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Article abstract

This article considers the limitations of 1990s humanitarian and diaspora frames to mediate a sense of the border that moves beyond securitization and yet remains accountable to refugee claimant advocacy. As an alternative, this article explores an intermedial pedagogy for bringing critical border studies into the realm of embodiment and feeling. Drawing on teaching and research interviews, I consider how asking "do you feel safe at the border?" produces an effective challenge to persistent public emotions conflating national "borders" with the need for "security." In complex ways, this kind of storytelling can bring into view, what Melissa Williams calls, "communities of shared fate" that exist across the spectrum of legal statuses, tapping in to extant feelings rooted in real, shared vulnerability at the border.

"Do You Feel Safe at the Border?" An Intermedial Pedagogy for Sensing Communities of Shared Fate

ERIN GOHEEN GLANVILLE

> *Borders only exist inasmuch as they can be sensed, made the objects of aesthesis.*[1]
> – R. Görling & J. Schimanski

INTRODUCTION

Against the powerful discourses of asylum crisis and state securitization, which figure the border as a source of security, critical scholars have reimagined borders variously as waning in relevance in an era of globalization or as sites of transgressive possibility and hope.[2] Still, news media and political communication persistently link state "borders" to a felt need for "security." This reified conflation can be challenged, not by producing more media showcasing refugee insecurity to inspire broader protection nor by telling stories of diasporic belonging in defiance of protectionism, but rather by evoking personal experiences of insecurity at the border and ordinary encounters with border practices. Portraying the border as a place of insecurity is a counterintuitive strategy for refugee rights advocates who regularly denounce "fear mongering" tactics. Yet this kind of

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[1] Reinhold Görling and Johan Schimanski, "Sovereignty," *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, Oxford, UK, Berghahn Books, 2018, p. 118.

[2] Emma Haddad, "Danger Happens at the Border," in Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr (eds.), *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p. 119–136, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsn8c (accessed 8 April 2020).

storytelling can bring into view the "communities of shared fate"[3] that exist across the spectrum of legal statuses, unearthing extant feelings rooted in real, shared vulnerability.

¶2   This article explores an approach to teaching diasporic theorizations of human affiliation beyond borders. I propose a kind of intermedial pedagogy initiated by the question "Do you feel safe at the border?" Christopher B. Balme defines intermediality as "the attempt to realize in one medium the conventions and habits of seeing and hearing in another medium."[4] Intermediality produces "a framing medium" and embeds media within another media.[5] Kris Rutten and Ronald Soetaert use the term "intermedial pedagogy"[6] to extend Henri A. Giroux's vision for postmodern pedagogy in classrooms shaped by digital culture: "pedagogy needs to [support] democratic processes in the classroom that [...] allow students to critically address the construction of their own subjectivities as they simultaneously engage in an ongoing process negotiation between the self and the other."[7] Eliciting students' experiences of interpersonal communication at the border enables students to construct a personal frame for knowledge about the border that may be more regularly gathered from political communication, news media, or theory. While digital media extends the reach of our senses (to use Marshall McLuhan's well-known metaphor),[8] the pedagogy I propose travels back to the body and its physical senses, reframing public knowledge with memories of embodied encounters at the border.

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[3] Melissa S. Williams, "Citizenship as Agency within Communities of Shared Fate," in Steven Bernstein and William D. Coleman (eds.), *Unsettled Legitimacy: Political Community, Power, and Authority in a Global Era*, Vancouver, British Columbia, University of British Columbia Press, coll. "Globalization and Autonomy," 2010, p. 43.

[4] Christopher B. Balme, "Intermediality: Rethinking the Relationship between Theatre and Media," in Christopher B. Balme and Markus Moninger (eds.), *Crossing Media*, Munich, Germany, ePodium, 2004, p. 7, https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/13098/1/Balme_13098.pdf (accessed 7 April 2020).

[5] *Ibid.,* p. 11.

[6] Kris Rutten and Ronald Soetaert, "Intermediality, Rhetoric, and Pedagogy," *Comparative Literature and Culture*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2011, https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1797 (accessed 8 April 2020).

[7] Henry A. Giroux, "Border Youth, Difference and Postmodern Education," *Critical Education in the New Information Age*, in Manuel Castells et al. (eds.), Lanham, Maryland, Boston, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999, p. 112.

[8] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, London and New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 4.

To illustrate what this pedagogy might look like in practice I offer anecdotes from teaching.

¶3   This article also references video footage collected for "Digital Storytelling as a Method for Refugee Dialogue in Canada,"[9] a postdoctoral research fellowship mobilizing knowledge about everyday words in refugee dialogue. Worn Words is the project's public-facing title. Worn Words (2017–2019) developed a digital storytelling praxis enacting critical refugee theory as community-engaged media production. It consisted of fifteen in-depth interviews with cross-sector experts, mostly in Western Canada, and produced two educational multimedia outputs.[10] The aim was to create educational media that prioritizes experiential knowledge and makes space for multiple voices to re-narrate ordinary words that are overused in everyday debates about Canada's responsibility to refugees. Interviewees defined, critiqued, and told stories about words such as "border" or "refugee," and I merged interview footage with animation, illustration, and original music to create a contrapuntal narrative. Following my research ethics protocol, I offer interview footage here as expert witness rather than ethnographic data.

¶4   This article begins by tracing refugee claimant advocacy in relation to two frames of reference that gained prominence in the 1990s: humanitarianism and diaspora studies. Both frames are limited in their ability to mediate border studies for public conversations because they do not address the feelings that undergird border—security conflations. To explore how storytelling about precarious citizenship might mediate critical lines of inquiry about the border—security conflation for non-academic publics, I introduce Melissa Williams' concept of "communities of shared fate." Finally, I describe five heuristic dynamics initiated by the question "Do you feel safe at the border?"

[10]   The first video, "Listening," can be found here: https://www.eringoheenglanville.com/listening-1 (accessed 7 April 2020). The second, "Border Story," is being embedded into an educational website and is not yet available.

Humanitarianism

¶5   The primary frame for understanding refugee cultures in Canada is that of humanitarianism. Arguably, "refugee issues" are considered the equivalent of "humanitarian issues." Humanitarianism emerged as a distinct field in the 1990s.[11] In 1992, humanitarian action was officially categorized under the purview of the United Nations, and states began to "treat humanitarian action as an instrument of their strategic and foreign policy goals."[12] Canada has developed a particularly strong identity as a humanitarian citizen of the globe. This humanitarian narrative is regularly counterposed to securitization narratives in the United States, yet both share a similar conceptualization of normatively unequal relationships among citizens, refugees, and the nation-state. The securitization of asylum is a discursive and material process that recasts refugee claimants as security threats rather than people in need of security. Where humanitarianism expands the security offered by state borders, securitization draws a smaller circle of security. Drawing on feelings of connection—either to celebrate difference (refugees) as it becomes "protected" within the state or to celebrate sameness (citizens) as it organizes to keep difference out—public mobilizations of both discourses posit the border as a source of human security.

¶6   The current struggle in the United States over asylum policy is a potent example for illustrating this dynamic. President Donald Trump's national address in January 2019 attempted to pivot on the affective fulcrum of humanitarianism to create support for his border-wall agenda, declaring a humanitarian emergency for citizens attacked by asylum seekers and explaining that we "don't build fences because [we] hate the people on the outside, but because [we] love the people on the inside."[13] In other words, citizens are the object of humanitarian concern. Emma Haddad describes this dynamic as inherent to state sovereignty: "[T]he actors fearing the threat are within the state–citizen relationship; the threatening refugee is excluded outside. Ironically this means it is the actors inside who are seen to be in need of

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[11] Michael N. Barnett, "Refugees and Humanitarianism," in Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long, and Nando Sigona (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 725.

[12] *Ibid.,* p. 726.

[13] Donald J. Trump, Oval Office Address on the Border Wall, transcript published in *Time*, 8 January 2019, http://time.com/5497569/donald-trump-oval-office-address-transcript/ (accessed 7 April 2020).

protection from the threat, not the vulnerable and marginalized refugee."[14] Tellingly, Trump's flipped script fluidly quotes the phrases meant to critique him, such as "No hate. No fear. Refugees are welcomed here" or "Love is greater than fear." His words reiterate the feelings of fear and love that structure national identity based on the absolute difference between citizen and migrant; he articulates the emotional landscape of sovereignty and national border regimes with breathtaking clarity. The ease with which "citizen" substitutes for "refugee" in humanitarian discourse points to foundational similiarities, even codependence, between humanitarian and securitization discourses. Because humanitarianism focuses on determining who is suffering or insecure and towards whom feelings of compassion should be directed, the border remains central to those feelings.

Diaspora Studies

¶7   A different, more promising frame for forced displacement cultures, which also emerged out of the political optimism of the 1990s, is that of diaspora or transnationalism. Diaspora's influence as a cross-disciplinary approach to migrant cultures in globalization grew out of its power as a counter-epistemology to the binaries undergirding colonial and some postcolonial discourses.[15] Within diaspora theorizing, those who exist at the border of two cultures in subnational communities, who cross borders over and over in a lifetime, or who have histories of violent displacement that make them feel out of place generations later, do not need to collapse their identity to being, on the one hand, part of the mosaic of multiculturalism or, on the other hand, forever in exile from their homeland. They can belong to both here *and* there. Diaspora people, because of the abundance of their cultural and geographic heritage, recast the border as a place of possibility and valuable subaltern knowledge. Culture—its products, its markers, its economies, its institutions—can be a homeland, producing a profusion of meaningful connections that snake over and under the borders between cultures, between nations, and between histories. Further, diaspora people are not aberrations to the norm, but are valuable sources of knowledge, even ideal global citizens. This scholarly conversation plays with the metaphors of metissage and rhizomes, of creolization and hybridity, as alternatives to the inadequate binaries categorizing identities in global movement.

[14] Haddad, 2007, p. 128.
[15] Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (eds.), *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, Oxford, UK, Wiley-Blackwell, 2003, p. 4.

¶8　　　　　Critical refugee studies have taken a related theoretical path, drawing on similar deconstructive thought processes to reimagine nation-state borders. Melissa Williams narrates “the unravelling of the neat package of autonomous political communities” as it occurred in the “civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s” and academic theorizations of “the politics of difference […] of the 1980s and 1990s.”[16] These movements “laid bare the multiform exclusions by which the myth of a unitary people was constructed through the politics of nation building,”[17] creating opportunities for new conceptualizations of political belonging and engagement based on residency or human rights rather than citizenship. Diaspora-inflected refugee studies deconstructs the central binary of refugee–citizen to probe the conceptual and political relationship between refugees and citizens, treating them as two sides of the same coin, produced and maintained in a world comprehensively demarcated by competing state sovereignties. This commodified coin can be interrogated by examples of political agency based on civic participation; or by blurring migrant categories to create a profusion of migrant subjectivities under a broad “human” umbrella; or by unveiling the hidden violence of the institutions and processes created by the legal categorizations of human beings. Peter Nyers argues that “the subjectivity of the diaspora body—in this study, the refugee—is constituted by being exposed to the violent limit of the sovereign relation known as the ‘state of exception’.”[18] Nyers turns to the poetry of refugee subjects to recognize “how cultural practices act as an intervening force within world politics.”[19] Applied to refugee studies, a diaspora epistemology turns the “bare life”[20] of refugee subjects into abundance: of knowledge that can critique systems; of global cultural, social, political, and geographic ties; of resilience against damage; of movement against containment; of agency against the limits of labels. The border may become then a place of possibility. However, my engaged research has struggled to articulate the relationship between this important theoretical trajectory and the community-based

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[16] Williams, 2010, p. 35.
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] Peter Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency*, New York, Routledge, 2006, p. xiii.
[19] *Ibid.,* p. 63.
[20] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Bloomington, Indiana, Stanford University Press, 1998.

work of supporting refugee *claimants*, as distinct from undocumented people or
resettled refugees.[21]

REFUGEE CLAIMANT ADVOCACY: A DISTINCT CHALLENGE

¶9   This footage from *Sensing borders. Clip 1* (see Fig. 1) comes from two
interviews on the significance of borders for refugee claimants. The first is with Loren
Balisky who grew up in Ethiopia and established Kinbrace Community Society in
Vancouver, BC. The second is with Sharmarke Dubow who grew up in Somalia and
is currently a City Councilor in Victoria, BC.

Fig. 1.   Still   image   from   the   video   *Sensing   borders.   Clip 1*,   19 March 2019,
https://vimeo.com/325278989/f93a60be6c (accessed 7 April 2020). Courtesy of the author.

¶10   In community-engaged migration research, the ties that bind refugee
claimants to nation-state borders require not only a theoretical critique of identity
formation (i.e. the construction of the state has created binaric refugee–citizen
subjects), but also engagement with the practical and urgent consideration of support
workers and refugee claimants about how justice can be enacted for those who need
it now (i.e. crossing borders enables my claim to rights to be heard and considered).
Whereas undocumented migrant activism (e.g. No One Is Illegal) may envision
justice as a borderless future, support work for resettled refugees envisions justice as
adjustments to integration and settlement policies. The first reimagines diaspora as
normative and the second is humanitarian. In contrast to either non-status organizing
or resettlement services, support of refugee *claimants* in Canada occupies a kind of

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[21] Erin Goheen Glanville, "Rerouting Diaspora Theory with Canadian Refugee Fiction,"
in Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru, and Sarah Lawson Welsh (eds.) *Rerouting the Postcolonial.
New Directions for the New Millenium*, New York, Routledge, 2010, p. 128–138.

middle ground between radical activism and pragmatic advocacy. Refugee claimant survival is thoroughly dependent on and shaped by border policies and practices. Yet their irregular movement fits uneasily within humanitarian communication because it challenges state sovereignty, the very discourse from which humanitarianism gains its legitimacy in the international refugee regime. To put it plainly, if refugee claimant advocates were to ignore the refugee–citizen binary, they would do so at the expense of those people to whom they are responsible. Thus refugee claimant advocacy holds tension between the urgent need for success in the refugee claims process (dependent on clear refugee-citizen distinctions) and the larger reality of embedded inequalities in the global system. The site of refugee claimant cultures and the questions raised by it constitute an uncertain borderline between the idealisms of diaspora theory and of humanitarian communication.

¶11   This dilemma has implications for approaches to public education and advocacy as well. A return to diaspora epistemologies is not sufficient in this moment, in part because the work that is needed includes distinguishing and not only proliferating meanings and categories. Further, without *sensing* the falsehoods contained in the border–security conflation, dialogue about refugee migration cannot move away from the symbol of foreignness at the border and towards the work of democratic participation that is responsible to and guided by membership in communities of shared fate. In light of the conflation of state borders and human security across polarized discourses, how do we shift shared senses of the border?

SENSING A COMMUNITY OF SHARED FATE

¶12   Rather than softening the citizen–refugee binary with diaspora affiliation, an explicit inhabitation of citizen–refugee subjectivities may help students to sense the ties that bind our fates together. The question "Do you feel safe at the border?" and its abstracted variation, "Do borders make us safer?" is an effective way of establishing a felt sense of belonging to what Melissa Williams has called "communities of shared fate." Williams defines a community of shared fate as "that set of human beings who are related through the impact of some members' actions on others, wherein each member has standing to make claims of justification against the others and claims of legitimacy against the nexus or system of relationship as a whole.[22] To claim belonging within a community that includes people with a variety of legal statuses

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[22] Williams, 2010, p. 43.

and that is formed through entangled fates, is to challenge the normativity of national belonging and citizenship identity. To claim belonging within a community of shared fate is not to dismiss or even de-emphasize peoples' desire for nation-state belonging, as diaspora theory sometimes does. Rather, this claim to a shared, communal fate (based on actual and unequal entanglement) positions subjects explicitly in relation to nation-states as being together at the mercy of the sole purveyor of sanctioned violence. What many citizens fear about foreignness and what they desire from the border is more rightfully feared and desired from their own nation-state and its policies.

¶13   To turn the fact of interdependence in "a nexus of relations of affectedness" into common political agency, Williams offers a two-part agenda: 1. "agents must develop a consciousness of the relationships as existing, ongoing structures of social interdependence" and 2. "they must imagine that the relationship can be made subject to [...] regulation aimed at some common good." Communities of shared fate are established by, first, "persuading [people] that the connections between them are real" and second, that these connections can be organized for a common good.[23] Here she suggests the media can make visible the connections that lie hidden beneath privileged participation in globalization. Building on and broadening the purview of postcolonial analyses of migration that frame interdependence as the inheritance of colonial history,[24] the phrase "communities of shared fate" includes the entire gamut of forces that exceed an individual's intentions in the world—"there are forces not of our own making that bind us to one another, like it or not."[25] This phrase reflects the language and motivation of support workers and refugee claimants with whom I have spoken.

¶14   In conversations about refugee claimant policy, the question "Do borders make us safer?" assumes and invokes a community of shared fate, inviting citizens to "secure" themselves in entanglement rather than becoming dependent on a collective expulsion of insecure subjects. This question engages the structure of feeling shaping asylum dialogue by asking a polar question that makes the answer simple and the proof personal; by asking people to critically inhabit their own positionality rather than try to understand another person's; by paying attention to and trusting

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[23] *Ibid.*, p. 42–43.
[24] For a postcolonial analysis of forced migration, see E. Tendayi Achiume, "Reimagining International Law for Global Migration: Migration as Decolonization?," *AJIL Unbound*, vol. III, 2017, p. 142–146, https://doi.org/10.1017/aju.2017.48 (accessed 8 April 2020).
[25] Williams, 2010, p. 43.

embodied sensations and their connection to feeling; and by putting people in the midst of a narrative they usually keep at a distance through rational analysis. My experience with students suggests this question can begin the process of distinguishing people's feelings about the need for safety and security from their sense of the border, a sense mediated thoroughly by humanitarian and political communication.

FINDING THE QUESTION IN THE CLASSROOM

¶15   I discovered the capabilities of this question to achieve the first point of Williams' agenda while teaching Special Topics in Communication, a graduate seminar. We had spent three months exploring narratives of forced migration using a critical refugee studies method. That is, we were studying refugee media not in order to understand people seeking refuge as objects of study, but in order to understand how stories produced by people seeking refuge mediate globalization. By turning the spotlight away from individual examples of suffering and destitution and instead studying global structures that connect human experiences, we see and imagine forced migration beyond the affective poles of humanitarianism and national security and consider the ordering that produces those poles.[26] To enable that perspectival shift we focused on culture produced by people with refugee experience and reflected on their critiques of common distinctions in narrations of forced migration, such as "safe citizen and vulnerable refugee" or "secure border and insecure state." We discussed the power of genre and institutional contexts and engaged in a participatory workshop on embodied narratives. Despite a high dose of critical theory and careful analysis and despite a class with diverse migration experiences, students continued to ask questions aimed at identifying the shared characteristics and generalizable experiences of refugees. The binaries persisted in these lines of inquiry, as did students' imagined, shared positionality as safe citizens within secure borders studying insecure, foreign refugee cultures. The conversation could not escape predetermined nationalist and humanitarian frames, even when engaging media that

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[26] Critical refugee studies is succinctly described on the website of the Critical Refugee Studies Collective as "a humane and ethical site of inquiry that re-conceptualizes refugee lifewords, not as a problem to be solved by global elites but as a site of social, political and historical critiques that, when carefully traced, make transparent processes of colonization, war and displacement," https://criticalrefugeestudies.com (accessed 7 April 2020).

was modeling and asking us to do just that, until the week we read Tings Chak's graphic novel *Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention*.

¶16   Chak writes, "[S]tatus is a fickle thing. It can be taken away from you, and at any moment it can be lost."[27] The drawing is of an identification card and a human figure, progressively disappearing as the identification card is separated from her. The narrator continues, "It determines your identity, your rights, your access, your freedom [...] [Y]our place of birth has nothing to do with the treachery of borders, violently imposed onto our bodies, between our families, and throughout the places we call home."[28] The students appreciated this page of the book and related it to a different story told by a stateless person. The possibility that someone could be born stateless highlighted how vulnerable human rights are when they depend on proof of citizenship. In discussion I admitted to the students, "Even as someone with citizenship crossing the border regularly and not breaking any laws, I get nervous. I know that my rights are vulnerable and completely dependent on this passport I hold. And it makes me feel unsafe for no good reason. Do *you* feel safe at the border?" This simple question about experiential, emotional knowledge broke open the discussion we had been on the edge of all semester.

¶17   Almost every student had a story to share about precarity—from losing a wallet containing every piece of ID, to losing access to social services during the time between expired and new documentation, from being denied the purchase of a phone because they only had one piece of Canadian identification, to losing identification documents in a fire and resorting to personal connections in government "back home" to prove their identity for new documents. "Thank goodness my mom keeps my birth certificate in her safe at the bank," one student breathed. The outpouring of personal stories of precarity helped them to *feel* how vulnerable we all are to being *made* "illegal" when the border's infrastructure permeates our lives, when state and paper borders become our security system both inside and at the geographic edges of the nation-state. Together students locked into a shared sense of "border" as a space of insecurity for citizens and refugee claimants alike. Their stories centred largely on the border technology of passports and other government identification—proofs of

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[27] Tings Chak, *Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention*, Montreal, Quebec, The Architecture Observer, 2014, p. 92. An excerpt can be found in *Scapegoat*, no. 7, 2013–2014, http://www.scapegoatjournal.org/docs/07/SG07_165-182_TingsChak.pdf (accessed 8 April 2020).

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

their claim to human rights lost, misinterpreted, destroyed. The question catalyzed something in the class' structure of feeling that I had not been able to get at with any other teaching strategy.

¶18   That day our sense of state borders shifted as students explored the personal possibility that precarity is at the root of all of our political and rights-based identities: insofar as our human rights are dependent on a piece of paper or plastic issued by the government, our claim to state protection is always vulnerable. Students' *feelings at borders* began mediating critical theory, embodying the insecure logic of citizenship and allying them with refugee claimants. Their storytelling suggested the border was not a place of security and safety for most of us. This opened up a conversation about what *did* make any of us feel secure within global, national, and local networks.[29]

Understanding the Question

¶19   At the same time I was teaching this course I was also conducting the Worn Words interviews. Since interviewees were offering expertise, not illustrative personal stories, I included this variation in interviews: "Do borders make us safer?" This question produced a pause and even elicited amusement for some of the interviewees. As a direct, polar question, it posed an interesting challenge to entangled theories of security, safety, and state borders, prompting answers embedded in felt human experience and in objective historical proof. When interviewees answered "yes" or "no," I would ask, "How do you know?" This often produced declarative or exclamatory answers ("I just know!") and then an exploration of possible sources of knowledge. If interviewees offered personal anecdotes, I would follow up by asking whether they felt personally safe at borders. As I have considered this question in the interview footage and in educational contexts, I sense at least four dynamics at work mediating critical border studies at the level of shared feeling.

[29] In classes since, I have given students a storyboarding template and asked them to recall a border crossing experience or the loss of documents that would help them cross a border. After storyboarding their experience, they write down one thing they know about the border based on that experience.

1. Step *out* of "the shoes of 'a refugee'" and into your own;
examining the normative side of the binary

> Imagine how you as writers from the dominant
> society might turn over some of the rocks in your own
> garden for examination.[30]
>
> –Jeanette Armstrong

¶20   Armstrong's quote invites a physical exploration of what lies hidden under the guise of normativity, in this case, citizens crossing borders. Public dialogue usually focuses instead on refugee subjects as signs of abnormal insecurity, arguing that their incorporation is either a threat to stability or else a welcome enhancement. An example of the heuristic approach generated by the latter was on display at a recent fundraiser I attended. A program director stood up in front of an audience full of well-dressed donors eating plates full of food and invited everyone to "imagine we were being bombed," followed by a series of similar "imaginative exercises" that only succeeded in making the prospect of displacement feel exotically absurd. My companion at the dinner, who was in the refugee protection system, suggested we leave. Invitations to "step into the shoes" of a refugee are stubbornly frequent across all kinds of public communication about refugee cultures; such invitations are empty promises of knowledge. They presume unity across myriad cultures, personalities, geographic origins and destinations, legal processes, and positionalities, and they train the spotlight of an audience's curiosity on an experience they cannot actually understand, thus becoming a source of misinformation.

¶21   A corresponding alternative approach to community education can be found in the question "Do you feel safe at the border?" which asks people to explore a question and an experience that they *can* know. It asks them to scale back their opinions to fit their experiential expertise. When the question is asked of those who have citizenship, this question implies that citizenship and border-crossing citizens are the real objects of curiosity and that knowledge gathered from studying the behaviour and experiences of citizens is relevant to understanding refugee cultures. In this way, the question spotlights the citizen side of the citizen–refugee binary so as to re-align "secure citizens" and "refugees at the border" rather as citizens and refugees desiring safety at the border. Asking how borders structure citizens' experiences of security can also provide data for making distinctions among experiences of the

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[30] Jeannette C. Armstrong, *Slash*, 1990, p. 143–144.

border (see Fig. 2). This pedagogical approach raises the question of how to mediate Giorgio Agamben's influential agenda of "building our political philosophy anew starting from the one and only figure of the refugee"[31] for public education contexts; it produces a recursive engagement with the idea that norms can be replaced without first being felt as inaccurate.

Fig. 2. Still image from the video *Sensing borders. Heuristic 1*, 19 March 2019, https://vimeo.com/325278940/5428ac4b7e (accessed 7 April 2020). Courtesy of the author.

2. Trust the testimony of senses; reframing the sensations of embodied experiences as political knowledge

> [E]ven if emotions have been subordinated to other faculties, they have still remained at the centre of intellectual history. [...] This is not surprising: what is relegated to the margins is often, as we know from deconstruction, right at the centre of thought itself.[32]
> –Sara Ahmed

¶22   What is particularly powerful about asking a question of "feeling" in the context of refugee studies is its connection to the cultural figure of the refugee, ensconced in the 1951 Refugee Convention. Refugees are identified in international law according to their "base drives [...] and their lack of political voice" as "human

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[31] Giorgio Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights," in P. Virno and M. Hardt (eds.), *Radical Politics in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 159.
[32] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 4.

beings 'in the raw,' so to speak, because they are motivated by a feeling—the subjective emotion of fear—rather than by rational deliberation."[33] The question "Do you feel safe at the border?" asks everyone present to centre their feelings precisely *as* a way of knowing their own political voice. People with citizenship (who are also buffered by financial security, identity documents, circles of influence, and communities of care) can easily mistake those buffers for the assurance of safety by and within the nation-state. As Mireille Rosello and Stephen Wolfe write, "When we reflect on borders, we write as subjects who were formatted very early on by our experience of borders. The contingencies of birth will have determined to some extent at least whether a subject internalizes national borders as serious, dangerous or non-existent obstacles." [34] In border studies, the contingency of border experiences is established through extrapolating from life as differently experienced. Lene Johannessen and Ruben Moi, for example, draw on Jacques Derrida's "Living on: *Border Lines*"[35] to suggest that "any structure of thought based upon commonality, selfsameness of subjectivity, centralization of ideas and appeal to shared legitimacy will only anticipate the future with flawed imagination and closure." [36] They suggest a negational rephrasing of Charles Taylor's concept of the social imaginary:[37] "the way in which people imagine their social *difference*, how they *do not* fit together with their own and others."[38]

¶23   Divergently, in my teaching experiences, an awareness of the conflation of state citizenship with the feelings created by those buffers did not emerge from the differences among peoples' experiences of the border, but rather from their similarities. That is, notwithstanding the "contingencies of birth," [39] without exception, among the people who have answered this question, strong sensory experiences of the border were negative (see Fig. 3). The experience is characterized

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[33] Nyers, 2006, p. 61.

[34] Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe, "Introduction," in Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe (eds.), *Border Aesthetics. Concepts and Intersections*, New York, Berghahn, 2017, p. 1.

[35] Jacques Derrida, "Living on: *Border Lines*," in Harold Blum (ed.), *Deconstruction and Criticism*, New-York, Seabury Press, 1979.

[36] Lene Johannessen and Ruben Moi, "Imaginary," in Schimanski and Wolfe, 2017, p. 59.

[37] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2004, p. 23.

[38] Lene Johannessen and Ruben Moi, "Imaginary," in Schimanski and Wolfe, 2017, p. 59.

[39] Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe, "Introduction," in Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe (eds.), *Border Aesthetics. Concepts and Intersections*, New York, Berghahn, 2017, p. 1.

by feelings of insecurity: "nerve-wracking" and "anxiety provoking." Further, the storytelling that followed naturally turned to incidents when the "paper border" of passports and birth certificates extended the reach of the geographical border; storytelling about embodied experiences naturally opened up discussions of how systemic racism undercuts citizenship rights and creates hierarchy among shared insecurity. In the exploration of our shared feelings at border crossings, students related experiences with similar feeling regarding the tools of border management; and, in turn, valid identity documents became signs of *in*security in the class's emergent sensing of the border.

Fig. 3. Still image from the video *Sensing borders. Heuristic 2*, 19 March 2020, https://vimeo.com/325278871/24375f8a80 (accessed 7 March 2020). Courtesy of the author.

Fig. 4. Still image from the video *Sensing borders. Heuristic 3*, 19 March 2019, https://vimeo.com/325279016/b726bab194 (accessed 7 April 2020). Courtesy of the author.

3. Let go of narrative control; replacing cognitive distance with proximate feeling

> Believing in the constructed and imagined community helps one to gain some control over the complexities of life. Borders must therefore be seen as a strategic effort of fixation, of gaining distance and control in order to achieve ease.[40]
>
> –Henk van Houtum & Stephen F. Wolfe

¶24   In an explicit attempt to establish order and security, law, policy, and even the design of our built environment mandate the exclusion of insecure people to manage feelings of security. Similarly, theory, as a genre that creates order and traces patterns, needs intermediality to access the bodily experience of disorder that may be at the core of its analysis. Asking the simple and personal question "Do borders make us safer?" invites memory, story, conjecture, senses, and emotion to mediate our analysis, connecting what we "know" and what we "experience" to make space for cognitive dissonance. As a frame for the theory-heavy discipline of critical refugee studies, this question is a heuristic that melds cognitive, emotional, and embodied knowledge to realign the way our feelings are structured vis-à-vis borders. The knowledge of embodied senses can then be expressed according to the conventions of propositional theory.

¶25   In class, I could have asked "What did you learn about undocumented peoples' lives?" or even, "What is the connection between the nation-state and our human rights?" Yet each of these questions might have allowed us to remain in the relative safety of concept management, analysis, or even application. While the violence of state borders is supported by cognition, it is not primarily experienced in the cognitive realm, and so feelings of insecurity cannot be experienced in the analysis of policies and laws that create that violence. The question "Do you feel safe at the border?" positions the learner as part of the scenario rather than controlling or assessing it (see Fig. 4). In their analysis of ecology as an aesthetic paradigm for reimagining borders Mireille Rosello and Timothy Saunders write, "[E]cologies of border have the capacity to encourage us to rethink what border-

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[40] Henk van Houtum & Stephen F. Wolfe, "Waiting," in Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe (eds.), *Border Aesthetics. Concepts and Intersections*, New York, Berghahn, 2017, p. 132.

crossing actors look like when we suddenly found ourselves crossing the border."[41] The person who is asked "Do borders make us safer?" is assumed to be part of the ecology of border crossings they are evaluating and as such cannot distance themselves in order to produce the "ease" van Houtum and Wolfe name. The unease produced by the personal address of the question to everyone connects to the unease of embodied experiences that are carried by many in the room. At times people have responded to the group's growing unease with their own desire or nostalgia for different spaces or times where trust characterized their movements.

4.   Make the answer simple; asking a polar question to invoke storytelling

¶26   The perennial critique of critical theory for irrelevant elitism misses a more central concern around form. Theory draws on poetic forms of communication, and so it makes sense that poetry has been lauded by some scholars as a radical aesthetic form that offers transformative potential for imagining the political and the political subject.[42] Yet story continues to grow as the dominant form of communication in digital cultures and in community education. Strategically, it is a form of communication that cannot be ignored by border scholars. When President Trump addressed the nation about the border wall, he offered stories of individual people, who happened to be both undocumented and also accused of a crime, as "proof" of the need for less migration at the US-Mexican border.

¶27   The power of story is a truism, and deconstructive scholarship depends on the reorienting truism that a single story is dangerous. Certainly the constraint of story as a unifying form has been a challenge in my own attempts to bring together multiple voices in digital stories. Yet the struggle to find new story forms is essential. When knowledge mobilization focuses only on theoretical interventions and op-ed arguments, we allow the popular social domain of storytelling to be dominated by emotive, simplistic government- or humanitarian-sponsored stories that leave the border–security conflation unquestioned. Critical analyses get increasingly complicated using the poetic-cognitive form of theory, and popular discourse becomes clearer and simpler with the narrative form of story. The question "Do borders make us safer?" followed by "How do you know?" makes the answer simple: yes or no. Asking a polar question bypasses the contingencies

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[41] Mireille Rosello and Timothy Saunders, "Ecology," in Schimanski and Wolfe, 2017, p. 45.

[42] Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

and nuances of theoretical answers and opens up space to remember and recount supporting experiences. These are inevitably stories. Telling stories in the classroom and in the interview conversations triggered similar experiences and created a sense of shared unease with border processes. Because the stories were experientially based, in the context of speaking aloud to one another, the stories "felt" truer and were easier to extrapolate from than theory.

Conclusion

¶28   This article has unpacked a single question as an example of intermedial pedagogy that invites people to sense their belonging in "communities of shared fate" as a mediation of political communication and news media (see Fig. 5). By critically inhabiting citizen subjectivity rather than trying to understand refugee subjectivity, by paying attention to and trusting our embodied sensations and their connection to feeling, by putting one's self in the midst of a narrative often kept at a distance through rational analysis, and by asking a polar question that requires a simple answer and personal proof, this question is a heuristic with potential to engage the structures of feeling shaping asylum dialogue.

Fig. 5.   Still   image   from   the   video   *Sensing   borders.   Heuristic 5*,   19 March 2019, https://vimeo.com/325279131/a05e041f81 (accessed 7 April 2020). Courtesy of the author.

"Do You Feel Safe at the Border?" An Intermedial Pedagogy for Sensing Communities of Shared Fate

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the limitations of 1990s humanitarian and diaspora frames to mediate a sense of the border that moves beyond securitization and yet remains accountable to refugee claimant advocacy. As an alternative, this article explores an intermedial pedagogy for bringing critical border studies into the realm of embodiment and feeling. Drawing on teaching and research interviews, I consider how asking "do you feel safe at the border?" produces an effective challenge to persistent public emotions conflating national "borders" with the need for "security." In complex ways, this kind of storytelling can bring into view, what Melissa Williams calls, "communities of shared fate" that exist across the spectrum of legal statuses, tapping in to extant feelings rooted in real, shared vulnerability at the border.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine les limites que posent les perspectives humanitaires et diasporiques des années 1990 lorsqu'il s'agit de convoquer, vis-à-vis des frontières, des sentiments allant au-delà la simple sécurisation mais pouvant toutefois prendre en compte la défense des demandeurs d'asile. Nous explorons ici une alternative : une pédagogie intermédiale servant à amener l'étude critique des frontières dans le domaine des affects. En m'appuyant sur ma pratique de l'enseignement et sur des entretiens de recherche, j'étudie la façon dont la question « vous sentez-vous en sécurité à la frontière ? » pose un véritable défi à l'association émotionnelle persistante entre « frontières » nationales et besoin de « sécurité ». Ce type de récit peut donner à voir de manière complexe ce que Melissa Williams appelle les « communautés de destin partagé », qui existent dans tout un éventail des statuts légaux et qui touchent à des sentiments ancrés dans de véritables vulnérabilités partagées à la frontière.

BIO

ERIN GOHEEN GLANVILLE researches and lectures on cultural refugee studies at the University of British Columbia. She is the co-editor of *Countering Displacements: The Creativity and Resilience of Indigenous and Refugee-ed Peoples* (University of Alberta Press, 2012) and primary investigator for "Digital Storytelling as a Method for Refugee Dialogue in Canada" (Simon Fraser University, 2017–2019). She has authored "Refracting Exoticism in Video Representations of the Victim-Refugee" (*Crossings* 2018),

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