics or the attributes and philosophy associated with those days.

It is typical of African people to name their children with names that tell their stories.

For instance, I learned that Kofi character is extremely pleasant, responsible, curious, adaptable, and capable of introspection when necessary. They are usually fascinated by adventure and novelty and could be torn between a sense of duty and responsibility. They have a desire to live life fully, without worrying about what anyone else thinks. They are more likely to respect those who are frank, direct, and respect a sense of justice and equity. They are conscientious and courageous individuals. Although abrupt at times, they are generally consistent. They love family and the comfort of their home. They seek peace and harmony. People with the name Kofi are known to be agile by nature, they have the traits of a leader, and are also known to be trailblazers, very inquisitive, and tend to be pulled into things of interest. It was astounding listening to these attributes. I felt like Kofi was unpacking all my previous puzzles about him. I felt like I was out for an adventure to learn more.

Growing Up Among Kinsmen

Kofi was raised in an extended family home where he lived with his maternal grandmother, uncles, mother, and cousins. His early learning and education were greatly impacted by his people.

> *I grew up in a very large consanguine family, with people that were important figures in my life. I was living with my grandma, my cousins and my mother, uncles all together in the same family household. That is typical of Akan tradition and well, it's an extended family. Being the youngest among my cousins, I have a whole lot of people to look up to as I was growing up, so I was fortunate to learn from their achievements and their mistakes (Kofi's conversation, January 30, 2021)*

Kofi talked about the system of education in Ghana, which he described as a domineering system informed by colonialism. According to him learning was basically determined by the teachers.

> *Traditionally, we have people of power, and our community is structurally hierarchical. Ghana being a formally colonized country, I believe that the impact of colonialism still pervades, and it is reinforced in all aspects of our life, including our education. So, relating to that background, I grew up receiving education in a system the teachers told*

> *us what we were supposed to learn, there was no platform for us to engage in a discourse on what was good for us and what was not. (Kofi's conversation, January 30, 2021)*

Where Values Conflict

I was wakeful to Kofi's story as he reflected on the decision about his career.

> *I graduated from the secondary school with very good grades, and I wanted to be a teacher. My family and my teachers at the time were not in support of that idea because once you are academically strong, you should go into either medicine or pharmacy or health-related field (Kofi's conversation, January 30, 2021).*

I could sense the tension in Kofi's words as he deliberated between his family values and his own value and the effects on his education and career choice.

> *My family and my teachers insisted that I should pursue a health-related program because teaching was meant for low achieving students. I had no option but to toil the health sciences land. Unfortunately for me, I didn't get selected into medical school and so I entered nursing, which is where I finally found myself. I thought, 'what do I do?' Probably go back to school and pursue a graduate degree so I can teach, then I would be satisfying my passion and doing what my family wanted. (Kofi's conversation, January 30, 2021)*

Again, as he storied his early school days and his experience of having to negotiate the tension between his passion and the wish of the significant people in his life, his family, and teachers, I found his choice of words intriguing. For instance, "…*no option but to toil the health sciences land*"[56]. I felt that people unfamiliar with this phrase might not make sense of it semantically. Yet, it made sense to me because he was speaking figuratively.

Border Crossing Comes with a Price

Kofi expressed his struggles about an unfamiliar teaching and learning experience, but he carefully wedged his story with optimism.

> *Things have not been easy, and I wouldn't say it has not been fruitful either. It's been challenging, but it's worth it because this is a new environment, new ways of doing things, and one must adapt. I realized the impact of my background on my education*

[56] Anyone reading this phrase might be wondering what "toil the health sciences land" mean. This is not a literary statement of toiling lands but a figurative way of saying that one works hard to adapt to a situation (in this case Kofi struggled to adapt his family's wish to study health science instead of being a teacher).

> *here. My basic education has been that of teacher centred, in which the teachers tend to give you directions. Then I came into a new environment where most of the job is done by the students, with minimal directions. This is completely different from my background (Kofi's conversation, February 15, 2021)*

Kofi described his experience here in Canada in comparison to what he experienced back in Ghana. I was curious to know what he found to be the differences and how he was affected. He talked about his lack of exposure to technology back home and effect this had on his learning in Canada

> *Back home, we were not exposed to technological devices, or online learning. It was basically traditional physical classroom. But here you are submitting assignments on eClass forum and using different learning platforms such as Google Drive. All these stuffs you must learn at a faster rate to catch up with your colleagues who have learning background in this environment (Kofi's conversation, February 15, 2021)*

Kofi provided an example of a course that he took when he first came, describing his challenges and those of other international students during the course.

> *I remember the first course I took in health care technology and assessments. It was something related to informatics. Because the course was on health care technology, we were expected to complete an assignment on Connect Care. I had no idea about what Connect Care was. My performance in that course was affected due to a lack of exposure to the system. I had no Canadian experience, but some Canadian colleagues were already working as registered nurses and using Connect Care (Kofi's conversation, February 15, 2021)*

He also talked about his challenging experience with English language and communication. This called my attention because it touched on what I observed earlier about his choice of words, and his figurative way of speaking. I felt some excitement as I listened to him. I could understand his frustration about this aspect of his experience regarding communication. I said to myself, 'it sounds familiar'.

> *I came for my master's program thinking that I was very good in English language. So, until you write papers and then…yeah, I'm very good in English, and that one, I wouldn't let anyone take away from me. I'm confident that I am very good. I'm able to write excellent papers. Our official language is English because Ghana was formerly a British colony. English is the language that I have been learning for three decades, that makes*

> *me confident about expressing myself but here, the confidence gets a bit low because of the accent. You speak but somebody said it was wrong because you didn't pronounce it the same way they pronounced it. When you are not able to speak like a Canadian, people would say that you have issues with communication. One challenge that I encountered was the choice of words (Kofi's conversation, February 16, 2021)*

He went on to give an instance when he felt he might have used a word wrongly in class and the reactions of his classmates.

> *I remember a time when I used the word 'patronize' in class during a presentation. I was surprised at the reactions I received from colleagues and the professor. I felt like, 'patronized was wrongly used'. So, I had to look up the meaning in the dictionary. Then I realized that the word was taken in a negative context. What people do not realize is that when English is not your primary language, you are always unconsciously translating your own language into English when you communicate (Kofi's conversation, February 16, 2021)*

Ouch! It Hurts Badly

Integrating into the Canadian culture was a big issue for Kofi. He described the challenges he encountered about social interactions and the psychological impact this had on him. To him, it was difficult living in isolation, he described himself as someone who grew up in an environment where people interact freely and socialize with each other. Being someone who grew up in an extended family environment myself, I could relate to Kofi's predicament.

> *You do not have relatives and friends around, who you can chat or do things with or cook together, those social aspects. You live alone, the only thing you can do is just make phone call throughout the day. This is the only form of communication with another human being. In Africa, we are social beings, we talk to people. Living an individualistic life had a lot of emotional and mental impacts on me. (Kofi's conversation, February 16, 2021)*

I asked Kofi if he could share more about how people perceive social interaction and what it means in his culture. He explained that in his culture, even casual meetings on public transport and exchanging pleasantries can lead to a long-lasting relationship. He explained how exchanging greetings is very important among the Akans.

> *When you meet somebody, you greet them in passing. We have greetings for every occasion. Good morning. Good afternoon. Then that person will respond. If you do not exchange greeting with a person, it means that something is wrong, or you are holding a grudge against that person. There is that social connection. I mean, you make friends and relate with people! (Kofi's conversation, February 16, 2021)*

As I listened to Kofi shed more light on the nature of social interactions in his culture, I could see that apart from being two neighboring countries, Nigeria and Ghana have some cultural similarities. Unfortunately, these cultural similarities are difficult to export abroad. Kofi talked about his frustrations trying to bring Ghanaian culture with him to Canada. I remembered Sealey-Ruiz's metaphor of a knapsack (Sheared et al., 2010), that our culture is something we carry with us wherever we go. It is a package of practices, beliefs, norms, and values that shape our lives and make us who we are, our identity.

> *But here is so different. Could you imagine attending classes with classmates for months, but when you meet them outside the classroom, you tried to say hello and instead of responding they just pretended as if you were not there! I mean…as soon as this person sees that you are going to greet them, they just divert eye contact immediately. Oh! My God! Am I not a human being? (Kofi's conversation, February 16, 2021)*

I could see the painful expression on Kofi's face as he exclaimed and threw both arms forward helplessly. His story reminded me of a culture shock experience on my first day at work some years ago. I arrived at work early that morning, and excited that I was starting a new position as a registered nurse in Canada. As I entered the ward, carrying that elated spirit of a winner with me, I started greeting a group of colleagues that were standing at the desk chatting, "good morning, everyone, good morning!" I stopped short in my tracks as people turned to look at me as if I was an alien.

I still remember the dirty look on some faces. No one responded! Instead, they just turned back to carry on with their conversations. They were talking about the weather, what was in the news, and other things. I was unable to hide my embarrassment as I slowly shrank into a corner.

It felt safer to watch them silently from that corner and not join them in their conversation. What I found interesting was that they interacted with each other freely. So, I found myself thinking about this experience for the rest of the day and wondering what I could have done wrong to warrant such level of hatred. I could relate to Kofi's story and I could feel his discomfort. I became more curious on how this kind of experience affected his learning, so I asked if he could elaborate on that.

> *There was a course in which we were supposed to join a group of our choice on eClass. I remember there were four groups, so I decided to join the fourth group. It was interesting that after meeting face-face in class and getting to know each other, all other members of my group left. I realized that I was the only international student in the group and all those who left to join other groups were Canadian students (Kofi's conversation, February 16, 2021)*

As I listened to this story, I felt like I was not catching Kofi's point. I wondered what could have caused all his group member to leave. So, I asked if he could explain more clearly.

> *The members of other groups were all Canadian students and those who left my group to join them were Canadian. So, I was alone in my group until other international students joined the course and automatically became my group members, they had no option even if they wanted to join other groups. So, in the end, my group was basically international students. I remember the assignments during that course were more relevant to the Canadian system and as we were all international students, we were suffering alone because of our limited knowledge on the topic. What I did was to write a reflection to communicate my experience to the professor at the end of the course. The beauty of cultural diversity is to share ideas but if there is that segregation in the classroom, then what is the essence? So, that was what I wrote in my reflection. (Kofi's conversation, February 16, 2021)*

It was interesting how Kofi communicated his experience in this case. This called me to think back to my experience that time two years ago, when my colleagues wanted to protest their grades. I believe there are several ways to share our stories to influence a meaningful change. Kofi disclosed that he had followed up with the professor - he was happy to see that the professor implemented his recommendation. This meant that subsequently, other international students would not have to experience what happened in that class.

Kofi also talked about the tensions he experienced between his cultural upbringing and the teacher-student relationship. According to him, he was raised to respect elders and authority figures. And for him, there are several ways to show respect to elders. For instance, a younger person is not expected to address an older person by first name, there must be a pre-fix or a title. It is respectful for a young person to give his seat up for an older person if there is no sufficient seating. If an older person is carrying something, it is considered a noble gesture for a young person to offer to carry it. However, as simple as these gestures may sound, they were challenging for Kofi to implement in Canada as people here are not familiar with them.

> *You know, I can't call you by your first name...? I mean, it's not acceptable! It is 'auntie, or sister!' So, if the person is a professor, you should address the person by the title. That is our culture back home. But here… it's like 'call me by my first name'. And it does not sound right culturally. How can I call my professors by their first name? In my culture, I cannot talk to an elderly person without saying 'please,' but here, they said it is wrong unless you are requesting for something. Semantic differences, as I initially mentioned, is a big issue. Sometimes when I type, I have to sit down and look at the email carefully before sending it. (Kofi's conversation, February 16, 2021)*

I asked Kofi if he could share the strategies that he has been using to cope with challenges. He talked about personal resilience and help from colleagues.

> *Being an international student here, it's not easy, but I thank God for my own resilience, for fighting a good fight. You know, one person told me that if Canadians spend like three hours to get an "A," you'll have to spend nine hours to get that "A." They will ask you to go and search for something you don't even know how to search for it. Your classmates, some of them I've realized are nice people, but until you forcefully approach them, they will not give you the assistance. (Kofi's conversation, February 16, 2021)*

Speaking the Way I Speak

Kofi listed some important strategies that have been helpful to him during his graduate education. He talked about the habit of reviewing assignment papers with Canadian colleagues to ensure that what he has written made sense in the Canadian way.

Another strategy for Kofi was to diffuse his anxiety prior to a presentation or public speaking. To him, the strong Ghanaian accent was an issue, but keeping to his natural accent and encouraging people to ask questions when they do not understand him were the strategies he has used most often. He believed that speaking in his natural accent was less anxiety-provoking and less distracting than trying to speak with a Canadian accent. He disclosed that he often found it embarrassing when people around him attempt to imitate foreign accents that were not natural to them. To him, it was a serious blunder pretending to be who one is not. He shared an instance when a fellow international student was trying to imitate a Canadian accent in a class and the reactions of the Canadian students. According to Kofi, this classmate was just making a huge mockery of herself in the presence of others.

> *Because you feel people might not understand the way you speak, you become anxious and do stuff. So, instead of pretending to speak in Canadian accent and getting it wrong, I have decided to always take my time, speak my normal English, and clarify what might not be clear to people. There is no way for me to change my tongue completely to become a Canadian. It is not feasible. So, I speak the way I speak. (Kofi's conversation, February 17, 2021)*

Even using these strategies, Kofi said he experienced intimidating attitudes from some colleagues. He shared the story of a woman in his class who used to question him intensely during presentations and making him feel like he was not making sense. I remembered that I have come across such occasions with students in the past and I was uncomfortable, but I did not know how to intervene. So, I asked if Kofi could share with me what he found the best way to address such situation.

> *One thing I've learned is to be straightforward, to tell people what I think when I feel so. I've also realized that when you let them know that what they are doing is wrong. They stop doing that. Some of them will apologize and they'll feel bad because they get to know that you understand what they are doing to you. (Kofi's conversation, February 17, 2021)*

Learning to Live Alone

Since we have talked at length about struggles and challenges, I asked if Kofi could share his positive experiences that he found helpful in coping during his graduate program.

> *So, these are some of the ways that I got supported along the line, I have friends who gave a second eye to my work, I have professors who were willing to write references for me when applying for awards. At a point when I needed a computer, my supervisor gave me a space to work. So, they are good, and they are willing to help me overcome the challenges. Not that things were always negative for me, saying that would be a betrayal. The university itself has rules and regulations to check some of these forms of discrimination and racism, just that some of them are done in such a way that nothing can be done about it (Kofi's conversation, February 17, 2021)*

I wondered how Kofi handled his experience during the COVID pandemic and the lockdown. He shared some coping strategies that he was using to cope with his loneliness.

> *I used to listen to my African music or gospel music, and I use a new age[57] to reflect a lot when I was having those experiences and anxiety, I was a bit paranoid, I felt like when I reflect a lot, I tend to think about so many things. So, I stopped reflecting. (Kofi's conversation, February 17, 2021)*

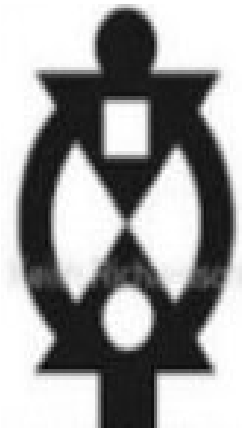
According to Kofi, making phone calls to connect with his family back home was a helpful strategy.

> *And of course, I'm calling and making a lot of calls to my mom and my grandma. At times, I cook at night, especially whenever I was having a sleepless night. Yeah, I also go for a walk, for instance, I tried to take 30 minutes' walk to catch some fresh air. And I'm learning to live alone (Kofi's conversation, February 17, 2021)*

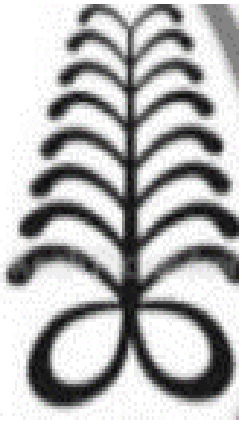
He also talked about the several ways he has been using to stay connected to his people. According to Kofi, some artifacts have been helpful to him in maintaining connection with his culture and some items often remind him of his ancestry. He used the *Adinkra* symbols as an example.

Figure 4: Adinkra symbols (artifact shared by Kofi)

[57] I wondered if this was a form of spiritual or religious practice for Kofi.



Cooperation and interdependence



Endurance and resourcefulness

I really liked the Akan (Adinkra) symbols that Kofi shared with me, and I was wondering if they have any impact on his experience in Canada. I asked if he could elaborate more on the significance of the symbols to him. He explained that the cooperation and interdependence symbol is '*Boa Me Na Me Mmoa Wo',* which interprets as "help me and let me help you." According to him, whenever he thinks of this symbol, he tries to connect with fellow students. While he believed that he could use the help of Canadian students by asking them to proofread his assignments, he also felt he could offer to assist other international students who were struggling. I also learned that the symbol of endurance and resourcefulness is *Aya*, the fern plant. It is believed that the fern is a hardy plant that can grow and flourish in difficult places. To Kofi, wearing this symbol suggests that he has endured many challenges and could outlast many difficulties.

It was an interesting and engaging conversation with Kofi. I learned a lot about the Akan culture. I was so engrossed in his story that I did not realize the scheduled one hour had gone by. We had to schedule our meeting for the following week. There were still many things to discuss.

Wondering what direction our conversation would take us next time, I wrote a letter to Kofi about what I would like him to unpack next meeting.

> *Dear Kofi,*
>
> *Thanks for sharing your story with me regarding your experience when you first came to Canada, and how you turned it around to assist others. I have learned that our lives are full of stories, and it is by telling our stories that we can make sense of our lived experience. As I began to think with your story, I wondered what it meant to you choosing to come to Canada for your graduate education instead of studying in Ghana where you have family and friends around you, where you are well familiar with the culture and environment. I wondered if there was any way in which this decision might have impacted your journey so far. I also found in your story that you are a confident, highly resilient, and independent learner. I found the Adinkra symbols very fascinating. I would love to learn more about your culture and the traditional methods by which your people educate their children. I would love to learn about the origin of formal education in Ghana. I am wondering if we could talk about these aspects of your experience during our next conversation session. Feel free to share with me any other memorable artifact or some nostalgic moments of your childhood. I am looking forward to our meeting next week. Thanks, Bisi.*
>
> (A letter to Kofi, February 18, 2021)

Staying Connected

Since the beginning of our inquiry relationship, Kofi has maintained that he would not be able to meet more than five times because of his busy schedule, and I was appreciative of his wishes. So, this was our fifth and last meeting. However, I managed to negotiate an open connection with Kofi. I told him that I would like to keep in touch so we could review the narrative accounts together, and he was agreeable to the idea.

As we were looking forward to the end of winter and the beginning of spring, it seemed like the cold weather had no intention of ending any time soon. As usual, despite the cold physical atmosphere, our interaction was warm and cordial. Both of us were excited, but probably for a different reason. Kofi was probably excited that our weekly meetings would be ending, and on my end, I was excited to start sharing the narrative accounts with participants. Probably because of my request for artifact items in the letter to Kofi, he brought a smock to show me. To him, the attire was of great significance, and for special occasions. I felt like this was another point where our paths crossed culturally. I remember that my maternal grandfather had different types of the similar attire, but they were longer and bigger. I learned that the smock attire is a symbol of African liberation from oppression. I also learned that the first political leader wore it during the Ghanian independence in 1957. But I wondered if it might have to do with the fact that the attire is comfortable or non-restrictive, rather than being an emblem of freedom.

Figure 5: Ghanaian smock (artifact shared by Kofi)

A High Institutional Reputation to Get

I could see that Kofi had reviewed the letter that I forwarded to him following our last meeting. He made a joke that I had asked for so many things in the letter that he was unsure where to begin the day's conversation. So, for a prompt, I asked if he could walk me through his decision to come to Canada. He described how he learned about Canadian education and how he gradually developed a personal interest in getting a graduate education in Canada.

> *You know, we Africans naturally like to travel. I like traveling, which was one of the reasons. Second, what I learned from reading about this university was among what attracted me. Searching for information, I got to know that the university has the best nursing program in Canada. I wanted to know whether there are opportunities for me to get there. So, I thought that was a very high institutional reputation to get, together with all the positive vibes that I had from people (Kofi's conversation, February 21)*

Inspired by Early Life Experiences

Taking the time to share more and more about his family background, Kofi explained his early experiences and the struggles. According to him, his determination to get a higher education was inspired by these experiences.

> *One of the factors that might have contributed to this resilience and resistance was my being independent at a young age. The only way I could do something for myself in life was to go to school and get a reasonable job for myself. And that motivated me to seek for higher learning. (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

Common in African cultures, the extended family played a major role in providing the means for Kofi to accomplish his educational goal. According to him, there was the financial constraint when he was admitted for his graduate education a couple of years back but his extended family stepped in to help.

> *When I got admission, I didn't have any scholarship. So the next hurdle was the fund. Looking at the weight of the Ghanaian cedis to that of the Canadian dollar, how many cedis do you think I needed to pay for my tuition? To even convince the immigration officers that I would be able to sponsor my education? So, that was when the extended family stepped in again. I talked to one of my cousins who agreed to support me*

> *financially. And that was the beginning of my journey to Canada and to this University to learn (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

Kofi talk about his learning experience with the indigenous Akan system of education, he explained how he was at the receiving end of learning. According to him, because there is emphasis on age and seniority, ususally the older members of the extended family assume the role and responsibilities for teaching the younger members about the norms and how to behave in the society.

> *Our society is structured in terms of power, so age matters. My cousins and I were all along the same generational line, but because I was the youngest, I was the one that they always sent on errands, asking me to go and do this or that. If I refused to do these things, then I would not have a peace of mind because it's either you are disrespectful, either you are rebellious or something. I was unfortunate being the youngest of them all, so I didn't get anybody to send to go to town … get this out … come out … or go and cook. I think all those things also helped me because when I came to Canada, I cook when I'm stressed out. (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

While learning from his cousins might have been inconvenient for Kofi at the time, he found that what he learned from his extended family while growing up was helpful to him in Canada. According to Kofi, "*I think all those things also helped me because when I came to Canada, I cook when I'm stressed out" (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021).*

Indigenous Learning: We Care for Other People's Children too

Appart from the immediate extended family members, the whole community is regarded as a family. They believe that whatever impacts an individual, affects the entire community. So, people watch each other's back in terms of teaching the younger generation moral behaviors. According to Kofi, any adult has the right to discipline a child who misbehaves regardless of the relationship, and teachers sometimes discipline students as their own children.

> *We live for the community and for the society. In our last meeting I told you that we are very social, compared to the Western individualistic ways of living. Even when I was in the nursing school where ideally, I should be independent, our lecturers occupied those paternalistic positions. They are teachers, but at the same time your parents, even at the*

> *university level. So, yes, we take care of other people's children. There are some haircuts I cannot have in Ghana, unless I want to be seen as a disrespectful person, and the judgment will not only be about you, but it also goes to your entire family who they believe did not do a good job in teaching you. (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

Kofi also spoke fondly about his grandmother who impacted him as a child and his adult life. According to him, there were many things he learned from her that were helpful to him in coping with being away from home, going to school, and living in Canada.

> *I have a unique relationship with my grandma. She is still alive, and she is a disciplinarian, yet a very caring grandma. At the adolescent stage, you know, when you get to that stage when there is a lot of rebellion. At that point when she used to advise me, I used to think she was so mean and do stuff, until I grew up. And as I reflected, I realized that most of what my grandma used to tell me were practically true. I'm just thankful to her today and to myself for adhering to her teachings. (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

As Kofi continued to describe his relationship with his grandmother, I wondered if there were specific examples of teaching and learning moments that he had with his grandmother. So, I asked if he could share some of such moments.

> *A lot of lessons. The one that stands out to me is to be myself and not comparing myself to people around me, to know who I am and to live according to me. Not to be envious of what others achieved and to work hard to achieve what we can achieve because the Ghanaian community is a bit competitive, and people do a whole lot of crazy stuffs to get rich and then pay dire consequences. So, my grandma taught me to be content with what I have. Even when I came here, she still reminds me of her teachings whenever we chat. I think that has made life easy for me. I don't strive to be others; I strive to be myself. Live a very simple life and I learned that from my grandmother (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

To Kofi, leaving home to obtain a formal education as a child was a huge transition. There were a few things that were different in formal education. Formal education was in English, compared to indigenous education, which was informal and offered in the native language. According to him, while the teachers might assume the role of parent figure, the essence of their teaching was to provide certain information or knowledge that they would expect back from students in the long run.

> *They want you to account for what you got from them. They are also indirectly playing those paternalistic roles. It's totally different. When we have left home for formal education, speaking our own traditional or indigenous language became an abomination. This is one of the consequences of colonization. Yes, because English is the formal language even at the primary school level, if you speak Twi you would be punished. They could ask you to kneel down for speaking Twi. (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

I wondered if there were indigenous teaching methods among the Akans, so I asked if Kofi had any example that he could share about his learning experience among his people. In response, Kofi first pointed out the impact of colonization on indigenous education and wondered if he had much to say on that. According to him, formal education has obliterated the indigenous teaching methods such as oral literature and storytelling.

> *Formal education has come to dominate through colonization. Our oral literature was through storytelling. We use nature around us to pass knowledge. We don't have formal or structured ways of teaching. We share knowledge through interactions, conversations, and everyday experiences. Teaching and learning are experiential in the sense that punishments and rewards are used, although some punishments are kind of vague and not necessarily physical. For instance, that time when my older cousin asked me to go and buy something for food for the whole family, as a younger one if I refused, I might be denied my share of the food when it was ready or be given half ration as a punishment. We do not have laid down principles, but we illustrate our culture in so many ways. We can use songs or a dance to tell stories. (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

Kofi performed a brief dance that was often used by the king to identify his territory. It was interesting watching Kofi demonstrate the King's dance, the way he stretched his arms right and left in style and bringing both arms together to make a brief winding movement. He then clasped both arms across his chest quickly. He performed this dance so easily and in an artistic manner that one would think that he was a king who has been doing it for a long time. He also talked about drumming as means of sharing knowledge. Listening to this story made me wonder what it would be like if these methods could be made a part of formal curricula. I imagined the potential impact when western and Indigenous pedagogies and teaching methods are combined. It would probably help in making sense of some abstract concepts. I remember when I used to teach my

students back in Nigeria about the use of *Pyxis*[58] and *Alaris pumps*[59]. Interestingly, I had no idea (as a teacher) what these devices looked like in real life until I encountered them in my nursing practice in Canada. Thinking about the disconnection called me to critically interrogate the essence of my higher education abroad and I wondered how I could make my foreign education relevant to the reality of my people back home.

A Visible Inaudible Minority

Being a beneficiary of Ghanian and Canadian education, Kofi indicated his intention to give back to both African and Canadian societies. According to him, he wants to become an international person, "*to transfer knowledge from Africa to the Western world and vice vasa, through international collaboration and research in both environments*" (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021). This kept me wondering how he planned to fit-in into both worlds.

> *It can be a confusing world, because working here has its challenges for somebody like me who is a visible but inaudible minority. I mean, you are visible as a person of color, even when they cannot see you, people know who you are, from the way you talk. (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

Calling to mind the words of Kerby (1991), that our identity is anchored in the various forms of narrative construction that make our lives and form the stories of our lived experiences, I asked if Kofi could share how his experiences in Canada might have impacted his perspectives and beliefs about himself.

> *I kind of got confused at times, but I'm happy when I look at my achievements that I'm inspiring a lot of people, friends, and family, who are looking up to me to get some places. It's been a sweet, bitter experience. And I'm still getting to know myself. So, you feel like you know everything until you try a new thing. I now appreciate the struggles of people who are not academically strong because I never had that experience until recently where I can read a book and not understanding even one paragraph after spending eight hours reading it. (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

[58] A Computerized Medication Storage System.
[59] Computerized Infusion Administering Pumps.

It is said that people traverse the border of their homeland for several reasons and for ages, it has been essential for people to leave their homes to explore opportunities abroad (Olaniran, 1993). Engrossed in this thought, I asked if Kofi could share his dreams and goals of coming to Canada for graduate education and what he hoped to accomplish after graduation. In response to this request, he disclosed that he was unsure what would be his focus yet, but he explained that he decided to come for his graduate education with the hope to become a teacher. He would also like to engage in public health research. According to Kofi, combining teaching and public health research would accord him the skills for health promotion activities among his people.

I was impressed by Kofi's honesty and open-mindedness. While the focus might have been uncertain at this stage, he demonstrated an open mind to follow a unique path of being an educator and a public health researcher. I listened attentively as he carefully explained a laid-out plan for his career dream.

> *I pray to God that I can get an academic position, maybe a tenure track. Oh, yes, I would be so fulfilled then. I don't want to be limited to the four walls of the academic institution, I want to get experience from there, from the field and give back to society. So, I also plan to establish a non-governmental organization on vaccine awareness in sub-Saharan Africa. I've been looking at minority populations and those vulnerable groups. One way I want to give back to the society is to establish a non-governmental organization in collaboration with the African Union and the World Health Organization. (Kofi's conversation, February 21, 2021)*

I was amazed at this exceptional dream; it showed that Kofi had a plan to contribute to his community and to the society at large. I was impressed by Kofi's broad-minded attitude. Since this was our last conversation. I asked Kofi to share with other international students what could help in coping with challenges. According to him, all that matters is the accomplishment of one's educational goal and explained that he often encouraged his fellow international students to focus on their goals.

Chapter Eight

Narrative Threads Across Accounts

I drew on the words of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to helped me understand narrative inquiry as a collaboration between a researcher and participants and as a way of understanding experiences "over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (p. 20). According to them "an inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still amid living and telling, reliving, and retelling the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social" (p. 20). This inquiry is conceptually grounded in Dewey's notion of experience. For Dewey (1938) it was important to acknowledge the embodiment of the person in the world and according to him, social, cultural, and institutional narratives shape individual's experiences. As I finished writing the narrative accounts and began to compose resonant threads, I was wakeful to the fact that my participants and I were living in the midst and that our lives would continue to change.

I entered this relational space with Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi for over ten months (September 2020 to July 2021). During this time of living and telling, reliving and retelling, we co-created stories that represented a collection of experiences. I negotiated the writing of the narrative accounts with the participants over a period of four months, from May 2021 to September 2021, as different pieces of each account were completed. I returned to negotiate the completed account with each participant again between September 2021 and December 2021 – during this time the narrative accounts were read in their entirety by each participant (except for Sadiat who could not be reached at this stage of the inquiry). However, this negotiation of narrative accounts was not without tensions. I can still recall these tensions, even as I transitioned into this next phase of the inquiry process. For instance, there were silences

around the impact of colonization on Sadiat's early education in Pakistan which gave the impression that her story was missing parts. Also, there were times when participants requested to have some parts of their accounts omitted, as they did not want to share all their experiences with a public audience in fear of being misunderstood. At other times, pieces were removed to ensure that the stories that were co-composed between participant and I did not privilege my understanding over those of each participant. Therefore, identifying resonance threads has not been a place of ease for me either.

At a point, I contemplated settling with my narrative beginnings and the participants' narrative account as my research text, but Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reminded me that sometimes, "our field texts are so compelling that we want to stop and let them speak for themselves. But as researchers we cannot stop there, for our inquiry task is to discover and construct meaning in those texts" (p. 130). These were the words that I kept in mind as I began to name the resonant threads across the accounts of the participants.

Since the focus of this inquiry was on understanding the participants' experience of border crossing and how these experiences shaped their identity making, it was important to ensure that the narrative accounts represented them in ways that participants were comfortable with and in ways that resonated with how they understood their experiences. It was also important that the narrative accounts reflected the temporal nature of their continuously negotiated stories to live by. I was cognizant of my ethical commitment, obligations, and relational responsibilities while composing research texts (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Connelly and Clandinin (1986) spoke of retold stories as the stories used "to interpret lives as told in different ways, to imagine different possibilities" (p. 478). I drew on this understanding to make sense of how our experiences position our lived stories of borders.

Keeping in mind that each account was a relational telling of the participant's lives and my living alongside each of them, it was important for me to attend closely to the process of naming the resonant threads. I struggled as I did this, not wanting to be caught within the dominant stories of who international students are. I worked closely with participants and my supervisor, who was a key part of my response community to ensure that I was attentive to process and relational ethics (Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018). From November 2021 to April 2022, I was attentive to honoring lives, those of the participants' and mine, as I "pulled forward and highlighted the resonant threads" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 143). As part of the process of re-storying narratives, I began to inquire with attentiveness to the particularity of plotlines in each of our accounts. I laid the narrative accounts of each of each participant alongside my experiences and began reading to identify resonant threads. Seeing tensions as part of the resonances I was reminded of my narrative beginnings. Looking across participants accounts and my narrative beginnings, I began to see four complex threads that shaped the fabric of borders in our lives. The notion of fabric helped me see how intertwined these threads are. The narrative threads that resonated include: 1. Multiplicity of borders and composing of identity; 2. Making borders; 3. Crossing borders; and 4. Dwelling within borders. In this chapter I explore these threads and how they are interwoven and shape the complex understanding of borders that shape our identities as international graduate students.

Thread 1: The Multiplicity of Borders and Composing of Identity

In pulling the thread – the multiplicity of borders and composing of identity - I framed my understanding around Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) notion that identity is grounded in the stories we live, tell, retell, and relive. Clandinin (2013) highlighted how experience and identity are narratively connected. According to her, "the terms – living, telling, retelling, and reliving –

have particular meanings in narrative inquiry. We understand that people live out stories and tell stories of their living". (p. 34). Retelling our stories involved searching for meaning, which meant attending to the three-dimensional space and engaging in sustained efforts to make sense of our stories. In retelling our stories there were also moments of reliving them.

Attending to the Three Dimensions of Experience

Narrative inquiry requires careful attention to three dimensions of lived experience: temporality, sociality, and place. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) called these the three narrative inquiry commonplaces. As our "stories are inextricably linked" with these three commonplaces (Clandinin, 2013, p. 41), I was cognizant of them throughout the processes of telling and re-telling of our stories of experience.

The temporality commonplace involves an understanding that the events under study, as well as participants and researchers, are in "temporal transition" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). This inquiry attended to temporality using a process that moves from researcher engagement with participants in the field, to field texts, to interim research texts, to research texts. While attending in a temporal way as suggested by Clandinin (2013), I also began to think with the stories of our experiences in terms of "past, present, and future" (p. 39). It was in my seeking for a deeper understanding of our identities that I was drawn to the ways in which our early landscapes shape who we are (Greene, 1995) and are becoming. Greene (1995) illustrated the notion of stories composed during childhood, the stories of our early landscapes (borders) that are not merely a "memory game", but stories "intended to restore a visibility to the shapes of a primordial, perceived landscape […] making visible what has sunk out of sight" (p. 77). This notion also helped me to look at border and identity making in relation to temporality.

The sociality commonplace required me to simultaneous attend to both personal and social conditions (Clandinin, 2013). Personal conditions include "feelings, hopes desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480), while social conditions include cultural, social, institutional, familial, and linguistic narratives (Clandinin, 2013). I inquired into the narrative accounts of Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, Kofi, and my narrative beginnings and the different ways our stories of identity making were shaped by multiple borders over time. I found that our identities were and continue to be composed within familial, cultural, social, geographical, and institutional borders.

Finally, the place commonplace involves attending to "the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Thinking with the notion of borders and their influence in shaping identity, I was called to look at borders from a physical vantage point. Borders include the different places where we live and how the experiences, we have in different places, frame how we think about ourselves (Mennon & Saleh, 2018). I realized that our identity making is inseparable from the shaping influence of the borders that mark our childhood stories. This, I understood, had been no easy task, since there were multiple borders for each of us, and these borders have constantly shifted and continue to shift in our lives. Caine (2010) wrote about "how critical the place of early home is to […] identity formation" (p. 1305), and to understanding who we are and are becoming. Thinking about borders in this way also helped me to see how stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) seem to be "rooted in geographic places and locations" (Caine, 2010, p. 1305). I also learned about the significance of the geographical border of these places where our absence may have "left its marks" (Caine, 2010, p.

1305). I was called to think about border and identity making in relation to those specific places that marked experiences.

Our experiences, those of Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, Kofi, and mine, seemed to speak to this idea of the multiple landscapes and how these early places have possibly shaped who we are. According to Minh-ha (1991), these places in their multiplicity, are places from which to "re-depart, a departure with different pauses and arrivals" (p.13). Thinking with the places that shaped our identities, it seemed like some aspects of our identities were already composed even before we were born and waiting for us only to be socialized into. Mohammed, Kofi, and I are of African heritage. Rita and Sadiat are of Asian descent. For each of us, our stories of identity were set within familial as well as the larger cultural, social, and institutional borders that bounded our experiences. Borders also includes the places "where stories have already been lived and told that shaped the place" (Young et al., 2012, p. 17). Within these borders of lived and told stories we came to learn who we are and how we have composed our dreams and values. Thinking about borders in terms of where stories have been lived and told helped me see borders from a different vantage point. It helped me understand that borders are also shaped by sociality.

Situating Identity Making in Familial Stories

As I engaged with Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi over time, I began to see how our familial stories shaped our identity making and who we have become. I began to realize that all of us make visible the presence of familial story in our accounts of identity making in relation to formal education. Rita learned about the importance of formal education from her family while growing up,

> *because of that mindset during my childhood and all those things was influenced by my family and the way they placed value on education…that was the first instances where I realized that education is important to me*.

At an early age, Rita learned how to value formal education in relation to social class mobility, and she also experienced the pressure to take her study seriously.

> *My family would always say that it is important to study because without having a good education, you never would be able to get good opportunities. And most importantly, you will not be able to earn a good amount of money because for a middle-class family in a developing country like Nepal, I think that is very important.*

These stories impacted how Rita composed her identity as a child. She recalls *I remember I was kind of a studious student.*

Mohammed composed his story around his parental decision to engage in formal education. *My parents, though they themselves were not educated much, felt that it was time for me to go for formal education because for them, they value formal education.* Mohammed storied himself in relation to how his parents saw formal education as a means for survival. *To my parents, I needed to have formal education whereby I would spend most of my time being educated for how to survive.*

Sadiat's identity making was shaped by familial narratives of school and formal education, the desire to have formal education was inspired by a generational story of poverty and struggles.

> *I belong to a poor family and, I had seen a lot of struggles in my life. I would say I didn't have to struggle much as compared to my parents but looking at their struggles and the struggles of my friends' family as well because they were from poor family too, there was a lot of encouragement among us that we needed to do something. We wanted to get more education to uplift our standards of life. Our parents never forced us but just experiencing those struggles motivated me to do something to concentrate more over my studies.*

For Kofi, the absence of a father figure in his life spoke of formal education as a way to re-story his story to live by. He made visible that: *Being without a father figure, the only way I could do something for myself in life was to go to school and get a reasonable job for myself.* We, Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, Kofi, and I, all nurtured the dream that having a formal education

could dismantle borders and enable a passage to new worlds and opportunities. In Mohammed's account, I also saw how familial stories in relation to career choices bumped against his choice to be a nurse. In Kofi's account, I saw how he negotiated his way around familial borders. For him to fulfil his family's wish for him to be a doctor instead of a teacher, he negotiated this bump by becoming a nurse educator. For Rita, coming for her graduate education in Canada was a way to cross a gender related border constructed for her by her family and society.

Turning Towards Institutional Borders that Shape Identity

As I pulled further at the thread of multiple borders in our lives, I saw more of the complexity of our lived stories as familial borders gradually shifted with the influence of institutional borders of education when we started school. The narrative threads that relate to identity making within institutional borders began to emerge. For some of us, the contradiction between these borders and the resultant moments of tensions in our sense of identity were prevalent. I realized that at certain points, like me, participants too began to question their sense of identity. Yet all of us expressed this differently. Indigenous ways of knowing were very valuable to Mohammed whereby he learned from his grandfather through storytelling, proverbs, and riddles. To him, the elders' informal sharing of wisdom was lacking in formal education, and he missed this important aspect of cultural identity making when he started school.

> *I felt I was missing the informal education, which I had before starting the elementary was a part of the merit of my life. They really played a role in as far as my personal and professional development is concerned.*

To Kofi, indigenous ways of knowing and the lesson he learned from his grandmother resonated with him as he came to Canada, *I reflected, I realized that most of what my grandma used to tell me were practically true. I'm just thankful to her today and to myself for adhering to her teachings.* However, he had a challenging experience with this aspect of his identity making

coming to Canada. *In Africa, we are social beings, we talk to people. Living an individualistic life had a lot of emotional and mental impacts on me.*

For me, calling forward my narrative beginnings, I found that the lessons that I learned from my grandmother were not valued in my current environment. My relational story with my grandmother shaped my identity and worldview. I recollect that the moral lessons and values that my grandmother taught me in her kitchen were differently understood and expressed across cultural borders and institutions of formal education. I learned as a child that being boastful was not a virtue, that the right way to show strength was not by words but by actions. Then I found that despite years of experience and qualifications, finding meaningful employment here in Canada has been tension filled for me because I have not been able to persuasively convince employers to hire me. I was told that, *being humble is not acceptable here, you've got to sell yourself!* (a well-meaning advice from a friend). Kofi's narrative accounts speak eloquently to this tension. Like me, Kofi was taught to be humble and respectful to elders, but living these stories created tension for him in Canada where his humility was highly misunderstood. He stated, *[i]n my culture, I cannot talk to an elderly person without saying 'please', but here, they said it is wrong.*

As I engaged with the narrative accounts of Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi, I returned to Young et al. (2012) to inquire into border spaces where stories have been lived and told. I saw that the education in our home countries was largely shaped by colonial systems. While Nigeria, Ghana, and Uganda may have gained independence, the vestiges of colonial influences continue to linger in our educational system. For Kofi, the influence was enormous:

> *Ghana being a formally colonized country, I believe that the impact of colonialism still pervades, and it is reinforced in all aspects of our life, including our education. So, relating to that background, I grew up receiving education in a system where the*

> *teachers told us what we were supposed to learn, there was no platform for us to engage in a discourse on what was good for us and what was not.*

A colonial education system had a profound influence on our identity making in relation to our ways of knowing and who we are as learners. For Kofi, this background has impacted his learning experiences in Canada, *I realized the impact of my background on my education here. My basic education has been that of teacher centred, in which the teachers tend to give you directions*. Rita's account was like Kofi's story, *there is so much influence by Western policies and Western things, like we needed to speak in English in class […]. We have education system back home that, whatever teacher says, students must follow.*

Making Visible Colonial Stories that Shape Identities

Across the narrative accounts of Mohammed, Kofi, and my narrative beginnings, I saw how our Indigenous identities gradually shifted over time due to the influence of a colonial system of education. I saw how the shift was maintained in different ways through a curriculum that functions to create borders. Vickery and Hall (2018) wrote that curriculum constructed in a colonial system of education functions to "marginalize and invalidate cultural values, heritage, language, knowledge, and lived experiences" (p. 30). As I returned to the narrative accounts, I saw how coherently the words of these scholars affirmed Rita's account and that of Kofi:

> *And if you do not speak in English, there used to be a captain and vice-captain of the class. If the captain or the vice heard you not speaking English and speaking Nepali languages or other kind of language, they would charge you five Nepali rupees.* (Rita)

> *Our official language is English because Ghana was formerly a British colony. English is the language that I have been learning for three decades, that makes me confident about expressing myself but here, the confidence gets a bit low because of the accent. You speak but somebody said it was wrong because you didn't pronounce it the same way they pronounced it. When you are not able to speak like a Canadian, people would say that you have issues with communication.* (Kofi)

Vickery and Hall (2018) pointed out how experiences like that of Kofi have been a longstanding issue for racialized minority students whereby in formal education, teachers play a key role in teaching societal knowledge that represents the values and perspectives of those in power, and that which is considered legitimate knowledge. This knowledge is transmitted to students via a hidden curriculum and taught as standard prescribed knowledge. Darder (2015) described this as a form of curriculum that is designed to "marginalize and invalidate cultural values, heritage, language, knowledge, and lived experiences which fall outside the purview of capitalist domination and exploitation" (p. 29). This is one way of maintaining borders that keep some students at the margin of education.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) wrote about how curriculum privileges white cultural knowledge and how histories create white normativity while positioning everyone else as abnormal. This too is one way of maintaining borders to exclude those outside the dominant. Our accounts made visible, the systematic ways in which we have been stripped of our cultural identities in relation to language, values, and our history. Often this was done with punitive reinforcement, and the participants and I were made to learn a culture that was completely foreign to us. For Mohammed, it was a form of victimization:

> *I remember very well in my geography class, we used to study about the glaciers, the alpine mountains, and the Prairie. Imagine being taught things from another world, yet in my own world, I had no idea what these things meant. So now, when it comes again to history, it was about the history of America and Europe. It was about America or French revolution. So, the curriculum, which was designed according to the British education during the colonial era was what we implemented in my country. I felt like I was a victim to such system of education.*

As I continued to search across our accounts in relation to our identity making within the institutions shaped by colonial border, I could see how formal education systematically worked to shift our stories, particularly those of us who came from contexts that were shaped by colonial

relations. The impact of such shift was described by King and Woodson (2017) as "psychological violence, one that keeps students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds from developing a full sense of their racial, historical, and political identities" (p. 3). For those of us who came from the background of colonization, colonial borders have been present in our school stories and they continue to shape our identities as learners.

Thread 2: Border-making

Menon and Saleh (2018) unpacked the pluralistic nature of thinking about, with, and within borders, border-making, border-crossing, and border dwelling. I also drew on the work of Diener and Hagen (2012) to helped me understand the different ways by which borders operate. They helped me understand that borders are constructed for specific purposes, and they are meant to separate social, political, economic, cultural meanings or geographic spaces from one another. They argue that the institutional phenomenon of borders is intended to regulate the movement of people and engender certain norms of behavior. Border-making involves how humans construct, communicate, and control geographical spaces, either individually or through some social or political entity. In other words, borders are symbolic markers of control, and social processes of daily life (Diener & Hagen, 2012). Frye (1983) also wrote about how constructed borders are sustained:

> It is only by maintaining our boundaries through controlling concrete access to us that we can enforce on those who are not-us our definitions of ourselves, hence
> force on them the fact of our existence and thence open up possibility of our having semantic authority with them. (p. 106)

Menon and Saleh (2018) wrote about different constructions of borders: physical borders in the form of physical locations such as the classroom, social relationship borders, political borders, identity borders, and institutional borders. Thinking with the notion of borders and the purpose of its construction, colonial influence was a visible thread across some of our accounts. These were

the systems within which Mohammed, Kofi, and I, developed our identity and the way we see the world. Mennon and Saleh (2018) also took up the notion of borders to represent the intersection and multiplicity of experience. Through experience, our identities are constructed within these borders, and they become the stories that we live in. Okri (1997) wrote: "One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves" (p. 46). Okri's words were true for the five of us, Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, Kofi, and me in relation to border making. In the reading and re-reading of the narrative accounts, and in the retelling, and reflecting on Okri's words, I saw that our narratives were framed with the description of the multiple borders constructed in our lives either by others or by ourselves.

Border-making: Early Pre- and Post-Secondary School Stories

Mohammed's accounts speak to the composing of the linguistic border during his secondary school education where those who could speak with foreign accent were separated from those who could not. Returning to my elementary school story too, I recalled how a border of social class was created within my elementary school classroom by teachers. This border separated me from my fellow students who were considered as less brilliant. For those students considered to be less brilliant, crossing of that border was only possible under one condition. They could be seen as brilliant only when they could earn the big check mark across their wooded slate. While I have maintained this border during my entire education in Nigeria, I saw how that border shifted when I came to Canada. This shifting of border was similar for Kofi, whose ability to speak and write better English was used by his teachers to set him apart from his peers, until he came to Canada,

> *I came for my master's program thinking that I was very good in English language. So, until you write papers and then […] yeah, I'm very good in English, and that one, I*

> *wouldn't let anyone take away from me. […] I now appreciate the struggles of people who are not academically strong because I never had that experience until recently.*

Border-making: Stories of Socio-economic Status

Border making for Rita was a question of belongingness, her account speaks to the story of socio-economic class. To her, some borders were desirable while some were not. To her, poverty was a border she did not like to cross.

> *It's not good to be poor and it is not good to be from a middle-class background. It's not good to get money from other people, that would be like, somebody is giving you because they are so sympathetic about you, not empathetic, but they have sympathy over your condition. So, because of that stigma, I did not tell my friends.*

Rita's accounts also speak of the cultural border of gender created in her elementary school, *I remember we used to have separate boys' and girls' rows in the class when we sit on the bench. So, we were not allowed to mingle with each other in the class'.* Kofi's account also made visible how curriculum is coded to exclude individuals when he says: *I remember the assignments during that course were more relevant to the Canadian system and as we were all international students, we were suffering alone because of our limited knowledge on the topic.*

Thinking with the notion of border-making, I also came to understand that although borders are socially constructed, they can shift with time. Menon and Saleh (2018) spoke of border as something that is not rigid or static, but "can be molded, shifted, and shaped by experiences-internal and external, personal, and social - over time and in relation with one another" (p. 55).

Thread 3: Border-crossing

Looking across our accounts, I saw that there was not a singular defining of borders that shaped our stories to live by, but instead, there is a multiplicity of early border crossing experiences. I inquired into the different ways in which the multiplicity of those experiences in

relation to different borders shaped the ways we live in multiple worlds (Lugones, 1987). I saw this way of looking backwards as an invitation to reflect, a "re-memory" (Greene, 1995, p. 82) as the only way to "become present to them" (p. 73).

Looking back to his childhood experiences, Mohammed remembered a multiplicity of border crossings, ranging from his home with his mom and grandfather, to moving to the big, strange house, the nursery, to the starting school for formal education, *my parents took me to a certain house, to the big house. And she introduced me to the person who was in that house, and then I saw my mother leaving me.* Moving places physically was one thing, but Mohammed would also world-travel (Lugones, 1987) – in those times he found himself at times in worlds where one might feel like an outsider. For Mohammed, the feelings were overwhelming, *I just felt like ... 'This place is very strange!' Because the house was too big!!*

Lugones (1987) said that a "particular feature of the outsider's existence [is that the] outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where one is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where one is more or less 'at home'" (p. 3). Thinking about crossing an institutional border of school, Rita was not 'at home' at her boarding school where she encountered peers from rich homes.

> *I was like a bubbly kind of a child, I used to speak to everyone, I used to go out and play. But then I was starting my education in a boarding school that was a highly expensive school where most of the people were very, very rich people. That was a kind of turning point for me.*

Coming to crossing of borders, Lugones (1987) refers to this as world-travelling by an outsider (or a minority) into a mainstream 'world', a "kind of traveling or crossing mostly done out of necessity" (p. 3). The participants in this inquiry framed their stories with the description of the conditions that warranted them to leave their countries of origin for graduate education. For Mohammed, it was because of experience with formal education in Uganda. He felt that he did

not receive quality education and wanted to explore what education was like in a developed country. *I decided to come and study here, because of what I went through, I said to myself, "now let me try to support myself so that I can go to another country, and I see how education is delivered over there".*

In the same manner, Rita framed her reason for coming to Canada around the story of poor quality of nursing education in Nepal. *Nursing education is not structured in my country. Curriculum was not up to the standard considered for a degree program.* Rita saw Canada as a place to get a better education and an exposure to research activities.

> *I think the value for me to come to Canada was related to the university and how the university was efficient in terms of research and the position of the university in terms of providing good education and opportunities it had.*

Besides, it was out of necessity that Rita left her place of work because she was denied of promotion opportunity, and she needed to get a graduate degree to keep from being marginalized. She wanted to get away from the familial and cultural obligation in relation to gender and the pressure to fulfil imposed obligations. These obligations constituted the necessity for Rita to cross borders.

Border-crossing: Seeking a Better Life

We all left our countries of origin for Canada to live a better life. Mohammed came because he wanted to fulfil his dream to be a great teacher. Likewise, Rita and Sadiat wanted to improve their lives and the lives of their families. Kofi had a big dream to make positive contribution to the society and live a better life. For me, my coming for graduate education in Canada was in relation to familial story. For me, the drive to embark on this journey was to fulfil a lifetime dream, my father's story, and my story to live by.

Yet, pulling hard at the thread of social and institutional borders, the threads of hostility and unfriendliness were the invisible borders that began to emerge across participants' accounts. Menon and Saleh (2018) said that borders could be erected or reinforced with words and actions, or absence that are often laced with "arrogant perception(s)" (Lugones, 1987, p. 12). These are rigid borders that do not allow for traveling or may perhaps necessitate one-sided and perilous attempts at world-traveling (Lugones, 1987). These borders she warned against when she wrote:

> The hostility of these "worlds" and the compulsory nature of the "travelling" have obscured for us the enormous value of this aspect of our living and its connection to loving. Racism has a vested interest in obscuring and devaluing the complex skills involved in it. I recommend that we affirm this travelling across "worlds" as partly constitutive of cross- cultural and cross-racial loving. (p. 3-4)

One would not imagine or venture into border crossing unless there existed an invitation to attempt to cross lines of boundaries constructed. Given all the rhetoric of multiculturalism, internationalization of higher education, citizenship, immigration, settlement, language, and culture among others, it was very compelling for aspiring applicants to choose Canada as a destination for graduate education. Despite the open-door policy some borders continue to function mainly as barriers, while other borders are being transformed into permeable sites of interaction, exchange, and cooperation (Diener & Hagen, 2012).

It is hard to know if the open-door applies to the multiplicity of borders that come with internationalization of education. As implied in Kofi's account, "*The beauty of cultural diversity is to share ideas but if there is that segregation in the classroom, then what is the essence?"* (Kofi's conversation). Some participants chose a Canadian university with high expectations for diversity and inclusiveness. Yet, the narrative accounts show that this did not meet the participants' expectations. Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi expressed how they experienced isolation and marginalization within their institution.

As described by Diener and Hagen (2012), borders and border permeability are inherently subjective phenomenon which provide a powerful symbolic and practical means of dividing "us" and "ours" from "them" and "theirs" (p. 64), and a capacity to use force to defend interests often centres on the maintenance of borders. The narrative accounts of Rita and Kofi made it visible the ways in which the dividing and defending of borders played out within institutions of learning. As I continued to think with our stories, the words of Connelly and Clandinin (1999) helped me to make more sense of experiences while learning at the margin and negotiating rigid borders. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1999), "things pass across the border and different things happen to them" (p. 104).

Border-crossing: Experiences of Isolation and Marginalization

A reverberating thread across our accounts highlight the different ways in which international students experience being isolated and being marginalized within the learning environment. Canadian universities often make value statements of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Sometimes, it is difficult for me to reconcile our account of experience with these statements. Reading through participants' accounts, I felt a sense of solidarity with them. There have been some moments when I began to doubt my reality in relation to what I experienced. These were moments of profound tension and cognitive dissonance, the moments that called forward the memory of my *Yeye*'s okro soup that I wrote about at the beginning of this dissertation. Sometimes, racism, exclusion, and marginalization are difficult and slippery to name. For Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi, the contradiction is astounding:

> *Could you imagine attending classes with classmates for months, but when you meet them outside the classroom, you tried to say hello and instead of responding they just pretended as if you were not there! I mean…as soon as this person sees that you are going to greet them, they just divert eye contact immediately. Oh! My God! Am I not a human being?* (Kofi)

> *I remember the assignments during that course were more relevant to the Canadian system and as we were all international students, we were suffering alone because of our limited knowledge on the topic. The beauty of cultural diversity is to share ideas but if there is that segregation in the classroom, then what is the essence?* (Kofi)

Thinking with this thread, I was particularly drawn to Lugones (1987) who explained what she named "arrogance perception" (p. 4) and how people experience it:

> "Arrogant perception" and the failure to identify with persons that one views arrogantly or has come to see as the products of arrogant perception. A further connection is made between this failure of identification and a failure of love, and thus between loving and identifying with another person. (p. 4)

As I pulled harder at this thread, these words seemed to speak to the experiences of international students in this inquiry who seemed to be the objects of "arrogant perception". We were viewed arrogantly by Canadian students who occupy a space of privilege, and as such, they failed to identify with us. This failure to identify was made visible in Rita's account:

> *I felt like nobody wanted me in the group because I had nothing to contribute. Whenever I was in a group, I realized that if there were other three people, those three people would be talking to each other and expressing their opinions, but you will be set aside ... Then there was the fear about supervisor related issues. It has been a rollercoaster ride.*

Thread 4: Dwelling Within Borders

For me to understand how border crossing and border dwelling work, I drew on Lugones' (1987) sense, that we "inhabit worlds and travel across them" (p. 14). Menon and Saleh (2018) further expanded my understanding when they describe border dwelling as:

> An ongoing state of flux, they can be messy, continually defined and redefined. Additionally, from this perspective, this amorphous quality enables borders, in both the figurative and literal sense, to be permeable and semi-permeable constructs, existing with spaces within and around them, alongside more traditional constructs or impermeable border conceptualizations. (p. 55)

Border scholars provide a much-needed understanding to describe the multiple borders/worlds we travel and live in. The idea of border porosity and permeability as described by Menon and Saleh (2018) is an invitation for us as border crossers to enter a space of ambiguity that requires

an intentionality of openness. Border dwelling for us, in this case, called for a shift in our stories. Given that Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, Kofi, and me live in embodied cultural and familial stories, we struggle with the borders constructed by these stories, the difficulty of crossing and modifying these borders continue to cause tensions for us in a profound way. A large part of our school story was constructed around colonial systems. Some of us spent a significant part of our early schooling learning how to conform to this system of education.

As good conduct and moral behaviors were constructed around loyalty and obedience, and as failure to conform to this institutional border would affect our progress, we were left with no option but to yield. It is understandable that loyalty and obedience were the moral qualities constructed with ease because they align with our cultural norms. Adaptation to these conditions of border dwelling was not an ideal living, it was a necessity for survival. Border dwelling according to Anzaldua (1987) is a struggle of keeping intact one aspect of one's shifting identity and letting go of another. She writes:

> Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element. The "alien" element has become familiar - never comfortable, but home (p. 3).

Anzaldua's notion of border dwelling challenged me to think critically about our experience as international students and as border crossers. The struggle to keep intact our identity was a common thread in all our accounts.

For those of us who came from Africa, Mohammed, Kofi, and me, it was a question of letting go and unlearning our indigenous way of knowing so that we could integrate into the formal education system. Border dwelling, for us is a call to unlearn our multilateral ways of knowing and adopt Western ways. We had to give up the form of education closely interwoven

with our indigenous social life; the type designed to shape our identity into a well-rounded personality that fit into African society.

For Mohammed, Kofi, and me, the inability to fit into neither African nor the Western society resulted in questions of where we fit at all. On several occasions, I have questioned where I belong, and I struggle so much with the feelings of ambiguity of being a citizen of neither worlds. Mohammed also shared this ambiguity in his story as he narrated his inability to keep intact his cultural identity in terms of language and the "culture of reading". For him, the colonial impact on his education at a young age created a profound tension that followed him to graduate education. *I asked myself, 'if I get admission, will I really be able to manage it?' and I said, 'I'm just going to be a failure there'.*

For many of us, it is like living in a state of liminality. The word liminality, is derived from the Latin word limen, meaning threshold. According to dictionary.com: "liminality is the transitional period or phase of a rite of passage, during which the participant lacks social status or rank, remains anonymous, shows obedience and humility, and follows prescribed forms of conduct, dress, etc" (np). Liminality is what I use to describe my experience of composing identities at the borderland. Anzaldua (1987) offered a compelling description of such experience:

> A struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others, we live in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages, The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frame of reference causes a cultural collision. (p. 78)

As I continue to think with the state of liminality that mark our daily life, I was reminded of the words by Menon and Saleh (2018) that, "while this confusion can be painful, it provides the opportunity for the development of a new consciousness. The development of this new

consciousness demands the reshaping of mental borders and a new process of thought" (p. 6). Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2003) also reminded me that liminality create a space for us to negotiate and re-write our stories. Looking across our accounts, I saw that Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, Kofi, and I are learning a way to live with the invisible borders that frame our daily lives.

Lugones (1987) in writing about the experience of 'outsiders' to the mainstream made me see our experiences as international students from another point of view. Lugones (1987) stressed a particular feature of the outsider's existence, "the outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where one is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where one is more or less at home" (p. 3). This flexibility is necessary for the five of us as "the outsiders in the mainstream" (p.3).

As I think with the resonant threads across our stories, I can see how different our flexibility is. Yet, there are similarities and differences that reverberate. The reverberation of a desire to adjust to the conditions of borderland through solidarity and the desire to connect with our ethnic communities was made visible by the many tensions and gaps in the stories told of the lived experience of international students in Canadian higher education. Kofi used cultural items such as the kente, adinkra symbols, and the smock as a way of coping and maintaining connection with his roots. I was struck by his confidence and his acceptance of his Ghanian accent. For him, solace resides in the lessons that he learned from his grandmother. Rita and Sadiat also find solace in networking with ethnic community and by reaching out to peers.

For Kofi, it was a question of keeping connections with his roots. For Rita, the tension is about an aged grandmother she left behind in Nepal. For me, giving up the lessons of my early life is what I constantly struggle with. Those cherished priceless lessons in my Yeye's kitchen continue to be a place of tension for me, as virtue such as empathy is an uncommon language at

the border. Kofi found it a huge struggle to unlearn all the lessons of his childhood about courtesy and the respect for elders.

Dwelling within Borders: Shaping Identities and Moving Dreams Forward

Lugones (1987) wrote about how some "worlds" we must enter at our own risk, because they have "conquest and arrogance as the main ingredients in their ethos" (p. 17). These worlds are entered only out of necessity. But Lugones (1987) also spoke to worlds that we can "travel to lovingly and travelling to them is part of loving at least one of their inhabitants" (p. 17). The experiences of travelling "between 'worlds'… inhabiting more than one 'world' at the same time" (p. 10) is described by Lugones (1987) as being "part and parcel" of the "outsiders experience and situation" (p. 11). I understand that this experience is also part and parcel of lived experience for Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, Kofi, and me.

I return to Rita's story, specifically to the experience where she was constructed by her supervisor in ways that did not feel narratively coherent with who she saw herself to be as a graduate research assistant:

> *I thought I did the best I could, I was told that it was not nicely done. I later realized that nothing that I did after that was ever good enough. The presumption was that there would always be mistakes in my work, even when there were no mistakes*.

In her account, Rita seemed to have entered into a world that constructed her identity as stereotypically 'not good enough'. This experience of being stereotypically 'not good enough' is a different construction of herself and is a part of different 'worlds' (Lugones, 1987). Thinking with the "distinct experience of being different in different 'worlds' and of having the capacity to remember other 'worlds' and ourselves in them" (Lugones, 1987, p. 11), I remembered how very uneasy I felt about the stories constructed about me as 'at risk' and I wondered what it was like for Rita to be storied by her supervisor as 'not good enough'. She seemed to have a sense of why

she was constructed that way, based on her sense of the different 'worlds' she inhabited simultaneously and did so with an embodied knowing of who she was (Lugones, 1987). Thinking with the dominant narrative of 'not good enough', I saw how Rita's stories exemplify the ways that practices in Canadian higher education (whether intentionally or unintentionally) exclude minority students who are 'not good enough' from educationally, socially, and economically advantageous opportunities thereby compounding and reifying the institutional dominant narratives.

These accounts made visible how faculty often identify students like Mohammed and Rita as 'poor writers' and 'not good enough,' and using such narratives to exclude them from research experience and 'scholarship' opportunities. Even though Rita was originally attracted to this university because she felt she could develop her research skills there, it was clear in her account, how she was systematically excluded based on the dominant story of 'not good enough'. Not only did she feel excluded, but she also felt like she was stereotyped, *I think she was really irritated by me that I am not good in doing all these things.* This account also affirmed the words of Chira (2017) about the stereotypical view of international students as people who perhaps lack the desirable qualities for succeeding in higher education, a notion that has been internalized by Rita herself, *they judged me based on maybe she…does not know the things that are really essential or fundamental to the graduate program*.

Not only are students like Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, Kofi, and me often excluded from the site of educational opportunities, it is documented that even more, they experience marginalization as well as the micro-aggressions that result in racial battle fatigue and racial trauma when they participate in such opportunities (Smith, Yosso & Solórzano, 2011; Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solórzano, 2009). The impacts of these experiences are enormous, with lasting

negative consequences (Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Scott, Safdar, Desai Trilokekar, & El Masri, 2015; Wang, 2009).

Dwelling Within Borders: Seeking Ways to Be at Ease

As I struggled with ways to speak to these experiences that resonated across our accounts, the words of Lugones (1987) called me to think about what it takes for an outsider to the mainstream to be at ease in the world. As outsiders to the mainstream and being awake to who we are, we saw the deficit ways in which we were being constructed at the borderland as something we needed to overcome and build resilience to. One way of being at ease in a particular 'world' is by being a fluent speaker in that 'world', knowing all the norms that there are to be followed, all the words that there are to be spoken, and all the moves (p. 12).

According to Lugones (1987), "another way of being at ease is by being normatively happy, by agreeing with all the norms and not to love any norms better. I am asked to do just what I want to do or what I think I should do" (p. 12). A way of being at ease for Sadiat was by accepting situations, *I was accepting everything, kept on accepting things. I was unhappy. My situation was to stick to our objectives* (Sadiat's conversation). In thinking with the experience of Sadiat, I came to see how important it is for international students to attend to the tensions at the borderland with flexibility and ease. Another way of being at ease in a 'world', according to Lugones (1987, p. 12), is by being humanly bonded. She suggested that bonding with the people we love and who love us too in a 'world' that is otherwise as hostile as 'worlds' get in the way of being at ease (1987, p. 12). For Rita and Sadiat, a way of being at ease was by bonding with those they love in solidarity.

> *I really used to cry a lot but as I mentioned, I was ambitious and a high achiever. Seeing people working really motivated me. I met some other international students who were struggling, who told me that they haven't got a job. But I said, there is no harm in*

> *applying for opportunities and as soon as I started digging more, I got a job. (Sadiat's conversation)*

For Rita, reaching out to a friend became a necessity in time of need. "*There was an instance when I asked a friend to speak with her supervisor for a research assistant job for me".* According to Lugones (1987), "one may be at ease because one has a history with others that is shared, especially daily history" (p. 12).

Conclusion

The four threads identified in this inquiry are: multiplicity of borders and composing of identity, border-making, border-crossing, and dwelling within borders. I saw the multiple borders that we navigate on a daily basis and how our identities shift in relation to crossing and dwelling within those borders. The words of Clandinin (2013) also helped me to understand borders and identity from another vantage point in that, "identities are understood narratively as stories to live by, as fluid and shifting; bumping places between our stories to live by with the social, cultural, and institutional narratives, and a view of leaving as a process lived over time" (p. 85). While border crossing and border dwelling might have been a big challenge for the five of us, there was also a transforming richness to it. Border crossing challenged who we are in ways that move our dreams and hope forward. This was exemplified by Kofi, who wants to take his education to a level where he could give back his service to the societies that have shaped his embodied identity. For Mohammed, Rita, and Sadiat, coming to Canada was a great opportunity for growth and reflecting on what they have invested into the program in terms of time and resources, they were determined to complete the program. For Mohammed, getting a Canadian credential is a prestige. Sadiat would like to obtain her practice license after the program to be able to practice in Canada.

Chapter Nine

So what? Who cares?

Clandinin et al. (2016) helped me to understand that "as we consider the significance of narrative inquiries, the question of "So what?" that often lives within our studies becomes more overt again" (p. 178). They also reminded me about the purpose of asking this question. By asking the "so what?" (p. 178) of this inquiry, I continue to think about what matters, what I want to share with diverse audiences, and the ways in which I can do so (Clandinin et al., 2016). They also helped me to think about this inquiry as holding personal, practical, and social significance that could be used to disrupt common understandings, perceptions, and practices. Clandinin (2013) also helped me to think about the need and how to make "the personal, practical, and social justifications of the work" visible (p. 50).

Personal Justification

My lived stories inspired a desire to engage in this work as a platform to create a safe space where other international students could tell their stories. Stories that were not limited by narrow stereotypes about who they are and are becoming. This work matters to me personally in terms of my life experiences, particularly as a graduate student and as an instructor in Canada. I remember that at the beginning of this work, it was difficult for me to name my tensions as I struggled with ways to speak to the emotions that came with those experiences. I also remember the overwhelming rage and internalized anger that I felt at a lack of coherence with which to express the experiences of hurt, disappointment, confusion, and identity disruptions. Over time, I recognized that I came to this work with a desire to understand my experiences of oppression which in turn led to my puzzles about the experiences of other students in similar contexts, places, and across time.

Over time, I realized my need to attend to the negative emotions that I carried. This caused me to pause and reflect on these experiences and the tensions they created. Being attentive to the tensions, silences, and gaps that are part of the experiences of international students that I lived alongside during this inquiry mattered. These tensions gave space for me to pause and think with our experiences in the four directional ways of forward, backward, inward, and outward (Huber & Clandinin, 2005). These moments of reflections shifted my thinking about the stories of borders and border crossing. I also remembered the words of (Clandinin, 2013), that called me to inquire into the experiences and the essence of this inquiry. According to her:

> First, we must inquire into who we see ourselves as being and becoming within the inquiry. Second, without an understanding of what brings each of us to our research puzzles, we run the risk of entering into relationships without a sense of what stories we are living and telling in the research relationships. Third, without an understanding of who we are in the inquiry, we are not awake to the ways we attend to the experiences of research participants. (p. 36)

It was on this note that I began this study with an inquiry into my narrative beginnings. I was attentive to the embodied stories that shaped who I was and who I am becoming. I learned that these stories are not static but rather they were given movement in response to my life in motion. It was important for me to inquire into my experience as a learner.

Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, and Huber (2016) also explained the significance of autobiographical narratives as narrative inquirers come alongside participants and become more attentive to how they imagine themselves in relation to particular research puzzles. According to Clandinin et al. (2016), the ongoing practices of autobiographical work make visible how participating in narrative inquiries have the possibility to shape not only who we are and are becoming but also the participants we come alongside with. Thinking narratively and writing autobiographically was helpful for me to think about the different stories that I was carrying with

me on my journey in this inquiry process. In chapter one of this dissertation, I travelled backward in time and called forward on my early experiences inquired into my early experiences, I recognized that my life had been shaped and continue to be shaped in distinct spaces between the borders that I lived and the ones that I travel in my lived multiplicities of identities.

This called me to travel back in time to my childhood. While travelling back to my early school stories, I attended carefully to how I understood myself in relation to the story of school. I also attended to those spaces where contradictions lived between my familial border and the borderland of formal education. I realized that it was in those spaces that my experience of tension began to emerge whereby I became conscious of the strict school rules for the first time. I might have learned to comply with those rules by learning from the experiences of those who faced the consequences of breaking them. I attended to how my stories of early life experiences have gradually shifted over time.

As I lived alongside Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi, these experiences in turn, helped me to think with their stories. Before I met Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi, I used to think of borders as a physical landscape and I understood that there was only one form of border crossing. By living alongside participants in this inquiry a space has opened for me to grow. This has helped me to understand that we dwell in multiple borders – borders that are complex. Our identities are profoundly nested within the layered borders that shaped and continue to shape our experiences.

Living alongside Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi, I have learned to let go and become open to possibilities. Before I met them, I was so much engrossed in my pains and hurts but I have drawn strength from listening to their stories. Listening to the stories of hope as told by

them helped me to see what it means to negotiate these borders in ways that move our dreams forward.

Border as a Place of Shifting Understandings

This narrative inquiry has created a space of self-discovery for me and helped me to find meaning in my stories to live by. While I have encountered situations that were not so welcoming to diversity and inclusion as a minority person of color, I learned from Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi how to draw strength from those situations; situations where genuine openness is demonstrated. This inquiry also shifted my thinking about who I am and who I am becoming. It also called me to rethink the way I think about my role and how I can attend to my responsibilities as a teacher, a nurse, and a woman of color. The inquiry called me to be wakeful to how I can shape the learning environment in a relational ways and ways that are inclusive of marginalized minorities.

Over the course of this inquiry, my understanding of border crossing has shifted. I have learned and I was reminded that there is no single or a rigid border and I have come to see border crossing in more than traveling between physical or geographical spaces. It is about understanding the world in the contexts of identity making. This new understanding challenged my own ideas about borders and conception of my own story of border crossing as a linear journey.

Border crossing according to Giroux (2005) calls for an understanding of the "co-mingling—sometimes clash—of multiple cultures, languages, literacies, histories, sexualities, and identities" (p.2). It was by thinking about borders in this light that I came to understand border crossing not just as a challenge, but also as an invitation to critically reflect on my own experiences of tensions. In living relationally alongside participants, retelling our personal life

stories, and sharing experiences of borders, this inquiry offered a safe space for us to tell our stories in ways we could be heard. We also have access to loving invitations to live alongside each other in solidarity to represent the voices of many. Telling our stories in this space offered us the opportunity to re-compose our identities in a way that is different from the dominant narratives of 'at risk' and 'not good enough'.

Border as a Place of Opening Possibilities

Borders, as I have come to understand, also open us up for possibilities. According to Menon and Saleh (2018), borders create an opportunity for significantly experiential endeavors that are storied, fluid, multiple, temporal, relational, contextual, and perpetually evolving. Thinking with borders as something more fluid rather than an exclusive or something to box us into a fixed space called me to see borders not only as a space in which we can change and be changed but as a place where our identities are in the making. The words of Clandinin et al. (2016) also spoke to border as a place of possibilities for identity making:

> Seeing ourselves as people whose experiences are also under study speaks of the significance of new understanding of inquiry, ones in which we see identity as always in the making within the cultural, social, familial, institutional, and linguistic borders in our past, present, and future experiences. (p. 36)

Considering the several borders that Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, Kofi, and I have crossed and those yet to be crossed, I envision the possibilities ahead if we approach borders with an openness. I imagine an open door into new worlds. I imagine worlds as spaces to provide un-bordered opportunities in new and transformative ways.

Carried by my story to live by, propelled by determination, I imagine moving forward no matter what lies in my path. My dream constantly reminds me of who I have been, who I am and how my identity will continue to evolve. My familial stories live in me, they cheer me on. I imagine what lies beyond the border for me, and for others who dwell at the margin and are

struggling in a state of liminality. Taking a reflective turn upon my practice as a nurse and a teacher, I was called to identify the underlying values and beliefs that guide equitable practices. I desire to take my inquiry to the level that attend to the lives of people who experience marginalization. I imagined what learning would be like when all students can be active participants in the teaching and learning process.

Practical Justification

The practical justification for this inquiry was grounded in the need to understand more deeply, the experiences of international students in Canada. The intention was to make visible how the lives and identities of international students are being shaped by the day-to-day practices in Canadian higher education and how practices might be shifted not only to acknowledge but to attend to those lived experiences. As a nursing instructor, I thought about how there is often no space to attend to relationships with students, the contexts that shaped their experience, or their identity. Throughout the inquiry I was attentive to the idea that it might be insightful to shift not only my practice but also the practices of others in ways that consider diversity and inclusiveness. I also begin to imagine situations where I am more attentive to the possibilities of inquiring into the borders that keep minority students at the margin of education.

Thinking with Borders and Margins

Consistent across accounts of Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi is a story of stereotype they experienced. I also saw a notable story suggestive of the margin in different forms. hooks (2000) spoke about a margin as a socially constructed space. For the participants, the margin has often been a space of tension. For them, living at the margin meant that they were expected to work harder than fellow students in order to prove they are worthy of that space as graduate students. This struggle was visible in Mohammed's accounts:

> *I remember when I just needed clarification on why I performed very poorly on an assignment. The professor just told me to go and read more. They told me 'You international students have problem with English as a language, so you people need to go to the writing centre in the university'. When I came out of the office, I said to myself, 'so it means by asking for clarifications, I don't know English'.*

For some of us, it is a space where we had our ideas dismissed as mere unequal and inferior to our peers as Rita recalled in her account:

> *Even though our poster was nice compared to others, we lost marks… The more disheartening part was when we asked where we lost mark, he basically said it was the university system… We did not receive a reason or rationale.*

In our stories, the margin is a space where voices were easily dismissed and silenced, a space where the only time we could be heard is when our ideas reinforce the sentiments of the dominant narratives. It has been a space where a way of coping is by living with the conditions of the margin. The margin was where we learned a particular way of seeing reality. I wondered, how realistic the institutional narratives about equity diversity, and inclusion are. To us, being inclusive means the willingness to understand other person's experiences and how those experiences shaped their identity, but how can one be inclusive when one is not open to other person's ideas or eager to learn about their experience?

Turning Towards World Travelling

I was reminded of Lugones' (1987) notion of world travelling. Being inclusive as I understand it in the light of world traveling, requires the willingness to take risks. Being inclusive calls for the willingness to explore. Thinking about institutional mission and vision statements about equity, diversity, and inclusion, I wondered what number of spoken words or statements of commitment can adequately represent international students when borders are constructed to separate them from the mainstream? For practical justification, this inquiry has made visible the ways practice can be changed to dismantle the rigid borders that keep

international students and other minority population at the margin of higher education: social, cultural, linguistic, gender, curriculum, ethnic, and racial borders. A starting point could be the willingness to take the risk to inquire into each other's worlds.

I find hope in this concept of "travelling to someone's 'world'" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). According to Lugones (1987) "travelling to some one's world could be a way of identifying with them" and beginning to understand "what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in our eyes" (p. 17). World-traveling as Lugones (1987) described, is an invitation to a relational space that requires sensitivity and an intentionality of openness. A space that called for a sense of trust, ease, and willingness to become part of another person's world. World traveling here is a call for a shift, it goes beyond geographical place, it is historical, cultural, social, personal, familial, past, present, and future. The practical justification in this study is a call for mainstream individuals, particularly administrators, faculty and students, to attend to those practices that maintain borders, practices that silence the voices of international students and place them in the margins. For the participants in this inquiry, having a safe platform that allowed them to inquire into their experiences and to tell their stories is a beginning step to empower them, and for their stories to be heard.

A Call for Critical Pedagogy to Disrupt Discrimination

Also, calling forward a resonant thread across our accounts in this inquiry, I saw a reverberation with documented experiences of international students in Canada (Calder et al. 2016; Chira, 2017; Guo & Chase, 2011; Rasmi, Safdar, & Lews, 2010; Su & Harrison 2016; Thompson & Esses, 2016). It was documented how international students are marginalized socially and academically and often experience ethnic or racial tensions. Frequently, mainstream students are known to resist, or at best to be indifferent about undertaking joint academic projects

or engaging socially with foreign students. A practical justification for this inquiry is a call for a critical pedagogical approach suggested by Giroux (2005).

Critical pedagogy came from a need to name the contradiction between what educational institutions claim they do and what they actually do. For Giroux, "a pedagogical practice that takes seriously how ideologies are lived, experienced, and felt at the level of everyday life is the basis for students' experience and knowledge" (p. 176). Critical pedagogy recognizes experience as a valuable resource to help students locate themselves in the concrete conditions of their daily lives while furthering their understanding of the limits often imposed by such conditions. For this inquiry to be practically justified, educational curricula must be designed in a way that empowers international students to interrogate the structural racism and marginalization that are part of Canadian higher education campuses. Rather than using curriculum as a tool to maintain the socially constructed borders of race, culture, class, and linguistics that marginalize minority students, it must be designed in a way that remove barriers to meaningful learning experiences for all students. One way to begin dismantling rigid borders is through a sustained effort at understanding students' experiences and being wakeful to how those experiences impact their lives.

Giroux (2005) convincingly argued that at least one way to create some form of unity, despite difference, is for teachers and students to engage within what he termed as a border pedagogy. Border pedagogy calls both educators and students to rethink the relations between the centres and the margins of power structures in their individual and collective lives. Giroux (2005) argued that to create a border pedagogy would allow teachers and students to accept and understand differences that often include cultural symbolic codes, particularly situated histories, multiple and varied experiences.

Border pedagogy could create a space for both faculty and students to join in a mutual pedagogy that crosses the boundaries of differences into a terrain of similarities and solidarity. Higher education can embark on critical approaches to education in the context of anti-racism and anti-oppression that requires a shift to teaching practices. hooks (1994) also called attention to the need for passion in the classroom, so that, "[t]he classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformation in social relations are concretely actualized and the false dichotomy between the world outside and the inside world of the academy disappears" (p. 143). I hold close the words of Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) that "all teaching and learning questions - all curriculum matters - be looked at from the point of view of the involved persons" (p. 4). In this way the classroom not only challenges the false dichotomy, but also is a place in which who people are matter.

Social Justification

Social justification for this inquiry arose out of attention to how the multiple cultural, physical, social, institutional as well as political borders within which our lives were and are nested have shaped our identities over time and space. As I continued to think with the questions of "So what? And who cares?" in this inquiry, I looked across accounts of participants and mine, and compared them to the documented experiences of international students in Canadian higher education. I saw a reverberation of what was documented by scholars such as Guo and Chase (2011). Despite the presence of multicultural centres, diversity education offices, bridge, or mentoring programs, the campuses themselves often remain unwelcoming and hostile environments for international students (Chira, 2017; Guo & Chase, 2011).

Focusing on the lived experience of international students, this study offered a platform to see contradictions. It is understandable and commendable that policies and written practices

were established to address equity, inclusion, and diversity in higher institutions with the intention to attend to the needs of marginalized population. However, the challenge is not in the intention of policies and written directives of practices, but in the actualization and accountability. When policies and practices of institutions of higher education do not align, the resultant impact is that international students remain at the margins no matter the efforts and intentions. I brought this social justification to the forefront because of the experience of the participants in this inquiry and as an invitation to be wakeful to the conflicting institutional narratives and how they shape the lives of international students. We often find declarative mission statements on many institutional websites about openness to diversity, inclusion, and learner-centredness. Our shared experiences in this study highlight the contradiction between these narratives and the reality for international students.

Anzaldua (1999) said that "[b]orders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them" (p. 3). As indicated in our accounts, each of us in this inquiry have reasons and conditions that made it a critical necessity for us to cross borders. According to Rodney (2011), some of these conditions are closely connected to colonial history, and some are in relation to patriarchal system introduced to some colonies by the colonizers. Like many immigrants, we owe our gratitude to the Canadian open-door policy. We chose to come for graduate education from our different countries, seeking better lives and a safe place to fulfil our dreams.

Thinking about the notion of safe places (Anzaldua, 1999), I return to the participants' experience of the dominant narratives of 'at risk' and 'not good enough' to interrogate the claim of multiculturalism, equity, diversity, inclusion, and a safe and welcoming place. I saw the dominant narrative as one of the several ways in which students like Rita are carefully excluded

from scholarship, jobs, or other resources that could support their education. Even though top Canadian universities attract 'the best and the brightest' students such as Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi from different countries continued to be storied with deficit label such as 'not good enough' inside the university classrooms.

I am mindful of the daily struggles of Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi, and I am conscious of my positionality. I acknowledge my place of privilege as a registered nurse and Canadian citizen. While I have been able to practice and support my education and family financially, Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi struggled, not only academically but financially, as they pay higher tuition than me. The dominant story of "not good enough" not only excludes them from classroom and academic participation, but the four of them have not been able to obtain their license to practice as Registered Nurses in Canada even though they have practiced for years in their home countries. Regulatory bodies in Canada have been ridged when allowing internationally educated nurses to obtain their license. For example: A mandatory English language test has been one of the means of maintaining the border. While English language was part of the admission requirements into the graduate nursing program, the participants are perceived as threats to patient safety by the regulatory body, because there is an assumption that they lack English proficiency and that they have communications issues. Kofi's account speaks to this border, *you speak but somebody said it was wrong because you didn't pronounce it the same way they pronounced it. When you are not able to speak like a Canadian, people would say that you have issues with communication* (Kofi's conversation).

Labeling a person's identity as defective is a story distant to inclusive spirit. An environment is critically unsafe when one's identity is perceived as a defect, rather than a difference to be accommodated (opinion). When one is prejudiced based on their skin color or

the way they speak, the message is clear, “we do not want you here unless you change”. One could ask how classmates treated Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi portrayed inclusiveness. I wonder if border dwelling would be different for students like Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi if the rigid borders of prejudice and the stereotype that are part of their experiences are dismantled. I wonder what it would be like for international students if peers and faculty could inquire into what each international student could offer. Perhaps we could be seen beyond our differences and find value in what we bring. Perhaps we could be heard beyond our accent and poor English skills.

The stories of Mohammed, Rita, Sadiat, and Kofi are just a tip of an iceberg to highlight what minority students endure within higher education institutions. My experiences of over 15 years in Canada called me to wonder about the meaning of inclusion, what it means to be welcoming, or the essence of diversity. Together with Kofi, I seek an answer. It was Kofi who said: *The beauty of cultural diversity is to share ideas but if there is that segregation in the classroom, then what is the essence?* I asked the same question that Menon and Saleh (2018) asked, “[i]f universities, and other forums are to be lauded as sites of inclusion, ought not the stories of diverse individuals (whether they be newcomers, refugees, immigrants, tourists, strangers, citizens, and innumerable others) need to be narrated and heard?” (p. 61).

Conclusion

Over my years in Canada, as an educator, I have learned an important thing about how to cross borders to reach each of my students, whether black, white, Asian, indifferent, confident, or not so confident. I travel to their world to inquire into their dreams and hope. I have lived alongside students in spaces where hurts and pains were shared. This is what I have come to understand as the spirit of diversity and inclusion. For the policy on equity, diversity, and

inclusion to be socially justified in our learning environment, a culture and climate that values and supports differences must be created to facilitate a sense of belonging for all students. Equity, diversity, and inclusion must be taken beyond the rhetoric on institutional webpages or posters of African and Asian faces on university websites. A system of openness to diverse ways of knowing need to be created to facilitate learning with, about, and from each other. For equity, diversity, and inclusion to thrive, universities need to be transformed into a community that promotes questioning and learning about different cultural perspectives, values, and experiences. There is a need to inquire into borders and travelling across them in ways that hold open a space where one can enter the multiplicity of worlds.

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Appendix A: Information Letter and Consent

Title of the study
Crossing borders: A narrative inquiry into the experiences of international graduate students.

Principal Investigator
Olabisi Oyelana
Faculty of Nursing
University of Alberta Edmonton, AB

Supervisor
Dr. Vera Caine
Professor
Faculty of Nursing
University of Alberta

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in this research study about the experiences of international graduate students because you are in Master of Nursing program at your university, and you moved away from your country specifically to obtain a graduate education. You have arrived in Canada over the past 2 years.
Purpose of the Study: This is a dissertation project for a PhD program in nursing. In this research, I wish to learn about the experience of international graduate students in Canada. I am very interested in your experiences with learning in Canada.

Participation: If you wish to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form. The Research Ethics Review Board of my university requires that I must fully explain to you the details of this inquiry, the terms of your involvement, and any expected risks and benefits before you sign the attached form and give your consent to participate. You are under no obligation to participate. If you choose to participate, your participation in the study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Study procedures: In this study, you, as an international graduate student, are being asked to participate in a narrative inquiry, which involves a reflection about your educational journey and the experiences of your current graduate education in Canada. I would like to engage in 5-10 conversations with you to explore your day to day experiences of what it is like for you to study in Canada. We would meet for about an hour each time. If you agree, our conversations will be audio-recorded using a small, digital recording device. I will also encourage you to keep a

reflective journal. I will write ongoing field notes after each session to document my observations and thoughts. The audio-recording will be transcribed word for word. I will also meet with you after I write about your experience. At that time, I will share the narrative account with you.

Benefits: There are no personal benefits to participating in this study. Participating in this study will provide you with an opportunity to share your story and thus contribute towards a greater understanding of the experiences of international students.

Risks: There are no known risks or any anticipated discomforts to participating in this study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: When this inquiry is written into texts, I will need to refer to you in your stories. You can choose to allow me to use your first name or select a pseudonym in the written text. I encourage you to decide how this shall be done. Selecting the option of using your first name indicates that you understand any risks that may be associated with this decision. However, all the information that you will share will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research. All information, both audio-recorded and study documents will be treated with confidentiality. I will refer to your institution as a university in western Canada. To minimize the risk of security breaches and to help ensure your confidentiality when corresponding with me through email, I recommend that you use standard safety measures such as signing out of your account, closing your browser, and locking your screen or device when you are no longer using them.

Data Storage: All word documents – transcripts, journal notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the office of my supervisor. Electronic copies of conversation transcripts will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer. All study documents will be kept for a minimum period of *5* years according to my university policy.

Compensation (or Reimbursement): Upon completion of each conversation, you will receive a $20 honorarium to compensate you for your time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will still receive this compensation. I will also provide coffee, tea, and small snacks each time we meet.

Information about the Study Results: When the study is completed, I will provide a summary of the inquiry outcome. If you would like to receive a copy, please let me know by indicating your mail or email in the space below.

Address: _____

_____

_____

_____

Email Address: _____

Your completion and signing of this form indicate that you have understood the information regarding participation in this inquiry and your consent to participate.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, you may contact the researcher at the numbers indicated above.

The plan for this study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Review Board at my university. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant or how the research is being conducted, you may contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615.

Consent:

I agree to participate in the study. I understand that I will participate in a series of audio recorded conversations as well as the possibility of writing a reflective journal.

(Please circle one) YES NO

I wish to remain anonymous in the research. YES NO

I wish that my first name be used in the research. I understand the risks involved in using

my first name. YES NO

I give my permission for the research to be used beyond the dissertation project, in presentations, and in other forms such as academic journals. YES NO

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation (via blind carbon copy)

Hello,

My name is Olabisi Oyelana, and I am a graduate student in the PhD Nursing program at the University of Alberta. This e-mail is being sent to you on my behalf by the Nursing Graduate Student Association (NGSA). For my PhD thesis, I am conducting a narrative inquiry about the experience of international graduate students in Canada. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at my institution. No. Pro00101623, July 23, 2020.

If you are an international student in the Master of Nursing program at your university and have arrived in Canada in the past two years, you are eligible to participate. I would like to have several conversations with you between August 2020 and June 2021. These conversations will last about one hour and will be audio-recorded. At the conclusion of each conversation session, you will receive a $20 honorarium as compensation for your time and effort.

If you are interested in hearing more about this study, please contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration for this study.

Sincerely,

Olabisi Oyelana, PhD student

Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta

Appendix C: Guiding Questions

1. Can we create a chronicle of key events of your life? Let's focus in particular on your educational journey.
2. What or who has influenced who you are today as a learner?
3. What cultural practices or beliefs impacted your early learning experiences and education?
3. What values, dreams, desires, and hopes motivated your coming to Canada to study?
4. What is like for you attending graduate school in Canada?
5. How have your experiences here (in Canada) impacted your values, dreams, and desires?
6. How does the Canadian academic culture compare or contrast with the system of education in your homeland?
7. How have your learning experiences in Canada influenced your beliefs about yourself?
8. What does learner-centered teaching mean to you?