

Life Writing: A Literary Métissage During A Global Pandemic

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Academic Writing as Literary Métissage: Fragments of A Global Pandemic

I regard all my autobiographical writing as a tantalizing search for wholeness by dwelling with the fragments. I write fragments of narrative out of the fragments I cherish, and the fragments of stories of others, especially family, offer me, and the fragments represented in photographs. The autobiographer is akin to a person putting a jigsaw puzzle together with most of the pieces to the puzzle, long lost and no longer recoverable. ...In my autobiographical writing I am hoping to catch hints of the whole story in the glimpses offered by fragments.

(Leggo, 2009, p. 220)

On December 30th, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office in the People of Republic of China first caught wind in the media of a viral pneumonia in Wuhan. That office then notified the International Health Regulations. WHO's Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources (EIOS) also began to pick up media reports on the same cluster of pneumonia cases that had yet to be traced to their root epidemiological cause (WHO, 2021). One month later, on January 30th, the WHO Director-General "declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern," which is WHO's highest level of alarm (WHO, 2021). On February 6th, the doctor who initially raised concerns in China died after becoming infected with the virus (BBC, 2020). That same day, Chinese officials began a mass quarantine of all infected residents living in the city of Wuhan (NY Times, 2020). A few weeks later February 11th, WHO was able to establish the cause of the disease. It was called COVID-19, to avoid the inaccuracy and stigma of associating the disease with a geographical region, an animal, or group of people. One day later, Ontario confirmed its third case. February 27th, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Theresa Tam expressed to officials and the public that our governments were preparing to respond to a global pandemic (Labbé, 2020; Government of Ontario, 2020). A week later, Dr. Tam warned Canadians that they should prepare for disruptions to their daily life (Gunn, 2020). That same week, the first case spread as a community transmission is confirmed in British Columbia (Slaughter, 2020). Countries in Europe, such as Italy, begin to implement strict traveling restrictions (Kirby, 2020). On March 11th, "deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction, WHO made the assessment that COVID-19 could be characterized as a



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pandemic” (WHO, 2021). A day later, Ontario announced the closing of its public schooling system, which also included in-person classes at the University of Ottawa (Stone, Gray, & Alphonso, 2020).

Prior to the nationwide lockdown here in Canada, we, the authors, were studying together in a course titled *Scholarly Writing Toward Publication*. This course sought to support graduate students in presenting their research at conferences and/or publishing their research in peer-reviewed academic journals. Each student proposed a specific writing project that we workshopped together over the course of that 2020 Winter term. The format of the course was blended with 6 face-to-face and 6 online sessions together. We soon found ourselves collaborating with each other completely online. As we neared the end of the term, I invited everyone in the course to contribute to this life writing research project which sought to document fragments of our lived experiences during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The University of Ottawa is the largest bilingual francophone and anglophone university in Canada, if not the world. Consequently, for this specific course, graduate students could write in the language of their program of studies. In turn, we offer narrative snapshots, fragments of our lived experiences in both English and French.

Several Canadian curriculum scholars have contributed toward enhancing life writing research methodologies. Perhaps, most notably, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo (2009) have performed the concept of life writing as *métissage* within *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times*. These Canadian curriculum scholars,

...take *métissage* as a counternarrative to the grand narratives of our times, a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy, and pedagogical praxis. (p. 9)

In this essay then, we offer narrative fragments, snapshots of our lived experiences in relation to a specific place, context, and moment during the COVID-19 pandemic. “*Métissage* offers,” for us, “a rapprochement between alternative and mainstream curriculum discourses and seeks a genuine exchange among writers, and between writers and their various audiences” (p. 9). As we conclude our writing, about our differing situated lived experiences, the third wave of the pandemic continues to rage on here in Canada and elsewhere in the world. Although several health professionals world-wide urged the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Japanese government to cancel the games (Dunlap, 2021, Swift, 2021), the Japanese government decided to proceed with the Tokyo Summer Olympics.

COVID-19 news is currently centred on variants and vaccinations. While there are people refusing to be vaccinated in countries with access to the vaccines, there is “scandalous inequity” says WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in vaccine distribution world-wide (Nebehay, 2021). In his address on May 24, 2021, he urged the ten countries who currently receive 70% of the vaccines to donate a portion of them to COVAX for distribution to other countries with the aim of vaccinating 30% of the world’s population by end-of-year 2021. Together with its appeal for equity, the WHO also announced a new naming system for COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC) and variants of interest to avert stigmatization (Elliot, 2021). The new system, based on Greek letters, Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, and so on, avoids naming countries and their peoples where the variants were first identified (Breslow, 2021).

As COVID-19 mutates and as our response to the virus evolves, this *Métissage* documents our early reactions to the pandemics as phases or strands. *Strand I, Navigating A Global Stand Still At Viral Speed*, highlights our shock and incredulity. *Strand II, Mediated: Slow Going - Virtually Alone*, speaks to our acceptance of the situation and our readiness to



begin adapting to it. *Strand III, Social Distancing: Reflections Toward A Way Forward*, engages with a phase of deep thinking we all found ourselves doing concerning the implications of COVID-19 for the social conditions of the world we live in.

STRAND I

Navigating A Global Stand Still At Viral Speed

The Virus Came

(Xiaoling Luo)

COVID One Nine

(Aaron Drake)

New Beginnings: There is a Crack in Everything

(Nicholas Ng-A-Fook)

viral fear: a haiku; and Media Straight Talk

(Carol Lee)

Sit Down

(Virginie Abat-Roy)

The Straw that Broke the Camel's Back

(Catherine Déri)

Is It Them or Me?

(Johanne Barrette)

The Government of Canada's Response to COVID-19

(Nyein Mya)

The Virus Came

Rumors and news of COVID-19 started to circulate in China during November 2019. Leaked news was reported on Weibo, confirming that Wuhan patients had a rarely seen virus (Thomson, 2020). Then the reports vanished into thin air. Later, as the virus spread fiercely from person-to-person, news about the virus was seen on Weibo. There were confirmed cases reported in every city, province, and later unfortunately, in other countries one after another. It soon became apparent that we were amid a global pandemic. However, it wasn't until January 2020 that the Chinese government announced that a new virus had been discovered: COVID-19.

It should have been a time for Chinese people to celebrate the traditional lunar new year. But the supposedly festive atmosphere disappeared because of the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent city lockdowns. Chinese authorities also issued a 'stay home' order to restrict the spread of the pneumonia-causing virus. Compared to past years when they could visit relatives, the Chinese people were stuck in their homes. I felt gloomy because the virus was causing countless deaths, because I couldn't spend the Spring Festival with my family, and because I am worried about my family's safety and security.

The only thing I can do is take care of myself. The COVID-19 came, I am not sure when it will diminish but I cannot lose hope.

COVID One Nine

CTV News (Bryden, 2020) reported the following on Tuesday March 24th, 2020, 2:24pm:

- One in five Canadians polled think the COVID-19 pandemic is blown out of proportion.
- One in five paramedics have fallen ill from COVID-19.
- One in five paramedics are unable to help those fallen ill from COVID-19.
- One in five are staying in.

Seven million, five hundred and eighteen thousand Canadians think COVID-19 is blown out of proportion. *They* are deciding the fate of thirty million, seven hundred and twenty thousand Canadians. To the thirty million, seven hundred and twenty thousand Canadians who are doing their part to stay home, stay safe, and protect the community, and economy around them:

Dear, thirty million, seven hundred and twenty thousand Canadians,

I grew up in Toronto, I was raised by my Grandmother, Sandra, and two other guardians who stepped into place after my mother passed away close to my tenth year alive. To my thirty million, seven hundred and twenty thousand Canadians, you probably don't know this, but I don't want to lose another parent, not that many people do.

To my thirty million, seven hundred and twenty thousand Canadians, my parents are immuno-compromised and to know that you are doing your part, to the best of your ability to keep this virus in check, to stay safe, to stay home is important to me.

To the thirty thousand people who have lost your lives, and to the millions who are impacted by such beautiful people falling ill, and away, too soon, I'm sorry. Your loss is more than just a number. You are not a number. We are not numbers.

It's now March 10th, 2021. Almost one full year after COVID-19 made headlines and cracked lifelines when I wrote those words. I was twenty-four on the 15th of March, the day before the federal shutdown in 2020. My birthday, the day before the world seemingly collapsed. But perhaps it didn't. One full year after COVID-19 was announced, I'm alive. That's more than enough. 2 600 000 fellow human beings have now lost their lives. For some, even one full year after, who refuse to wear a mask, it is seemingly not enough. The lost, the names and faces I will never get to know, the spaces and places they will never get to go, we, the living, will not forget. It was COVID-19 who took their lives away, but it was us who let it.

New Beginnings: There is a Crack in Everything

After a restless, night I reach over to the desktop where my cell phone is temporarily resting from the grasp of my fingertips. I open it from my bed and scan the news updates and the World Health Organization's (WHO), situation report on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. At the end of yesterday, at 10:00 pm WHO released Report 64. Confirmed new cases and deaths are still being reported in China, albeit at a slower rate. Italy and Spain are dealing with death rates that exceed what has already taken place in China. And, the United States now has over 40,000 infections. Meanwhile, Trump continues to host propaganda rallies during his daily White House briefings by claiming that the life support of the US economy is more



important than the lives of the most vulnerable affected by this global pandemic. Here in Canada, today there are over 2000 infections.

I scan Apple News for articles on the different testimonies from patients, doctors, and nurses from across the world, trying to make sense of what we should be preparing for to come as a family. I often become frustrated with our politicians for not acting fast enough with the necessary appropriate actions that are necessary to what is now referred to as “flattening the curve.” Why have they not learned from the empirical evidence so highly touted in social and health science research? I understand that politicians are attempting to mitigate the potential spread of panic among the public, and in turn civil unrest.

What has become clear over the past few weeks is that our health system, like other countries around the world, has itself been on life preserve. We have been subsidizing big corporate interests at the expense of much-needed public services. One only needs to read the different news stories about the dire situation of privatized health services in the United States. The 1% has access to asymptomatic testing. They can rest assured in self-isolation with a certain lack of anxiety.

As parents, we have tried to establish a daily routine with our three boys. Indeed, because of my occupation as a University Professor, my daily work routine, for the most part, has not been affected. We are part of the privilege few who still have our economic livelihoods. Over the weekend I spoke with my brother who lives in Vancouver. He expressed that one of his good friends had to layoff 800 employees who work in the service industry. On Facebook, a friend who is a mechanical engineer, was laid off from his auto manufacturing company here in Ontario.

After scrolling through social media, the news, and my emails, I get up and greet Ezra and Jonah who are watching Japanese Anime on Netflix. Aidan is still asleep in the tent he and Jonah set up in the basement. He usually does not pop his head up from the basement until 11:00am or so. I put on a pot of coffee and make breakfast for the boys. Their mom usual comes home from her run as we finish up breakfast. After cleaning up, I then make my way to my office where I read over students' work, respond to emails, read, and write.

Who knows what tomorrow, next week, or next month holds for us all. So many of our fellow citizens are not sure if they will have a roof over their head, food on the table, or a future job. This is a moment in time where we will be asked to make a radical shift in the ways to which we relate to our institutions, the world, and each other. I have been posting a song each day on my Twitter feed. This past week, I share Leonard Cohen's (1992) *Anthem*.

*Ring the bells (ring the bells) that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything (there is a crack in everything)
That's how the light gets in...*

Perhaps it takes such world crisis to provoke us to stop, slow down, hear the bell ring, and witness the crack; to let the light get in.

viral fear: a haiku ...

a warm breath inhaled
an asphyxiated gasp
ignites a wildfire



... and Media Straight Talk

My youngest son sent me a link to a podcast of [Joe Rogan interviewing Michael Osterholm](#) (Osterholm 2012; 2013; 2017) has spent 30+ years studying infectious diseases and is often consulted by health organizations throughout the world about epidemics and the current pandemic, COVID-19. This interview, unlike other information sources from agencies, such as the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), or Health Canada, is not guarded. Osterholm (2020) speaks candidly about the scope and scale of the COVID-19 virus, and what in his opinion, based on experience, we can realistically expect in the coming months. Even with social isolation, he says not to expect the disease to run its course, or for our lives to return to normal, for a minimum of three to six months or longer unlike other predictions of a few weeks.

Sit Down

Sit down

Pull it down – refresh

Focus

Pull it down – refresh

Deep breath

Pull it down – refresh

Is this a pinch?

Pull it down – refresh

Are you sick?

Refresh – open article

Anxiety symptoms: chest tightness, difficulty breathing

Title – this is now a pandemic

Difficulty breathing: COVID-19 symptoms

Close it, pull it down – refresh

Repeat after me: it's just anxiety

You should turn it off

But the news never stops, you will miss information, you won't be aware

Anxiety symptoms: overread and overprepare

Be ready for anything, be aware, be connected: overcome the pandemic

Holding your hand up, shaking, and find the X on an equally shaking square

Breath

It's gone

Breath

It's your choice

Breath

You choose to be connected

Breath

You choose what you read

Breath

You read what you want, whenever you want

Breath

You are anxious, but anxiety is not you

Breath



You are vulnerable
Breath
You are human

Breath

Through our choices, we will protect
Through our reading, we will inform
Through our movements, we will respect
Through our constancy, we will keep fighting the tightness
Through our breathing, we will calm down our hearts
We will grow stronger.

The Straw that Broke the Camel's Back

On March 14th, 2020, the University of Ottawa President and Vice-Chancellor sent a general message to the student population announcing that a student was found lifeless in a campus residence. We receive these messages from time to time and they always make me pause. I wonder what prompts young adults to end it when they have their whole lives in front of them. Then again, university students are not always young. The University of Ottawa student population is rich in diversity. Students come from all corners of the world. Some with the hopes of not only obtaining a university degree, but of also achieving a better life for their families. So, three days after the World Health Organization confirms the Coronavirus as pandemic, a student takes his own life on campus. Was that the straw that broke the camel's back? Out of curiosity, I searched for the number of students from Canadian universities who committed suicide in 2019. I thought that it would be an easy task, but it proved to be quite challenging. Even by narrowing my search to the province of Ontario, it led to a dead end (no pun intended). It appears that the Office of the Coroner of Ontario tracks suicide by age group, without recording employment status. As for universities, they seem to track suicides that occur on campuses, but exclude student deaths taking place elsewhere. If we can track every single individual contaminated by COVID-19 across the world, we should be able to do the same for student suicides under normal circumstances, with a view of preventing reoccurrences.

Is It Them or Me?

My first week into confinement was spent almost oblivious of the pandemic. It is the end of the semester. I am swamped with work and living alone in the countryside. I spend most of my days in front of the screen, stopping only for the daily walk in the woods with my dog, eating and sleeping erradically. I see no change due to COVID except for this chat at the grocery where I ask a clerk about this toilet paper pandemonium:

“Is there a shortage?”

“No. The warehouse is full. And it's made next door, so no worries.”

So where is this panic coming from? Is it them overdoing it, or me not reacting enough?

The solid wall-to-wall rock-hard carpet of ice covering the alley at home is more threatening than any virus. I fear falling and breaking my neck or worse. Boots need to be spiked. I saw a cat sliding down the alley slope, helpless. It's mean stuff.

Then I read about two COVID cases in the Faroes, and it hits for real. The Faroes! There? The place only has a few people isolated from each other on islands isolated from the world (Peterson, 2018). There, space and silence, but for the far cry of the sheep and the call of the sea. If the Faroes have cases, no one, anywhere, is immune.



The Government of Canada’s Response to COVID-19

We are recommending to those travelling abroad to return home while it is still possible to do so. Let me be clear: if you are abroad, it’s time for you to come home. If you’ve just arrived, you must self-isolate for 14 days. And finally, all Canadians should stay home.

(Trudeau, 2020)

Coping with the pandemic, initially, meant asking questions and seeking answers. Whether the replies were fact or fiction, for some, it did not matter. It was certain that Canadians abroad were to be brought back home. We were told how rapidly the virus spread. How contagious it was. How it may already be in Canada.

As the narratives shifted, so did the questions that were asked. Canadians who were stuck abroad were questioned about the legitimacy of their citizenship. Some asked why they were abroad in the first place. Why should we waste taxpayer money on ‘Convenient Canadians’? Why would we risk the health of millions just to bring back a few hundred?

There was true fear of COVID-19, the invisible enemy, and because humans act as human do, we began to create tangible formations for our fears. Thus, in many ways, the virus took shape in the form of a “race” of people to blame.

STRAND II

Mediated: Slow Going - Virtually Alone

Praise for the Chinese People

(Johanne Barrette)

Facing Some Changes in Canada

(Xiaoling Luo)

Sandcastles on the Sand

(Aaron Sardinha Drake)

Police Checkpoints

(Catherine Déri)

Funambule des frontières invisibles

(Virginie Abat-Roy)

Not So Different

(Carol Lee)

Drinking from The Well of Being: One Song A Day

(Nicholas Ng-A-Fook)

June - Black Lives Matter Protest 2020

(Nyein Mya)

Praise for the Chinese Government and its Citizens

Extreme situations can bring out the worst in people. Some are shaming the Chinese people for the virus, blaming them publicly, shunning them, and calling COVID-19 the Chinese Virus. Some folks use every opportunity they have, be it official or anonymous, to insult and even threaten the Chinese living in Canada.

If it wasn't for the Chinese government and its citizens' outstanding reaction to the outbreak, we'd all be in a much worse place, said a WHO report (2020). Yes, they made mistakes and they have political issues, but the people's quick and total mobilization makes them examples we'd all do better to follow, said same report. So, praise to the Chinese people. You are showing us the way.

On the other hand, extreme situations also bring out the best. I came upon a bouquet of soul soothing gestures put together in a short [video](#) (The Canadian Press, 2020). For anyone in need of a little help to mend their faith in humanity, it is done in less than five minutes. Also, my 95-years-old neighbor has put a big red heart in her window. To think she committed herself to painting that heart makes mine lighter.

Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt (2000) writes, "Death teaches us nothing but the urgency to love" (p. 29). It seems like we humans were never so close before COVID-19, but since, different kinds of social networks have formed. Checking in has become mandatory. The "urgency to love" is palpable. To know that we are all in this together, albeit differently, creates a certain kind of "us" that was not very real until now.

Here Erich Fromm (1968) reminds us,

Only through full awareness of the danger to life can this potential be mobilized for action capable of bringing about drastic changes in our way of organizing society... One cannot think in terms of percentages or probabilities as long as there is a real possibility — even a slight one — that life will prevail. (p. 10)

Facing Some Changes in Canada

Just two weeks ago, I received an email from the University of Ottawa stating that our group trip to visit Niagara Falls was open and ready for registration. However, after the Prime Minister's wife tested positively for COVID-19 (Bogart, 2020), stronger measures were put in place. And, I soon began to experience changes. Schooling pivoted from in-person to online. International flights into and from Canada have stopped. Masks, alcohol hand sanitizers, and toilet paper sold out. Buying fruits and vegetables at some grocery stores was limited. People stood farther from each other on streets. It is a tough time for most of us. We keep hearing horrible news of an exponential increase in confirmed cases. People are staying at home more and there is a huge decline in traffic on the roads.

It seems that Canadians have become more aware of the severity of the virus lately, but people on the streets still don't always wear masks.

Sandcastles on the Sand

Stay inside and sing to sandcastles on the beach.
The imaginary queens and forgotten storied kings
The moat is gone, and the flag made of twigs was used for a sparrow's nest.
Quarantined isolation.
Event-less entropy
Our minds made of sand, squeezed through a vile of time,
moved by the currents of circumventing circumstance,



relaxing if you let it.
 If you /can/ let it.
 We can build castles, they will fall,
 we are pressurized glass, fragile.
 Distorted quartz
 remorseful headless horsemen
 Re-spouting myths and memories of a time we once knew
 To relive.
 To remind you that it will all be fine.
 Serendipity will play its role
 Our sandcastles will stand.
 For seconds by the sunset.
 Isn't that enough?
 And if we don't make it to tomorrow
 If our hearts give us notice
 If our bodies don't make the cut
 If our hands can't hold each other
 Then let us be what we thought we always could
 Imagine
 By the waves, under sun, given time we'll be diamonds.
 Pressurized
 Bury your temptations, even if it's with a broken plastic shovel from an unremembered picnic
 years ago, discarded and disappointing
 The tide will come, and the currents pass(t) will bring us back tomorrow
 All in all, with just enough time to make one more sandcastle.

Police Checkpoints

Yesterday, the Quebec Premier decided to put police checkpoints on bridges between Ottawa and Gatineau. Police only allowed essential services personnel to cross the invisible border between the two provinces. I live in Ottawa, but I usually go to Gatineau to work, visit friends, enjoy museums, hike in the national park, and see French movies... Since the start of the pandemic, my friends have been confined to their homes and everything else has progressively closed. I no longer have a reason to go to Gatineau. But the fact that I still could, gave me a shred of freedom. Now I can't. Now I feel trapped on this side of the river. Then, I realized that my doctoral thesis director is in Quebec, and I am in Ontario. Although graduate students can suffer from a dysfunctional relationship with their supervisors, I have been fortunate to have a thesis director who is highly invested in my success. We meet monthly to monitor my progress. We do so face-to-face. I have enjoyed these meetings, as they are filled with inspiring intellectual dialog and insightful advice. We can no longer meet because we are now physically separated by law enforcement! You might say that I can Skype, Zoom, Messenger, Google Hangout, Facetime... I know that. I have used these virtual platforms to supplement first-hand interactions. But it will never be the same as flesh and blood human contact. The same human contact that must now be avoided at all costs because it can infect me and kill others who are in more vulnerable positions.

Funambule des frontières invisibles

Je suis originaire d'un petit village sur la Rive-Sud de Québec où je devais traverser un pont chaque jour pour me rendre à mon travail. Maintenant, j'habite à Gatineau, j'étudie et travaille à Ottawa. Pour visiter ma famille, je dois habituellement quitter la province du Québec,



traverser l'Ontario pour finalement retourner au Québec. Les frontières physiques ont toujours fait partie de ma vie. Cependant, dans la volée des balbutiements de mars 2020, la présence des frontières visibles et invisibles entre l'Ontario et le Québec n'a jamais été aussi éloquente.

Depuis le début de cette pandémie, je dois me tenir en équilibre sur la mince ligne des consignes de deux provinces ayant chacune leur propre plan d'action afin de contrer la COVID-19 et de protéger leur population. Mais qu'en est-il pour ceux qui vivent sur la frontière ? Comme de nombreux travailleurs de la région de l'Outaouais, j'habite au Québec et travaille en Ontario. Même les réseaux de nouvelles sont en dualité : l'annonce quotidienne du premier ministre canadien est à 11h, puis les premiers ministres québécois et ontarien font la leur simultanément à 13h. Alors qu'il y a quelques semaines mes collègues ontariens m'informaient que les rencontres de moins de 50 personnes étaient encore permises, au Québec elles étaient déjà interdites. C'est à en devenir étourdie, alors que je me concentre à ne pas perdre pied sur un fil tissé de fleurs de lys et de trilles blancs.

La rivière des Outaouais a toujours été bien plus qu'une frontière entre deux provinces. Elle est aussi, pour moi comme pour d'innombrables gens, le lien entre différentes facettes de sa vie: emploi, études, maison et cercles sociaux. C'est ainsi que je me retrouve, un pied de chaque côté de ces limites physiques et invisibles, en recherche d'équilibre face à une maladie qui, elle, ne s'impose aucune frontière.

Not So Different

At the risk of sounding anti-social, I have to say that life has not changed much for me since COVID-19 social distancing was put in place. I must admit that when I learned that the two conferences (CSSE and GEA), for which I was scheduled to present three papers, were cancelled, a part of me was relieved not to have to travel and leave home. The same for the Writing Retreat in Montreal and even for my New York trip to attend the Posthuman Conference where Katherine Hayles was going to be the keynote. I make myself speak at conferences and otherwise participate in academic life. And yet, it does not come naturally for me. This is not to say I don't really enjoy meeting people, talking with them, learning from them, I do. I just hate leaving my place, my backyard, my neighborhood. Every Fall when I send my proposals to CSSE, I try not to think about how I will miss the best bloom time of the Lilac tree that grows next to my deck and the magnificent scent that perfumes the air and attracts hundreds of bees at a time. I try not to think of how I can sit a half meter away and never get stung while I listen to their collective hum, so loud that the bird songs can't get a note in edgewise. In this time of social distancing, I miss my three children who do not live with me, but I would anyway. I miss them every day, COVID-19 or not. Fortunately, one son does live here. However, this Spring/Summer, while my youngest stays distanced to protect me, I miss him especially because he loves the life in my backyard as much as I do. He revels in it too. This is a place where we connect and are of one mind. Still, we share what we can. I just sent him a picture of the lilies that have already pushed up about 10 centimeters, green and eagerly drinking in the sun, the rain, and whatever each day brings.

Drinking from The Well of Being: One Song A Day

Like other professors and teachers here in Ontario I was called on to "pivot" from teaching courses face-to-face to online via Brightspace, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. The ensuing social and physical distancing would have serious impacts for graduate students enrolled in the different curriculum studies courses that I was teaching over the Spring/Summer session. In response, I tried to send weekly check-ins via email like the following for our Seminar in Curriculum Research course:



Dear colleagues,

We've been studying the importance of recognizing the historical connections to our present circumstances in relation to the curriculum-as-planned, -implemented, and -lived (Aoki, 1992/2005). Over the last six days we have seen in the media what public officials would like to keep hidden as part of the public curriculum, the hidden curriculum of anti-black racism. Dr. Vidya Shah (2018, 2019) addressed this work in Module 5. Sara will be sharing their reader response this week in relation to Vidya Shah's work. However, I also noticed that no one took up Dr. Mishra-Tarc's (2011, 2020a, 2020b) work for this upcoming week. This is my fault of course for not pointing this out sooner. However, Dr. Mishra-Tarc discusses how we might respond to the injustices in the world via literature. So, if you can draw on Dr. Mishra-Tarc's work and concepts to respond to Sara's post on the Module 5 Discussion Board, that would be greatly appreciated.

It was for me, a restless weekend, in terms of witnessing the intergenerational hurt, pain, and destruction shared through the media over the weekend ([McCarten, 2020](#)). As our readings for this week and next will illustrate, this has also been part of the very constituting of a nation we call Canada. And yet, what can we then unlearn and learn in terms of our conceptions of curriculum as a potential response to such ongoing systemic racisms?

For the rest of the course, each week a few of your colleagues will be sharing their reader responses. If you could please respond to Sara over the course of this week. The key is to try and make connections among the concepts from the readings and their response in your postings for the remainder of the course. Please take time to do and enjoy the readings. And then draw on concepts put forth in the readings, on the news, or from your lived experiences to create a conversation over the week. Please keep your responses to 250 words.

I will be releasing Module 5 later today. Sara will also share their reader responses.

My song of the day is *A Change Is Gonna Come* (Cooke, 1963) performed by The Main Squeeze (2013). How might we become proactive in addressing everyday anti-black racisms and other forms of racisms [@uottawa](#), [@uOttawaEdu](#), [@ottawacity](#) within our wider community and lived curriculum?

Until, Nicholas

Over that weekend, like others, I witnessed the hurt, harm, and rage expressed on the streets of cities across the United States and here in Canada in response to the brutal murder of George Floyd. As part of my daily check-ins with students, I expressed that amid the seasonal transition here in Ottawa, there are also several communities, families and individuals who continue to experience violence beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. I too, was still struggling to make sense of it all. And that "trying" to do so, that is, making "sense," at least for me is part of the privilege of my hyphenated proximity to whiteness, of living in Ottawa, and working as a first-generation immigrant settler professor at the University of Ottawa. Others



are still trying to survive a life worth living in the face of ongoing systemic violence and inequities. I invited students to reconsider how we might address the current macro contexts in relation to the micro contexts of our lived experiences? This life writing research question continues to be a core curriculum inquiry for me. That week several Black students reached out to me to express the harm that they were experiencing as witnesses here in Canada to what was taking place at the time in the United States. That week we sought to drink from the well of being, without any promises of respite, to express our pain, anger, and/or outrage through writing. We took heed and council while listening to podcast interviews with Vidya Shah, Aparna Mishra-Tarc, Catherine van Kessel, and Timothy Stanley about this current moment of outrage and protesting against systemic racisms. (see www.fooknconversation.com)

June - Black Lives Matter Protest 2020

June 19th; Juneteenth. Life goes on. The current reality is that we are to live with the affects and effects of COVID-19. The pandemic has revealed to us fundamental truths of being human and that social interaction is a need. Healthcare is a right. Diversity reflects our societies. But there are sects that deem these as privileges. By doing so, many lives have been, and will be, lost to viral aggressions that are racial, political, and human in nature.

There is true fear in COVID-19, however, it is an invisible enemy. Humans act as human do, and we tend to latch on to the tangible formations of our fears. Thus, these viruses have become a person. Or rather, “races” of people.

But human resiliency is unmatched. If we carry on, we can overcome the biggest adversities and the smallest viruses.

STRAND III

Social Distancing: Reflections Toward A Way Forward

Every Decision Bears a Moral Compass

(Johanne Barrette)

Confinement, Isolation and Loneliness

(Catherine Déri)

Tip Toeing

(Carol Lee)

Saskatchewan Enters Phase 2

(Nyein Mya)

Troubling a Doctrine of Discovery

(Aaron Sardinha Drake)

What's In My Mind Now

(Xiaoling Luo)

1^{er} avril 202, La journée de la marmotte | Groundhog Day

(Virginie Abat-Roy)

Living the Wake of a Third Wave

(Nicholas Ng-A-Fook)



Every Decision Bears a Moral Compass

The ice in my alley is totally gone! It's a miracle. Never had it been so thick and dangerous, and never has it melted away so fast. At the same unfathomable speed, the pandemic continues to spread.

My beloved, whose work is considered essential, decided he should not visit on weekends until the end of the crisis. I have an autoimmune condition that might make me more vulnerable. And besides, there is not much point anyway, as I'm always working. Not much point. Not much. If he gets sick, I am utterly forbidden to show up to help. When did we become so reasonable? Or is it plain insane? Then there is my mother who is recovering from surgery. I am not around for her. How hard it is to convince myself that I love her better by staying away. It seems like every decision bears a moral compass.

There's this invisible threat all around. It might not have changed anything for me, but there remains a weight in the air. And, even though I can't see it or touch it or feel it, *I know* that right this minute, or the next, in growing proportions the world and *the times they are*, as Bob Dylan forewarned, "*a-changin'*." Through this eerie silence, the noise, at least for me, is within.

Confinement, Isolation, and Loneliness

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, post-secondary institutions globally switched to a complete virtual delivery of their curriculum. This change came at a time when there were only two weeks left to the winter semester, to complete a course that I was auditing on "Writing Toward Publications." As a graduate student there is always pressure to "publish or perish." Especially, if the end game is to join academia after completing a doctoral study program. Academic writing can become a lonely task, spending hours in front of a computer to do research and in turn write thoughts down on paper. In fact, it is well recognized in existing literature that PhD candidates suffer from isolation. This feeling stems from a myriad of sources, from doubting personal capabilities, to lacking time and money, to being misunderstood by loved ones. The doctoral journey requires a certain amount of isolation to assimilate new knowledge from which emerges innovative scientific contributions. Nevertheless, when isolation becomes a synonym for loneliness, a line needs to be drawn. Joining academic writing groups is an effective way to break from isolation, while continuing to progress individual projects. Under normal circumstances, I would be participating in writings groups, where I could feel energized by the presence of other graduate students. We would support each other toward improving our published contributions to different fields of study. During this current social distancing reality, I have joined writing groups using virtual platforms to maintain a semblance of normality during these times of uncertainty. Graduate students are obviously forced to isolate like anyone else, but what I am most afraid of is that my isolating will transform into loneliness.

Tip Toeing

COVID-19 social distancing and home confinement is more difficult for some than for others, due in part to lost income, sick loved ones, or because they are extraverted personalities. Extraverted personalities not only miss the company of others, but also *need* the company others to maintain their energy levels (DuBrowa, 2013). Notwithstanding, some of my colleagues and a few notable others have been posting observations that sound dangerously close to statements about COVID-19 having an upside. These statements are hushed and couched in other socially appropriate and sanctioned discourse. And yet, there is no mistaking what they are saying:



- We can breathe easier because the environment is less polluted.
- We notice the beauty in nature more often. We are walking and hiking and enjoying the outdoors.
- We are more hospitable. When we meet people (at a distance of course) we smile and say hello even if we don't know each other.
- Parents are enjoying their kids and making things and memories with them; some are cooking together, others building things together, and soon it could be gardening.
- For some, tele-commuting and distance learning has freed up time to do or learn other things they kept putting on hold.
- We are not so addicted to consumerism; shopping is based on need.
- We are taking time to reflect on what we have been doing to our planet.

It is as if Mother Earth has said enough and sent us to our rooms for a Time-Out to think about what we've done and how we can make amends.

I'm recalling an Alberta bumper sticker I once saw a long time ago that went something like this, "God, please give us \$40 a barrel oil again and I promise I won't waste it all this time" (The Hon. Ed Stelmach Speaker, 2007). The message here is not about Alberta's economy, but about remembering the lessons we've learned when the COVID-19 pandemic ends. Will we forget these lessons, like the many Albertans who subsequently saw oil rise to \$80 a barrel and still managed to squander much of it by returning to their same old practices? Or will we take pause, recalibrate, and heed the message we see routinely on Quebec license plates? Je me souviens.

Saskatchewan Enters Phase 2

Phase 2 of Re-Open Saskatchewan continues on Tuesday, May 19th, with retail businesses, shopping malls, public & farmers markets, and select personal care services, subject to their own guidelines. #COVID19SK.

(Government of Saskatchewan, 2020)

Dashboards of my various worlds have been consolidated within the palm of my hand. Endless scrolling and an endless feed. Anti-lockdown protesters. Commemoration of the mass shooting. Facebook memories. Snapchat memories. Memories, a reminder of moments gone by.

Strange is the word that comes to mind as various modes of lockdowns are lifted across the world. Within Canada, there are entire cities still under mass quarantine while simultaneously there are crowds that go about their usual or who are brewing a revolution.

I look down at my social media feed, my world between the 4 corners of my phone screen summarized in 280 characters. Scrolling, scrolling, scrolling...

Video chats, video calls, and video conferences are my only form of social interaction. Before, I reveled in technology almost to a state of religious dependency. Now, I detest pop-up reminders and I block notifications. I mute the chimes and whistles. I am born of a generation who lived with social media but also remember a life without it. And yet, I keep a wary eye out for those pesky notifications. Irony! I have been given the ability and the heavy expectation to traverse the entire world through my fingertips only because the pandemic has ball and chained me to my bedroom. I am tired of my screen time because my view of the world is only as big as my bedroom window and my laptop.

Troubling a Doctrine of Discovery

Amid the chaos, a glimmer of remarkability shines brighter and stands taller than the rest. During this COVID-19 pandemic, I am finding myself connecting to family and friends in ways I never have before. I am learning about myself and my heritage. This week I have spent countless hours on the phone with my cousins and grandmother on my mother's side discussing our family history. She told us about our late grandfather, Gus who was born and raised in Lamaline, Newfoundland. We didn't know this. My cousins and I never had the opportunity to meet Gus due to his early passing before we were born. He was a schoolteacher, mainly raised by our great grandmother, who was a Mi'kmaq woman, and our great grandfather, who no one seems to remember. My grandmother and I then spent time searching through the Toronto Yellow pages in search of Gus' late brother's wife, who we have never met, and whose wisdom would shed light on our untold histories. The line is disconnected. My Dad and my aunt tell us of our history of slavery, of perseverance and strength. Our great-great-grandparents, born of someone enslaved in St. Kitts, and an unknown father, raised in Barbados and storied in Trinidad. My history is scattered, erased, by shame and trauma, left for generations ahead to forget, and for stories to be silenced. As a Trinidadian, Settler Canadian, with Mi'kmaq ancestry, I don't have the privilege of a complete genealogy. And yet, I possess the potential strength of memories yet to be made. The time we have during this pandemic has taught me that our stories are not over, and to share and learn with our loved ones while these moments are still available.

What's In My Mind Now

The COVID-19 pandemic has already lasted for a year, which has changed how we connect with others and the world. I had to use technology and gradually found myself indulging in it. Every news, email, notification seemed to convey that I was not alone. Attending online courses with a time difference of 13 hours in China in the middle of the night and seeing everyone's faces on the Zoom video appeared to form a supportive community. However, there's a voice deep inside me, saying I was not fully satisfied with the life I was living. I wanted my "normal" life back. I wanted to see my lovely classmates and professors and have academic conversations on the noisy but energetic campus soon. I wanted to sing along with others at concerts and travel to see astonishing sceneries I have never seen before. During the pandemic, I realized that this might be a time to pause, to fall behind, and an opportunity to see through what's in my mind. And now, I get to cherish every moment I spend with my family and friends. I have become more aware of living healthier by doing more exercise and eating healthily. I hope to mitigate COVID-19's effects on me by wielding my power of will and a lot of self-care. I will become a better person when the pandemic is under control.

1^{er} avril 2021, La journée de la marmotte | Groundhog Day

« Madame, quand pourrais-je revoir mes amis ? »

Cette question, mon élève me la pose de temps en temps. Entre nos leçons et les activités, dans sa petite chambre à la maison, elle me regarde du haut de ses 8 ans et me demande quand elle retournera à l'école, au parc, à sa vie normale. Elle a des diagnostics de santé qui la rendent à très haut risque en public et une autre condition qui l'empêche d'utiliser les écrans. L'enseignement médical à domicile est sa seule option.

Depuis mars 2020, de nombreux articles ont fait état des oubliés de la pandémie. Pour n'en nommer que quelques-uns : les personnes âgées en centres de soins longue durée, les adolescents en manque de contacts sociaux, les parents qui jonglent entre école à la maison



et travail sur la table de la cuisine, les étudiants universitaires isolés dans leurs appartements sombres et les individus qui vivent seuls. Or, les élèves qui passent entre les mailles du filet social d'urgence tricoté pour cette pandémie semblent passer inaperçus. Ceux qui ne peuvent aller à l'école à cause d'une condition médicale préexistante et qui ne peuvent, pour la même raison, faire de l'enseignement en ligne. Ces élèves qui ont le cancer et suivent des traitements, ou qui ont une malformation aux poumons et font des crises épileptiques provoquées par les écrans. Ces jeunes de 4 ans, 9 ans, 13 ans, 17 ans. Ils regardent défiler les mesures de santé publique saupoudrées de codes de couleurs, de confinements en dé/confinements, des plaintes aux applaudissements dans une valse qui semble sans fin.

« Madame, quand pourrais-je revoir mes amis ? »

Je n'ai plus de réponse depuis longtemps. En ce 1^{er} avril 2021, alors qu'elle me colle un poisson de papier dans le dos en riant derrière son masque, elle est à la maison depuis plus d'un an. Nous devons apprendre à vivre avec les hauts et les bas de cette pandémie, mais où est la solution pour ces élèves qui doivent jongler entre les risques collectifs et leurs besoins fondamentaux ? Un an après le début de la pandémie, cette dernière continue de mettre en lumière les zones grises de notre système.

Living in the Wake of a Third Wave

...The Wake spoke to the affect of the process/event in which knowledge, emerging from the middle and growing at the edges, was not always a comfortable place. The Wake rendered the sense of aliveness that materialized in an ambiguous and transient space. (The word "wake" has three definitions: not only is it a noun for the track left behind a moving ship, it is also a verb meaning (1) to awaken; to be aroused from mental activity; to become alive or active; to be restored to life; and (2) to hold vigil for someone who is deceased as an act of commemoration.)

(Leblanc & Irwin, 2020, p. 14)

Today, at least for our family, is Day 385! We are now in another provincial lockdown. We are living COVID-19's third wave with all of its respective global variants. For some of us, COVID-19 has awakened us, perhaps momentarily, from a curriculum lived as a neoliberal capitalistic form of sleepwalking. For several others, they continue to hold vigils in commemoration for those whom they have lost during the first, second, and now third waves of this global pandemic. Here in Canada, today on April 7th 2021, we have surpassed 1 million cases, and lost over 23,000 fellow citizens. Despite the waves of lockdowns, teachers, frontline health workers, and other essential service providers continue to risk their lives to serve the public good. Unlike Australia or New Zealand, the provincial governments here in Canada have refused to sacrifice the "promise" of our economic livelihood in exchange for the livelihoods of certain fellow citizens and their respective communities. What will "it" mean to be aroused, alive, active, restored to live, to hold vigil, when we emerge from the a/wake/ness of COVID-19?

Notes

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