"Lostness"
Exploring being lost in border spaces (in research) with refugees

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Abstract
In this article I explore the concept of lostness in relation to doing research with refugees. I conceptualise it within the framework of border thinking (Mignolo, 2000), also examining the idea of 'borderlands' as put forward by Anzaldúa (1987). I argue that lostness is an existential human condition which not only causes confusion and fear, but also inspires creativity and inventiveness. Researching refugees is a journey littered with lostness; a journey in and through border spaces. And like the refugees who experience loss and the feeling of being lost in all its facets, I as researcher have lived through lostness and discovered some of its potentialities.   If we embrace encounters with lostness, and are willing to let go of the taken-for-granted, then we may also experience the potential of new forms of relationality and inter-relatedness, which open us up to rich discoveries and to researching from the perspective of presence – and of "being in the present and 'being in the now rather than the know'" (Hosking, 2012).

Key words: Border thinking, Lostness, Being Lost, Relationality, Reflexivity, Refugees, Border Spaces, Borderlands

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Introduction

The Way It Is
There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.
~ William Stafford ~
(*The Way It Is*)

It would appear that many of us "let go of the thread" at some stage or another. Or alternatively the "thread" may be wrenched from you, cut, shred, torn or just plain worn down, or even forgotten in the madness of happenings. Threads may be tenuous, barely perceptible, or frayed, or perhaps if we're fortunate, thick, sturdy, and as strong as steel, guiding us in the transience which is life.

Researching refugees I recognise the imperceptibility of the thread, the lostness of their experiences. I recognise it, because I experience it too.

lost adj. 1. unable to be found or recovered. 2. unable to fine one's way or ascertain one's whereabouts. 3. confused, bewildered, or helpless: *he is lost in discussions of theory*. 4. (sometimes foll. by *on*) not utilized, noticed, or taken advantage of (by*): rational arguments are lost on her*. 5. No longer possessed or existing because of defeat, misfortune, or the passage of time: *a lost art*. 6. destroyed physically: *the lost platoon*. 7. (foll. by *to*) no longer available or open (to). 8. (foll. by *to*) insensible or impervious (to a sense of shame, justice, etc.). 9. (foll. by *in*) engrossed (in): *he was lost in his book*. 10. Morally fallen: *a lost woman*. 11. Damned: *a lost soul*. 12. Get lost. (*usually imperative) Informal*. Go away and stay away.
(*Collins English Dictionary, 3rd ed.*)

"Come and sit with us. We are your children now. We need your help now to find the way".
(Bahaa, Iraqi refugee)

"I am tired of all these papers and forms. I don't understand anything. I don't understand anything at all. I just don't understand it. I am completely lost".
(Leyla, Chechen refugee)

"Those refugees are traumatised enough as it is, without having to deal with all these procedures. I personally believe we shouldn't let them handle their own money. Half of them don't know how. They come from societies without banks, or where you can't trust banks and they don't know the first thing about how to spend their money properly. They just go buying ridiculous things as they haven't got a clue about managing their finances".
(Dutch civil servant)

Researching refugees is like embarking on a journey without a map. Not knowing where to start, in which direction to head, being uncertain about what to do on the way, and being unsure about where and how it will end, if ever. The refugees too are on journeys; in more ways than one. "Lostness" seems to me to be an integral part of both our journeys and of our connectedness.

The complexity of our interrelatedness is at times disturbing, at others it feels like an absolute un-missable necessity. I can no longer imagine how it might be to stand on the other side of the border; on the side, as an 'other' who is not one of 'them'. Yet strictly speaking I am not, nor will I ever be one of 'them'. The spaces in-between are blurred, yet full of possibility and affectivity. They are 'spaces in the side of the road' (Stewart, 1996).

In saying that they are *'my children'*, Bahaa is not only referring to his, and their sense of 'lostness' in the Netherlands; he is also noting that I am (no longer) just a researcher to them. I am on the 'inside' as it were; a part of something which distinguishes itself from an exterior beyond. Though where or what that 'beyond' or 'outside' signifies, demands continued reflexivity and critical awareness.

Lostness in and on the borders
In this paper I want to explore the concept of 'lostness' and to develop an inquiry into its relation to border thinking. Borders can, in this sense, be spatial or temporal. They may refer to physical space and how we imagine that space is or should be, or to boundaries in time and the conceptualisation of time. Equally they can be epistemological or ideological, separating distinct types of knowledges, all of which are vying to establish themselves as legitimate or truthful; stirring up affective passions which disturb previously held certainties, and upset usual binary divisions. Borders 'vacillate' (Balibar, 2004), they are "sneaky" zones of indeterminacy (Cameron, 2011), and their functions are innumerable.

"I ask him how things are going; he says ok, no change. "still no news from IND (governmental agency dealing with immigration). I am waiting now three months, they didn't ask for DNA, no news". Bahaa mentions that the embassy in Syria is now closed, 'I heard this', which means that if his wife and children have to travel to an embassy, there are few choices left open to them. Turkey may be the only option, but this is a long distance; travelling in Turkey once inside the border will be more than 20 hours he says. "Jordan is not possible. We cannot go there. We went there before with Italian

passport, falso, and they catch us. They question us, and now they have our names at the border police. They say the ban lasts 5 years, it was 2006, but I think forever. We can't go there. Only Turkey maybe". (diary notes, meeting 20th January 2012)

Bahaa contemplates how his wife and daughters, who have been granted the right to family reunification, will ever make it to collect their entry visa. The latest news on 20th January was that the Syrian Embassy was closed. They'd previously had to travel to Syria to hand in the forms at the Dutch Embassy, there being no possibility to do this in Iraq. This had already meant one long journey, and an uncertain border crossing and they were willing to take the risk again to pick up their visas to the Netherlands. But now that possibility seemed cut off, the family must find some other way. Options were limited. Officially they may have to go to Jordan, but getting across the border there would be impossible due to the family's earlier failed attempt at trying to enter the country. Yet more obstructions, more borders, entrenched with confusions, hampering attempts to unify a family that has been apart for more than three years.

"Lost" is how Bahaa (and others) describe their lives. The anxiety of not knowing how to behave, fear of making blunders, shame at the perceived inadequacy of their Dutch language skills, hurt at their own incapacity, terrified to fill in a form wrongly or to omit a detail here or there, passive in their encounters with authority, fearful of the projections of others and the diagnoses of doctors (borderline, traumatised, potential child abuser).….lost.

But amidst "lostness" there is agency, choice, strength and defiance. As though "we don't know where we're going, or how we'll get there, or even where the road is leading to, but we know we're getting somewhere" (Leyla, Chechen refugee).

There is potentiality in the in-betweenness of borders, where new social spaces can be (re)imagined, in which the boundaries of representational truth, knowledge and certainty are explored and perhaps even perturbed.

Thinking from the borders, or border thinking, also termed "double consciousness", "double critique" and "an other thinking" by Mignolo (2000), are "theoretical articulations" which turn around the epistemological hegemony of the Eurocentric perspective, which claims Europe as the locus of knowledge production.

For Mignolo (2000) "Postcoloniality (and its equivalents) is both a critical discourse that brings to the foreground the colonial side of the 'modern world system' and the coloniality of power embedded in modernity itself, as well as a discourse that relocates the ratio between geohistorical locations (or local histories) and knowledge production". This is referred to as the "reordering of the geopolitics of knowledge".

This so-called "reordering' is twofold and besides the 'critique of the subalternatization from the perspective of subaltern knowledges", it also entails the "emergence of border thinking". Border thinking broadly encompasses the articulation of a "new

epistemological modality at the intersection of Western and the diversity of categories that were suppressed under Occidentalism….Orientalism….and area studies" (Mignolo, 2000).

Certainly researching refugees, who more often than not fall into one of those suppressed categories, and whose "Otherness" oozes reification and objectification, demands thinking "from and about the borders". Yet the question arises as to the possibility for the researcher to effectively do so, if the researcher has no direct experience of being a refugee herself. I am not, nor have I ever been, a refugee. I cannot understand the experience of the refugee from the point of view of the historical experience of being a refugee. I am not that "new epistemological subject" that Mignolo talks about; the kind that thinks from subaltern experiences and that induces "new forms of rationality" (Mignolo, 2000).

Nevertheless, I would suggest that an alliance of thinking in the border is possible. An alliance which displaces traditional subject-object thinking, and which rearticulates lost sensibilities and accentuates inter-relatedness. My research is not, therefore, an attempt at postcolonial theorizing according to Mignolo's terms; rather an emergent process of creation and re-creation, in which the "distinction between the knower and the known" (Mignolo, 2000) can never be erased, where 'contamination' is not necessarily undesirable, and where borderland spaces provide possibilities for new logics, and for new forms of intersubjective empowerment, even amidst loss and at times, despair.

"Lost" refugees
Being a refugee automatically implies varying degrees of loss. Be it loss of one's homeland and lost family members, lost possessions and artefacts, not to mention the loss of one's language and culture. Losing one's bearings is part and parcel of the experience; which is more often than not accompanied by a loss of self-esteem, of trust (in oneself and others), and a lost sense of self.

"I knew who I was back then", "I knew how things worked, and what to expect", "I don't know what's expected of me anymore", "I was somebody in my home country", "I have to rely on others to help me all the time", "I've lost everything"; these are just some of the many ways refugees have expressed their losses to me.

The life of refugees is turned upside down. First of all in the would-be-refugee phase. Becoming a 'refugee' is a privilege not afforded to every hopeful who arrives in Europe seeking asylum. The journey here is arduous, in all senses of the word: leaving everything behind, facing numerous dangers to get to the Netherlands, and once arriving to the relative safety of an asylum camp, enduring procedural obstacles, interviews, questioning ("as if you're a criminal" as many asylum seekers experience it), deciphering 'how things work', and negotiating life in the camps.

Despite the promises it affords, migration "…is a route without guarantees, it involves pain, suffering, hunger, desperation, torture, even the deaths of thousands of people in ships that have sunk beneath the oceans of the earth". (Papadopoulos, Stephenson, Tsianos, 2008)

Once refugee status is accorded, a new can of worms opens up. Sometimes more confusing and just as stressful as during the asylum phase. For some it is even more terrifying, precisely because of the expectations that troubled times are over and that the refugee simply needs to get on with integration. Bahaa told me once "I get so many letters, I haven't got a clue what it's all about. If it goes on like this, I think it will be better if I just go back to Iraq. Now I really have to become somebody again, but what are the chances of that? Now I have to prepare everything for when my family comes. When I was an asylum seeker, nobody expected anything of me, but now everybody's looking and waiting for me to be somebody".

In the past he has referred repeatedly to a loss of self-esteem and self-respect, to the fact that he had a good position in Iraq, a respected job, which brought with it a good salary, a big house and plentiful opportunities for a good life. He didn't come here "for the social security" but because his life (and moreover that of his son) was in danger, and would never have chosen voluntarily for a future in the Netherlands, indeed in a non-Muslim country. He feels demoted, devalued, a loss of dignity and self-worth.

Honneth (1995) remarks that "…a person's 'honour', 'dignity,' or to use the modern term, 'status' refers to the degree of social esteem accorded to his or her manner of self-realization within a society's inherited cultural horizon. If this hierarchy of values is so constituted as to downgrade individual forms of life and manners of belief as inferior or deficient, then it robs the subjects in question of every opportunity to attribute social values to their own abilities".

I have been closely involved as a researcher in the lives of Leyla, Bahaa, Tatiana, Ali, Olga in the past few years; the exact number of years depending on the date of their arrival in the Netherlands (Olga being the 'newest', arriving a little over a year ago, and Tatiana the 'oldest' arriving in 1997, though I have known her personally almost five years). These and other refugees (with whom I have worked in the past eight years), have described this loss of self-respect on numerous occasions, and the accompanying shame of being isolated or not entirely accepted as an equal member of society. Of course they benefit from the welfare benefits system, some more fully than others, but they would like nothing better than to "have a profession", or to "get a job", or to "be able to support my family" or "to have a job equal to the one I was doing at home".

One might argue that being a refugee affords one with even more chances than were available in one's own country. At least this is often how I have felt when talking to refugee women escaping lives of abuse and humiliation, with little or no political, economic and social rights in their own countries. However, being able to take advantage of chances here is not as easy as it may seem, especially when one has had little formal

education and when one comes from a society whose level of complexity, especially at the institutional and bureaucratic level, is far less than what it is in the Netherlands.

Leyla is almost a model case in this respect and finds the absolute number of demands on her from this agency or that school, bureaucracy or institution, overwhelming. There's always some letter to be read, some appointment to be kept, some official to meet, and some form to be filled in. She says "...even though I didn't have much of a life, at least I knew what I was doing at home and in my own way I could still be some kind of a role model for my children. Despite the war, and everything that happened, I was more certain about how to handle stuff and I knew how the system worked. At least I could speak the language better than my children could. Now I can't even do that" (Leyla, Chechen refugee).

Refugees always seem to be teetering on some border or another. The border of knowing and unknowing; of living on the periphery or being at the centre of society; the language border with its incessant doubt - 'when will my language skills be good enough, if ever?"; the border of (in)sanity, balancing precariously between the various stresses of integration and refugee-ship; the border of 'otherness', between belonging or being an-Other. Oft times regarded as foreigners with some sort of deficit (or an-other) – language, understanding, work, health - life invariably seems to play off in one of many possible borders, between inclusion and exclusion, acceptance or denial.

The extraordinary stress of living a decade without an official refugee status, then finally becoming a refugee in a national amnesty in 2007, still didn't lead to paid work for the economist Tatiana, who arrived in the Netherlands in 1997. With a gap of more than a decade in her CV, leaving a huge hole in her work experience since fleeing Kazakhstan, Tatiana is not one of the forty percent of refugees who benefited from the amnesty (in total 28,600 refugees were granted amnesty) who have found paid work. She has participated in a couple of work schemes for the unemployed, getting minimum wages for six month periods to do work far below her level ("it's secretarial work – again" she wrote to me recently, exasperated), but the reality of such schemes are that they provide neither job satisfaction nor job security. At the end of the six months the contract is not prolonged, which means a new round of bureaucratic procedures to sign-on again, and then a period of unemployment, followed by participation on yet another revolving-door work project. However, "precarious labour" (Papadopoulos, Stephenson, Tsianos, 2008), is preferable to no labour at all. She says "it's better than sitting at home".

Extraordinary situations, being played out in ordinary lives in some borderland, where admittedly not everything borders on the unimaginable, or inconceivable, but a lot does. Tatiana and her husband and youngest son, who was born in the Netherlands, finally decided to leave their 'home' in the north of the Netherlands for somewhere closer to the big cities, this summer, in order to improve their chances of a decent living. Her since 1997, unemployed herself since then, Tatiana's husband, a car mechanic, has had

low-paid, part-time work for a couple of years, but his contract ended recently due to the crisis, and so a move seemed like the only option.

Integration infers reinvention, not once, but often many times. Being lost, and found, or losing and (re)finding one's self, one's identity and one's life, is all part of the process. And for some, the periods of lostness are longer, more stretched out and more bewildering than for others. The longer one is lost, the deeper the trench, and the further one appears to wander from the 'right' side of the border.

A borderline case
When I first met Leyla several years ago, I knew nothing of her tragic past, nor of her previous suicide attempts. She is a beautiful mother in her early thirties, with four children, the oldest of whom she had at the age of fifteen. "Snatched" as she repeatedly told me, before it finally registered, she was literally hauled off the street by a few men to an impending marriage with a man twelve years her senior. A man from the hills, who stole her innocence, unwillingly, making it a customary impossibility for her father to 'have her back', tainted as she was. Cast out, she never spoke to her father again, though she did have secret communication and meetings with her mother, Leyla lost more than her virginity at the age of fourteen. As she tells me, "I lost my life at the age of fourteen".

With her first pregnancy at fourteen, Leyla gave birth to a sickly baby girl, about whom she has never ceased to worry. If it's not her health (her daughter Busana has a mild heart condition), then it's the state of her looks (Busana has recently had an operation on her jaw structure to improve the position of her teeth), or her school results (B has a low IQ and is in a senior school for children with 'special needs'). Busana now seventeen, is a dreamy, clumsy, girl, with a great sense of responsibility for her younger brothers and sisters, of whom there are three, despite her obvious limitations when it comes to academic ability.

Leyla, however, still fails to acknowledge that Busana will probably never have the university education of which she (Leyla) is dreaming, and neither will she have the looks of Kate Moss, despite numerous operations to fix her teeth. We've talked about Busana's education, her chances, her motivations and her possibilities on different occasions, and protective, like all mothers (should be), Leyla insists on believing that perhaps the school has got it wrong, or that perhaps once the "rabbit teeth" are fixed, a host of other problems will dissolve.

Perhaps these type of hopes are the 'thread' to which Leyla grips, in order to maintain her sanity, or some sense of balance in her life. I found out about the diagnosis of 'borderline' probably about a year ago. We often discussed Leyla's then more or less regular trips to the psychiatrist, because Leyla found it increasingly difficult to shoulder the long journeys and stressful days when she had to trek all the way to his practice. Her psychiatrist was roughly a six to seven hour return journey from her home, and that was on a good day when there were no bus or train delays. The

possibility of going on a school day depended on whether Busana would be home on time to pick up the younger children from school, and going on a Saturday meant once again leaving Busana to look after her siblings whilst mum was away.

This period coincided with a warning, or notification of risk being made to the local social services, by the very same psychiatrist, who suggested that the family should be researched as the children might in in danger of child abuse. This was not the first time that this had happened. The other occasions were when Leyla attempted suicide because of some fight with another asylum seeker in the asylum seekers' centre about accusations that Leyla was trying to 'steal' the other woman's boyfriend. And when Busana, Leyla's daughter, purposefully took a host of Leyla's sleeping tablets after an argument with her mother about some boy which she had been secretly sending messages too. On both occasions there were a round of interviews, talks and the like and the file had been closed.

On this occasion, after receiving a notification from Leyla's psychiatrist that he thought the children might be at risk of child abuse, by which he meant at risk of precarious living and neglect, due to Leyla's supposed mental imbalance, the local division of the social services, department for youth care, sent a letter to Leyla, which sparked all manner of appointments and meetings once more. The teachers of all the children were interviewed, a meeting took place with Leyla, and I too was contacted. The dangers of the complaint leading its own life were inevitable, especially since at the time Leyla did not have a clear picture of what it all meant or could mean.

Leyla, as she had with her refugee case files, asked me to look at her files from the psychiatrist, as she couldn't understand why the psychiatrist would make such an official report to the social services. I called him to ask him myself. Rather surprised, he did not however hesitate to go into particulars, referring to Leyla's borderline syndrome, her past suicide attempts, her instable personality, her inability to sustain long-term relationships or friendships of an intimate or other kind, her difficulty in bringing up the children alone, her history of traumatic events, and her unreliability when it came to keeping the appointments at his office.

He paradoxically put forward the argument that when Leyla did come to visit him, she seemingly had no hesitation to leave the younger children with Busana, noting that far too much responsibility was being placed on the shoulders of a young teenager who should not have to take care of her siblings in this way. Yet on the other hand, if Leyla cancelled, due to a lack of childcare possibilities, this was alternatively interpreted as a lack of commitment to the treatment and as evidence of her unreliable, unstable nature. I did mention this to him, but he insisted that despite never having interviewed the children himself, he was worried for their safety and therefore fulfilled his moral duty by filing a 'complaint' and noting that the children may be at risk of abuse at the hands of their mother. "Their safety is paramount to me" he explained over the telephone.

Upon reading 'borderline' in the documents, and upon hearing it from the lips of the psychiatrist, I was rather shocked. My only previous encounter with 'borderline' was with a cousin-in-law whose psychological instability was evident and whose daughter clearly suffered the consequences of a shaky, irresponsible upbringing, with fragmentary care swinging between over-protection and pampering at one end of the scale, to inconsideration and a lack of attention at the other. This combined with the mother's overly concern for her own wellbeing, unfortunately more often than not to the detriment of the child. I'd also heard (horror) stories from an acquaintance whose son was married, then divorced, from a 'borderliner' with a young two year old son. Stories of a mother who was incapable of providing the loving care the child needed, who stayed in bed in the mornings whilst the child was alone downstairs, who usually couldn't be bothered to cook, so the child only got take-aways, and so it went on. All hearsay of course, but nonetheless it got me thinking.

It got me thinking and comparing. I started to wonder how I could have missed this in Leyla. I started to wonder whether the psychiatrist had in fact just got it wrong, or had imposed some Western diagnosis on a patient whose lifestyle choices might be more or less normal in her own country. Strange, I pondered, how the apparition of a 'label' began to get me wondering about what I knew about Leyla and her family, questioning some of the assumptions which I had once held as 'true' or as close to 'true' as possible.

Did I miss
          something?
Why was I thrown off   track?
Lost….in a sea of
psychological concepts and psychiatric diagnoses
the DSM, borderline, PTSS, ASS,
          personality disorder
prescriptions for tegretol, alprazolam, anxiety, panic attacks
and nightmares
which invade the night hours.
I knew of all that stuff but
          nevermadetheconnection……

What difference the expert diagnostics, the categorisation of
(your) illness to my capacity to see, observe, feel, affect and be
affected?

Did I need to know the doctor's account or is it (still) your
ac-count that ….. counts?

On discussing these accounts with Leyla, and these medical categories, she failed to recognise the term and symptoms of borderline. Post-traumatic stress syndrome was a more recognisable condition, though further than it relating to a trauma, Leyla couldn't pin point what it exactly meant. The nightmares, which were an integral part of her experiences up to about a year ago, when she decided enough was enough and to stop taking "all those medicines which I don't know anything about", had gradually subsided and didn't haunt her nights any more.

I felt it was necessary for me to examine my own reactions to the disclosures in a critical manner. It was impossible to disregard what I'd been told or what I'd read, yet it seemed as though I may be disrespecting our relationship in some way if I unquestioningly just went along with it all. It would be a "denial of recognition" of kinds (Honneth, 1995), which disrespected the confidence and trust we shared. Yet despite not wanting to be overly enthusiastic in making connections, my mind consistently jolted one experience after another to the fore, which seemed consistent with the behaviour of a woman with borderline.

Perhaps I did not want to recognise Leyla's borderline before now; perhaps I still don't want to; or perhaps it doesn't really exist. At times we have heated discussions about her future and about the future of her children, about her needs and their needs and about the duties and responsibilities of parenthood. I see that her children are often left to their own devices, watching far too much television, playing way too many violent computer games, drinking far too many sugary drinks and eating far too much fatty and unhealthy foods (what is too much?); she shouts and yells a lot and goes to the gym at night at the time when my own youngest children are being tucked up in bed; there are no books in the house and the children get little to no daily exercise.

I wonder if this is the reaction of an overly protective, moralising west European mother, to a young mother from another culture and another history. Or whether these are the symptoms of a mother with borderline who finds it difficult to achieve a balance between her own desires and those of her children. Similarly, where is the border between 'good' and 'bad' parenting? Am I denying the existence of a syndrome which Leyla undoubtedly has; or confirming that there's something amiss, spotting the bogeyman at every corner, and glorifying my own parenting in a bid to reassure myself that at least I'm doing it right?

However you choose to look at it we are bodies whose "..existence entangles us in a process of co-constitutive action, a process in which we and other things do not simply inter-act with each other as external and autonomous entities, but each exists through the process of action" (Papadopoulos, Stephenson, Tsianos, 2008). This mutuality engenders affect and engagement, as we not only respond to one another, but co-construct meanings and practices, as "things and objects are constantly incorporating and producing other things (and therefore the world we live in)" (Papadopoulos, Stephenson, Tsianos, 2008).

We are not separated and bounded individuals. And because of this our reflexivity must also strive to be dialogical and relational (Hosking, Pluut, 2010). Indeed as Gergen (1994) states: "with each reflexive enterprise, one moves into an alternative discursive space, which is to say, into yet another domain of relatedness. Reflexive doubt is not then a slide into infinite regress but a means of recognizing alterior realities and thus giving voice to still further relationships".

Honneth speaks of "the vulnerability of humans resulting from the internal independence of individualization and recognition" and "the experience of being disrespected [that] carries with it the danger of an injury that can bring the identity of the person as a whole to the point of collapse" (1995). Challenges to fragile self-esteem, balanced precariously "between fusion and demarcation" (Honneth, 1995) accompany this research process, hand in hand with loss and lostness. But neither pertain exclusively to the experience of the refugees.

A researcher lost(?)
Pondering seems to be a major activity of mine. Alongside observing and talking, and reading. Not to mention feeling and being affected by the stuff I see, hear, read about or experience. All of that together can lead to confusion, though I ponder that researchers are probably not meant to be confused too often. Perhaps it's too much reflection which is the problem. Coupled with the desire to understand, and to understand as much as possible, so that I can do justice to the refugees with whom I'm working. Or at least so that I do no harm.

One of the things I ask myself is whether doing research can be about not doing harm, or is it about finding the truth and getting it out there? But since what truth is, and what knowledge is, is contestable, I invariably end up thinking of this research as an opportunity to tread in border spaces filled with uncertainty, exploring the edges of knowledge, and triggering reflections on common aspects of our human condition.

I have been following several refugees for a number of years now, in a quest to understand more about the 'refugee condition', focussing on what the lived experience of 'integration' actually entails. This ethnographically inspired journey is revealing a lot about refugees and about those whom they encounter in their daily lives, including teachers, social security officials, welfare officers, social workers, medical personnel and so on; but it is also revealing a lot about the possibilities for research with refugees, throwing up methodological conundrums along the way.

How to research refugees properly is a recurring question for me. This process is enriching, yet confrontational, challenging yet inspirational. I endeavour to follow a 'thread' without being obsessed about not letting it go. Being lost has opened opportunities to stray into new waters, to reconnect with resilience and to re-center the research voyage back to its humble beginnings.

Lostness is relational, attending to a shared experience between myself and the refugees who participate in this project. Lost at different angles and in different magnitudes, never in-different, we nevertheless construct a part of our daily realities together. As Gergen and Hosking (2006) point out "we do not begin [here] with answers already in place, but with questions and curiosity. For this exploration we also choose the medium of dialogue……..Within the constructionist domain dialogue plays a pivotal role as the progenitor of all meaning".

Whilst being lost can engender confusion, or lead to the tendency to grip tighter on to that which is known, if we soften the boundaries between knowing and un-knowing, and allow ourselves to open to lostness, we widen the resources for our research and, in the words of Gergen and Hosking "…we have an enormous canvas available for painting new futures" (2006).

It is not about giving in to confusion and turmoil, accepting as it were that 'all is lost'. I prefer to look at lostness as an existential condition, in some ways a human necessity, something temporary, encapsulating periods of losing the past to join the present (Solnit, 2006), collisions with difference, or encounters with transcience, discovering the resilience which rises out of abandonment, "something that can be explored but perhaps not mapped" (Solnit, 2006).

Research is like that; affording the opportunity to oscillate between the familiar and the strange. At some stage we stop being lost (at least temporarily), having gone through a transition "whereby you cease to be who you were" (Solnit, 2006).

> "Si vous êtes prêts à abandonner père et mère, frère et soeur, femmes, enfants et amis et à ne jamais les revoir; si vous avez payé toutes vos dettes, rédigé votre testatment, réglé toutes vos affaires et êtes un homme libre; alors vous êtes prêts pour aller marcher".

> "If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again; if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man; then you are ready for a walk"
> (Thoreau, Walking, 1862)

Perhaps we might exchange the words of Thoreau "…then you are ready for a walk" with "….then you are ready to research". Ready for the transformation process to begin as it were; opening oneself up to new resonances, and mutual affectations, which may dismantle old maps and trace new pathways of knowledge and knowing, changing landscapes forever.

It sounds attractive, exciting, doesn't it, this idea of lostness, losing oneself, getting lost, being lost? And it is, or it can be. Yet I would argue that in both senses of the word ("losing things is about the familiar falling away, getting lost is about the unfamiliar appearing", Solnit, 2006), it can not only be disorienting, but also frightening, even terrifying.

At home with lostness
Perhaps there are few who feel at home with being lost. Few who don't associate lostness with suffering, doubt or fear. The known, be it culture, language, surroundings, friends and acquaintances, acts like coordinates from where we get our bearings and construct meanings, in order to understand our world. Olsson, paraphrasing Wittgenstein, notes:

"As my takens-for-granted are unhinged, my fix-points begin to float and my compass to spin. In the resulting confusion I no longer know my way about. Whatever I do, I do something wrong" (Olsson, 2007).

Researching refugees for the past few years has brought me repeatedly into contact with professionals, volunteers and others who play, to a more or lesser degree, a role in the so-called integration process of refugees. This includes school and higher education college teachers, social workers, welfare workers, benefits officials, government civil servants, hospital staff, doctors, psychiatrists, neighbours, volunteer helpers, friends, colleagues of various sorts, co-students and other family members. All are, or have been, invariably lost, at some stage or another. To varying degrees, and with varying degrees of accompanying confusion, sometimes masked by power (antics) and firm talk, or avoided for risk of having to admit one doesn't know what to say or which course of action to take, at others expressed by pure despondency, indifference, or panic. It would appear to be a common condition to us all.

Take the welfare benefits officer who is at a loss to know what to do with the refugee claimant, in this case Bahaa: the citizenship course is completed, the examination is sat, and Bahha is still awaiting the result, but what now? Constant rounds of cost cutting have left the local municipality with fewer and fewer options for claimants, meaning there's little chance of getting an additional study paid for, hardly any possibility for a second language course to improve badly needed language skills, and the days of hopping from one municipal work scheme to another are also (thankfully) over. In practice this means that unless refugees, and others like them, badger their welfare officers, they may well be 'forgotten about', for want of another term, as municipalities have more than enough on their hands dealing with local Dutch unemployed people, never mind 'hard to help' foreigners.

In a similar case of being 'lost' to the system, Ali, an Iraqi national who I have known for more than three years, and who arrived in 2007, finished his citizenship course about a year ago. Since then he has had regular contact with social workers to help him sort out his mail, deal with financial matters and put forward applications for social

assistance, but he has had perhaps one official meeting with the welfare benefits officer in charge of helping him find work. Despite requests by him for a meeting, he has been consistently left waiting.

I recently got in touch with one of the team managers in the benefits department in his municipality, and received relatively promptly a reply from the benefits officer. She confirmed that she had had a meeting with Ali but that she was still unconvinced that he would be able to undertake the study he had sought out himself due to his poor language skills. And in any case, despite wanting to pay for the study himself, if he was accepted by the vocational college, he would not be allowed to do so because he would need her permission. And as he needed to be available for work, which she also admitted would be pretty impossible for him to acquire due to his language skills, he would not be given permission to do a study.

The benefits officer informed me nevertheless that "As far as I can see, I can put Mr A's name down for a scheme by "Synergon" (a local sort of 'Work First' bureau) where they will also do a test for him to check his knowledge and his skills and to see where the problems lie. After that they should look for a work experience place for him" (email, dated 12th July, 2012).

The real question is why a middle-aged man, who has been in the Netherlands since five years, and who has been claiming welfare benefits since then, has had so little contact with the local municipality and with his benefits officer who should, after all this time, already have a good overview of his competences and capabilities. Perhaps we could talk of 'five lost years'? Whilst the citizenship courses and general social guidance are contracted out to other organisations, it remains the case for the refugees that I know that there is too little contact between organisations. This means that even if the knowledge about a client does exist in the first place (in the heads of people or in the files of one organisation), it somehow gets lost in the systems and procedures, and does not make its way readily to the next link in the (integration) chain. Time, energy, money, but especially trust and hope are also lost in the process.

Tatiana, before moving to what she hopes will be a more active municipality, had on average one meeting a year with her benefits officer; Olga, a Russian refugee, has had refugee status approximately one year (and has also been receiving benefits for that time), has never seen her benefits officer; Leyla who has had refugee status for one and half years, has had one meeting in that time; Bahaa has had two meetings in the last one and half years with his contact person at the local municipality.

Contact with the local refugee council is more frequent, except for Tatiana and Ali, who don't meet with their representatives at all. Again the amount of help received varies, depending on the willingness and experience of the volunteer in question. Bahaa especially has his hands full with his volunteer, who more often than not asks Bahaa, or me "what should I do now"? despite him being a long-serving, almost retired volunteer. The man appears more lost with each question that Bahaa poses, so much so that Bahaa

really only sees him out of a certain degree of sympathy (or pity) and because he doesn't want to cut ties completely, just in case.

The school teachers in the vocational colleges who deliver the citizenship and language courses have generally many years of experience in working with foreigners and refugees alike (they are part of an ageing population of teachers of Dutch as a second language). Whilst one may be more astute and a better teacher than the other, the teachers I know have a map and a plan, and know in which direction they need to go to get the students ready for the citizenship exam.   There may be many ups and downs on the way, including drop-outs and 'hopeless cases', and every now and then some students fall by the wayside, and get lost, or the teachers face a student unlike any other and are lost for words, and don't know what to do.

Overall, however, the teachers in my research are a sturdy, resourceful bunch, whose intercultural communication skills are, as to be expected, rather better than those of the average civil servant or social worker. Out of the ones who I have worked with, it is certainly those who are open to letting go of their plan and map when necessary, and who exhibit their curious nature by a willingness to find themselves in unknown territories, having to explore new possibilities, who achieve the best results. They allow themselves to be lost, which enlivens their creativity and sharpens their attention, and eventually enables them to alter their plans, readjust the compass, regain balance and reassume their journey with their students.

The lost teachers (but also volunteers, professionals, civil servants etc.,) with whom I've worked, who are more in chaos than out of it, or who are unable to navigate their way back to known waters having strayed, tend to have trouble keeping students interested and involved. These are the professionals (and others) who bend more than they are humanely able, trying as hard as they can to comply with the wishes of those around them, unable to plot a course, or make a decision to which they will stick if faced with dissent. Lacking authority, they are unable to convince students (or anybody else for that matter) that they know what they're doing, or where they're (collectively) going. Many refugees, searching for strong bearings and clear sign posts lose confidence and stray when faced with such individuals.

> If lost were a map, what would it look like?
> What would be its coordinates and who would live there?
>
> Would it be over-crowded? A nodal network chaos, with no borders and no signs?
> Only people searching, looking, not knowing what for…
> Just looking…lost
>
> Or a creative, imaginative place? A space for novelty and discovery, where limits are put to the test, or dissolved, and
> borders
> are crossed or redefined …and hope is found

in the unknown

Or both? Duality banished. No separateness.

No border-lines.   Just border spaces. Full….of potential….

Reterritorialization and lostness

Refugees, like other migrants, undergo a process of deterritorialization, fleeing from their homelands and from familiarity. Their histories are histories of escape;   the escape of "precarious subjects" whose "emergent subjectivities are the ground on which the embodied experience of precarity is lived" (Papadopoulos, Stephenson, Tsianos, 2008).

Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008) note that "escape is a constructive and creative movement – it is a literal, material, embodied movement towards something which cannot be named, towards something which is fictional. Escape is *simultaneously* in the heart of social transformation and outside it. Escape is always here because it is non-literal, witty and hopeful".   Escape, they argue, occurs everywhere, as a forum of resistance and evasion, preceding control rather than following it.   It acts as a tool of subversion, against the appropriation of subjectivities and spaces by neoliberalism.

Whilst I can certainly recognise a number of key ideas put forward by Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, including the desire of migrants to be imperceptible, the almost permanent state of becoming, the 'strategy of dis-identification', and the re-appropriation by migration's outside politics of 'the postliberal capture of the subject', this concurs more with the experiences of the asylum seekers I have researched, than with the experiences of the refugees I know.

Arguably, there is an element of "imperceptible politics" and "inappropriated sociability" or unexploited "surplus sociability" in the way particular elements of the lives of the refugees I know remain unregulated and beyond control, existing in "spaces for the play of purposeless action" (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008). Take the way in which refugees go unhindered in their daily lives, drawing benefits with little or no interference from civil servants or public authorities, until such a moment that they themselves demand to be seen or heard. The case of Ali is a case in point, but the same applies to Tatiana and others like her.

However, one could argue that this invisibility, even if a form of escape from any one of a number of control regimes, does not bear the promises of social transformation or mobilisation that is alluded to (or hoped for) by Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos. Migrants, but especially refugees, long for visibility and the attainment of rights through formal representation. Resistance to the various degrading ways in which they are treated, or have been treated, does of course take place. They learn how to bypass certain rules, or how to circumvent regulations, and through their (often vast) networks

of cooperation and reciprocity, the majority muddle through their daily lives, avoiding explicit exploitation in a nevertheless precarious existence. Whether this is "cunning" however, or pure necessity, I am not sure.

Is Olga cunning when she recruits me to approach her gynaecologist to complain about her treatment, or rather lack of it? Or is she just desperate? Is Bahaa using cunning when he questions me, alongside countless others (friends, volunteers, helpers, professionals) about his chances of getting a study paid whilst drawing welfare benefits? Or is he just confused and lost in an whir-war of rules and regulations, processes and procedures. Or perhaps he is expressing his fear at never getting out of the benefit rut that he is in, angst at the prospect of never having a paid job again in order to look after his family in the manner to which they are accustomed, or in the manner in which his custom (and religion) dictates.

Deterritorialized, refugees live, at least partly, in the borderlands, which according to Anzaldúa are not confined to geographical or territorial spaces, but materialize in the ideological, cultural, emotional, spiritual, religious, and epistemic realms (Anzaldúa, 1987). These are places of becoming where ambiguity and identity are negotiated, constructed, enacted and re-constructed. Spaces of lostness and confusion, inventiveness and creativity alike.

What does reterritorialization mean to the refugees in my study? Does it refer to belonging, or feeling at home, or to finding oneself and one's place in the Netherlands? Is it geographical and spatial, or is it like Anzaldúa's 'borderlands', more than just pertaining to geography and space? I would suggest that like lostness and the concept of loss, reterritorialization is multifaceted and complex, incorporating transformation and adaptation, creation and hybridisation of culture, language, socialities and relations. Some elements of re-adjustment, or fitting in may occur with relative ease and relatively quickly, whilst others require greater effort, skill, agency or compliance, or may not be possible at all. I imagine that reterritorialization takes place, at least partially, in and around the borders, accompanied by the potentiality of new forms of relationality, and the possibility of imperceptibility and escaping (forms of) precarious living.

Inhabiting the borderlands, as refugee, even as researcher, need not be feared, though it can be a frightening prospect. That is if one equates the border with the idea of remaining in the margins of society, or of residing in a permanent maze with no evident exit. That can be what the border is about, but not necessarily. The border is not necessarily the outside limit to inclusion. Borders can be crossed, if one is not afraid of first getting lost. They can be the gate to new, more inclusive, more fair spaces, especially if premised on inter-relatedness. As Gergen (1995) and Hosking (1995) point out: "..relational premises open up the possibility space for power relations to include *power-to* practices that allow the construction of different but equal forms of life – and not just the *power over* associated with subject-object ways of relating" (italics in the original).

18

Presence in borders

Borders are permeable, changing, porous spaces which resist control (Papadopoulos, Stephenson, Tsianos, 2008). The in-between spaces of borderlands, at the confluence of the known and the unfamiliar, form dynamic potentialities in which lostness can lead to new discoveries and to intensified relationality and affectivity, pushing "towards a new consciousness" (Anzaldúa, 1987).

I would argue that lostness is a condition familiar to us all, researcher and refugee alike. We can be taken by surprise by it, try to fight it or eschew its presence, but we cannot avoid it completely. New spaces may be crafted in lostness, forging a resilience and hope, which surpasses the traditional reading of the refugee's experience as one that hunkers nostalgically for a lost life. And like border thinking, it can encourage the imaginary of the modern world system to "crack" (Mignolo, 2000), "compelling the reorganisation and refocusing of knowledge" (Brydon, 2007), leading to a "reconsideration of what counts as knowledge and who has the 'right to research'"(Appadurai, 2006).

Research in the borders can challenge conventional notions of knowing and of migrants and refugees as "lost shadows" (Rohr, 2012) projected into turmoil, with little hope of escape. The cradling arms of familiarity may be comforting. But if we are willing as researchers to loosen our grip on Stafford's "thread" or visit Collins' "Blue", we may delight in the affective responsiveness of relationality, which also dwells in borderlands, experience "acting in a not knowing way" (Ray, 2000), and organise from the perspective of presence - "being in the present and 'being in the now rather than the know'" (Hosking, 2012). We will certainly be more than ever able to harness the potential of border spaces for releasing the creative and empowering dynamics which lostness holds for each and every one of us.

The Blue
You can have Egypt and Nantucket.
The only place I want to visit is The Blue,
not the Wild Blue Yonder that seduces pilots,
but that zone where the unexpected dwells,
waiting to come out of it in the shape of bolts.
I want to walk its azure perimeter
where the unanticipated is coiled, on the mark,
ready to spring into the predicitable homes of earth.
I want to stroll through the pale indigo light
examining all the accidents about to rocket into time,
all the forgotten names about to fly from tongues.
I will scrutinize all the surprises of the future
and watch the brainstorms gathering darkly,
ready to hit the heads of inventors
laboring in their crackpot shacks.

A jaded traveler with an invisible passport,
I am at home with this heaven of the unforeseen,
waiting for the next whoosh of sudden departure
when, with no advance warning, to tiny augery,
the unpredictable plummets into our lives
from somewhere that looks like sky.

~ Billy Collins ~
(*The Apple That Astonished Paris*)

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