LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

LJMU Research Online

Enriquez, J

Becoming-Story: a decolonial desire of a colonized 'I'

http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/25072/

Article

Citation (please note it is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work)

Enriquez, J (2024) Becoming-Story: a decolonial desire of a colonized 'I'. Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change, 4 (2). ISSN 2767-6013

LJMU has developed **LJMU Research Online** for users to access the research output of the University more effectively. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LJMU Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain.

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of the record. Please see the repository URL above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information please contact researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk

http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/

JASC
JOURNAL of
AWARENESS-BASED
SYSTEMS CHANGE

Volume 4, Issue 2, pp. 15-34
Copyright ©2024 Judith Enriquez
https://doi.org/10.47061/jasc.v4i2.8209
www.jabsc.org

Peer Review Article

Becoming-Story:

A Decolonised Desire of a Colonised 'I'

Judith Enriquez
School of Education, Liverpool John Moores University
judith.g.enriquez@gmail.com

Abstract
The pandemic disrupted a literacy project fully subjected to the discourse of community development, dominated by the English language. The disruption created an encounter with the potentiality of a different cartography—a new way of mapping literacies through reading the world and self, particularly as a colonised academic researcher engaged with decolonial theory. This article explores how concepts of the "I"—both as the individual and the modern subject—along with the notions of "voice" and "literacy," shape and condition ways of knowing. It gestures towards a decolonial approach to literacy—framed as "becoming story"—involving processes of becoming-imperceptible, becoming-minor-language, and becoming-land. The work serves as an invitation to be companion and kin to a different telling of stories in qualitative research.

Keywords
community, literacy, decoloniality, storytelling, Old Man Coyote

©2024 Judith Enriquez. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license. www.jabsc.org

Becoming-Story: A Decolonial Desire of a Colonized 'I'

The pandemic disrupted a literacy project fully subjected to the discourse of community development, dominated by the English language. This disruption led to an encounter with a potentiality of a different cartography—a new way of mapping literacies through reading the world and self, particularly as a colonised academic researcher engaged with decolonial theory. This article explores how concepts of the "I"—both as the individual and the modern subject—along with the notions of "voice" and "literacy," shape and condition ways of knowing. It gestures towards a decolonial approach to literacy—framed as "becoming story"—involving processes of becoming-imperceptible, becoming-minor-language, and becoming-land. The work serves as an invitation to be companion and kin to a different telling of stories in qualitative research.

Borrowed Story with a Borrowed Tongue

I came across *The Coyote's Story: Searching for the Bone Needle* from Jo-anne Archibald et al. (2019). I was gifted the story as a companion to help me attune to what had happened in a literacy project I had helped facilitate. The story created a space for me to think about research differently. I later describe the project as an 'I-script'—designed with all my research acumen and claimed academic experience—and then as a story, where 'I-literate' means little and *becoming-illiterate* matters more when I find I belong to a 'we' of more than human encounters and possibilities of literacy itself. First, the story from Archibald et al. (2019):

> Old Man Coyote (OMC) decided to go hunting for deer to replenish his food supplies. He packed his bag with his hunting and other gear. After a long, unsuccessful day of walking up hills and down valleys and through thick forest, with no deer in sight, he decided to set up camp for the night by starting a fire for his meal. After supper, he sat by the cozy warm fire and rubbed his tired feet from the long day's walk. He took his favourite moccasins out of his bag and noticed there was a hole in the toe of one of them. He looked for his special bone needle to mend the moccasin but couldn't feel it in the bag.
>
> Old Man Coyote started to crawl on his hands and knees around the fire, which was blazing by this time, to see if he could see or feel the needle. He went around and around the fire many times. Just then Owl landed next to OMC because he had watched OMC go round and round the fire. He asked OMC what he was looking for. Old Man Coyote told Owl his problem.
>
> Owl said that he would help his friend look for the bone needle. After he made one swoop around the area of the fire, he told Old Man Coyote that he didn't see the needle. Owl said that if it were around the fire, then he would have spotted it. He then asked

> OMC where he last used the needle. Old Man Coyote said that he used it quite far away, in the northern direction, to mend his jacket. Owl then asked OMC why he kept going round and round the campfire when the needle clearly was not there. Old Man Coyote replied, "Well, it's easier to look for the needle here because the fire gives off such good light, and I can see better here. (adapted slightly, Archibald, 2008, as cited in Archibald et al., 2019, pp. 2–3)

When I first read this story in Archibald et al. (2019), it spoke to me in the same way it spoke to Archibald in the early 1990's. She reflected on Old Man Coyote's circling the fire as a metaphor for the types of quantitative and qualitative research that we apply *on or about* others, often based solely on what we are accustomed to or what we know, without necessarily asking if our actions serve others with respect and without harm (Archibald et al., 2019). Like her, I thought the logic of Old Man Coyote's actions made sense to a colonized mind, an 'enlightened' and literate mind according to Western standards of reading and writing, most specifically in the English language.

I was schooled in a 'borrowed' language, English. Its words inhabit my mind more easily and naturally than Tagalog, the language of the country where I was born. My colonized mind demands clarity and rigor, illuminated and certain in its seeking and seeing. Yet the 'literate search' is the culmination of this mind's efforts to find meaning through its enlightened ways of seeing. My mind has been educated to search in the light, where I can apply my literate ways of seeking and looking. Going round and round the fire was a familiar mode of research enchantment, shaped by the hard-wired frameworks of qualitative and quantitative methodologies that researchers like me are trained in within the modern system of academia. We insist on their rigorous applications, even when evidence suggests they are inadequate, inappropriate, or even unethical when taken to interact directly with life experiences outside the Western logic of approved ethics.

The story of Old Man Coyote is an invitation to do things differently—to move into the dark and leave the warmth and light of Enlightenment, of the fire. It is an invitation to engage with what may emerge through decolonizing my research approach, with the help of stories. My academic life, with a doctorate, has detached me from the rich teachings that come from the land, forests, mountains, Indigenous plants, families, and communities. Unbeknownst to me, a literacy project in the country of my birth would be my undoing – my unbecoming as an academic researcher in the literate, PhD-qualified sense. In short, not as I have been 'educated,' and definitely not as I came to produce knowledge and became an academic researcher. I was invited to search in the dark and look beyond my literate or enlightened mind.

David Whyte's words about our species, shared in a recorded podcast interview (Simon, 2013) and again in an audiobook (Whyte, 2008) I listened to, have occupied my mind and possibly inhabited my body. He said the one thing he

has learned about humans is our great capacity to refuse to be ourselves, and choose to do so with wide ranging possibilities. We demand progress and certainty (light) while the world itself seems more uncertain (dark) and in ruins. The colonized mind attempts to 'repair' the future with 'what works,' focusing on reliable outcomes and guaranteed answers. This 'best practice' approach, championed by the most literate scientists and scholars of the world, mirrors how we approach research inquiry—with ready-made answers based on the same logic that brought us to a state of disrepair in the first place. We have toolkits, models and frameworks for almost everything. We see the world as a problem to be solved.

This mindset—for our planet and for research—is worrying and reductive. We cannot use the same tools, logic, or solutions that got us where we are—and yet this is the tendency, the default programming of a collective consciousness enthralled by the Enlightenment. We circle the light when we need to move in the dark. The invitation of this work is not what I had in mind, has been gifted me: the opportunity to explore deeply the call for decoloniality and to ground my work on the planet and not in a theoretical framework. The intentions are, first and foremost, personal: To decolonize my own voice and agency in this research, and to leave the warmth and light of the fire in order to gesture toward a decolonial approach. To explore a call for decoloniality, grounded in my experience of working on the planet, not through a theoretical framework.

Part of the invitation of this work is to explore without the clarity of concepts as sedimented in the minds and works of scholars and theorists. This is not an unwillingness to give credit where credit is due, nor an avoidance strategy, but it is a commitment to do the 'shadow wok'—to stay awhile in the less discernible, undefined—and to allow concepts to exhale another possibility of meaning, making, and becoming. That concepts themselves could be or have and do have the potentiality of *becoming-story*.

There is an Old Man Coyote in all of us. We seem unable to stop going round in circles when it comes to learning theories, learning outcomes, research methods, tools and methodologies that are not beneficial to us or to those we teach. We continue to use them because they are well known, well cited, and what we have always relied on or proven to work (Smith, 2012).

The invitation then of this work is, first and foremost personal: to decolonize my own voice and agency in this research, and to leave the warmth and light of the fire in order to gesture towards a decolonial approach. My teachers on this journey are not academic scholars; they are artists (storytellers, documentary artist, writer, publishers), 'illiterate' parents, and their children. They are considered illiterate based on how we construct education or what it means to be educated or literate. The decolonial desire is, therefore, to live *along* the understanding that not everything is known, knowable or should be made literate—that becoming is dependent on more knowledge, more evidence, and better analyses.

> What if the 'righting of wrongs' requires some wronging of perceived rights, like: displacing ourselves from the center of the world; interrupting our desires to look, feel and 'do' good; exposing the source and connections between our fears, desires, and denials; letting go of our fantasies of certainty, comfort, security, and control; recognizing and affirming (rather than disavowing) that we are already "entangled, vulnerable, open, non-full, more than and less than" ourselves (Moten, 2014); and reaching the edge of our knowing and being - and jumping with our eyes closed. (Andreotti et al., 2015, pp. 36–37)

There are both new and old encounters in the creative assembly that led to the making of this article. Below, I briefly describe the *literate* methodology—conditioned through Western constructs—that I initially planned to implement with a remote farming community in Southern Philippines. I then proceed to explore the invitation to move toward the dark, as suggested by Old Man Coyote's story above, by loosening the rigidity of my literate mind and following the unfolding of many (un)becomings that, first of all, displaced me from the center of my own literacy project in the Philippines. Something else happened: I was unable to travel due to Covid-19 restrictions. I found myself out of the way of the project as it became a community-driven initiative. My own colonized 'I' confronted the attachments to the education enterprise and the making of academic research—particularly the entrenched ways literacy and community development have been constituted. For instance, our attachment to literacy and its development, since the invention of schooling, tends to promote it as an unquestionable good and worthy goal of education. We have become so attached to its perceived benefits that we tend to ignore or overlook its costs.

I re-encounter David Greenwood, formerly Gruenewald, and his invitation to ask the question: *How to be here?* This is a question he explores by citing the works of Tim Lilburn (1999, 2017), whom I have yet to encounter. It is the invitation of *becoming-story*: an awareness of the inner rhythms of living systems or enlivenment. The question *how-to* is asked—not necessarily with the expectation of an immediate answer, but to shape the mapping and the map-making that arise through its questioning. *How-to-be* decenters 'I' from being an individual, a bounded subject, or body. *How to be here*—in a Deleuzian sense—invites detachment from fixed points of view and attunement to that which moves or propels us to continue with the vitalistic energy generated from living or becoming—not by human agency, but by the life force of existence, actions, and relations. *To be here* invites an awareness that shifts the understanding of voice away from an intentional, free subject acting in the world with will. It is an inquiry that loosens my attachments to certain things through a *re-turn*—a going back and a re-looking anew (Enriquez, 2023).

Going into the Dark

In 2018, I had a well-crafted script for my community-based literacy project in the Philippines. I had a ready-made research plan and ethical approval. In my mind, I was responding to the SDG 2030 (UN, 2015) call for quality education and gender equality. I promised to adhere to participatory approaches such as appreciative inquiry and asset-based community development, valuing collective action, shared values, cultural assets, participation, empowerment, and people-oriented facilitation. My planned methodology was community mapping, a term that refers to both a process and a product. I was committed to mapping literacies within the community using narrative inquiry-based methods, such as storytelling and story writing. These methods are considered well-suited to capturing and unearthing the cultural and literacy assets of a dynamic, ever-changing community, with socio-political-historical legacies and contemporary resources.

The project received ethical approval from my university's research ethics committee (reference number 21/EDN/010) on April 6, 2021. To implement the planned study design, I was scheduled to fly to the Philippines in April 2021. However, this plan was thwarted by the UK Prime Minister's announcement on March 8, 2021, that the country under the stay-at-home restrictions would only allow international travel that were deemed essential. My research funding had to be spent by the end of July. To meet this deadline, the project had to be carried out without me. I made arrangements for Rey and MJ, my Philippine partners, to travel to the community without me, while I would conduct the study at a distance. Rey, MJ, and members of the community took on various tasks to carry out the project in my physical absence.

One of the main tasks of the project was to build a space for books and to conduct storytelling and story-writing workshops to facilitate the mapping of literacies within the community. After a few consultations and meetings with community leaders, the location of the *Sari-Sari* (which means 'variety' in Tagalog) Education (SSED) hub was chosen and agreed upon. Instead of placing it within the school grounds, as originally suggested, it was decided that the hub should be owned and managed by the community, which is governed by the local education agency. Many storytelling events and book borrowings took place that I did not witness. I saw video recordings of some children telling stories in the local Hiligaynon language. Storytelling and story-writing workshops were led by Rey, and field notes where written and translated into Tagalog by MJ. It happened without the colonized 'I,' and this absence was a 'going into the dark' that allowed other things to emerge.

A community-based literacy program took place without my physical presence. However, I was involved in every development, discussion, and decision along the way. It took Rey and MJ two months to deliver what we had discussed and agreed upon, with the community's participation and support. I heard the stories, watched recordings of activities, and viewed numerous photographs taken by my partners and community members on the ground. Field notes and

interviews were transcribed and translated to Tagalog when relevant for me, and these were delivered as part of the project data.

How do I begin to attend to the data I did not directly collect or create? How do I re-tell stories I did not hear with my own ears? How do I bear witness to what happened at a distance and in my absence?

The Mountain of My (Un)becoming

The journey back to the mountain required not just data gathering but simply a gathering – a taking part and taking time to develop relationships and strive for a reciprocal, beneficial outcome for the children and families in the community. The invitation that came to me through Old Man Coyote's story and the works of many scholars was to decolonize myself and let go of my "bone needle"—the foundations of what I thought I knew. This invitation was compelling. I was a willing "subject," though I did not know how to traverse the darkness of my own absence in a project that was so dear to me.

I lost my "bone needle" 20 years ago, though I did not know that I was losing it. The first time I visited a mountain in Southern Philippines, I was on a different island. I encountered Indigenous people whose ways of knowing—through walking the mountain ridges and reading tree lines and treetops—were far more intricate and sophisticated than the GPS device I held in my hands, which I used to collect datapoints for mapping watersheds. I quickly realized that the value of my undergraduate degree, my deep engagement with philosophy, theory, and computing, had little consequence in such a place—one so fully enlivened by the elemental and by walking the land. I thought to myself, *they do not need me*. But a voice inside me clearly spoke, *I need them*. I did not know what this meant, but my response was simple: *I shall return.*

Return to the Mountain

That promise of a return was fulfilled a year later, when travel became possible. After the project had already commenced without me, I was finally able to visit my project partners in another mountain community. My partners provided me with data to analyze and work with as an academic researcher. I had a second chance to find and care for my "bone needle."

I was fortunate to have read Archibald et al.'s (2019) retelling of Old Man Coyote's story (quoted above) before this experience. I was also deeply inspired by reading Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) and Rebecca Solnit's *The Faraway Nearby* (2013). The invitation I felt then—and feel now—is to stop becoming an academic coroner, rendering lifeways as dead matter ready for analytical dissection. I recall the words of Clyde Woods (2002):

> Have we become academic coroners? Have the tools of theory, method, instruction, and social responsibility become so rusted that they can only be used for autopsies? Does our research in any

> way reflect the experiences, viewpoints, and needs of the residents of … communities? (p. 63)

These words are like shadow markings on my academic sensibility, challenging and haunting me to venture into the dark and admit that the 'enlightened 'research methodologies I have been accustomed to may not be spacious enough to carry the community's stories or support my own process of becoming decolonized. This article is my attempt to gesture toward the dark. In contrast to the dream of the Enlightenment or modernity, which seeks to render everything explainable, predictable, and controllable, the 'logic' of *becoming-story* gives priority and credibility to the unknowable and values the inaudible and unsettled.

There I was, on another mountain, visiting a remote farming community 20 years 20 years after my first visit. I had not realized the promise of returning I made in my twenties would happen within the first-ever Sari-Sari Education (SSED) learning hub, funded by my institution and built by community members. What an homage it was—though I did not know this until I was actually sitting on the bamboo floor and invited to speak by Rey. It was the final day of my visit.

Inside the SSED hub, with children seated on chairs and the bamboo floor, I was invited to speak to young faces staring at me wide-eyed—somehow both terrified and curious about what I might offer. I had nothing concrete to give them. My hands were empty, but my heart was filled with a sense of 'return 'to the mountain I had promised to revisit one day, twenty years ago, before I knew I would become a Doctor of Philosophy or an academic researcher, just before I lost my "bone needle."

I told those wide-eyed faces my first mountain story, which came to me in that moment as I searched for words to express my awe and gratitude for what they have gifted me—not with words, but with the literal fruits of the land. I thanked them for offering me plastic bags full of fruit, gifts from so-and-so's parent(s) or household. It was their way of saying *'Salamat po '*(meaning 'Thank you 'in Tagalog) for the SSED, for the books. To be gifted with the fruits of the mountain was quite special—how my life, our lives, are sustained by the labor and death of many other beings. I am composed and kept alive by many stories becoming inside me.

I did, and still do, experience the 'call of the mountain 'and its stories of land, its people, and my own—though our lives have seemingly untraceable lineage of descent and circumstance.

What is my "bone-needle," seemingly lost and hopefully found? This question, posed by two reviewers of this article, is deeply unsettling. I welcome its invitation, even as I resist the implication of naming a sense of the multitude of things I have lost or do not simply have the words to write or speak. I respond tentatively and partially. My "bone-needle" is an inner urge, from my gut, to live

out the spirit within and to attune to *Mabuhay* (meaning 'be alive 'in Tagalog) by weaving an attunement to all beings.

I began writing this article far away from those faces and the dark mountain that has given me both homage and a homecoming—a return to my land, language, and community. I welcome its call to become other-than, and, in some ways to (un)become academic by decentering my ego, tools, and methods, and being present to receive the gifts of the land and reconnect with a community in the spirit of becoming-kin. In making this utterance, I understand beyond words that my role—and my appreciative response—is not to *analyse* the community's stories.

Where, then, does one begin with a more-than analysis of stories? I am relieved to know that decoloniality does not mean a total rejection of all theories of research or Western knowledge. I could not possibly reject my own constitution, or my becoming academic in Westernized institutions, which have shaped my life. However, I cannot approach decoloniality without changing basic assumptions about self, voice, and literacy itself. These are concepts I must open up to scrutiny and invite into a space of new possibility, of coming together to mean and do differently.

I take guidance from the Deleuzian sense of a *concept* (Colebrook, 2002) as a creative power, not a means to assign labels to a world or reality pre-arranged by methods, tools, what can become data, or what counts as literacy.

To enliven dead concepts—and to reconceptualize beyond what is already known or assumed—is the task of *how to be here* in the dark, a place teeming with uncharted possibilities for decolonizing one's mind (Greenwood, 2019). The following sections, or subheadings, are not a matter of certainty but a gesturing toward the possibility of decoloniality, more particularly toward *becoming-story*.

Becoming-Imperceptible

Each species exists as an assemblage, that is, through various modes and in relation to other beings. Metamorphosis of form—translation—is fundamental to establishing and sustaining existence. Humans, in this sense, are reciprocally composed with non-humans. Instead of perceiving an image or representation set against or within the world, we recognize that we are not the origin of perceptions, but rather one possible perception among many others, in many other perceptual worlds. In this refinement of perception, I wish to approach becoming-story by drawing attention to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-imperceptible (Colebrook, 2002).

Becoming-imperceptible is the "opening of ourselves to the life that passes through us, rather than objectifying that life in advance through the systems of … [what is called in this article literate and illiterate/non-literate]" (Colebrook, 2002, p. 132). It is the power to let go of perception. Instead of being the one who perceives, imperceptibility invites us to become one with the differential flows of life.

In *becoming-story*, *becoming-imperceptible* means no longer acting as the author or separate plot-maker within the perceived world, but instead becoming different with—and through—what is perceived. *Becoming-story* does not mean become "like" a story or being an autobiography. It is a becoming *along* (Ingold, 2011) the lines of becoming-land, becoming-language, becoming-animal, among other becomings-other-than-the-self. It is the process of wayfaring, as Ingold (2011) would put it, not just *in* the world, but *along* what is alive and going on.

Social distancing, travel restrictions, face masks, and negative Covid-19 test results reorganized the "field site" or "place of study" for my research, wherein I experienced *becoming-imperceptible*. In the words of Rebecca Solnit (2013), I experienced *becoming-imperceptible* through embracing the "faraway nearby":

> From faraway you see the pattern, the connections, and the thing as a whole, see all the islands and the routes between them. (p. 170)
>
> To perceive that 'everything travels. (p. 71)
>
> Stories migrate; meanings migrate; everything metamorphoses. (p. 172)

Every life form, animate or inanimate, has its own power to become. Becoming-imperceptible occurs before sense-making splits and creates difference among species-specific perceptual worlds. If there are a multitude of modes of existence or perception, then there are a variety of ways to articulate becoming. I may have not spoken or written in Tagalog throughout my academic life, yet its utterances, songs, and stories are not faraway. It is the language of my breath among others. It is the language that invites awareness of alterity in my colonized body.

In becoming-imperceptible, decolonizing "I" involves an attunement to voices other than one's own and loosens attachment to human speech or articulation. In this context, human language is not going to be helpful—it cuts across a whole range of phenomena without sufficient attention to the specific practices that bring species into existence. It is not the case that certain entities are literally unseen or unheard or integrally unseeable or inaudible; there are active (alive) processes at play that render some entities imperceptible in every sense.

Voice Without a Mouth

Voice without a mouth is a refusal of the primacy of spoken or written words emanating from an author. Instead, it emerges from the entanglement, of becoming-story in this case. The concept of *voice without a mouth* or '*voice without organs'* (Mazzei, 2013) had my full attention. Voice beyond words and a "human" beyond the individual subject, or in Deleuzian sense, toward the "inhuman," became a live question for me, a purposeful invitation for my project in the Philippines. Decolonizing the 'I' involves attuning to voices other than one's own and loosening attachment to human speech or articulation. The

reframing of voice away from 'I 'has already been undertaken by Elizabeth St. Pierre (2008), Alecia Youngblood Jackson (2003) and in an edited book by Jackson and Lisa Mazzei (2009).

In the prevailing scientific view, the inanimate does not speak. Truffle fungi are not articulate. They are automatons, following robotic routines to maximize survival. Again, this perspective is rooted in a humanist view, which holds that speaking is only for those with mouths or vocabulary. But the community I spent time with is not just its inhabitants, its people; the land speaks. I find resonance here in Merlin Sheldrake's (2020) question:

> Might we be able to expand some of our concepts, such that speaking might not always require a mouth, hearing might not always require ears, and interpreting might not always require a nervous system? Are we able to do these without smothering other life forms with prejudice and innuendo? (p. 46)

I carry this question with an affirmative response and slice it open for further consideration in how literacy has been constructed as something for those who can read and write. What if we expand this definition to include illiteracy or other human expressions of life experiences? To cultivate literacy beyond language or speech in research, a mountain robbed of its trees and a community that relies on its corn produce provided a fertile space for such imagining. I was well placed, out of the way and in the "dark," when this project—one I led—did not include me being at the center of its happenings.

Language is the voice of the land itself. Based on the growing field of biosemiotics, it has become clear that signification or sign-making is not restricted to human sign use but encompasses all living systems including cells, fungi, plants, and animals—all of which are sign producers and interpreters. Biosemiotics has cleared the way for hearing non-humans. Fungi may not have brains or mouths to speak, yet through the mycelium, they adapt and navigate their fickle environments. In De Landa's (2006) morphogenesis, a rock is articulated through the processes of sedimentation and cementation, and does not need language or the human mind to express itself (Hickey-Moody, 2015).

Umwelt and Signification

To become a voice without a mouth is to become imperceptible and Umwelt. I encountered Umwelt through reading Jakob von Uexküll's contributions to sign theory in Bueno-Guerra (2018). As von Uexküll states: "All that a subject perceives becomes his perceptual world [Merkwelt] and all that he does, his effector world [Wirkwelt]. Perceptual and effector worlds together form a closed unit, the Umwelt" (von Uexküll, 1920/2014, as cited in Bueno-Guerra, 2018, p. 1). In short, my perception of how I experience the world cannot serve as the basis for the perceptual and effector worlds of other beings or species. And yet, this is precisely the default mode of I-literate in framing and perceiving other beings.

Bueno-Guerra (2018) highlights von Uexküll's observation that we interpret the physical world based on our senses and actions. This is, in essence, incomprehensible when applied to non-human beings. He points out that "… the world for a Jacobean oyster, for example, is just movement. And the world for a bright jellyfish, is just electricity" (von Uexküll, 1920/2014, as cited in Bueno-Guerra, 2018, p. 2).

At the frontiers of von Uexküll's *Umwelt* and De Landa's morphogenesis, *logos* (i.e., word or reason) is not something that only humans can possess. Speech is not uniquely a human property. Instead, logos—sense-making or meaning-making—is a property shared by humans and non-human assemblages. Signification is distributed among beings in the world and it is not confined to humanness. It is tied to the *place* and the *role* these beings play in the operations of life. Therefore, semiosis is possible with or without the presence of human speech.

Signification is not limited to humans, and literacy, as a matter of expression, is not confined to language or discourse. Instead of literacy events that have been codified by language and writing, other expressions emerge from events in the natural world, proceeding from sensible qualities for signification that are not restricted by language or words.

My work, then, is based on the premise that if articulation is not a property of human language or speech but an ontological property of the universe, it is my task to create conditions of possibility in which or where other life forms can become intelligible. It is to deeply observe that inquiry does not only invite questions from the community but also from the dam, corn plants, Hiligaynon, and unnamed others, all speaking in their own terms. Ideally, these perspectives would shift the very terms of the inquiry itself. This is exactly what the Covid-19 pandemic has done.

Life and death are shaped around senses and composed of different perceptual worlds. Thus, human perception must be challenged when working with non-humans. We have to consider the sensory spectrum of other species and appreciate their ecological situations that, for example, animals have overcome through evolution a perceptual process different from our own. With the concept of *Umwelt*, of sign- and sense-making, I approach Deleuze's concept of *becoming-imperceptible*, a molecular style of perception that is freed from the perceiving human mind and from a human self who can be disengaged from the force of life. There is no point of view that detaches us from life. We become with life, affirming its creative power through all kinds of becomings—such as a plant becoming through the reception of light, heat, moisture, insect pollination, and so on, and the mycelium becoming through decomposing organic materials.

How silly of me! The SSED's becoming did not need my physical presence. I am already entangled with its land and language, whether I like or not, and with the community I did not know before returning to the mountain of my (un)becoming.

Becoming-Minor-Language

When I finally had the opportunity to visit the field site in 2022, my presence was still accompanied by silence or absence. I could not understand the local language, Hiligaynon, of the community. And yet, there were moments of intense presence when I heard Tagalog being spoken or when I spoke it myself. Filipino words passed my lips, and interlocutors helped me find meaning that I could not articulate or translate with the singular voice of my English-speaking self.

The English language, including the Tagalog language I could speak, carries a majoritarian bias in Deleuzian sense-making, aligning with major literature—a superior, essentialist formulation that "recycles previous forms and structures to which it must stay conceptually devoted" (Garcia, 2017, p. 27). After all, English is the privileged and established global vehicular language. It is exclusive rather than inclusive, despite its far-reaching presence in the speaking world. English has the capacity to exclude those who do not meet its criteria of speaking, reading, and writing. The marks of a literate person are traced through English grammar. Although the Philippines achieved political independence from the US in 1946, its postcolonial economic, political, and educational reforms are still indirectly influenced by the colonial mindset. This is most evident in the privileging of English as the language of education and communication within households, often serving as a marker of literate social status.

The English language has occupied my cognitive and speaking self. Hiligaynon, on the other hand, has not, yet it allowed me to inhabit Tagalog in its translations. My mother tongue feels both foreign and familiar, open to mutation as it moves from one lexicon to another. Hiligaynon fractures the English language that has occupied my articulated self for far too long, producing sense-making and culturally linguistic and somatic expressions that are incomprehensible to me in transcribed text. In the presence of Hiligaynon, I become illiterate. It dislocates my locus of understanding and interpretation, shifting me away from the grasp of the majoritarian language. In this sense, language is not simply tied to communication and interpretation. Its power lies in its ability to "…not represent the world or located subjects, but to imagine, create and vary effects that are not already given" (Colebrook, 2002, p. 101). Hiligaynon jolts me into a deep observation of how languages have been muted in our bodies, and in my migrant body.

As Deleuze and Guattari (1983) express:

> How many people live today in a language that is not their own? Or else, no longer even know their tongue – or do not know it yet – and know a major tongue which they are forced to use poorly? Problem of immigrants and especially of their children, Problem of minorities. Problem of a minor literature, but also the problem of us all: how to wrest a minor literature from our tongue, a literature that can hollow the language out and spin it along a sober, revolutionary line? How to become the nomad and the immigrant and the gypsy of our own language? (p.19)

The interview data transcribed had already been translated for me from Hiligaynon to Tagalog by MJ. From Tagalog, I then translated the field notes to English. *Becoming-minor-language* thus entails the decentering of the majoritarian premise that denominates it as such. In its translation, the language of *becoming-minor-literature* is post-representational. There is no originary source from which the data could attribute its textual meanings or provide a clear contextual basis for interpretation.

Translation cannot function as a simulation of the original spoken or written text. Helplessly analogical at its very inception, every resultant text becomes derivative—irreducible to the discursive forces that brought it about, even as it is constituted by them. Translation deterritorializes and produces meaning as difference, decoupled both from its representational ties to reality and from its expressionist ties to the author (Colebrook, 2002). This allows for a plurality of articulations, where intentions are created—not merely expressed—in the encounter. We might call this the beginning of *becoming-minor*—a move away from the binary and majoritarian bias of both the languages I speak here: English and Tagalog.

Hiligaynon, though no longer visible in my inability to comprehend its lexicon, remains articulated in a *minor* way. I am hopeful that its translations can be a small step toward *becoming* with other tongues, and an urgent call to relocate the value and status of language away from the purely linguistic to all other material, sensory, and semiotic expressions and practices. The fact is, Hiligaynon, in this context, is already trapped within the majoritarian logic of national language (i.e., Tagalog), national identity and "… nativism that always already limits what it can be and do" (Garcia, 2017, p. 30).

Translatedness, therefore, becomes a crucial generative tool for *becoming-minor*, for orienting or gesturing toward a complex appreciation and attunement of the differences that constitute both language and community. The 'carrying across 'that translation performs slips and slides, remaining unmoored from its unstable connections to the community and language it intends to belong to. *Becoming-minor-language* is a shifting away—an opening up—from universality, conformity, standards, and the normativity of the majoritarian. To *become-story* is to give voice to what is not given, or what has been hidden—to a "people to com"', nomadic and yet not estranged from many other translations and articulations.

Becoming-Land

In *A Philosophy of Walking*, Frédéric Gros (2015) writes:

> To become imperceptible is to keep and take the self walking.
>
> By walking, you escape from the very idea of identity, the temptation to be someone, to have a name and a history. Being someone is all very well for smart parties where everyone is telling their story, it's all very well for psychologists' consulting rooms.

> But isn't being someone also a social obligation which trails in its wake – for one has to be faithful to the self-portrait – a stupid and burdensome fiction? The freedom in walking lies in not being anyone; for the walking body has no history, it is just an eddy in the stream of immemorial life. (pp. 6–7)

Walking the land provides an orientation—a cartography—to *becoming imperceptible*. When I was in the community, I spent a lot of time walking across paddy fields, uneven ground washed away by monsoon, and forest with no roots to hold its ground in place. I observed the small reservoir dam, which, over the years, has become a tourist spot and perhaps the most photographed landscape of the community. I walked between corn plants, haunted by befallen trees. Everyday of my visit was greeted with the blasting music from a karaoke system from one of the houses in the community. There was no hiding or escaping the music that I could never trace as it carried across the undulating mountains.

The language of the land is alive with the natural world's relationships: corn, floods, masks, water, the dam, and karaoke—all commingled. Up in the mountains, there is no clear boundary where the mountain ends and the dam begins; such borders are artificial and restrictive to spiritual and environmental connectedness of the land. The wound of this rift is most acutely felt in the livelihoods of those who live near the dam, which has replaced the farming lands of many residences. Fish travel—not as easily as "lost trees"—in the mixed media of darkness, humidity, water, light, and karaoke.

Landscape is not just a scenery or a backdrop to the community. It is itself a story, unspoken on some days and retold again and again on others—especially when visitors ask about its place and its belonging in a forest that is no longer there. In this community, the land holds together its past geography and biography. As such, the land is storied and they (we) inhabit its stories. Therefore, its assemblage implicates me and engages me—whether I like it or not—whether I would speak of it or not. It merges and emerges through layers of becoming along the lines of colonization, indigeneity, and race. To make present the colonial history and its pattern of land theft and disregard for Indigenous peoples cannot be resolved by land ownership and acknowledgment alone (Greenwood, 2019). Human-land relations under the ownership story treat land as property, not as kin.

People (in this case, me) must learn to care for places as deeply observed and described in Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2020). The tracks and traces of colonial legacies in the land and its inhabitants must be told. Functional literacy skills cannot repair or restore the loss of forest trees, farming land, and livelihoods—nor can they return lives lost. This begs the question: What purpose does literacy serve, if it does not save?

As already discussed above, voice is not a matter of agency, nor its authenticity individual or separate from others. Instead, voice is a matter of relation—of bumping into things and people through walking, getting lost, or losing one's 'colonized 'mind. Voice is composed by many other acoustic

encounters. It is heard in the spaces of intermingling, in the seemingly non-literate network of relations, such as a child planting corn instead of going to school (child-corn relations), fathers out before dawn to catch fish from the dam (adult-dam relations), and so on. These require a refocusing and new ways of showing up in the world. The land, with its corn plants and dam, presents itself differently from what conventional expectations and practices of literacy demand.

Neighborly relations, animated by affective (sonic) encounters and laboring bodies with unspoken, yet shared intentions—not dialogues—became more prominent and binding in the expression of experiences entangled with Hiligaynon, a language I could not speak. The trauma of a landscape shaped by monoculture crop planning, imposed by capitalist arrangements and the community's need to earn a living, was palpable. With the grammar of nature alongside the community's language, Hiligaynon, I became a listener without ears to the stories told by a language I do not speak. In this way, my voice occupied the silent articulation of the landscape.

(Un)becoming 'I-literate'

Becoming-story does not happen from an outsider position. It is a recognition of my already-entangled thread of becoming, linking me to my motherland and mother-tongue. It is an attunement to an encounter, event, or happening—without the need to seek meaning—while I was enfolded in another mother-tongue that was not my own. In those moments, spoken words were silences of the place and community, and all I could be was to be there—immersed in the unfolding story that did not demand my comprehension or interpretation but, more profoundly, required my participation and implication. Tongue-tied, I learned how to be *(t)here*, a "tug-o-where" (Enriquez, 2011), and here, a way of "speaking nearby" (Trinh T. Minh-Ha, in an interview with Chen, 1992)—not on behalf of or about—but being okay with a "faraway nearby" (Solnit, 2013). I breathe in a deeper knowledge and awareness of others, their language, landscape, and livelihoods.

Hiligaynon, more-than-words, is an ongoing storytelling process in which I am spoken to rather than being the one speaking. This insight comes from the Coyote story invitation of "becoming towards the dark." Haladay (2006) describes how oral stories are grounded in Indigenous epistemology, philosophy, and pedagogy that are not fairy tales or bedtime stories, but tellings that come from many tongues and mouths of the Filipino people and the land around them. Haladay (2006) writes:

I understand I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form, I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns. I have known this about my language since learning English as a second language (Haladay, 2006, p. 35).

In similar way, I have been invited to become a listener-teller, hearing (and, in some ways, still hearing) the stories told by the dam, the corn plants, the sweat-giving heat, and more. I am invited to retell these stories in many ways, and here, I share them in my borrowed tongue, a colonizing language. I was embraced and reclaimed by a language and land that has always been mine, yet I have been a stranger to them throughout much of my academic life. Voices, sensations, and sounds that travel through my body are not solely awakened or experienced when they are formed into words. I know this now. What I am gifted with in writing gives spaciousness to the unspoken, untold patterns that hold and carry stories to others, weaving a social fabric that stitches together time and place. *Becoming-story* originates from literacy events that arise from this sense-making of the body, which does not require a telling of what it is about.

Literacy events that are life-based and life-giving bear witness to the land, language, and community. The land speaks and must be listened to. This means literacy events are not confined to the linguistic expression involving print or alphabet-script texts. The ways children learn or become literate are shaped by the lifeways they acquire—through encounters with peers, family, plants, animals, the land they inhabit, and the languages that carry and tell their stories.

In its typical forms, literacy is often school-oriented, centered on middle-class parents and their children. *Becoming-literate* is modeled through books and reading—practices that seem natural in Western homes and schools. For example, the bedtime story sets recurring patterns of behavior, reinforced by encouraging children to take home books to read, usually at bedtime. Life events outside the pages of these books must measure up or create scenarios that can be evaluated and culturally embraced through the lens of these books, as seen in book-based films and Halloween costumes for children. Here the story form is framed or trapped within "text-worlds," nested in patterns that sit within patterns, all under the guise of literacy development.

In *becoming-story* and in gesturing towards decolonizing literacy, I encounter literacy as a happening that carries and articulates particular norms and values, which may disrupt, interrupt or devalue the norms and values of the community, and the voices and stories of its land and language. System change, in this sense, requires a lot of walking—as I did during the lockdown months of Covid-19, when I eventually found myself re-turned to the mountain. Gros (2015) describes how "[i]n walking, far from any vehicle or machine, from any meditation, I am replaying the earthly human condition, embodying once again [hu]man's inborn essential destitution" (p. 199). To decenter 'I 'in the pursuit of system change towards decolonization, walking is a vital act—a quiet rejection of accelerated consumption, mindless productivism, high-demand solutionism, and short-term approaches to the future of life and well-being. Walking is simply the right speed to understand, to show up, and to attend to a multitude of sounds as one places one foot in front of another (Gros, 2015).

The making of this article—a *becoming-story* in itself—is more akin to a collection of potential storylines that the reader may bring into coherent sequence, unfolding a particular story and feeling one's own *becoming-imperceptible*, *becoming-land, becoming-minor-language* and other becomings (or not) toward decoloniality from within. The story written here underwent a process of selection, shaped by what is remembered and forgotten. The role of memory in crafting data and its interpretation or analysis is deeply reliant on memory work—wholly partial, and spatiotemporal. This is usually not part of the story itself. This article is my way of settling the score and grounding partial articulations of how I might encounter the land of my birth anew, within a community-based literacy project. Writing this article made me grateful for something that I had not fully appreciated until now: I speak other languages, and therefore possess a worldview that extends and at times escapes the English-speaking system of institutions and professionals that shaped me into an academic with a colonized identity, while simultaneously serving as a threshold to gesture toward the "dark".

Allow me to begin again—with a borrowed story, in a borrowed tongue, and slowly approach *how to be here*, most likely, by walking as the methodology of waking up my awareness to the potentiality of *becoming-story*.

References

Andreotti, V., Stein, S., Ahenakew, C., & Hunt, D. (2015). Mapping interpretations of decolonization in the context of higher education. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 4*(1), 21–40. https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/22168

Archibald, J. A. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body and spirit*. UBC Press.

Archibald, J., Lee-Morgan, J. B. J. & De Santolo, J. (Eds.). (2019). *Decolonizing research: Indigenous storywork as methodology*. Zed Books.

Bueno-Guerra, N. (2018). How to apply the concept of "Umwelt" in the evolutionary study of cognition. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*, Article 2001. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02001

Chen, N. N. (1992). "Speaking nearby:" A conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Visual Anthropology Review, 8*(1), 82–91. https://www.situatedecologies.net/wp-content/uploads/Trinh-Speaking-Nearby-1983.pdf

Colebrook, C. (2002). *Gilles Deleuze*. Routledge.

De Landa, M. (2006). *A new philosophy of society: Assemblage theory and social complexity*. Continuum.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1983). What is a minor literature? *Mississippi Review 11*(3), 13–33. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20133921

Enriquez, J. G. (2011). Tug-o-where: Situating mobilities of learning (t)here. *Learning, Media & Technology, 36*(1), 39–53. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2010.531022

Enriquez, J. G. (2023). Hope inquiry: Vital moves from the gut in the middle cut together. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *29*(7), 806-813. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221134085

Garcia, N. (2017). Translation and the limits of minority discourse in the Philippines. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, 31*(1), 24–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2016.1262093

Greenwood, D. A. (2019). Place, land, and the decolonization of the settler soul. *The Journal of Environmental Education, 50*(4–6), 358–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2019.1687412

Gros, F. (2015). *A philosophy of walking*. Verso Books.

Haladay, J. (2006). The grandmother language: Writing community process in Jeannette Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows*. *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en Littérature Canadienne, 31*, 32–48. https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/SCL/article/view/10197

Hickey-Moody, A. C. (2015). Beside ourselves: Worlds beyond people. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 36*(5), 802–813. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1043187

Ingold, T. (2011). *Being alive: Essays on movement, knowledge, and description*. Routledge.

Jackson, A. Y. (2003). Rhizovocality. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *16*(5), 693–710. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839032000142968

Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (Eds.). (2009). *Voice in qualitative inquiry: Challenging conventional, interpretive, and critical conceptions in qualitative research*. Routledge.

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.

Lilburn, T. (1999). *Living in the world as if it were home: Essays*. Cormorant Books.

Lilburn, T. (2017). *The larger conversation: Contemplation and place*. University of Alberta.

Mazzei, L. A. (2013). A voice without organs: Interviewing in posthumanist research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, (26)*6, 732–740. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2013.788761

Moten, F. (2014, n. D.). *Wykład prof. Freda Motena: Performans i "czarność"* [Prof. Fred Moten's lecture: Performance and "blackness"] [Video]. Vimeo. Retrieved from https://vimeo.com/100330139

Sheldrake, M. (2020). *Entangled life: How fungi make our worlds, change our minds & shape our futures*. Random House.

Simon, T. (Host). (2013, April 23). David Whyte: Being at the frontier of your identity [Audio podcast episode]. In *Insights at the Edge*. Sounds True. https://resources.soundstrue.com/podcast/david-whyte-being-at-the-frontier-of-your-identity/

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.

Solnit, R. (2013). *The faraway nearby*. Viking.

St. Pierre, E. A. (2008). Decentering voice in qualitative inquiry. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, *1*(3), 319–336. https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2008.1.3.319

United Nations (UN, 2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly [Online]. Retrieved from https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

von Uexküll, J. (2014). *Cartas biológicas a una dama* [Biological letters to a lady]. Cactus. (Original work published 1920)

Woods, C. (2002). Life after death. *The Professional Geographer, 54*(1), 62–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-0124.00315

Whyte, D. (2008). *Midlife and the Great Unknown* [Audiobook]. Sounds True.