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From Metaphors to Figurations: Experiencing 'Margin', 'Centre' and 'Resistance' in the Ethnographic Field and Beyond

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Abstract This paper examines 'margin', 'centre', and 'resistance' as metaphors that move beyond abstraction, becoming historical and political figurations that interrogate ethnographic methodologies. Through the analysis of their application in two different research contexts – antiracism in Switzerland and popular education in Bogotá – it explores the interplay between their contextual articulation and creative writing. Inspired by feminist writing, the paper advocates for an approach that bridges different levels of understanding through 'ConversA(c)tion', embracing multiple layers of meaning.

Keywords Metaphors. Figurations. Ethnography. Decolonization. Creative writing. Feminist writing.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Engaging with the Margin: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives. – 3 Interrogating Ethnography: Navigating Alternative Methodologies from the Margin, Bogotá, Colombia. – 4 Interrogating In-Betweenness: Defining Spaces of Margin from the Centre, Geneva – Switzerland. – 5 'ConversA(c)tion': From 'World-Sensing' to 'World-Making'.

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1 Introduction

> To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. (hooks 1984, 8)

This is how the renowned feminist thinker and writer bell hooks defines the concept of margin, a notion that holds particular significance for the discussion in this paper. Margin and resistance are key concepts in postcolonial theory. Yet, these terms are often employed in abstract or overly mainstream ways, which can dilute their meaning and reduce their capacity to illuminate the complexities of contemporary societies and dynamics.

Bell hooks' understanding of the margin, and the forms of resistance it enables, has profoundly shaped our theoretical perspective. Her insights remain central not only to academic discourse but also to broader reflections outside of institutional settings. As PhD researchers in cultural anthropology and sociology of cultural processes, we bring distinct perspectives to the study of specific contexts and historical moments. In doing so, we feel compelled to engage with her theoretical tools while critically examining how these ideas manifest in concrete and material terms.

Coming from two disciplines historically implicated in the colonial project, we are continually driven to question ourselves, our practices, and the ways we approach both theory and fieldwork. Our starting point has therefore been to acknowledge the inherent tensions within our work and our thinking as we navigate multiple shifts: from centre to margin, from academia to fieldwork, from institutional to non-institutional spaces, from the heart of Europe to the Global South, and from positions of privilege to experiences of oppression. These tensions resonate with Sandro Mezzadra's definition of postcolonial times, that is a time

> in which colonial experience appears, simultaneously, to be consigned to the past and, precisely due to the modalities with which its 'overcoming' comes about, to be installed at the centre of contemporary social experience – with the entire burden of domination, but also the capacity for insubordination, that distinguishes this experience. (Mezzadra, Rahola 2006)

The postcolonial time described by Mezzadra encapsulates both the system of domination –and the violence inherited from colonialism that continues to shape contemporary structures –and the persistent forms of insubordination, opposition, and resistance to it. These forms of resistance, though often marginalised or rendered invisible, remain vital to understand and contest the enduring legacies of colonialism.

By examining two distinct research contexts within postcolonial times – Switzerland and Colombia – we aim to interrogate the concepts of 'margin', 'centre', and 'resistance'. This exploration will ultimately lead us to reflect on methodological considerations and the ways in which our academic practices are shaped by these contexts. Although we come from different areas of human and social sciences, we share a common methodological approach – ethnography – and draw from a convergent theoretical framework, including Black feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and decolonial theory.

In this paper, we illustrate how the concepts mentioned above emerged in our respective fieldworks, as well as how our lived and shared experiences of ethnography have enabled us to conceptualise new horizons of meaning and expression. The practice of 'writing otherwise'[1] led us to interrogate the boundaries of academic writing but also to include voices, perspectives and spaces that often remain silent. As indicated by Braidotti:

> writing enacts the micro-political, self-reflexive analyses of the power at work in its own structures and practices. By exposing the compulsive and rather despotic inclinations of language, the writer thus forces upon the readers a critical reflection into the workings of power itself. This critique includes the institutions that uphold and sustain that power, notably the university structure of departments, institutes, faculties and the whole hierarchical disciplinary machinery that spreads to specialised journals, citation indexes and careers management. (Braidotti 2014, 165)

In order to critically examine the approaches and practices that have shaped our fieldwork over the past years, we will begin by presenting the theoretical framework that has guided our inquiry. To provide tangible examples, we will then present key aspects of our fieldwork, aiming to deepen the understanding of our questions and clarify our intellectual journey.

Specifically, we will illustrate how the concept of 'margin', together with the related notions of 'resistance' and 'centre,' has shaped our two distinct research projects: the first investigates the intersection of communitarian movements and popular education in Bogotá, Colombia, while the second examines antiracism in Switzerland

1 Decolonial thought sees 'otherwise' as an active alternative to modernity, coloniality, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy, creating new ways of being and knowing that resist colonial power (Mignolo, Walsh 2018). In *Writing Otherwise*, 'otherwise' challenges traditional academic writing by embracing experimental, open, and interdisciplinary forms that reject conventional authorial positions (Stacey, Wolff 2013). Across both perspectives, 'otherwise' represents resistance, transformation, and the pursuit of new possibilities beyond dominant structures.

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and the creation of specific spaces of resistance. By addressing the tensions and complexities of our field sites while acknowledging the inherent coloniality of our work, we aim to demonstrate how ethnography and creative writing, as shared methodologies, can serve as tools for both resistance and reimagination. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the intricate relationship between theoretical frameworks, their application in day-to-day fieldwork, and their poetic and linguistic articulation on the page.

Indeed, we consider our approach to knowledge production – particularly through the integration of creative writing into ethnographic narrative – not simply as a stylistic choice, but as a collaborative and transformative practice. Over the past years, we have developed a dialogic method and shared space that emerged from the need to carve out a zone of potentiality – at the margins of academia – where we could reimagine our ethnographic experiences and elaborate our own modes of writing. This is not only a methodological gesture but an epistemological stance: an approach to knowledge as relational, situated, and processual. 'ConversA(c)tion' – the name we gave to this evolving practice – is both a method and a form of resistance, one that opens new pathways for understanding experience beyond dominant frameworks. It seeks to unsettle conventional research practices and affirm writing as a practice of world-making. This shared space has both shaped and been shaped by the way we render fieldwork on the page, giving us the opportunity to cultivate new ways of understanding experience.

2 Engaging with the Margin: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

In their essay "Decolonization is not a Metaphor", Tuck and Yang begin by emphasizing that their reflection is meant "to remind readers what is unsettling about decolonization" (2012, 3). In the last decade, particularly following the Black Lives Matter movement in the Western world, the term 'decolonization' has gained prominence in mainstream discourse, but its widespread use has also revealed certain limitations. Tuck and Yang argue that by turning decolonization into a metaphor, settlers create opportunities for evasive "moves to innocence" (2012, 9) – strategies that deflect responsibility, ease guilt, and obscure ongoing colonial structures, all while safeguarding settler futurity. Their critique, which focuses on contexts marked by settler colonialism, such as in Australia or the United States, proves valuable for understanding the specific mechanisms that underpin public and institutional discourses on decolonization and their inherent limitations.

In recent years, particularly in the Western world, decolonial theory has gained significant traction in public debates, highlighting the intrinsic links between racism, colonialism and other forms of domination, and emphasizing the need to examine how they have been structurally embedded in the development of European modernity and its central matrix: capitalism. Understanding the interconnectedness of various forms of domination – including sexism, among others – is therefore essential.

Decolonial theory in Europe, while informed by the foundational work of Latin American thinkers, has at times been co-opted to reproduce superficial gestures that avoid grappling with the deeper implications of decolonial thought. In academia, efforts to expose the role of colonialism in shaping disciplines that perpetuated white and European superiority have been a critical step forward. As Mellino observes, in the European context, postcolonialism, before its overtaking by the decolonial narrative, has been a vital framework for rethinking

> western representations of the rest of the world and their 'ethnographic authority' in articulating global and imperial rule and domination. (Mellino 2012, 10)

According to Mellino (2012), postcolonial theory found concrete expression in struggles that revealed the centrality of capitalism and its tangible impact on global inequalities and hierarchies. This points to a condition where coloniality – understood through Aníbal Quijano's framework as the persistence of power dynamics and hierarchies inherited from colonialism – and resistance to it coexist in a state of tension. In his analysis of postmodernist thinking, the author urges for a new approach to cultural studies that refuses apolitical and dematerialised visions of cultural processes, thus advocating for a deeper engagement with processes of cultural dislocation. In other words, this approach calls for the recognition of how our understanding is overdetermined by what happens outside the walls of universities and beyond the institutional boundaries of knowledge. This acknowledgment challenges the insularity of academic discourse and emphasises the importance of engaging with the broader sociopolitical realities shaping decolonial thought.

Many Black, postcolonial, and feminist critics have highlighted and critiqued the paradoxes embedded within these processes. They have drawn attention to the often –problematic division of intellectual labour that has emerged, where thinkers situated in the centres of past or present empires take the lead in deconstructing the very power structures that uphold these centres. This dynamic not only risks perpetuating asymmetries in the production of knowledge

but also transforms formerly marginalised identities into objects of discursive consumption, further reinforcing the dominance of those at the centre. In fact, it is there that metaphorization of decolonization becomes a both theoretical and concrete problem. As Tuck and Yang assert:

> When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it re-centres whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonise (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym. (Tuck, Yang 2012, 3)

This critique underscores the risks of reducing decolonization to a metaphor or abstract concept, which ultimately undermines its transformative potential. Instead, decolonization must remain grounded in material and epistemic practices that dismantle colonial structures, refusing to be co-opted or diluted by existing frameworks that merely reproduce the status quo. In this sense, and considering Tuck and Yang reflection on decolonization, concepts such as 'margin', 'centre', and 'resistance' – can operate as metaphors and contemporarily when applied to specific analytical contexts, transcend mere abstraction. Metaphors are indeed intended here as hermeneutic, historical, and political "figurations", functioning as

> a politically updated cognitive map that reads the present through the lens of individual radical situation. (Braidotti 1998, 51)

Authors such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde and Rosi Braidotti have been essential in theorizing language and the articulation of spaces of openness that enable expressions outside dominant structures. These spaces, which – considering how racism, sexism, and colonialism have historically shaped urban landscapes – are often geographically located in the peripheries, not only challenge the dominance of hegemonic power but also foster new forms of solidarity and alliances, among women and beyond, as Lorde poignantly articulates, revealing how the

> Interdependency between women is the only way to the freedom which allows the 'I' to 'be', not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. (Lorde 1984, 99)

Their approach to writing – particularly feminist writing and thinking – has led us to discover transformative forms of writing, such as poetry, memoir, and other creative modes that resist linearity and closure. These forms, through a continuous process of writing, sharing, and collective re-writing, invite a dual movement of 'dislocation' and 'location' – as intended by Hall (Hall quoted in Mellino 2012, 58-9). Dislocation here can be understood as the recognition of individual fragmentation, an acknowledgment of the ways in which identity is fractured by systems of oppression, histories, and personal struggles. Conversely, location refers to the process of integration: the weaving together of the multiplicity that constitutes the self and its relations, grounding it within an informed context and time.

Through this dynamic interplay, these feminist writers have challenged traditional academic and literary modes of expression, reimagining writing as a radical act of self-creation and collective empowerment. Writing, in their vision, transcends its function as a mere tool for articulation; it becomes a transformative process of becoming – bridging the personal and the political, the individual and the communal. This approach underscores the subversive potential of language, framing it as a site of resistance and renewal that opens pathways to solidarity and transformative change. Their perspective also resonates with the concept of the 'distribution of the sensible', coined by French philosopher Jacques Rancière for whom:

> Political statements and literary locutions produce effects in reality. They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies. (Rancière 2004, 39)

This concept, deeply tied to politics and aesthetics, proves central to ethnographic writing: words do not merely describe reality; they actively shape it. In this sense, we have embraced micro-narratives to prioritise individual experiences over grand totalities, constructing alternative frameworks that challenge dominant structures. This approach calls for an ethnographic aesthetic that moves beyond conventional representations, focusing on spaces and subjectivities that embody decolonial resistance. Rather than treating these

spaces as objects of external interpretation, we view them as sites of meaning-making, using cognitive maps to approach social realities from the bottom up. This perspective shapes our ethnographic practice: the choice of writing form becomes a political act that disrupts established frameworks, values experience in new ways, and encourages reflexivity. Through these processes, we navigate diverse expressions of the margin, which have become central to our reflexive inquiry.

The concept of the margin has been explored by various scholars, artists, and activists as a space inherently tied to language and resistance, a way to assert their positionality against the centre. As hooks reminds us, marginality is not an imaginary construct but rather "it comes from lived experience" (1989, 20).

One of the most powerful examples is Anzaldúa. In 1987, the Chicana writer and political activist, reflecting on her experience as a 'border woman', a *mestiza* from the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border, defined the borderland, *la frontera*, as a space that is

> physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (Alzandúa 1987)

When one reaches the margins and chooses to inhabit them, new forms of thought, relationships, writing, and language emerge – forms of rebellion and disobedience that no longer conform to the categorizations imposed by the West, which has established itself as the geopolitical, economic, and epistemological centre. Inhabiting the border means rejecting the colonial label of 'dangerous aliens' historically imposed on those at the margins. Instead, it becomes a space to build alliances and resistances, a place to learn from, engage with, and have dialogue with those who occupy it. This dialogue is shaped by the diverse polyphony of the borderland, where language is never singular; people speak "*lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*" – poetry, meticulous historical reconstruction, personal and communal memories, indigenous languages, storytelling, and songs (Alzandúa 1987, 55-6). From this arises a new consciousness: la *conciencia mestiza*, a consciousness of the borderlands, where concepts and ideas cannot be confined within rigid boundaries:

> *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterised by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (Alzandúa 1987, 79)

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La frontera is the geographical space that hosts the epistemological 'third space' theorised by Mignolo, from which emerges 'border thinking-sensing-doing', or the practice of 'epistemic disobedience' (2011). The coloniality of power manifests even in seemingly neutral domains, such as epistemology. This means that the rules and structures of dominant knowledge continue to perpetuate colonial hierarchies, maintaining the epistemic divide between what is considered 'legitimate' knowledge and what is relegated to the margins. As Mignolo states

> If you 'study' colonialism or the subaltern but you maintain the rules of the social sciences and humanities game, you maintain the coloniality of power that reproduces the epistemic colonial difference. (Mignolo 1999, 241)

Building on Alzandúa's experiences and theorization as 'border woman', hooks conceptualises the margin as a space of radical openness, drawing from her own lived experiences and emphasizing the political legacies embedded in that space. By adopting a 'politics of location' as a methodological approach, the margin transforms into a dynamic site of renewed and alternative meanings. Far from being a static or peripheral space, the margin is a vantage point from which to critically interrogate the centre. However, it is also a challenging space to inhabit – demanding not only intellectual engagement but also a willingness to confront discomfort, complexity, and vulnerability. The margin repeatedly asserts the importance of positionality, of the place from which one speaks and exposes oneself – as a political choice.

This raises profound questions: How can we, coming from positions of privilege, enter the margin without replicating the dynamics of the centre? How do we understand radical openness when viewed from a position of power? What does it mean to act ethically and responsibly within the politics of location as outsiders to the margin? And, crucially, how do we write about it? In "Choosing the Margin", hooks directly addresses these challenges, asking:

> Within complex and ever-shifting realms of power relations, do we position ourselves on the side of the colonizing mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible? (hooks 1989, 15)

Hooks argues that the margin, as a space of radical openness, is filled with possibilities. Crucially, positionality is not a static choice

but a fluid and evolving political act. Standing in resistance with the oppressed requires an ongoing commitment to movement – a willingness to rethink, unlearn, and reimagine. She further urges:

> I'm urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions. I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (hooks 1994, 12)

But what does it mean to transgress? How do we put transgression into practice? What are the boundaries we are called to move against and beyond? And how do we cultivate the capacity for such movement?

The margin itself, hooks argues, is a space of transgression, a space that exists in constant motion and relation with others. To position oneself within the margin is to embrace this movement, to remain open to "envisioning new, alternative, oppositional aesthetic acts" (hooks 1989, 15). It is a practice of learning, unlearning, and co-creating a practice that insists on the possibility of change, both personal and collective.

Thus, engaging with the margin as a space of radical openness challenges us to confront our own positionalities and privileges. It invites us to see the act of writing not merely as a mode of documentation, but as a site of resistance and renewal – a dynamic interplay between self and other, centre and periphery. Embracing this perspective allows us to imagine and enact forms of scholarship that disrupt hierarchies, cultivate solidarities, and foster transformative possibilities.

It is from this commitment that our own writing practice has emerged. Grounded in our ethnographic experiences, we have sought to articulate a mode of writing capable of enacting small but significative 'acts of opposition' – alternatives to traditional academic and ethnographic forms. While our respective field sites and methodologies were distinct, they were held together by a shared decolonial framework and a common desire to write from – and with – the margin. Writing became a methodology in itself: both a personal practice through fieldnotes and a collective, experimental process shaped within the space we created through 'ConversA(c)tion'. It offered a way to aesthetically represent the lived experience of marginality, along with its inherent transformative and political potential.

This process does not claim to offer a revolutionary discovery but instead is nourished by the paths opened by other scholars, activists, and writers. For us, writing becomes the material form of thought – the embodied act of thinking together through shared

texts. It is both a method and a practice: an aesthetic expression of the process of making sense of reality, deeply attuned to the bodily and affective dimensions that shape it. As Quintana reminds us,

> when speaking of affects, what is asserted is the exteriority and the conflictual nature of emotional forces, the social relations from which they stem, their assemblages and uncoded excesses. (Quintana 2023,73)

Inspired by the performative power of writing and informed by a dialogic practice of quoting and exchanging ethnographic fragments, our methodology has taken form from the very positionalities we inhabited in the field – positionalities constantly unsettled by the affective entanglements we experienced. This ongoing dialogue, often unfolding outside institutional spaces, led us to revisit those moments which, as the Colombian philosopher describes, are shaped by:

> encounters traversed by sensorial experiences in which tones, textures, smells, atmospheres, unforeseen intimacies, voices rooted in territories – and at the same time able to detach from previously formed images of these territories – emerge. Complicities. But also tensions, silences, discomforts. Elements that are often not made visible in writing but that affect, from beginning to end, the way I compose an idea, an argument. (Quintana 2023, 36)

Through this lens, our practice became about creating resonances – between our distinct yet connected experiences – and assembling, from our shared fieldnotes, archival fragments, daily encounters, and layered language registers, a different kind of space: the page. This reassembly is, for us, a political and subversive gesture – a way of writing with the margin, and of rendering resistance legible on its own terms.

In the following sections, we will delve into our respective ethnographic experiences, weaving in excerpts from the fieldnotes we have previously shared in 'ConversA(c)tion'. These fragments will open up intertextual and interpersonal reflections, rooted in the affective textures and emotional intensities that have shaped our situated and dialogical understanding of the 'margin' – and the diverse forms that resistance may take within it. The aim is not to redefine the notion of the margin, but rather to understand how the margin can be a space where it is possible to think and write differently, and how ethnographic research should detach itself from academic impositions and remain open to the destabilizations that come from truly living theory – not just metaphorically.

3 Interrogating Ethnography: Navigating Alternative Methodologies from the Margin, Bogotá, Colombia

In my research, I focused on Popular Education and pedagogical decolonization. I have been collaborating with various educational community-based processes in the peripheries of Bogotá, Colombia. The aim was to explore how these grassroots alternatives to the traditional education system, in conjunction with community neighbourhood movements and cultural politics, can offer critical tools and practices to challenge Eurocentric educational discourses.

The methodology adopted was inspired by the participatory action research (PAR) approach as theorised by Orlando Fals Borda, in constant dialogue with the pedagogies of Popular Education. Participatory action research involves active engagement in the territory and a political militancy that makes the researcher an integral part of the social processes they observe and engage with. It fosters the collective production of knowledge based on the experiences of those who inhabit the territories, combined with an educational action, and a disruption of the dichotomous relationships between the researcher and the research object. In my case, such involvement also required a critical reflection on the tensions arising from my external positioning in relation to the social transformation this methodology seeks to promote.

This involvement also meant experiencing these territories not only as sites of research but as privileged epistemological and political spaces – taking seriously the epistemic power of local stories, situated knowledge, and the everyday practices that emerge within them. In this sense, the research positions itself in an intermediate and dialogical space between the academic knowledge that guides the investigation, and the extra-academic experience lived in the field. It thus reflects a methodology inspired by Popular Education, which seeks to maintain a critical and transformative connection between theory and praxis.

We can therefore speak of a reflective, educational, and *conscientizing* ethnography, or of a process of participatory learning. My field experience became a true path of radical (trans)formation. Popular Education, initially considered an object of study, gradually also became a critical tool for ongoing reflection and conscientization, allowing me to critically examine my own actions, to reconsider my interpretative categories, and to question the power dynamics that shape both the society I was observing and my own positioning as a Western researcher.

Throughout my entire ethnographic research journey, the margin was essential. It manifested as a geographical and physical space, an epistemological lens, and a breeding ground for alternative educational practices, community-based movements, and political

relations. In fact, it is where oppression and stigmatization come into sharp focus, yet it also incarnates a space of expression – a vibrant, creative community – based realm where new concepts and practices can be explored and experienced. Eventually, with its interconnected meanings, it became the place where I was compelled to rethink my entire investigation. It offered me the tools and perspectives to deconstruct and reframe the ethnographic experience in new and improvisational ways, based on coalition, conspiring, friendship, and love.

Addressing the margins as specific geographical locations, in this case, those areas on the outskirts of Bogotá, it became evident that stigmatization, violence, and the pathologization of their inhabitants are defining characteristics of these spaces. The city is designed to perpetuate divisions imposed by colonial and neoliberal superstructures; migrants, refugees, displaced people, informal recyclers with large recycling bags for sorting, Black communities, and other marginalised groups are forced to live far away from the centre – on the banks of the Bogotá River, in neighbourhoods that mark the edge of the city, at the foot of the Eastern Hills. As Frantz Fanon describes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), the colonised city is not merely an ordered space but reflects the forces, structures, and boundaries of the colonial world. This space is not organised equitably; rather, it is 'compartmentalised', and it operates on principles of mutual exclusion. The term suggests a structural segregation that stems from colonial urbanization processes, where the expansion of the city pushes the 'wretched' to the geographical margins, thus exposing racialization, ethnophobia, and aporophobia – fear and repulsion toward the poor.

As mentioned, the margin is not merely a site of exclusion but a space of potentiality. In engaging with this space, I discovered fertile ground where the decolonization of educational practices takes shape through its entanglement with political movements, grassroots cultural politics, artistic expressions, and everyday life. Education in the margin is not a domesticated practice but one of transformation and liberation – an ongoing, collective process in which the entire community simultaneously becomes both student and educator. Rooted in the lived experiences of marginalised individuals navigating oppressive systems, these practices challenge dominant narratives and offer a perspective grounded in daily resistance. The margin thus emerges as a space of defiance, where new possibilities for liberation and justice are not only imagined but actively forged.

One of the projects I have been involved with is a popular eco-political school. This initiative embodies an eco-pedagogical commitment with a strong political dimension, deeply rooted in the unique context of the Villa Cindy neighbourhood, situated along the banks of the Bogotá River. The school focuses on educating children

about the structural injustices affecting marginalised communities in Bogotá. During an interview, one of the founders of the school shared that the need to establish a popular school in that area stemmed precisely from a desire to reflect on the concept of 'trash'. She said: "The aim was to think, reflect, criticise the *basura* (trash). As an object, as an element that shapes society. So, when I attended the first *olla comunitaria*, I noticed the entire area was full of recyclers. I thought, 'This is a great place to start a process!'".

Her words immediately made me reflect on how, in the margins, the dominant system imposes what Segato (2018) calls 'pedagogies of cruelty', practices that condition individuals to reduce living beings and their vitality to mere objects, commodified within a modernity project centred on materialism, individualism, and consumption. 'Trash' represents what is discarded by society; everything relegated to the margins – discarded, unseen, unheard. Through this metaphor, we are invited to reflect on how society produces and manages 'waste', both in the physical and social sense of exclusion.

Yet, from this exclusion and rejection, anti-systemic practices can emerge. In fact, educators reclaim what is seen as 'waste' and create an educational alternative practice around it. Against the pedagogies of cruelty that normalise violence against subaltern bodies and territories, community movements organise themselves around what is considered 'nothing' by coloniality. Creating this kind of educational praxis is deeply tied to the formation of revolutionary subjectivities, shaped by the shared experience of living in the margins. Drawing inspiration from hooks' assertion that the margin is both a space of oppression and resistance, the research redefined the term 'margin', moving beyond its traditional association with exclusion and embracing it as a powerful act of reclamation for those who inhabit it.[2]

2 All ethnographic notes that follow in this chapter are original excerpts drawn from field diaries and fragments of texts exchanged by the two researchers during their collaborative conversations. Originally written in Spanish, Italian, or French, these texts were translated and reworked through a shared process of dialogue and co-writing. The notes take multiple forms in the chapter: some run along the right margin, recalling the edges of a notebook, while others – particularly those in poetic form – flow across the centre of the page in wave-like patterns. Their creative and, at times, poetic presentation reflects a conscious choice to move beyond conventional academic writing.

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Ethnographic note 1: conversations in my head with Alzandúa

"Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them". (Alzandúa 1987, 3)

I know that borders are imaginary places, but as I climb that steep hill, the words of the taxi driver echo in my head. "Be careful, they'll rob you here, you're *gringa*". I glance at my reflection in a store window without drawing too much attention. I'm very *gringa*, there's not much I can do to hide my appearance. At first, the educators and children will constantly remind me of it. Soon after, there's no distinction anymore, no boundary marking the limits of safety. The territory and the community become home.

"The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the *mulato*, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'". (1987, 3)

After three hours of public transport, I arrive in the neighbourhood, exhausted. The landscape is both beautiful and unsettling. There's a bright green lagoon from which rises a neighbourhood made of bare brick. Trash everywhere. Men and women unloading huge bags of recyclable material from large trucks. The smell from the sewage system is unbearable. The dust kicked up by the trucks, cars, and motorcycles speeding down the unpaved streets makes the air unbreathable. Dogs and sheep steal food from the garbage. "I'm looking for the white church, I think it is near the Oasis neighbourhood. I came last week, but I can't find the way". The recycler looks at me, puzzled by my presence, and calls his wife, "Come, *mami*, it's not this way, I'll show you".

"Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot". (1987, 3)

Enter, I dare to suggest – especially in a time when spaces of care are scarce, where dreaming feels fragile, and imagining true alternatives to the world we have inherited grows ever more elusive.

Enter, I have been accepted, nourished with food, dried after heavy downpours, teased, coloured, hit by balls, gently politicised, taught historical notions, educated, and loved.

When I had to leave, at the end of my ethnographic period, I felt vulnerable. One of the educators gave me a book about Popular Education. I cried all my tears.

The geographical margin thus becomes a pedagogical laboratory, a new epistemological lens, and a creative space for the sociologist herself, who must navigate a dense web of re-significations, challenging prior expectations, concepts, and methodologies. I consider the margin as a creative space for the ethnographer herself, where the resistances and oppressions of its inhabitants enable the emergence of new languages, forms of writing, and forms of investigation. It becomes, within ethnographic research, a space of possibility where collective creation fosters the collective decolonization of ethnographic sensibilities and invites the ethnographer to move beyond academia.

The same ethnographic methodology got out of my hands and daily improvisation played a crucial role. The fieldwork extended beyond the boundaries of educational projects, encompassing all the experiences that life in the margin offered me, while seeking a transformative practice that merges research with political commitment – *en busca de un método*/looking for a method, as Colombian sociologist Fals Borda described it (2015). Therefore, my role as an ethnographer was constantly redefined through relationships with those who inhabit these spaces daily. The communities and educators I encountered fostered both political and personal growth; on this path, children I worked with played a key role in my transformation from ethnographer to educator.

Once again, I draw on Lugones' insights, understanding playfulness as a way of knowing, being known, and learning through diversity – a means, in the words of the Argentine philosopher, to 'travel worlds'. In the field, play became a vital bridge to connection, offering a unique entry point into communities and their dynamics. It was far easier to integrate into spaces where daily engagement unfolded through games, sports, hands-on workshops, and caregiving practices. Play also allowed me to relinquish control. With its ability to dismantle imposed structures, play reshapes meanings, emotions, and interactions, prevented me from being confined to fixed roles or a sense of detachment. It led me to reconsider the very nature of research, dissolving the artificial boundaries between academic objectivity, personal experience, political activism, and practices of care:

> Playfulness, at its core, embraces a willingness to be a fool – a mindset that involves letting go of concerns about competence, rejecting self-importance, questioning established norms, and finding wisdom and joy in ambiguity and contradiction. A playful attitude is, therefore, defined by openness: openness to surprise, to embracing foolishness, to reshaping oneself, and to reimagining the worlds we inhabit through play. (Lugones 1987, 17)

Ethnographic note 2: Confusion 1

I don't know what I'm doing anymore. For the past few months, every Friday I've spent two hours watching children's movies. I've taken salsa lessons. I've also gotten punched in the face and insulted by a 6-year-old. Everything's fine. Every Thursday, I help a child with his homework, and I still can't make him understand why he should write on the lines and not on the edges of the page. The other day, they nearly destroyed the library after I let them colour with their hands to express their emotions. One of them poured an entire jar of dirty water over the other's head. When I went to the bathroom to dry him off, two siblings had painted all the tiles with black paint. I took part in a workshop to make podcasts. Tomorrow, I'll make pizza for 30 children.

Everything is out of control, but at the same time, it feels like I've found the best way to be, to exist, to help, to do research.

Ethnographic note 3: Playfulness

The friendship with the educators and the daily care of the children are making ethnography a joyful experience. Children have the ability to remove masks; you arrive in the field as a stranger, and in less than 10 minutes, you're rolling in the grass or answering a barrage of questions after which there's little left to say about yourself. They reveal you before you can construct a different version of yourself. Can an ethnographer pretend to be a rabbit? Does an ethnographer know how to draw a dolphin? Should I remind everyone that I'm there to do research? Play is part of my field, it lets me enter imagined and unimagined realities, it allows me to be known for who I am, freeing me from external impositions. If that day the game is to pick as many flowers as possible, I'll pick as many flowers as I can. It doesn't matter if the ethnographic notes will reflect my obvious defeat.

Also, throughout the fieldwork, I realised that the guiding concepts I had initially chosen – such as Popular Education, community, margin, and resistance – were insufficient to fully capture the complexity of the projects I was engaging with. The margin continually elaborated the senses of what is education, what is a community, what is political, what is resistance. Definitions changed continuously for one year and a half. It is important to note that the projects I have identified as the focus of this investigation are neither clearly nor unequivocally definable as projects of Popular Education. In Colombia, the word commonly used to describe these initiatives is *proceso*. A simple metaphor that nonetheless encapsulates the indeterminacy and continuous evolution of actions – eluding fixed definitions, unfolding

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within contradictions. A *proceso* is something always in motion, a constant reworking of elements that draw from past practices, engage with present elaborations, and move toward future objectives.

Bell hooks critiques the way those from privileged backgrounds perceive the margin as a passive object of study, failing to recognise or learn from the lived experiences and resistance of those who inhabit it through continuous engagement. In her reflections on the feminist movement, whose practices also shape our ethnographies, she argues that true revolution requires a liberatory praxis in which everyone must actively participate. Such a transformation can only take shape through the recognition and integration of the experiences of those who endure oppression at the margins, ensuring their active role in both theory-making and political action (1984, 161).

Ethnographic note 3: confusion 2

We spent three whole days painting all the pots and sawing with the children. Less than a week later, someone damaged them by writing stupid phrases or scribbling with a black spray can. We gathered everything up, cleaned the entire area, and put up a big sign that said *no tiren basura porfa* (please don't throw trash). While we were picking up the last bits, a man came and dumped an entire cart of broken furniture at the feet of one of the educators. "You need to stop with this nonsense". This is a true story. How can they not understand that it's an open space for the children? That this is a Popular school? That it is/exists for the benefit of all? I suspend judgment. I can't understand. A deep breath. I won't include this story in my thesis because, honestly, what could I even say? How would I present it with the necessary analysis?

To critically approach the subjects and understand the struggles that characterise the margins, I drew inspiration from Gutierrez's practice, which suggests "learning about struggles through the struggles themselves" (2013). This involves reflecting on and from their inherent instability – that is, starting from their contradictions – while keeping in mind the idea of understanding cultural and social processes as a dynamic mosaic of overlapping and interdependent antagonisms. In the margins, oppressive structures do not function in isolation, nor are they imposed solely by the centre; rather, they operate interdependently. The margin itself – far from being an idealised space, "where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as 'pure'" (hooks 1989, 21) – is deeply contested, shaped by internal tensions and daily struggles. Political movements and projects seeking change often faced resistance and were not always universally embraced as beneficial for the territory. Communities,

too, can internalise and perpetuate racist, misogynistic, and colonial behaviours within their own spaces.

The margin is thus a space that can never be romanticised; realizing this required critically examining the impact of my own social, cultural, and personal background on my approach to the ethnographic field. It was equally crucial to understand how this background influenced what I observed, interpreted, and analysed in the realities I encountered. Often, the complexities of the territories, the internal conflicts within communities, the difficulties faced by the children I interacted with, and the reasons behind certain pedagogical choices were difficult to fully grasp. This was partly due to the expectations and imaginaries I brought with me to the territories, which sometimes did not align with the realities of the field, and partly due to the need to delve deeper into issues that remained unclear.

Responding to the imperatives of integrating subaltern voices and practice and adopt a decolonial reflexive approach, it was central to understand my *lugar de fala* (place of speech), as articulated by Ribeiro (2017). This concept does not confine individuals to speaking solely from their own lived experiences or social group; rather, it emphasises the importance of recognizing one's social position – whether privileged or marginalised – when engaging in discussions, as it shapes the way social realities are perceived and interpreted. For ethnography, this translates into a 'politics of location', a critical awareness of one's positionality within the structures of knowledge production. Crucially, recognizing diverse experiences and perspectives across different 'loci of speech' allows for a move beyond universalist frameworks, creating space for alternative ways of knowing and understanding reality. A fundamental part of the ethnographic field was thus built through misunderstandings or partial understandings. In this, I share how the relational ontological proposals of de Castro and de la Cadena, who oppose approaches that treat difference as a result of incommensurable cultural perspectives. Entering the heterogeneous logics of daily life implies inhabiting and being ready for misunderstandings and ambiguities – what de Castro defines as "different positions of perspective" (2004, 5) – and practicing what de la Cadena calls "ontological openings", slowing down our interpretative frameworks (2007, 6). As a result, my perspective was fundamentally unfinished. Yet it was this very incompleteness that made it flexible, responsive, and constantly reshaped within specific space-time contexts, actively embodying a 'politics of location'.

Ethnographic note 4: Memories that count

If I think about my ethnography now, I barely mention academia and success. I think of everything I have learned from my companions, to whom I owe a gentle, understanding, and open politicization, as well as a reconstruction of myself through an unprecedented community engagement. I think of all the children who made me vulnerable through games, drawings, and hours spent playing *ponchados*. I think of the battered territories I have experienced, which, as relational spaces, hosted the cultural and identity policies of the place. I think of the assemblies in which I participated silently, those in which I found the courage to speak up; I think of the *ollas comunitarias*, the *mingas* (collective cooking pots, community and volunteer workday), and the festivals; I think of the occupations and the reclaiming of space by marginalised children. That's because reflecting on these memories and bringing them back to an academic dimension is complex, as these are practices and knowledge that arise and impose themselves outside of institutionalised spaces of power and knowledge.

The practical and concrete actions undertaken by the community preceded and guided the development of broader theories or concepts, emerging from the community's *quehaceres* (practices and knowledge) that had already permeated the space, grounded in a shared and inclusive sense. As Lugones argues, it is not about understanding and conducting research on "theorised possibilities", but about learning from the "lived possibilities" articulated in intimate daily life of the margin (2005, 70). Entering the margins requires the ethnographer to actively participate in struggles – both personally, through self-deconstruction, and collectively, by learning to embrace love. Bell hooks writes:

> Acknowledging the truth of our reality, both individual and collective, is a necessary stage for personal and political growth. This is usually the most painful stage in the process of learning to love. […] Choosing love we also choose to live in community, and that means that we do not have to change by ourselves. We can count on critical affirmation and dialogue with comrades walking a similar path. (hooks 1994, 295-6)

The social dimension of resistance plays a fundamental role because, as Lugones notes, society constantly relegates individuals to a state of deep isolation, hindering and making impossible any attempt at collective creativity and shared construction (Lugones 1992, 36). As researchers, it is our duty to act to promote and participate in

collective resistance, overcoming academic isolation and considering research as a process of practical-theoretical co-construction based on alliances where the community is the ultimate beneficiary. To this end, I have decentralised my academic project, weaving together ethnography, activism, care, love and friendships as mutually reinforcing elements, seamlessly integrating them. While invocating love in the ethnographic field may seem like romanticization, if understood in Lugones' terms, love becomes "a way of taking responsibility", a means "of practicing not being condemned to oppress others" – an essential approach for any researcher (2003). Thus, research expands beyond the confines of academia, evolving into a renewed political practice that reinvents ethnography as an educational process grounded in a socio–praxis that is territorialised, situated, and contextualised within vulnerable realities.

Ethnographic note 5 – Care

I packed some photographs; they are a precious gift. I placed them inside the book on Popular Education methodologies. Of all those written methodologies, they didn't mean much to me. These photographs, on the other hand, captured the essence of what Popular Education is.

Me adjusting the tie on Mr. Cement's puppet with C.
A little girl eating *sancocho* sitting on my legs.
When we reopened the school in April and we were only 4 educators.
Me with my face covered in red paint, holding a paintbrush during a *minga*.
The last photo with some children before the migration through the Darien border.
The group photo from Carnival. There are so many of us that I don't even recognise myself.
Another little girl placing her feet on mine to walk together, in balance.

4 Interrogating In-Betweenness: Defining Spaces of Margin from the Centre, Geneva – Switzerland

My research focuses on how racism has been challenged over time in Switzerland. Specifically, it examines how trade unions and militant spaces have responded to migrant workers' struggles from the 1970s to the present. Switzerland constitutes an especially compelling case study, as its history – almost always portrayed as neutral and positioned outside of global affairs – has only recently entered academic reflection on race (dos Santos Pinto et al. 2022). Yet the country supposed neutrality has played a crucial role in concealing

the enduring processes of racialization and exclusion within Swiss society.

Postcolonial and decolonial theories, taken together, offer critical insights into these continuities between past and present. They invite us to understand colonialism not as a closed historical chapter, but as an ongoing structure that informs current institutional practices, discourses, and forms of governance. Their lens help illuminate how racialised labour regimes, exclusionary national imaginaries, and discursive strategies of innocence persist in shaping Swiss public and political life.

However, these critical perspectives often remain abstract or fail to meaningfully enter Swiss public debate. Racism is still widely framed as a relic of the past or the result of individual ignorance, rather than as a systemic and structural phenomenon. In both institutional and public arenas, it is frequently reduced to outdated ideology or personal prejudice, rather than recognised as an entrenched system of power. In this sense, Alana Lentin argues that deflection, distancing, and denial – the three D's, as she terms them – are key to understanding dominant European narratives. These discursive strategies have contributed to concealing Switzerland's – like that of its neighbours' – historical role in colonial projects and to obscuring the material and symbolic manifestations of racism that persist to this day.

Ethnographic Museum

Read the descriptions –
Don't leave.
Stay here.
Look at us.
Look at where we come from.
Feel the superiority that rises,
In having us here, taken.
Now step into the rooms,
Meet the artists through their work.
Feel the nexus –
Between what has been and what is still.

The ethnographic museum, often viewed as a metaphor for colonial legacy, is in fact its concrete manifestation – a material site where bodies, objects, and imaginaries have been displaced, reordered, and aestheticised under the guise of knowledge and cultural appreciation. It stages a persistent tension: one of representation shadowed by erasure, fascination intertwined with domination. This dynamic – where visibility masks denial, and historical violence slips into contemporary disavowal – mirrors broader discursive

mechanisms in the Swiss context, where national narratives continue to obscure the country's historical complicity.

In this light, the specificity of the Swiss narrative becomes particularly striking when examined through the lens of 'margins' – a term often used to describe Switzerland's supposed peripheral position within the global colonial and imperial project (Fischer-Tiné, Purtschert 2015). While Switzerland is frequently portrayed as marginal or neutral, its deep entanglement in transnational colonial networks and informal power structures complicates this portrayal.

Recent scholarship on postcolonial Switzerland reveals that the concept of marginality itself functions as a discursive strategy – one that reinforces national innocence. This is especially noteworthy given Switzerland's geographic and political location at the heart of Europe. The use of the term 'margin' creates an illusion of distance from colonial power, when in reality, as the text *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins* (2015) compellingly demonstrates, the country was deeply involved in colonial processes. Switzerland contributed to and benefited from colonialism through its economic networks, scientific institutions, and cultural imaginaries, despite lacking formal colonies. In view of this, marginality is not a marker of disengagement, but a rhetorical device that obscures complicity and sustains a myth of exceptionalism.

Switzerland's involvement in colonialism was multifaceted. Missionaries and religious institutions supported colonial expansion; Swiss mercenaries served in imperial armies; individuals and families profited from slavery and colonial trade; and financial institutions channelled those profits back into the national economy. Moreover, Swiss academia played a central role in developing and legitimizing racial science and eugenics, providing intellectual scaffolding for colonial hierarchies.

The limited academic and public engagement with race as a category of social analysis in Switzerland must be understood in the context of this carefully curated narrative of neutrality and innocence (Salamat 2024). As recent studies have shown, such discourse enables the country to sidestep critical conversations about its colonial entanglements. If we recognise the postcolonial era not as a rupture but as a period in which colonial violence – symbolic, discursive, and material – has been reconfigured rather than dismantled, then Switzerland must be acknowledged as part of this ongoing history. The cultural legacy of colonialism remains palpable: representations, commodities, and imaginaries tied to colonial power continue to permeate Swiss society.

James Baldwin's reflections in "Stranger in the Village" (1953) – written during his stay in the Swiss village of Leukerbad – offer a powerful lens through which to understand these dynamics. In this

deeply prescient essay on race, whiteness, and belonging, Baldwin writes:

> Yet they move with an authority which I shall never have; and they regard me, quite rightly, not only as a stranger in the village but as a suspect latecomer, bearing no credentials, to everything they have – however unconsciously – inherited. [...]These people cannot be, from the point of view of power, strangers anywhere in the world; they have made the modern world, in effect, even if they do not know it. (Baldwin 1955, 165)

Although written over seventy years ago, Baldwin's insight continues to resonate today. It speaks not only to the historical construction of whiteness and power in Switzerland, but also to the ongoing ways in which authority, exclusion, and racialised belonging are negotiated in contemporary Swiss society. His words confront us with the enduring legacies of colonialism and challenge the notion that the Swiss context is somehow exceptional or disconnected from broader global histories of domination. Baldwin's village is not just a metaphor of the past – it is a mirror held up to the present.

Eloquence Contest

A room full of people,
An Arab man in a suit is on the stage.
"No colonies, no racism",
His title echoes.
"Look at the name of our streets", he says,
"Our parks, our buildings –
Here lies your colonial, racist heritage,
Hidden in plain sight,
Celebrated in the names we speak
Without knowing. We must know from now.

Public discourse – especially when delivered in polished, official settings – can often serve to conceal more than it reveals. Declarations of neutrality, condemnations of violence, or proclamations of national innocence become part of a rhetorical performance that masks deeper continuities of power and exclusion. In spaces where historical accountability is resisted and where colonial entanglements remain unacknowledged, even the language of critique can be absorbed into the machinery of denial. But when such performances falter, they sometimes expose the cracks – the moments when what is hidden in plain sight begins to speak.

These cracks in the façade of Swiss neutrality are not just abstract but appear in the concrete gestures of the state. One such fissure in the surface is the 2003 official recognition of slavery and the slave

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trade as crimes against humanity. At the same time, however, the Swiss Confederation reasserted its distance from colonial history, citing its lack of formal colonies and its long-standing neutrality. This gesture allowed the state to position itself as external to the structures of colonialism and racism, thus reinforcing a self-referential narrative of exceptionality – one seemingly outside the circuits of global responsibility (Purtschert, Falk, Lüthi 2016, 290).

To make sense of these rifts, we need concepts that go beyond surface gestures. As Mellino reminds us, echoing Césaire, the white Eurocentric gaze often falls into a "discursive procedure of (self-)absolution" (Mellino in Césaire 2020, 7-8). This self-cleansing gesture, where states symbolically acknowledge the violence of the past while simultaneously erasing their implication in its afterlives, is a defining feature of what Aníbal Quijano calls 'coloniality'.

In this sense, there is an urgent need to interrogate the language and frameworks that sustain these dynamics. The way history is told and the vocabulary used to describe power relations play a crucial role in shaping collective memory and political discourse. As Braidotti argues:

> Ethics is the other way around the vicious circle of language. It consists in unveiling this complex and paradoxical political economy and exploring its complexity and inner contradictions. To the extent that a text enacts the nexus of power and meaning, power and discourse of which it is composed, it both exposes and holds them to accountability. (Braidotti 2014, 165)

Interrogating language is thus not a mere academic exercise but a political necessity – one that allows us to unravel the interpretative frameworks that legitimise exclusion and invisibilization. In the case of Switzerland, the dominant discourse surrounding race reflects this complexity. While Swiss national narratives often avoid explicit discussions of racism and segregation, terms like 'xenophobia' are frequently used to address issues of exclusion and discrimination, particularly regarding racialised people, migrant workers, asylum seekers, or the Muslim community. This choice of language reflects broader European tendencies to frame racial dynamics through cultural fear, as noted by scholars like Alana Lentin (2011). The persistence of such language has helped to obscure the historical roots of these social divisions, even as Switzerland's demographic composition has quickly evolved. Today, over 40% of the Swiss population has a migratory background, and in cities like Geneva, this proportion exceeds 65%.

Although Switzerland did not experience postcolonial migratory flows on the same scale or in the same form as former colonial powers such as France or the United Kingdom, its migration policies since

the post–World War II period have consistently produced racialised hierarchies. These hierarchies are organised around national origin, skin colour, and perceived cultural proximity, shaping access to labour, social rights, and political participation in deeply unequal ways.

The construction of 'Swissness' – closely tied to whiteness – has been actively maintained through formal and informal mechanisms that reward assimilation and cultural conformity while punishing visible difference. For many migrants and racialised individuals, integration becomes a process of 'performing whiteness': adopting linguistic, cultural, and behavioural norms coded as 'Swiss' in order to gain conditional acceptance (Cretton 2018). This performance, however, rarely results in full belonging. Instead, it reinforces whiteness as the unmarked and invisible standard of citizenship and nationhood.

At the same time, Swiss public discourse often frames multiculturalism as a positive, liberal value – a celebration of diversity that supposedly reflects the country's openness. Yet this form of surface multiculturalism tends to function depolitically, emphasizing folkloric or culinary diversity while leaving structural racism and historical inequalities unaddressed. By promoting a harmonious image of coexistence, it erases the power dynamics and exclusions that underpin national identity. In this way, the discourse of multiculturality can obscure race altogether, denying the systemic forms of discrimination that shape the everyday realities of racialised communities in Switzerland.

When the veneer of harmony shatters, the fault lines of exclusion become undeniable. The cracks appear most visibly in the rise of Islamophobia: the 2009 minaret ban and the 2021 face-veil prohibition. These political campaigns, often framed in terms of secularism, security, or gender equality, function as racializing tools that construct Muslims as culturally incompatible and fundamentally outside the bounds of 'Swiss' identity. Islam in these contexts is not just a religion but a racialised category, and such measures legitimise exclusion while reinforcing a national self-image grounded in whiteness, homogeneity, and moral superiority.

At a Conference

He stood and spoke
"Hello Hello" – he said.
"I condemn violence –
Of Course! I am neutral and apolitical.
This is why I'll ask
A neutral and apolitical question –
Though still a little personal.
I am Swiss,
I grew up in Switzerland.
Strangely, a joyfully childhood
In a land where I was told we were good –
Not like the racists French.
My Moroccan dad told me I was lucky,
For here, colonial logics were left behind
So, yes, I had a happy childhood".
"Later, I studied –
to become more curious
To learn about the world here and beyond.
Today I am sad.
Any idea?"

"The answer?
Militant spaces and common struggle"

For bell hooks, the margin is not simply a place of exclusion, but a space of radical possibility – a site of resistance, where oppositional worldviews are nurtured through the everyday struggle against systems of domination. It is not pure, nor outside the reach of power, but shaped by historical and relational complexities. As hooks writes, the margin is "a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist" (hooks 2015, 150). It is precisely because the margin exists in tension with the centre that it holds transformative potential. It is a space from which dominant narratives can be questioned, identities reimagined, and collective forms of solidarity and struggle can emerge.

In a context like Switzerland – where 'racelessness' often prevails, and neutrality is valorised as a moral and political ideal – talking about race and racism becomes not only difficult but frequently delegitimised. The dominant discourse works to erase the language, the history, and the visibility of racialised experience. This erasure raises a critical question: Where, then, can resistance take place? Where are the margins from which an alternative politics can emerge?

The poem ends with an answer: "Militant spaces and common struggle". These words name a direction, if not yet a destination. In light of bell hooks' framework, the "militant spaces" invoked are not just physical sites, but relational and imaginative ones – places forged in resistance and sustained by shared struggle.

In this spirit, focusing on trade unions becomes a deliberate and critical choice. Historically, unions have been imagined as militant collectives – spaces where workers gathered to resist exploitation, demand dignity, and fight for structural change. In many national myths of resistance, they occupy the heart of the political margin. And yet, in contemporary Switzerland, these spaces have become increasingly institutionalised, professionalised, and embedded within a welfare logic that can blunt their radical edge. Today, unions often struggle to engage meaningfully with the lived experiences of racialised and migrant workers. The margins risk becoming rhetorical – divorced from the material struggles they were meant to represent.

Ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with trade unionists – many of whom come from migrant backgrounds – reveal that trade unions often fall short of expectations as spaces of resistance. Workers frequently perceive unions as service-oriented institutions rather than political collectives, and the emotional solidarity forged through struggle tends to emerge only in the context of specific labour disputes. These moments, however, are typically isolated and of limited duration; they do not reflect a broader vision of trade unions as politically transformative or revolutionary forces.

The historical development of Swiss trade unionism helps explain many of these dynamics. Since the late 1930s, labour relations have been shaped by a model of social partnership – an institutional arrangement in which employers and employees negotiate collective work conventions aimed at minimizing conflict. This system, known as the 'peace of work', positions unions as mediators within a framework of class collaboration, rather than as antagonistic actors in class struggle as envisioned in Marxist theory. Within this logic, militancy is not absent, but it is managed, often redirected toward bureaucratic negotiation rather than collective mobilisation.

This institutional history sheds light on the ambivalent experiences of many workers – and trade unionists themselves – within these spaces. The paradox of visibility and invisibility, formality and fragility, reflects the tension between what these spaces promise and what they deliver. And yet, this does not mean they are empty.

Drawing inspiration from Braidotti's 'politics of location', the research moved towards micro-narratives to explore how subtle and often invisible forms of daily opposition are experienced by workers and trade unionist. This led the investigation to look at how individuals navigate between resistance and oppression, expressing themselves outside official spaces and through alternative means.

Through the narratives and personal stories of militants and trade unionists, I had the opportunity to explore multiple political paths where political work is continuously shaped 'in-tension' by experiences beyond institutional frameworks. Many trade unionists

today come from academic backgrounds, and their individual perspectives are influenced by past militant engagements, personal emotional or generational frameworks, and a strong desire to actively contribute to political change. However, as trade unions often struggle to define the contours of emotional communities within a broader political project, frustration emerged as a recurring theme in my ethnographic fieldwork.

The gap between expectation and institutional reality is not always immediately visible. It is often articulated elsewhere – across different times and spaces – through laughter, pleasure, or moments of shared joy that help carry the emotional complexity of daily labour. These fleeting encounters do not erase the weight of institutional limits, but they offer small acts of endurance and connection that make collective political life possible.

Out

Let's meet outside,
Loud music,
Wine and smiles.
Most spoken word:
'Tired'
Do you want to register?
No –
I'll write about it later.

If the politics of emotions are a key factor in understanding the history of politics, then individual and collective perspectives, shaped by shared experiences, become essential in grasping specific political structures and landscapes. If one were to map the trajectories of trade unionists, tracing the individual paths that lead them into other political spaces, the resulting map would reveal a highly complex network. These pathways could be seen as both personal and social bridges, where political possibilities converge. The limitations that arise within institutional spaces could, in this context, be interpreted as 'gaps', in the sense expressed by Sack, Meier and Bürgisser:

> Gaps need not be intimidating entities but opportunities, a third space or an in-between space where ideas can be explored and celebrated outside of the limitations set by particular social standards. (Sack, Meier, Bürgisser 2025, 27)

While the author's reflection focuses on the role of performative arts in social change, it offers an intriguing lens through which to examine new spaces of inquiry – ones that illuminate communities of practice operating beyond traditional and fixed institutions.

Within spaces where different subjectivities intersect and navigate between institutional and non-institutional realms, feminist strike collectives have emerged as particularly significant sites of inquiry for historical, social, and political research on antiracist discourse and practices.

The feminist strike collectives that autonomously organise across various Swiss locations trace their origins to the historic women strike of 1991. A decade earlier, in 1981, Switzerland had voted to adopt Article 4.2 of the Constitution, which enshrined gender equality. However, by 1991, it had become evident that political and economic institutions had failed to implement the promised changes. On June 14 of that year, a wave of protest swept across the country as thousands of women took to the streets to demand concrete action. This unprecedented strike, led by trade unionists in alliance with the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes* (MLF), mobilised a significant portion of the population, reaching beyond traditional militant and political spaces to create new sites of solidarity, collective action, and resistance. Nearly three decades later, on June 14, 2019, the feminist strike returned with renewed force: 500,000 people responded to the call issued by women within the Swiss Trade Union Federation, determined to bring gender equality back to the centre of public debate (Federici et al. 2020).

A Look at the Past

"Do you know the meaning of striking in Switzerland?
Do you know what brought us here?
We'll tell you.
Look at the pictures –
You might recognise us.
We were there
Now we need to understand,
And organise
The next strike is coming".
In the room, everyone was listening.

While deeply rooted in past struggles, the contemporary movement also aligns with broader feminist, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist mobilizations, emphasizing the intersecting forms of violence experienced by marginalised bodies. Today, the feminist strike remains a crucial counter-power within the Swiss political landscape, though its relationship with trade unions remains complex. While unions provide institutional legitimacy to the strike, their function as spaces of negotiation within the labour market also imposes certain constraints on the movement.

Today, the Feminist Strike disrupts entrenched union structures, challenging their deeply rooted patriarchal and paternalist

foundations. Activists are transforming these arenas into spaces of intergenerational dialogue, introducing rituals of solidarity that bypass traditional hierarchies, and advocating for greater representation of racialised, queer, and LGBTQ+ workers. In doing so, they reimagine unions not as mere service providers or sites of compromise, but as crucibles of collective power – places where diverse struggles converge and new political imaginaries emerge. Yet this transformation unfolds in tension. As feminist representatives work within union bodies, they must continually confront and unsettle the patriarchal logics that still shape Swiss trade unionism.

Unbelievable

"I'm so angry, I am crying", she says.
"Why do they feel the need to speak for us?
We speak, and they speak after us –
So white, so men, so cis".

"The strike is our victory –
They didn't care to support,
And now they are "proud".

"Fucking paternalists"

For me, these collectives did not only represent sites of resistance – they became spaces of learning, experimentation, and methodological reorientation. Engaging with them shifted my position as a researcher and allowed me to experience fieldwork from a place that felt freer, more collaborative, and deeply feminist.

Bell hooks' reflections on the margin were instrumental in reframing both the practice of fieldwork and the contours of political inquiry. Her work offered not only a theoretical perspective but also a methodological provocation, leading me to occupy this place of in-betweenness – where the friction between institutional and non-institutional forms of resistance becomes a generative force. Within trade unionist contexts, this meant witnessing how feminist critiques continuously reworked dominant narratives, particularly around the intersecting violences that structure contemporary social life. Within the collective, it meant trying to grasp the multiplicity of experiences that produce, both personally and collectively, a critical space from which visible actions are formulated to interrogate and challenge our societies.

My methodological approach thus emerged as a layered and responsive practice: grounded in in-depth interviews, militant narratives, participant observation, informal conversations, and a steady accumulation of fieldnotes. These notes were never merely documentation; they became spaces of reflexive engagement, where I attempted to trace the rhythm, texture, and contradictions of

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everyday political work – including its silences, affective resonances, and incompleteness. They also prompted me to constantly rethink how I translated lived realities onto the page.

By placing these methods in conversation, the research sought to remain faithful to the complexity of movements that inhabit the margins – not as static spaces of exclusion, but as dynamic sites of experimentation, contestation, and potential transformation.

The margins have thus shifted beyond trade unions, towards new and unconventional spaces where people come together, engage in dialogue, and bring struggles back to the streets – struggles that lie at the heart of both individual and collective resistance. It is precisely within these spaces, shaped by diverse subjectivities, that questions of whiteness and racism emerge. In fact, it is important to acknowledge that feminist strike collectives remain predominantly white, with limited representation of racialised individuals. Since 2019, addressing this systemic reality has been a persistent concern. The Feminist Strike, as a movement that defines itself as anti-racist and intersectional, strives to challenge existing structures both in discourse and in practice. At the same time, the necessity of developing new practices of solidarity – ones that do not replicate existing forms of dominance – remains an open and ongoing challenge, as

> The centres proliferate in a fragmented manner but lose none of their powers of domination. The conclusion is clear: it is important to resist the uncritical reproduction of sameness on a planetary scale. (Braidotti 2014, 178)

Recognizing this dynamic turns spaces such as the feminist collectives into a strategic starting point for resistance – a space where dominant structures can be questioned, redefined, and ultimately, disrupted. Through experiences of political engagement with other social and political actors, this question presents itself as a 'margin' in the sense of a space of resistance, political re-elaboration, and openness to new alliances.

Answer the Questions: We'll Make Clouds of Words

Our own.
What does feminism mean to you?
Sorority, struggle, care, power.
What would be your ideal feminist collective?
Dialogue, solidarity, diversity, transformation.
What is missing?
Non-white voices, more or them,
moments of profound discussion... a library!

The clouds appear on the table,
Linked to one another,
never unfold in solitude,
in the space we share.

In the context of feminist strike collectives, the words that come out in these counter-power spaces enter the public sphere whenever these collectives make statements. Though predominantly white, the collectives remain aware of their positionality and continually interrogate their own limitations. They refuse to reproduce welfarist attitudes and instead challenge the political landscape, engaging in performative acts that seek to expose systemic violence and raise awareness. By choosing to disrupt dominant discourses in this way, the collectives play a crucial role in pushing for a more inclusive political conversation within what Bhabha (1994) terms the "third space".

Bhabha (1994) describes this space as an ambivalent site of cultural encounter – one that both resists and negotiates with dominant power structures. As Jefferess (2008) argues, this in-between space is not simply a site of failure for colonial narratives but one where they are actively transformed in politically meaningful ways. Here, the totalizing force of the coloniser's authority is disrupted, creating a gap between expectation and response – one that destabilises fixed binaries and produces alternative modes of subjectivity. However, while Bhabha's framework highlights the discursive dimensions of resistance, it is crucial to consider how this negotiation interacts with material struggles. Without addressing the economic and institutional inequalities that persist within postcolonial and neoliberal contexts, the third space risks becoming a purely theoretical construct. This suggests that the third space is not an evenly shared site of negotiation but rather one that is, as Parry (2004) puts it, 'differentially occupied'.

The experience of diaspora, for example, is not homogeneous, especially in multicultural cities such as Geneva. It varies significantly depending on one's legal status, occupation, gender, and class. Second – or third-generation immigrants, skilled immigrants, undocumented workers, and students may navigate the third space in radically different ways, and these differences must be taken into account when analysing the process of cultural negotiation. In short, while Bhabha's framework is valuable for highlighting hybridity and the deconstruction of binaries, it fails to fully address the unequal power dynamics that shape lived experiences within the third space, leaving gaps in its applicability to diverse postcolonial realities.

The ethnographic fieldwork that began within trade unions and later expanded into spaces that have distanced themselves from institutional frameworks has revealed the concreteness of these

limitations. At the same time, these spaces represent an interesting site of resistance, presenting themselves as spaces of continuous interrogation, where knowledge is acquired through collective participation and collaboration and where political choices are made as "a complex strategic operation of positioning" (Braidotti 2014, 168).

Tribunal's Court

A black girl is facing the judge.
White skin, nice suit, white silence.
In the room, the accusee –
Also white.
Also still.

Her voice cracks the air –
Maybe from fear,
Maybe from the echo of too many rooms
Where words like hers
Were trimmed down,
Made manageable,
Made small.

The judge leans in,
A voice polished with paternalism.
He speaks not to her,
But through her,
As if her body were a screen
For some old reel
Where Black girls don't think,
They only feel.

The room remains composed.
Inside it, the rage hums low –
A soft, militant tremor
In the bodies of women watching.

From twenties to eighties,
They sit quiet,
Bearing witness.
Each wrinkle, each gaze,
Is a testimony.

They shift forward in their seats,
Not to interrupt,
But to hold the ground steady.
The silence is full –
Charged with something that doesn't erupt,
But settles deep in the body.
Tension travels through glances,
Clenched jaws,
In the way hands are held still.

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In that room,
Rage was not rupturing –
It was binding.
A quiet solidarity,
Where the past stood with the present,
And the future listened.

This moment captured more than a scene – it revealed how deeply intergenerational expressions and reflections shape the terrain of resistance. It reminded us that what we inherit is not only memory, but ways of holding each other through struggle.

In conclusion, the micro-narratives and life stories of activists from various generations, in dialogue with the findings of my ethnographic study conducted among unions and the Feminist Strike Collective in Geneva, illuminate the tensions and emerging possibilities within these spaces of ongoing in-betweenness. Drawing from historical studies on trade unionism, feminism, and racism in Switzerland, this research has explored the creative, subjective, and political potential of these boundary experiences that both emerge from the individual and the collective. It presents the third space not as a site of complete decolonization but as a place where multiple subjectivities participate in a movement for transformation:

> an act of resistance against methodological nationalism and a critique of Euro-centrism from within. (Braidotti 2014, 179)

Ethnographic note: Sorority

There were four of us. We travelled to the outskirts of the city, to the neighbourhood where I was born and raised. There, we met with local women and others from a nearby asylum seeker centre. We talked about swimming pools.

In a country where racism and Islamophobia are disguised under words like fear, inadaptability, and hygiene, swimming pools become sites of exclusion, rather than sites of playfulness and conviviality.

We listened, we organised.

On 14 June, the collective will be there – for the liberation of the swimming pools!

5 'ConversA(c)tion': From 'World-Sensing' to 'World-Making'

Moving through the words we have shared has become as natural as the ebb and flow of waves crashing against the shore. Each time we retreat, we carry with us a little sand, a few fragments. Contaminated by our passage, traces of what we have touched remain with us, clouding and numbing us. I no longer see as I did before – your words create new currents, open new paths, and reshape concepts that remain tangled in my mind, blurring the certainties I had already set down on paper.

Do you remember?

In some way, we travel with each other, we blur the waters, like sand is carried by the sea.

we were lying down on the hammock,
suspended between thought and breath.

We took time –
time to rest,
time before the next note,
before the next sentence
would carry our weight again.

And then –
I slipped,
stepping into the cold water at our feet,
startled, laughing louder,
and the world turned
with a splash

It was time to go back to writing.
But something stayed.
The feeling of safety –
of being held.
We weren't alone in this.
Not then.
Not now.
It was our fall,
and our laughter.

Care

our rising into the next sentence.

Margins appear to me as unresolved and

always unresolving spaces.

Together.

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Through the feminist collective, I have come to see this as a central characteristic. People come and go, bringing their individuality and their ways of seeing the world. Militancy follows personal life paths – it pauses, shifts, and sometimes begins again. In a capitalist society that constantly drives us toward performance, we rarely allow ourselves to stop. The same happens in militancy – time is seldom acknowledged, though it should be. Here, however, I feel that it is.

I still remember it.

And I still feel that lightness today, between one sentence and the next. The laughter tucked between the words of a paper that wasn't flowing all that smoothly.
With you, I learn every day what it means to be part of a micro-collective of care.
Where I can't reach, you do.
There's no competition, only support. A gentle accompaniment toward a shared achievement.
Like when someone enters an unfamiliar territory and becomes part of it in the most spontaneous form of relation: by collaborating, by loving.
One stands for the other, to watch them fall and laugh together. To help them back up.

Conviviality.

People come and go, but through the contamination of those who pass through, the collective grows and expands its horizons.
An educator once told me that through their pedagogical actions and their practices of care and resistance with children, they were seeking a 'butterfly effect' on a global scale.
I hope we'll always be tickled by that wind stirred from the margins, a breeze that might one day become a revolutionary typhoon

Lugones refers to the practice of 'travelling' between worlds as "the shift from being one person to being a different person" (1987, 11), a necessary process for abandoning an arrogant perception of reality in favour of co-constructing it through generous and continuous collective dialogue. She introduces this figuration to emphasise how engaging with multiple perspectives helps us articulate alternative visions of justice and liberation rooted in the plurality within and around us (2003). This, in turn, reflects the existential message of 'crossing', as theorised by Jaqui Alexander. In *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2006) the Black scholar argues that the colonial project is based on the "division of things that belong together" (283); it has led us to treat emotions as distinct from politics, spirit as disconnected from activism, and the Self as independent from the Other and the community. The pedagogies she presents, which proved central in our individual and collective writings, aim to restore wholeness and heal these fractures through Black feminist methodologies. These methodologies call us to

> The urgent task of configuring new ways of being and knowing and to plot the different metaphysics that are needed to move away from living alterity premised in difference to living intersubjectivity premised in relationality and solidarity. (Alexander 2006, 7-8)

Essentially, it calls for a rethinking of how we relate to one another and to the world, moving from divisions toward a more integrated and cooperative way of being.

Of course, the margins we encountered in our respective fieldwork did not present themselves in ways that were easily comparable or parallel. Their concreteness, shaped by distinct geographies, histories, and political tensions, refused any simple mirroring. Yet it was precisely in reflecting on these divergences that our dialogue gained depth. The need to make sense of radically different experiences pushed us toward a shared act of subversion – a methodological and theoretical commitment not to return from the margins to the centre without first interrogating how those margins had transformed us. Our writing, then, became a space of rupture and refusal, where we could re-articulate what it means to know, to feel, and to express from the edges, without smoothing those edges to fit dominant epistemic frames.

When we began sharing our emotions from the ethnographic field, our focus shifted from linear, rational modes of writing to chaotic, poetic notes, where the self could express its movements while searching for a way to articulate its feelings. As we recount in "The Day We Discovered We Were Islands in an Archipelago" (2024), our ethnographic research began with a sense of disconnection – Elsa returning to Switzerland, Nabila moving to Colombia. Distance and

time zones made dialogue difficult, and as we entered the field, isolation and disorientation set in. Early on, we realised that sharing our experiences was not just valuable but essential. So, we began writing together in a shared document, exchanging emotions, doubts, and uncertainties. Over time, even without constant discussion, this document evolved into a dense and spontaneous web of creative expression shaped by the need for connection. Through this practice, writing and rewriting became central to the process itself. We used words not to fix meaning, but to move through it – to give voice to the vividness of our experiences and to the emotions that animated our time in the field.

We called 'con|fusion' the transition from initial isolation in the ethnographic field – marked by chaos and emotional intensity – to a space of shared experience through collective writing. It was in this context that we turned to the concept of 'tidalectics' – a term that mirrors the act of traveling, crossing, and navigating our visions. While dialectics has long served as the dominant framework for structuring modern thought – organizing the world through oppositional and separated categories – 'tidalectics' offers an alternative mode of thinking, one that embraces the dynamic, cyclical, and interwoven nature of reality. Coined by Barbadian poet and scholar Kamau Brathwaite (1999) in *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, 'tidalectics' draws inspiration from the fluid, rhythmic movements of water, proposing a mode of engagement that resists rigid binaries in favour of flux and relationality. For us, this concept was not merely metaphorical; it became a methodological orientation that shaped how we lived and how we wrote ethnography. We sought to incorporate its undulating patterns into our own experiences, allowing its aquatic sensibility to guide our approach to knowledge, representation, and lived practice.

'Tidalectics' challenges the idea that difference must always be fully legible or reducible to familiar categories. Instead, it advocates for a form of coexistence that respects singularity without demanding assimilation or absolute clarity. Drawing from Édouard Glissant's work and poetic, we embraced the opacity of the Other – a process that opens new ways of engaging with difference, while also challenging the colonial logic that conditions us to perceive identity through assimilation, transparency, or fixed categories. By doing so, we created a space for more nuanced and reciprocal forms of relation (Glissant 1997).

The acceptance of opacity, together with feminist and decolonial methodologies – such as those inspired by the concepts of 'crossing' and 'traveling' – offers us tools to articulate reality outside the dominant structures. This shift requires methodologies that bridge the gap between the mind and the body, emphasizing an embodied engagement with knowledge and language (Galeano 1989; Fals Borda

2015). In this sense, Mignolo's reflection on the differences between 'worldview' and 'world sensing' (2011, 275) is particularly relevant. The decolonial scholar criticises the concept of 'worldview' because, as a perspective rooted in the Western tradition, it privileges sight and dominant epistemological categories, reducing the understanding of the world to a single, limited vantage point. In contrast, he proposes the concept of 'world sensing', which embraces all senses and human affections. This broader and more inclusive approach invites us to consider the multitude of ways in which human beings perceive and understand reality, incorporating a wider range of cultural, emotional and epistemological perspectives.

Through the relationships we built, we integrated emotions and feelings – often dismissed in academia as non-rational – into our work, shaping our writing onto the page. Our texts took the form of a collective improvisation or rehearsal, as intended by Harney and Moten (2013). The value of rehearsal is to keep writing open, allowing space for experimentation and co-creation. Sharing our writing without fear of judgment allowed experience to emerge in its most natural, unfiltered form. This act of continuous 'ConversA(c)tion' gave us the space to articulate a marginality that mirrored the one we lived in our daily ethnographic practice. Our experiences collided and converged; our words – first in French, Italian, Spanish, and later in English – grew out of collaboration. Translation itself became a creative and emotional act: a shared process of rewriting and re-living our thoughts, one that brought us ever deeper into the felt texture of our daily encounters.

The goal was not to make the text closed or definitive but to keep it in a state of trial, like a theatrical or musical rehearsal, where elements are repeated and modified before a final version – one that will never truly arrive, always remaining incomplete, open to interpretations and further developments. In this way, texts are not a static product but present themselves as continuously evolving processes and social spaces (Harney, Moten 2013).

To write, think, and create collectively is to resist the isolating structures of the academy and to engage in a form of study that is not extractive but generative – one that is grounded in relation, responsibility, and transformation. This is not merely an academic exercise but a commitment to an ongoing process of unlearning and remaking, where knowledge is not possessed but shared, and where the work is never finished, only carried forward. The sense of coalition theorised and practiced by Harney and Moten for/with the 'undercommons' resonated strongly with our intentions. They emphasise that coalitions emerge from the recognition that the current system is harmful to all those involved, and that it is the recognition of shared struggles that is crucial, especially from a position of privilege.

While the work *Undercommons* critiques academia and institutions, its significance extends far beyond them. As Ferreira da Silva states in the foreword of *All Incomplete* "the undercommons is crucially about a sociality not based on the individual" (Ferreira da Silva 2021, 9). They embody a radical and dissident project of love that not only challenges but outright rejects dominant power structures, including institutionalised education. Functioning as both a practical framework and an aspirational vision, this concept invites a critical re-examination of traditional political paradigms while envisioning new forms of resistance. Rather than being bound by shared ownership of material resources or physical spaces, the 'undercommons' emerge from the deep, lived connections among those pushed to the margins. Instead of seeking recognition from the very system that has relegated them to the periphery, they embrace rupture – choosing not reform, but dismantlement. Their objective is to tear down the structures that constrain their ability to connect, organise, and create spaces of existence beyond imposed limitations. In this underground space of resistance, Moten and Harney conceptualise 'study' as "what you do with other people" (2013, 110).

It is within this spirit of radical relationality that our own collaboration found form. Though our writing styles were distinct, they began to speak to one another – responding, resonating, shaping a rhythm of mutual recognition. What emerged was not a single narrative but a movement between voices, an invisible yet palpable motion that bound our separate experiences into a shared whole. This was not just a method, but a way of relating – a form of 'study' grounded in care, trust, and a refusal to conform to rigid academic expectations.

This practice demanded a shift in how we approached knowledge production – not as an individual pursuit confined to rigid disciplinary boundaries, but as a collaborative process that values relationality over authority, multiplicity over singularity. It required embracing uncertainty and discomfort, allowing space for forms of knowing that do not fit within dominant epistemic frameworks. Writing – through 'world sensing' – became a means of 'world-making', a way to contest and reimagine the conditions that determine what is heard, seen, and valued.

Reflecting on Tuck and Yang's essay, it is reductive to treat decolonization as merely a discursive matter, confined to linguistic and stylistic choices. However, we argue that practicing an ethnography rooted in sharing and coalition – while embracing non-academic, emotional, and creative forms of representation – offers ways to resist this reduction.

We carved out our own margin within the academy, drawing on the insights of bell hooks. As she suggests, counter-languages and

alternative forms of writing serve as spaces of both self-decolonization and transformation – not only for those at the margins but for the centre as well. These counter-languages do not remain fixed at the periphery; rather, they have the potential to move toward the centre – not to assimilate, but to disrupt and reshape it – becoming powerful tools for both systemic and personal decolonization. In this sense, we reclaimed the margin as a generative space for our writing practices.

Through alternative ways of understanding and expressing the 'I' and the 'we' in a shared process that went way beyond theoretical abstraction and transformed in an actual act of 'becoming', we have come to understand that solidarity and sorority cannot simply be invoked as abstract ideals or rhetorical gestures. For these alliances to be meaningful, they must be rooted in an awareness of power, privilege, and historical context. They require learning together as an act of allowing ourselves to blur with the experience of the other forming micro-collectives of resistance.

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