Sensing Wellbeing and Health:
A Linguistic-Affective Approach

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Abstract

The definitions of wellbeing and health determine, to a great extent, the actionable steps that societies take to achieve them. Fundamental limitations to the current dominant understandings of these terms have been identified. Following an affective, decolonial, and Latinx feminist perspective, in this research I collaborate with 59 first- and second-generation internal migrant women in Quito, Ecuador, and El Churo, a local communication NGO and community media outlet, to explore expressions of wellbeing and health beyond hegemonic theories. In doing so, I introduce the linguistic-affective approach as a possible alternative to reach novel insights, foster meaningful collaboration with diverse communities, and reconsider health communication processes and community-engaged research more broadly. The reflections shared in these pages emerge from the under-represented experiences of women in the Global South. As such, they add to feminist and decolonial models and endeavours existing outside and surpassing dominant considerations and practices by further contradicting, complementing, and expanding ruling paradigms. The main contributions of this study include tracing new paths to discover and communicate alternative expressions of wellbeing and health; advancing the theory and practice of affective, decolonial, and feminist work; and enhancing the implementation of communication and community-engaged research projects within the health and social sciences. These insights could inform the creation of policies, systems, and healthcare services that better serve excluded groups within and beyond the Western world, particularly those more systematically and historically deprived of access to material, communication, and health-related resources.

Keywords: Affect; Feminism; Wellbeing and Health; Community-Engaged Research; Health Communication; Migration in Latin America

To Pablo and our baby on the way ❤️

Acknowledgements

Although it appears at the beginning of this dissertation, this section is the last I wrote and, definitely, the hardest one of all. My gratitude towards the many people who shaped this project in one way or another is, just as the matters explored in this work, profoundly felt but difficult to put into words. However, following the arguments I describe on these pages, I will try to bring at least some of these sensations into the text.

First and foremost, I am eternally grateful to every single one of the 59 women who participated in this research. The knowledge they shared with me and the friendships we built in the process not only informed this study; they also sustained me in one of the most challenging periods of my life and transformed how I feel, think, act, and live in multiple and everlasting ways.

I am also deeply thankful to my friends from El Churo for embarking on yet another endeavor with me and for their continuous support and input in this project, without which it would have never been the same. I am particularly indebted to Belén Cárdenas Landázuri, who conducted the participatory components of this study with me. Tocayita querida, gracias de todo corazón por toda tu entrega hacia este proyecto que fue tan especial y sanador gracias al sentipensamiento, cariño, cuidado, y tiempo que tuviste la generosidad de compartir conmigo y con todas las mujeres que se nos unieron. Nuestra amistad es uno de los regalos que más atesoro de todos los que me llevo de este proceso.

My gratitude towards Dr. Katherine Reilly, my senior supervisor, is also immense. Thank you, Katherine, for the constant support and the countless conversations and draft reviews that gave direction to this work. Thank you as well for knowing exactly how to guide me every time I felt lost or stuck. You are the best supervisor I could have wished for! I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Milena Droumeva and Dr. Frederik Lesage for their invaluable knowledge, input, and advice, which expanded my perspective and significantly strengthened this work.

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necesario tenerte conmigo para caminar. Lo sé, sé que no hace falta que te diga nada, solo basta con cruzar una mirada, voy contigo al cielo y al fondo del mar 🎵.

Last but certainly not least, thank you, Pablo, for your eternal support; for being the peaceful centre to which I return every time the intensity of my emotions and the world overwhelm me; and for bringing so much laughter, joy, and playfulness into my life. Almost ten years later, I repeat, with even more conviction, what I wrote in my master's thesis when I said that these words, my words, will always be for you. My love for you only grows with time, and I cannot wait to experience together the next chapter that is coming into our lives.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

You will find these boxes throughout the text

Sometimes, they will have quotes that summarize or exemplify the argument from the page

Other times, the link may be less obvious, but I believe you will find it if you feel inclined to engage

I also include my own voice in some of them

These boxes show words that have moved me in some way

(You will also find some words in green)
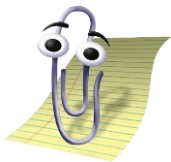
(They are whispering hints)

For you, will they do the same?

"You have left your readers with a very special gift: a headache. By which I mean a problem: what in the world to do with it all".

(Massumi, 2002)

"If you don't understand try to feel. According to Massumi it works."

(Leys, 2011)

1.   Introduction

As will soon become apparent, relationships are an essential element of this dissertation. Many components are involved in the intricate web of relations that give form to the research project that I am about to describe in the following pages, and you, the person reading them, are a crucial piece of this equation. As in most cases, our bond will grow with time, and it will start with a question. However, instead of your name, place of birth, or what you like to do when you are not reading lengthy academic texts, on this occasion, I ask:

> If you could choose something that represents what wellbeing and health are or feel like to you, what would that be and why?

Although I may not know you or your answer, I can almost be sure that a stethoscope, the device with which doctors listen to the sounds inside patients' bodies, is not the first thing that came to you when considering this question. Yet, when we search the word "health" in Google Images, that is precisely what comes up, along with portrayals of (mostly male-looking) doctors in white medical aprons or surgical attires, hospitals, ambulances, pills, and injections. A few pictures of fruits, vegetables, or people exercising appear here and there. We get similar results if we do the same search in Spanish or French. (If you speak another language, it would be interesting to see what you get). To me, this quick search sharply contrasts with some of the ways in which wellbeing and health have been conceptualized and experienced worldwide while demonstrating how widespread the current dominant Western models approaching these terms are.

Contrary to what we may believe, our considerations around wellbeing and health are not static. Like in the past, at the moment, different models addressing them exist simultaneously within and across geographical settings around the world, several of which have emerged from the knowledges and experiences of Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples, and of populations outside the Global North (Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021). The depth and range of these models is vast. For example, the Kichwa concept of Sumak Kawsay (Good Living in English and Buen Vivir

in Spanish) is based on the Andean principles and practices of Indigenous Peoples in Latin America and promotes wellbeing and health through harmony and equilibrium with nature and everything that inhabits it (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Cachiguango, 2011; Hermida Bustos, 2017; Loewenson et al., 2020; Simbaña, 2012). Similarly, some Afro-descendant approaches in the region view the relationship with the environment –as well as food, plants, and herbs– as essential components of health and healing (M.E. Quiñónez Castillo, personal communication, March 29, 2021). For its part, based on the consideration that "I am because you are," the African notion of Ubuntu considers wellbeing and health in terms of community relations, including elements like sharing, caring, reciprocity, empathy, and solidarity. As a result, the traditional health systems related to this concept do not only focus on individual physical health, but also on people's ties with the community (Loewenson et al., 2020; Nolte & Downing, 2019; Prinsloo, 2001).The principle of relationality is also shared by the Maori health models in New Zealand. These models are based on values such as connectedness, community engagement, positive relationships, kindness, mutual understanding, and compassion (D. Wilson et al., 2021). In places like India, multiple approaches coexist. For example, following Mahatma Gandhi's anticolonial considerations and actions, some models focus on the quest for balance between body, mind, and spirit that he promoted. At the same time, other pre-colonial conceptions of wellbeing and health in the country are based on the integration of "the supernatural, moral, spiritual and material worlds" (Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021). Meanwhile, in settings like Canada, some of the perspectives and teachings around wellbeing and health of First Nations Peoples have been captured in symbols such as the Cree Medicine Wheel, which underlines the totality of the human condition and the balance between the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional realms, while simultaneously depicting the interconnectedness of all aspects of life (Graham, 2010; Wenger-Nabigon, 2010).

Although these and other non-hegemonic conceptualizations of wellbeing and health have their unique characteristics, they often share core values and principles, such as community life; reciprocity; relationality; collective interest; complementarity; spirituality; equilibrium; and respect for all beings, including nature and the environment (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021; D. Wilson et al., 2021). Despite the crucial contributions that these and other existing global models have to offer,

biomedicine has imposed itself as the current dominant paradigm (Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Loewenson et al., 2020; Lowy, 2011).
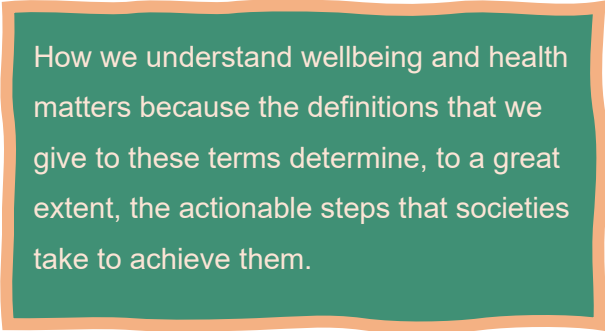
As its name implies, biomedicine is a medical model focusing on biological aspects of health and illness. The understandings of health, medicine, and the body that characterize biomedicine have been influenced by economic and political models and doctrines, such as the Enlightenment, capitalism, and neoliberalism (Lupton, 1994, pp. 57–58, 2003; Price & Shildrick, 1999, p. 145; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). The Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality has shaped the construction of medicine as objective, neutral, and independent from history, culture, geography, and language. On their side, capitalism and neoliberalism have constructed the body as a "mechanized commodity" (Lupton, 1994, p. 58), placing responsibility exclusively on the individual and ignoring the social sides of healing, such as the quality of care and the power dynamics that might be present in medical practice (Lupton, 1994, 2003; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). Aligned with these perspectives, biomedicine strongly emphasizes science and reason, and follows an individual perception of the human being. As such, this model considers that illness is caused by biological, specific, objective, and individual factors; and it conceives health as the absence of disease. Hence, for this tradition, health resides in medical settings, and it is mediated by technology (Gordon, 1988; Lock, 1988; Lupton, 2003; Sterne, 2001; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003).

The biomedical model has not gone without contestation. One of its main critiques is that it does not consider and address the factors external to the individual that also influence health, such as social, political, cultural, and historical contexts (Gordon, 1988; Lock, 1988). Informed by such considerations, approaches that also include these broader and key determinants of health have emerged. As a result, the World Health Organization now defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1948). This definition has included mental health and social factors, which have been shown to be crucial determinants of integral health (Crinson & Martino, 2017; Marmot et al., 2008). However, authors from different settings have pointed out that current dominant definitions, such as the one offered by the World Health Organization, have mostly been created in the Global North without enough leverage or consideration of the knowledges, healthcare systems, understandings, and practices that exist and take place outside the

West. Consequently, they are broad and do not always respond to the needs and realities of such contexts (Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021).

Critics of current dominant definitions have also maintained that they tend to consider only ideal conditions, thus leaving little space for contemplating how wellbeing and health might manifest themselves even in the presence of physical (e.g., chronic illness, disability), mental (e.g., depression, anxiety), social (e.g., migration, poverty), or contextual (e.g., pandemic) factors that may make such a state of *complete* wellbeing difficult or impossible to achieve (Crinson & Martino, 2017; Godlee, 2011; Huber et al., 2011; Misselbrook, 2014; The Lancet, 2009).

Significant limitations to the current understandings of wellbeing have also been identified. While questions around wellbeing have been addressed in novel ways from fields such as phenomenology, critical geography, anthropology, and health sciences, most research examining

> How we understand wellbeing and health matters because the definitions that we give to these terms determine, to a great extent, the actionable steps that societies take to achieve them.

wellbeing and its relation to health has followed the World Health Organization's conceptualization of the term, which envisions it as having two dimensions: objective and subjective (WHO, 2012). Informed by this conceptualization, different approaches to understand and measure these two dimensions and their relation to health have been advanced (Dodge et al., 2012; Lee Kum Sheung Center for Health and Happiness, 2017).

Shaped by global doctrines of development based on economic growth, efforts focusing on objective dimensions of wellbeing have mostly followed a positivist approach, measuring it in terms of material, tangible or quantitative indicators, such as education levels, physical environments, and economic stability (e.g., Gross Domestic Product, income distribution, unemployment rate) (Lee Kum Sheung Center for Health and Happiness, 2017). However, this focus has been critiqued for leaving unaddressed important aspects of wellbeing (e.g., quality of life, dignity, justice, equality) that are perhaps harder to measure and surpass economic markers. Even more, it has been argued that this approach can lead to practices, such as the extraction of natural

resources, that hinder rather than support the wellbeing of societies (Arteaga-Cruz et al., 2020; Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021).

With these critiques in mind, efforts following an interpretivist approach to focus on subjective dimensions of wellbeing have emerged. These have aimed to grasp individuals' subjective assessments of their lives through scales and surveys that consider psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions (Albuquerque, 2016; Camfield et al., 2009; Lee Kum Sheung Center for Health and Happiness, 2017). They include considerations such as perceptions of quality of life; satisfaction; and positive (e.g., happiness) and negative (e.g., anger, shame) emotions, moods, and feelings. On their part, these approaches have been critiqued for their strong focus on the individual and their subsequent insufficient attention to broader structural factors shaping health, human rights, and access to fundamental social needs (James, 2007; Neff & Olsen, 2007). Moreover, it has been argued that they still often follow external pre-conceived understandings of wellbeing (e.g., wellbeing as always equating to happiness) rather than people's own unique experiences and interpretations of the term (Camfield et al., 2009).

Similarly, an overarching critique of the dominant approaches to wellbeing and health coming from decolonial thought is that such models tend to equate these terms with development, modernization, and progress as understood and measured by the West, assuming that the expressions of wellbeing and health that they advocate for are (or should be) the desired goal everywhere (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Arteaga-Cruz et al., 2020; Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021). Often considering development as a lineal process always achieved through similar stages, they frequently view the steps to attain development in Western standards as easily replicable in other locations without much need for understanding the circumstances, histories, and structures of each context (Arteaga-Cruz et al., 2020; Escobar, 1995; McAnany, 2012; Waisbord, 2020). In addition, they rarely address the repercussions of such efforts, such as land devastation and health-related impacts due to extraction projects conducted in the name of 'progress' and economic growth (Arteaga-Cruz et al., 2020).

These universalized and ethnocentric views of health, wellbeing, and development have not remained unchallenged. Critics of these approaches have maintained that economic growth should not be the only marker of progress, wellbeing

and health, as maintained by the West. Instead, more intangible factors should be considered as well, and these must be defined and achieved in local terms with the active involvement of local actors (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Beltrán, 1974, p. 77; Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021; Servaes, 2006, p. 283; Waisbord, 2020). Paying attention to intangible elements that have been little or not explored before can open the possibility of imagining and forging new futures (Pink, 2009a). However, as decolonial work has pointed out, such involvement has not been prioritized. Instead, hegemonic views of wellbeing, health, and development are created and continue to be maintained, to a great extent, by historically constructed discourses and practices that produce and perpetuate unequal material realities (Escobar, 1995; Mignolo, 2010) and by a constant erasure of forms of knowledge and knowledge production that exist outside Western parameters (De Sousa Santos, 2014).

The West has been positioned as the only bearer of knowledge, reason, and truth (Quijano, 2000). At the same time, the diversity, perspectives, practices, and agency of countries outside the West have been flattened. A homogenous representation of settings that 'lack' the education, knowledge, and capacity to achieve development has replaced this complexity (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Escobar, 1995; Loewenson et al., 2020). This representation has served to justify the exercise of power and control over countries and peoples of the Global South (Asher, 2013; Loewenson et al., 2021; Quijano, 2000). Portraying 'other' forms of knowledge, understandings, meanings, experiences, and practices as less valid, 'folklore' and, ultimately, detrimental to health, wellbeing, and life has served to depict countries outside the West as having an urgent and constant need for external salvation, protection, and intervention (Airhihenbuwa & Dutta, 2012; Asher, 2013; De Sousa Santos, 2014; Dutta, 2009; Escobar, 1995; Loewenson et al., 2020; Mignolo, 2010; Quijano, 2000). For this reason, it has been argued that existing dominant approaches to wellbeing and health reproduce rather than challenge pre-existing geopolitical power dynamics and systems, such as colonialism and imperialism (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Arteaga-Cruz et al., 2020; Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021).

Informed by these considerations, this research project asks if alternative expressions of wellbeing and health can present themselves in ways that are outside existing dominant theories and, if so, how these can be identified and shared. Overall, it aims to determine whether non-hegemonic expressions of these terms can offer new avenues to address them.

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Research Context and Collaborators

This research project came to life amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which made the need to find novel approaches to wellbeing and health even more apparent than before. It is based in Quito, Ecuador's capital city. If you are familiar with Latin American or Ecuadorian ancestral knowledge, you might be expecting this dissertation to focus on Sumak Kawsay. As previously mentioned, this is a political and cultural project conceptualized and lived by Indigenous communities based in what is now Ecuador and other Andean Latin American countries that details alternative understandings of the 'good life' (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Cachiguango, 2011; Hermida Bustos, 2017; Simbaña, 2012). While this concept was, in fact, addressed by some of the people who participated in this study and it is discussed in later pages of the dissertation, it is not the main focus. The group with whom this project was conducted was extremely diverse, and the expressions of wellbeing and health that we explored together were just as varied. Hence, while the expressions of wellbeing and health that emerged during this project are compatible with Sumak Kawsay and may complement it, they did not always arise within the boundaries of this concept.

The people with whom I embarked on the exploration of alternative expressions of wellbeing and health played a vital role in this process, and they are a fundamental component of the web of relations intertwined in this project. These collaborators include the members of El Churo (www.elchuro.org), a communication NGO and community media outlet based in Quito, Ecuador. Since its opening in 2005, El Churo has

promoted the rights and amplified the voices of communities across Ecuador that have historically had (and continue to have) little or no access to other media platforms, including Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian groups; women; and feminist, youth, and LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations. It does so by producing and publishing information relevant to these communities in **Wambra** (www.wambra.ec), El Churo's digital community media outlet. Aiming to strengthen communities' self-representation efforts, it also offers the groups it works with technical and professional support so that they can create their own content and/or mediums of communication, and it fosters events –such as festivals, summits, workshops, and gatherings– to bring communities together and advance their rights, initiatives, and demands. Moreover, it conducts research on the implementation of communication and human rights in Ecuador, and it advocates for the democratization of communication in the country. Finally, El Churo builds and maintains strong networks with other compatible organizations and media outlets in Ecuador and throughout Latin America with the objective of connecting diverse populations facing similar struggles and increasing their reach.

El Churo's work is informed by its ongoing collaboration with national and regional communities and organizations, and by the insights of Latin American authors working on topics such as alternative communication and communication for social change (e.g., Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron), decolonial theory (e.g., Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Arturo Escobar), and feminism (e.g., María Lugones), to name a few. Like several other alternative and community media in the region (Barranquero, 2006, 2011; Mato, 2004), El Churo's participatory and political approach is particularly influenced by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and his views on dialogue as an avenue for liberation and social transformation (Freire, 1970, pp. 44–48).

El Churo has just recently started to hire more people. So far, most of its work has been conducted by the core team (composed of only four extremely hard-working individuals) and by volunteers and community members who want to support the organization.

I first met the members of El Churo in 2013 when I was researching community media in Ecuador to complete my master's degree in Anthropology. I spent three months conducting participant observation at El Churo with this objective. During this time, I collaborated as a member of the team by writing, translating, and editing articles; co-

leading workshops and gatherings with them in different cities across Ecuador; providing logistical support during festivals and summits; and reporting news and covering events. We built a strong personal friendship and professional relationship that we have maintained over the years. We have partnered on multiple projects since then, and I have been a member of their board of directors since 2019. Following the recommendations of decolonial and community-engaged approaches to research (Grain, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2021; S. Wilson & Mulrennan, 2016), I created the project that I describe in this dissertation alongside them right from the start, and it would not have been the same without El Churo's invaluable knowledge, support, and input, present at every step of the way.

On this occasion, I worked particularly closely with Belén Cárdenas Landázuri, another collaborator and member of El Churo's board of directors. She is a community-based educator who has immense experience with fostering deeply participatory, affective, and safe spaces with diverse marginalized communities in Ecuador. Her approach is particularly informed by Paulo Freire's popular education (Freire, 1970), Participatory Action-Research (PAR) (Fals-Borda, 1987) and community-based and decolonial feminist methodologies (Mendez, 2015; Territorio y feminismos, 2017), as well as her own empirical practice and the incredible array of methods and activities that she has learnt during the 20+ years that she has been performing this work.

We also collaborated with a total of 59 first- and second-generation internal migrant women in Quito. Internal migration –defined as the permanent or temporary movement of people within national borders (IOM, 2015)– is common in Ecuador. As the capital city, Quito is one of the country's primary recipients, with 35% of its population being internal migrants who come from highly diverse life paths (INEC, 2010; Redacción El Comercio, 2011). Ecuador is composed of 24 provinces divided across four distinct regions: the Costa (Pacific Coast), the Sierra (Andes Mountains), the Amazonía (Amazon Jungle), and the Región Insular (Galapagos Islands). Despite its small size, there are 18 Indigenous groups and one Afro-descendant group living in this territory, each with its own cultural identity and systems of social, economic, political, and legal organization. These groups are clustered within 14 ancestral Nations formed before the Ecuadorian Nation-State. Each of these Nations has its own historical identity, language, culture, and territory within what is now Ecuador. As such, 14 different languages are spoken in the country (FLACSO, 2011; GoRaymi, 2021). Ethnicity in Ecuador is

determined by self-identification. According to the last available census, 71,93 % of the population self-identifies as Mestizo (i.e., mixed European and Amerindian descent), 7,39% as Montubio (i.e., Ecuadorian of mixed descent from the rural coastal region of the country), 7,19% as Afro-Ecuadorian (i.e., African descent), 7,03% as Indigenous (i.e., Amerindian descent), 6,09% as White-Ecuadorian (i.e., European descent), and 0,37% as other (INEC, 2010).

Although they were all Ecuadorian, the 59 women who participated in this endeavour were extremely different from one another in multiple ways, including race, ethnicity, income, level of education, language, city of origin, occupation, (dis)ability, and age. They self-identified as Mestizas, Montubias, Afro-Ecuadorian, and Indigenous. They spoke three different languages and had roots in 17 of the 24 provinces of Ecuador and three of the country's four regions. The youngest was 19 years old; the oldest, 71; and every decade between these extremes was represented by at least one of them.

Exploring wellbeing and health with such a diverse group allowed multiple experiences and perspectives to be shared, considered, and discussed. These various, complementary, and often contradictory perceptions contributed to the previously identified need to further our understanding of how wellbeing and health can manifest themselves in specific contexts and even in the presence of limiting factors such as those posed by internal migration in Ecuador. Although the country's current Constitution recognizes cultural diversity by declaring it a pluri-national, pluri-cultural, and multi-ethnic State (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008), there is a lack of adequate structural response to Ecuador's vast diversity. This absence presents severe multilevel challenges to internal migrants and poses significant overlapping risks to their wellbeing and health. Violence, racism, and discrimination (often related to intersecting social locations such as class, gender, and ethnicity); language barriers; and unequal access to education, healthcare services, and economic resources are some of them (Barboza & Zaragocín, 2021; Eguiguren, 2017; ONU, 2019). As described in the following chapters, conducting research in this context enabled us to explore the situated ways in which wellbeing and health presented themselves even under these adverse conditions. Doing so permitted us to directly address some of the shortcomings of existing approaches which, as detailed in the previous section, only tend to consider these terms under ideal circumstances (Crinson & Martino, 2017; Godlee, 2011; Huber et al., 2011; Misselbrook, 2014; The Lancet, 2009).

Perhaps even more importantly, exploring these concepts with this group allowed us to listen to the formerly unheard or highly under-represented considerations and insights of diverse women from the Global South. In the Ecuadorian context, opportunities for minority groups to express their experiences, knowledges, and needs are scarce, with women's voices being particularly silenced (Barboza & Zaragocín, 2021; Valdivieso Vega & Armas, 2008). In light of this absence and informed by the work of Latinx feminism, critical health communication, community-engaged research, and mainly Latin American decolonial thought, this project aimed to foster a participatory space where different and complex perspectives of internal migrant women could converge. As such, it sought to strengthen social bonds and facilitate dialogue, collaboration, and collective action among local actors.

The multiple insights of the women who participated in this project add to the decolonial goal of attending to the knowledges and experiences of people who have been left out of communication, research, and decision-making platforms (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Dutta, 2011). These perspectives can contribute to contesting and expanding hegemonic Eurocentric approaches to wellbeing and health, while disputing the historical and systemic homogenization and erasure of non-Western peoples and knowledges, resulting in the dominant assessment of the West as the knower and the rest of the world as a known (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Escobar, 1995). The formulation and advancement of perspectives that leverage local knowledge and go beyond those imposed by Western thought could inform and spark potential efforts toward social and structural change in the specific context of internal migration in Ecuador, which could directly improve the wellbeing and health of the women who participated in this project (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Dutta et al., 2016). At the same time, the learnings from these initiatives could inform the implementation of policies and systems to support the health and wellbeing of excluded groups in this and other settings.

At a personal level, the presence of each woman who participated in this project also contributed to sustaining me during one of the most challenging periods of my life. As the writer and curator Zeba Blay describes in her book "Carefree Black Girls: A Celebration of Black Women in Popular Culture" (Blay, 2021, p. 4), I feel this dissertation came together as I was falling apart, and writing about the experiences of women is what put me together again.

11

In October 2019, I travelled from Vancouver, where I have lived for the past ten years, to Quito, my birth city, to conduct fieldwork for this study. Shortly after I arrived, my father was diagnosed with bladder cancer. For months, I endured an intense roller coaster of confusion, disbelief, grief, gratitude, and debilitating fear. It was one of the most difficult and profound experiences I have ever had. I have never felt so unbelievably raw, human, shattered, vulnerable and, surprisingly, also powerful and alive.

Thankfully, Katherine, my senior supervisor, invited me to continue with my research. I do not know how I would have endured this time without this advice. I conducted my fieldwork between sobs and hospital stays. In those moments, the interactions that I had with the women with whom I met to carry out this project gifted me with small pockets of normality in times when anything resembling routine or familiarity seemed impossible, while their stories gave me infinitely more answers than the ones I was looking for. I rarely told women what I was going through, as I wanted to be careful not to overshadow their experiences with mine. Yet, the vulnerability and wisdom that each of them shared supported me without them knowing.

Their descriptions of what wellbeing and health under adverse conditions might feel like in their lives helped me find some in mine. When they related wellbeing to having company, I tried talking to a friend; when they said that health felt like soil under their bare feet, I went for a walk in the woods; and when they described finding meaning in their work, I tried to write at least a few words.

During the first months of my fieldwork, the idea of a pandemic was still a distant threat. Then, the reality of COVID-19 hit us all. My fieldwork had to stop. After months of quarantine, I returned to Canada where, again, I found in the accounts shared by the women that I had met with while I was in Ecuador the ability to deal with the pain of the separation and the longing that I felt. And when Yvonne, my mother-in-law, was also diagnosed with cancer and died after just a few months following my return, I found

in women's words the strength to be with her in her last days, and to support my family and myself once she passed:

> "Time is cyclical, it is always going away, and it is always returning. We, along with everything else, are part of that process. When we are born, we come from earth. We are formed by earth, and we have the four elements within us. When we die, we just return to that state. It is just the part of the cycle, and the cycle never ends. Your body becomes earth again and it turns into the origin of new life. A tree grows from there, and a bird lives in that tree, so in a way, you become part of that tree and that bird. How could that be sad? Death is a beautiful transition. You do not disappear; you just start living everywhere."

I typed these words expressed by Killari, one of the women who participated in this project, while the chirps of a sparrow at my window made me think of my mother-in-law and smile. As I reviewed my notes and recordings to write this dissertation, memories of my fieldwork kept coming up and deepening, even more, the profound gratitude, respect, and admiration I feel towards each person I met while conducting this research. Their essence and contributions are just as engraved in me and my life as they are in between these lines.

Another Piece of the Puzzle

Because this project is both a personal quest and a shared intellectual endeavour, I cannot hide my own presence in it. However, as much as I love writing, opening up about myself is hard. This is because, as a kid, I dreamed of being a singer. I spent hours rehearsing in front of the mirror, first with a brush, and later, with a white and light-blue plastic microphone that someone gifted me. My dream felt so real and attainable that sometimes I would cry with dazed excitement as I imagined myself opening my first concert. I knew exactly what I would say, which songs I would perform, and in what order. Only one thing stood in the way between me and my dream: my terrible voice.

I saw my total lack of any musical talent as a slight difficulty that I could mend with enough time, patience, and perseverance, and I had plenty of all of them. For

months, every Tuesday and Thursday, I went to audition for my school's choir. Understandably, I was rejected every time. Yet, each time I reminded myself of an interview with Shakira, my main idol at the time, where she said that she too had been banned from her school choir. "I have a misunderstood voice, just like Shakira. As it happened to her, soon people will realize that I do not sound like a goat," I would tell myself before auditioning again. When my school's choir teacher accepted that I would not stop trying, she finally let me be part of it, and I could not have been more ecstatic! But my excitement did not last long. As soon as I started singing, my teacher walked towards me and turned off my microphone. With much effort, I was able to hold back my tears until I arrived home, where my mom, dad, and sister had to console me for hours. Singing to a muted microphone finally convinced me that my voice was not good enough. Extrapolating from this experience, for years, I have been sure that my story, my experiences, and my perspectives are, and always will be, out of tune.

This event led me to abandon forever any wish to sing. As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry describes in my all-time favourite book, The Little Prince, grown-ups have the power and the tendency to do that to children's artistic dreams. Yet, it gifted me with a new obsession: the profound desire to listen to the voices that have been silenced in ways much more violent, significant, and unjust than mine. Following this objective, I became a journalist. For years, this profession allowed me to hide behind the unattainable pursuit of objectivity, which not only let me, but even encouraged me, to censor my own voice to give space for the voices of others. However, while conducting this research, I have begun to acknowledge that if other people are entrusting me with their stories, I too need to be vulnerable and share my own, as difficult, shameful, corny, or bluntly wrong as it may feel. Thanks to Gloria Anzaldúa, one of the Latinx feminist authors who informed my work, I have started to accept that my writing only works when

it says something I have repressed or pretended not to know. "The meaning and worth of my writing is measured by how much I put myself on the line and how much nakedness I achieve," she states (Keating, 2009, p. 1). As she did, I now recognize that only by

"I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you" (Keating, 2009, p. 30).

weaving my own stories with the stories of others can I fully explain my claims.

The arguments that I make in this dissertation are equally informed by my personal experiences as they are by the texts that I cite to sustain them. For now, I would like to address the intersecting social locations that shape my positionality in relation to this project, along with the privileges that come with them, which are deeply intertwined with the experiences and the people who shaped my desire to conduct it in the first place.

In a way, I could say that this research project was born with me, as my entanglement with health, illness, medicine, and death has shaped my life since my first day on Earth. I was born with a malformation that filled my first years of life with a series of infections and resulted in two years of post-operatory and a 16 centimetres scar that reminds me of the vulnerability of my body if I stare too long. The first memory that I have is that of my parents' sad and worried faces trying to find the words to tell an almost 4-years-old me that Katy, my best friend, who was my age and with whom I had played until dusk the day before, had suddenly died on her sleep. I recognized those faces again when, a few years later, they struggled to explain why Juanjo, another one of my best friends, needed open-heart surgery to survive. Luckily for them, they were not in charge of letting me know that Caro, yet another of my best friends, had been diagnosed with leukemia when we were eleven, and that her cancer had returned just a few months before we turned fifteen.

My captivation for this topic was also shaped by the fact that my father is a medical doctor. Although he always told my sister and me that he would support us in any career path we decided to pursue, as long as it had nothing to do with health, my decision to explore alternative expressions of wellbeing and health was –paradoxically– inspired by him. I vividly remember the kindness with which he cared for me when I was sick when I was growing up. I can still recall how his lead apron smelled when he arrived late at night, and the admiration I felt for him for not hiding his tears when a girl he was treating died. I still hold the taste of the corn, beans, lettuce, and chickens he accepted as payment when his patients could not afford his consultation fees close to my heart, as well as all the birthday parties and Christmas celebrations he had to miss. "Sickness does not know of dates," he used to say. My dad showed me what care and medicine are all about, or could and should be. With his example, he inspired me to search for

avenues towards these affective ways of approaching health, which I have not encountered in other medical spaces, and to try to extend the feeling of wellbeing that he transmitted to me, even when sick, to people who do not have the privilege of being related to a doctor who really cares for them as I did.

Yet, perhaps the person who influenced my work and my view on life the most is Isabel. Isabel worked at my grandparents' house from the age of 19, and she lived there until she died at 81. She cared for my mother and then for me after I was born. As I grew up, Isabel played with me, told me stories, hugged me, kissed me, and helped me with my homework. We cooked and cleaned my grandparents' house together, and she let me believe that I was actually helping her. She gave me beautiful gifts every Christmas, sang songs to me, and celebrated with tears of pride even the smallest of my achievements. Her picture hangs on my bedroom's wall, and I wear the ring that she gave me to gather some courage or strength, and whenever I need to feel unconditionally loved.

Isabel was a grandmother to me, so I could not understand why she would never accept any of my invitations to my birthday parties or presentations at school. "My beloved little sweet girl, one day you will understand why I cannot come," she would simply say. She knew that, at some point, I would realize that although we spent almost every day together, we lived in opposing worlds. She knew that at some point I would realize that because of racism and classism, so horribly present in Ecuador, where we were both born, as middle-class self-identified Mestiza (i.e., mixed European and Amerindian descent)[1], I had privileges that would always be denied to her just because I came from a family that had more money than hers and because my skin is light, and hers was not. She knew that, at some point, I would realize that the gifts and time she gave me meant that Patricia, her daughter, could not have them. And she knew that, at some point, Patricia would let me know that she, too, had my picture hanging on her wall. I pray that she knew what she meant to me. I wish I could tell her the extent to

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[1] I do not want to use this term without first acknowledging its problematic use in the Ecuadorian context, where the concept Mestizaje is often employed to convey the idea of a Mestizo Nation. "Todos somos mestizos/ We are all Mestizos". This discourse is often used to negate the existence and experiences of Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples and Nationalities, along with the historic and systemic inequalities that they face and their multiple efforts to resist them. Despite this problematic tradition, I use this term for lack of a better word to recognize that, in the deeply classist, racist, and discriminatory Ecuadorian context, not being a member of any specific ancestral group unjustly situates me in a position where numerous privileges intersect.

which her presence in my life and her care toward me shaped my heart and my goals. Too many things were left unspoken between us. These unspoken words that I finally understood when I grew up are what first lit in me the burning desire to shout against injustices and fight with all I have for a more equitable world. These unspoken words, along with her love, are the fire behind every endeavour toward social change I undertake, including this one.

Finally, this project was shaped by my identity as a migrant woman and by Joa, one of the best and first friends I made when I moved from Ecuador to Canada. When I told her how lonely I felt in my new environment and how much I missed the people and places that I had left behind, Joa invited me to a reading group that she had created, where migrant women met once a month to discuss books related to migration written by women, and to eat food from the place where each story was set. To be honest, we almost never read or talked about the books assigned. Yet, the opportunity to share the space, food, and stories with other migrant women allowed me to find subtle expressions of wellbeing in a period of my life in which it felt out of reach. Although several years have passed since then and until I started drafting my project design, I always remembered how much I cherished those encounters, and how much they helped me. This experience drove me to explore the daily and small ways in which wellbeing might be present, even during difficult times, this time alongside women who had migrated to the capital city of Quito from other places within Ecuador, or whose families had done so.

These are just a few of the people who have influenced my work. The truth is that more individuals have shaped this project in one way or another than I could possibly mention. However, whether I name them or not, the appreciation I feel for every single one of them is present in every word I write in this dissertation, outlined as follows.

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation has six chapters. In this first chapter, I have presented the central questions guiding this research and the reasons behind them, and I have introduced some of the people involved in this project.

Chapter 2 explains that this study is also shaped by affect. In this chapter, I describe what affect is and the different trajectories within the field. Then, I situate myself in relation to existing work and describe the linguistic-affective approach that I created to address my research questions. Finally, I explain the possible contributions of this approach.

Chapter 3 describes how the linguistic-affective approach introduced in the previous chapter, along with the insights of multisensory ethnography, allowed me to start exploring alternative expressions of wellbeing and health with first- and second-generation internal migrant women in Quito, Ecuador, in novel ways. This chapter details how the methods presented provided internal migrant women and me with the opportunity to begin recognizing subtle expressions of wellbeing and health that addressed some of the shortcomings of existing dominant approaches. However, it acknowledges that, alone, these methods still replicated some of the limitations of these approaches. To address those, we needed an additional step, described in the following chapter.

Informed by affect, decolonial considerations, and Latinx feminist theories, Chapter 4 details how the linguistic-affective approach enabled us to keep exploring wellbeing and health in ways that are outside of existing dominant theories. Specifically, this chapter describes how the affective, embodied, and cognitive process that led to the rise of a heterogeneous group identity among the women who were part of this project allowed us to trace the intricate relationships between individual experiences, and between these experiences and the structural factors that shape the context in which they occur, while opening the opportunity for the collective enactment of wellbeing and health, which drove us to experience them in an affective and embodied (rather than just cognitive) way.

Through the exploration of the participatory process undertaken to create collaborative media content, Chapter 5 analyzes how a linguistic-affective approach to communication can contribute to strengthening alternative expressions of wellbeing and health, and be leveraged to start to challenge, contest, and address the structures and systems of power and oppression that hinder them. Finally, this chapter discusses how the linguistic-affective approach can inform communication and dissemination efforts not only outside, but also inside academic environments.

As the concluding chapter, Chapter 6 reviews the main arguments presented in the dissertation and discusses their strengths, limitations, and broader implications. Overall, this study traces new avenues to discover and communicate alternative expressions of wellbeing and health; expands the theory and praxis of affective, feminist, and decolonial work; and enhances the implementation of communication and community-engaged projects within the health and social sciences. This project also adds to other fields that deal with health and wellbeing by offering perspectives that emerge from the under-represented sensations, experiences, and knowledges of women beyond the Western world, which exist outside and surpass existing dominant considerations and practices. As such, these insights complement and contribute to decolonial and feminist models and approaches in particular. They also provide theoretical and empirical contemplations that could inform the creation of policies, systems, and healthcare services that better respond to the needs of marginalized communities, particularly those more systematically and historically excluded from access to material, communication, and health-related resources.

2.   Affect.

A Path Towards the Site Where the Secret Hides

> "I adore the word intangible.
>
> It carries so much wisdom, so much mystery.
>
> It has so much opportunity, potential, healing.
>
> In a hurry to measure and define, some people have forgotten their ability to
>
> STOP
>
> and listen, feel,
>
> and truly understand.
>
> Yet, it is precisely there –in what cannot be touched– where the secret hides."

I clearly remember how these words by Yenny, one of the women who participated in this research, moved me when she said them. They gave me hope amid the COVID-19 pandemic, when opportunity, potential, and healing seemed to belong to a distant past. By tapping into the intangible and the unknown, Yenny was delving into imagined futures (Pink, 2009a) in a context where any path toward new possibilities appeared impossible. I also loved her words because they were aligned with this project's search for alternative expressions of wellbeing and health beyond existing approaches which, as explained in the previous chapter and unlike Yenny's description, focus primarily on what can be quantified, observed, calculated, and specified. However, this initial thrill soon started to transmute into a spiral of questions inside my head: If, as Yenny said, the secret to new possibilities hides in the intangible –in that which cannot

be touched, measured, or defined– does it mean that it is out of reach? If not, how might we access it? Could affect offer a possible path?

What is Affect?

The word affect has often been used to refer to "emotions, feelings, moods, dispositions, and attitudes associated with persons and/or situations" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989, p. 7) . However, in this dissertation I do not follow this definition of the term. Instead, I draw from existing work that sees affect as an approach to culture, history, geography, and politics that engages –precisely– with the intangible that Yenny describes (Schaefer, 2016). Although it has been taken up in multiple ways across different fields within the social and human sciences (Blackman & Venn, 2010, p. 7; Sharma & Tygstrup, 2015, p. 7), it rests on the main consideration that life does not only consist of what is measurable, palpable, explainable, and recognizable, but also of intangible forces that may be difficult or impossible to see, define, and articulate. These intangible forces –also known as "intensities," "energies," or "affects"– are experienced by the body, whether we notice them or not.

> Affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*… all the minuscule or molecular events of the unnoticed" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, pp. 1–2).

We have all sensed them, even without theorizing about them. Their traces are floating in the atmosphere and between crowds (Brennan, 2004). They are in the tingling in our guts, the sweat on our hands, the choppiness in our voice, and the glimmer in our mothers' eyes. They are in the "I just don't like them, don't ask me why" and in the "are you sure you're fine?" that we ask for the fifth time. They are in the way we "just know" that the couple who invited us for dinner was having a fight, although they are smiling. "The tension is in the air," we might think as we uncomfortably smile back. They are in my 8-year-old nephew's review of an immersive experience we recently attended: "I could tell that they used that powerful, loud music to try to make me cry, but they couldn't. Ha! Yet, there was something that made my cheeks tickle, kind of like they do when I start to feel sad, but different somehow. I don't know what that was."

This approach is part of the "embodied turn" that has characterized the social and human sciences for the last decades. Influenced by feminist and queer scholars' interest in the body and emotions, (Ahmed, 2015, p. 206; Blackman & Venn, 2010, p. 8), and by philosophers exploring embodiment like Spinoza, Deleuze, Guattari, and Bergson (Blackman & Venn, 2010, p. 8; de Antoni & Dumouchel, 2017, p. 91), it is one of the existing approaches that is concerned with thinking about and through the body. As such, it makes the body the main site of interest, considering it a "problematic locus for meaning, experience, and knowledge" (Highmore, 2010, p. 119).

These approaches have shown that bodies can be understood in multiple ways. For example, they have argued that normative conceptualizations in biomedicine see the body as a physical structure that hurts and can be dissected, handled, and cured in a purely empirical, unbiased, rational, and scientific way (Kirmayer, 1988; Mehta, 2011). Meanwhile, capitalism and neoliberalism tend to view bodies as individual entities that support physical and cultural capital (Blackman, 2012, p. 171), thus becoming symbols of neoliberal values, norms, and principles, such as discipline, personal achievement, productivity, competition, self-determination, self-responsibility, and success (Martschukat, 2021; Welsh, 2022).

While affect shares the interest in the body, it offers a novel take. Instead of understanding the body as a biological organism, a physical structure, a symbol, or a fixed entity as other theories do (Blackman, 2012, p. 5), it argues that the body is not defined by a body alone, but by its capacity, power, or potential to affect and be affected (Massumi, 2002, p. 15), moved (Sharma & Tygstrup, 2015, p. 16), or "put into motion" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 11).

> With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself –webbed in its relations– until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 3).

Hence, affect defines bodies "not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 2). Following this consideration, affect does not focus exclusively on bodies themselves, but on the continuous process "by which a body becomes other to itself" (Beasley-Murray, 2010,

pp. 127, 132) through intensities that move within and between them. In other words, affect focuses on bodies' "*in-betweenness:* in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 1), and on the effects of these interactions. As such, affect is not an individual but a relational experience (Bissell, 2010; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Mandolessi et al., 2022; Massumi, 1995, 2002).

With this understanding of bodies, affect offers a crucial change of perspective that opens the possibility of a relational and beyond-anthropocentric approach to life. In other words, it shifts the focus from individuals to relationships, including those between self and the other, nature and culture, animal and human, human and technology, and mind and matter (Blackman & Venn, 2010, pp. 10, 14).

Trajectories Within the Field

While studies on affect have taken multiple directions across different disciplines, there are fundamental debates that have characterized the field. One such discussion is the relationship between affect and cognition, which has been theorized in two main ways (Mandolessi et al., 2022; Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015, p. 4).

On the one hand are the approaches that consider that affect is separate from cognition (Clough & Halley, 2007; Massumi, 1995, 2002; Thrift, 2007). As such, they regard it as "a nonconscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder" (Massumi, 2002, p. 25). Although not always stating it explicitly, these approaches seem to agree with the Cartesian dualism, which makes a conceptual division between mind and body and sees them as two separate substances (Kirmayer, 1988; Mehta, 2011). Therefore, authors from tradition consider that affect is an outside stimulus that can hit the body without ever reaching cognition (Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015, pp. 4–8).

Researchers following this approach have developed crucial theorizations of affect that have expanded the understanding of social and cultural dimensions of life. However, their dualistic take has posed challenges to the empirical study of affect (Wetherell, 2013). Their view of affect as separate from reason makes affect incompatible with discourse, language, code, text, and signification. Under this premise, language cannot mediate affect because once it is expressed through language and reason, it gets twisted or lost. The studies following this approach that have aimed to

develop empirical research have resorted to methodologies focusing on the body and embodiment, which they have seen as being separate from language, arguing that "any analytical strategy must focus on semantics and semiotics as distorted traces of affect, not a medium for it" (Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015, p. 4).

"Knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 171).

On the other hand are the efforts that criticize the inherent dichotomies between mind and body, affect and cognition (Ahmed, 2015; Blackman, 2012; Leys, 2011; Wetherell, 2012, 2013). While they still consider that affect is founded in the body, they view it as being inseparable from cognition. Avoiding making distinct analytical divisions, they approach affect, emotions, embodiment, language, and thought as "inextricably linked" realms of human experience (Ahmed, 2015; Wetherell, 2012, p. 20). Rather than considering them independently, they are interested in exploring the movement of affect between these different registers.

Without finding an intrinsic contradiction between the two, scholars working within this trajectory consider that language is compatible with affect, which makes affect approachable through language-based methods. From this perspective, novel empirical studies on affect, as well as creative explorations delving into the relationship between language and affect, have started to emerge. However, the need to further these lines of inquiry, which remain largely underexplored, has been recognized (Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015, p. 4).

Where do I Stand?

While I draw from several insights developed by scholars working in both traditions, I situate myself within the second group. I do not agree with the conceptual distinction between body and mind that currently characterizes Western thought. Notions like 'sentipensamiento' make more sense to me (Cepeda, 2017). Emerging from the peoples living in the Coastal region of Colombia and taken up by Latin American authors

like Orlando Fals Borda, Arturo Escobar, and Eduardo Galeano, as well as several of the people with whom I collaborated in this project, 'sentipensamiento' combines the Spanish word for 'feeling' and 'thinking' into a single, indivisible term. "Is it possible to feel the fire and not to think about it at all?", authors inspired by this concept ask (Cepeda, 2017). "There are those who are solely dedicated to think of it because they fear to be burned!", they add (Cepeda, 2017). With these words, they invite us to re-examine the dichotomies between thinking and feeling often marked by Western thought, and view them as a cohesive, inseparable unity instead. As such, they explain that the nature of sentipensar "requires a connection *from the heart* with nature as a whole; understanding the cosmos with all its meaning and senses implies not a pure and simple reasoning –only reasoning– But a reasoning-with (with-everything-that is and with-the-heart), that is to say: to co-reason: *corazonar"* (Cepeda, 2017, p. 15). With these fundamental considerations, the notion of 'sentipensar' reflects much better the relationships between mind and body as I understand and experience them.

I see affect, cognition, and embodiment as inseparable and profoundly entangled. I believe that we are whole, multifaceted beings who encounter life through a complex and perpetual combination of affect, cognition, embodied sensations, feelings, and emotions. Far from occurring in any sequential or organized manner, I see these elements as operating in a messy (Ahmed, 2015, p. 210), eclectic (Wetherell, 2012, p. 53), chaotic, and unbreakable entanglement. I consider that trying to separate them conceptually is both impossible and unnecessary. As Ahmed (Ahmed, 2015, p. 210) and Wetherell (Wetherell, 2012, p. 67), I ask: if these elements do not operate in perfectly organized categorizations in real life, why and with what purpose would we establish artificial distinctions when theorizing them?

"When experiences (human or otherwise) are messy, making distinctions that are clear can mean losing our capacity for description. One problem with constantly refining our conceptual distinctions is that arguments can end up being *about* those distinctions" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 210).

"Overall, I doubt the pragmatic value of violently severing parts of the assemblages recruited in bursts of affect and using a verbal scalpel to extract just the body/brain responses. It is a mistake to try to remove pre-conscious visceral perception from its usual and habitual world/brain/body/mind contexts, and to artificially freeze and isolate affects as a separate element from the dynamically integrated sequences in which these things normally operate. No easy distinction can be made between visceral and cultural meaning-making, and why should we make one – where is the advantage?" (Wetherell, 2012, p. 67).

Rather than creating false dichotomies between elements that are fundamentally intertwined when we experience them, embracing the profound complexity of affect and exploring its intricate relationship with the different realms that make up part of our whole existence can help us unlock the full potential of this approach. I am particularly interested in the relationship between affect and language.

Language has been defined in multiple ways across different disciplines, including linguistics, neuroscience, philosophy, communication studies, anthropology, and psychology. Language as a system, a toolkit, a site of social struggle, and as a form of social action are just a few examples of how language has been understood (Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990; Wetherell et al., 2001; Wilce, 2009). Each of these ways of defining language comes with its own approach to studying it.

In this dissertation, I understand language as a crucial and complex component of our eclectic encounter with life, which both mediates affect and is itself affective. This understanding includes oral, written, and sign language. However, I focus on written and oral language exclusively because I do not know sign language, and neither do the people with whom I collaborated to undertake this project. I see this lack of attention to sign language both as a limitation of this work and as a potential route for future studies.

> I understand language as a crucial and complex component of our eclectic encounter with life, which both mediates affect and is itself affective.

Language as a Mediator of Affect

I consider that affect is present in every single one of our daily experiences and that it leaves imprints, traces, marks, or "impressions" in our bodies (Ahmed, 2015, p. 6), which we may or may not consciously recognize. Language can help us reach and discern them, even when they may first seem beyond our grasp.

The path that led me to this contemplation is not exclusively intellectual. It was also shaped by my involvement with Focusing Oriented Therapy. This type of psychotherapy was developed by the philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin. It is based on the concept of the felt sense that he coined. This concept refers to "a body-sense of meaning," "a special kind of internal bodily awareness," and a direct access to inner knowledge that has not yet been consciously recognized or articulated (Gendlin, 1978, p. 10). Although the felt sense can and often does encompass emotions, it is more than that. It is the capacity to reach a deeper level of perception by paying close attention to the sensations in our bodies that we generally neglect, which are initially "murky," "fuzzy," "unclear," "vague," and challenging to describe with words (Gendlin, 1978, p. 10). As such, this concept offers a more straightforward way to define the imprints, traces, marks, or impressions that affect leaves behind. In addition, this practice details a series of steps that can be followed to

> "The felt sense refers to 'a body-sense of meaning,' 'a special kind of internal bodily awareness,' and a direct access to inner knowledge that has not yet been consciously recognized or articulated" (Gendlin, 1978).

access and make sense of them. In my case, this therapy also allowed me to attain an embodied and affective understanding of one of the roles that language can play in our eclectic encounter with life.

I came across this therapy by chance when writing an article for an online media outlet focusing on migrants' mental health in Canada. Because I felt I could not fully understand how this therapy worked without experiencing it myself, I contacted Josy, a therapist that practises Focusing Oriented Therapy in Vancouver, the city I currently live in, asking her for an appointment. My first experience with this therapy was so powerful and transformative that I decided to continue with it throughout the years.

Following the steps of Focusing Oriented Therapy, in our sessions, Josy first invites me to close my eyes. After having my eyes closed for a while, the felt sense starts to emerge. Sometimes, it comes as images, shapes, or colours that I 'see' in my mind. Other times, it presents as different sensations in my body like itchiness, pressure, or pain. Josy instructs me to focus on these sensations and let them rise, move, and shift without judging or trying to change or suppress them. Then, she asks me questions that help me find the words to express my feelings without analyzing their meaning. As these sensations deepen or shift, I continue looking for new words and ways to describe them. This process often sparks feelings, emotions, and memories that I did not remember or that I had not fully recognized cognitively. Once I feel I can leave these sensations, I open my eyes. Then, Josy and I talk about them and, together, we make sense of the experience. In this way, the words I find to describe the felt sensations that rise in my body help me access them and bring them into consciousness. The dialogue I have with Josy afterwards allows me to attribute meaning to them and identify actionable steps towards solving the problems I face.

I combine my embodied and affective experience with this therapy with the work of scholars who have argued that language is often what "provides the means for affect to travel" (Wetherell, 2012, p. 19) and suggest that language has the capacity to mediate affect. It does so by becoming one of the conduits through which we can access the imprints or traces that affect leaves in our bodies, which can manifest themselves as the felt sense that we may or may not have noticed before (which I experience in Focus Oriented Therapy as the images, shapes, colours, and body sensations like itchiness, pressures, or pains described above), and bring them into full consciousness to make sense of them.

Writers "must take into account and put into use already established concepts drawn for one or another discipline, or better, from many all at once… The concept will start to deviate under the force. Let it. Then reconnect it to other concepts, drawn from other systems, until a whole new system of connections starts to form" (Massumi, 2002, pp. 18–19).

Language as Affective and Embodied

While I consider that language can be a mediator of affect as described above, I do not think that it is the only way in which affect relates to language. Language is itself affective and embodied as well. Again, this perspective emerges from my personal experience. Being a Montessori guide, my mother used the "Moveable Alphabet," which is the physical representation of sounds, to introduce me to reading and writing. This alphabet consists of wooden letters that can be moved around to form words. Through this method, my mother sparked in me an everlasting embodied and affective relationship with words. I still feel like I am building a puzzle and playing with letters when I read or write, and I feel emotionally closer to her every time I do. I also feel connected with other members of my kin through words. Almost every reunion with my extended family ends with us reciting poems around the dining table. These are the same poems that my grandmother used to recite to me while I rested my head on her shoulder and I softly pressed the veins on her hand, and they are the same poems that I memorized to be able to recite them to her when she could no longer recall them.

Drawing from this embodied and affective relationship that I have with words and from previous studies exploring the link between language and affect arising in diverse perspectives (which some refer to as emotions) (Ahmed, 2015; Besnier, 1990; Busch, 2020; McElhinny, 2010; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989; Velasco et al., 2015; Wetherell, 2012, 2013; Wilce, 2009), I consider that affect is always embedded in language, even if it presents itself in more or less apparent ways (Besnier, 1990; Wetherell, 2012, p. 52).

Perhaps the most obvious way in which affect is present in language is in its oral form. For example, it shows in our attachment to language (McElhinny, 2010, p. 314), which reflects on how we feel when speaking or listening to a language that we carry close to our hearts. Affect is also present in the communicative activities –such as laughing, weeping, silence, dysfluency, inarticulateness, and interjections– present in speech (Besnier, 1990, p. 427). It also appears in non-verbal and embodied cues like facial expressions, gestures, bodily posture, movement, and eye gaze (Busch, 2020, pp. 332–333; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989, p. 11; Wilce, 2009, p. 52), and in acoustic phenomena like tone, intonation, volume, pitch, and speed (Besnier, 1990, p. 425; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989, p. 11; Wilce, 2009, p. 43). These communicative activities, non-verbal and embodied cues, and acoustic phenomena accompany and complement spoken words, and they can contradict them too. When this is the case, affect might be hiding, for example, in the undertones of anger, judgement, sadness, or irony that we may perceive even despite the other person's efforts to disguise their words as warm, honest, kind, or objective remarks.

"Affect gives you away...You may protest your innocence, but we both know, don't we, that who you *really* are, or *what* you really are, is going to be found in the pumping of your blood, the quantity and quality of your perspiration, the breathless anticipation in your throat, the way you can't stop yourself from grinning, the glassy sheen of your eyes. Affect is the cuckoo in the nest; the fifth columnists out to undermine you; your personal polygraph machine" (Highmore, 2010, p. 118).

But even if affect is easier to find in speech, it is not the only linguistic site where it resides. It is often assumed that spoken language is more affective than written language. Some even argue that the affective elements present in speech are impossible to translate into written words. "There is so much going on that cannot be

squeezed into knowable or representational form," they say (Bissell, 2010, p. 81). However, while I agree that it may be difficult to translate all these affective elements present in speech into the written text, I do not believe that the maxim that written language is devoid of affect is true by any means. After all, our physical bodies, feelings, emotions, intuitions, memories, and symbolic systems, such as identity and sense of self, are just as present when we read and write as when we listen and speak (Pink, 2009a). They all influence how words move us, as well as the meaning we attribute to them and their effects on us. Whether we pay attention to them or not, raising feelings of curiosity, sadness, joy, empathy, excitement, surprise, anger, shame, and even boredom –along with the ideas and embodied sensations that may accompany them– are just a few examples of how we are affected by words, both during verbal conversations and as text written on a page.

We can find affect's presence in the written text in other ways too. For example, it is present in the process of writing and reading. Even if the final versions of what we read may seem coherent, we all know that there are moments of "silence, dysfluency, and inarticulateness" in the process of building an argument, just as we know how frustrating it is when we get stuck, and the right words just refuse to come. Affect is also hiding in the phrases we highlight when we read and in our comments at the margins of the page. And it is in the embodied and felt sensations that these activities cause, such as wrist, neck, back, and even hip pain. This strong link between affect, embodiment, and language is also evident in our affective relationship with the materiality of some channels (Pink, 2009a). "Reading a physical book feels different from reading it in the Kindle version," we often say.

In addition, affect is apparent in formal and artistic language, such as in the verses that we write, read, listen to, and recite (Besnier, 1990, p. 426; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989, p. 11; Wetherell, 2012, p. 52; Wilce, 2009, p. 45). It is also obvious in the words that evoke emotions and sensory events, as well as in the metaphors that we use everyday, which show the link that exists between elements like language, conceptual systems, emotions, embodiment, and space (e.g., saying that we "feel **down**" to express sadness), and have the power to influence perceptions, social realities, and actions (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). But in fact, affect is not only present in these instances. Depending on how and when we use them, it is also present in our entire vocabulary and the total stock of words and word elements that compose

31

language (Besnier, 1990). Affect is even present in the (N) words that should not be pronounced or spelled because of the history behind them. This is because, I would argue, affect sticks to words just as it does to objects (Ahmed, 2010a, 2015). And this happens because language occurs in specific social contexts, and it is embedded in the power relations and everyday activities within these contexts (Besnier, 1990, pp. 429–430; Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990, pp. 10–14; Wetherell, 2012, p. 52). As such, affect connects and moves between senders-messages-channels-receivers- in multiple, intricate, and messy ways. And context is always there [2]. Historical records of slavery and concentration camps (Combs, 2016). The names of the people who died in the 9/11 attacks. Marriage, divorce, adoption, birth, and death certificates. Suicide notes. If language was not affective and did not occur in context, these would be empty words, but they are certainly not, are they? They are testimonies of life and pain (Ahmed, 2015, p. 36) that have the capacity to affect us in intense and everlasting ways.

But… there are **other** ways in which affect infuses BOTH the <u>written</u> and the <u>spoken</u> word, *RIGHT***?!?!?!** 😉 As authors working in fields like typography and design have argued for a long time (Khandwala, 2019; Velasco et al., 2015), the word order, font, size, color, visual elements, tone, and grammatical and narrative structures that we use are all filled with affect too (Besnier, 1990; Velasco et al., 2015). Yes, "affect permeates all levels of linguistic and communicative structures, all utterances, and all communicative contexts, but it does so in more or less transparent ways" (Besnier, 1990, p. 437). If affect was not present in our attachment to language, we would not immediately turn our heads every time we hear someone speaking our mother tongue when we are in a place where the first language is other than our own, and the mere sound of these words (and not what they say) would not make us miss our home. If language did not cause felt sensations in our bodies, the blushing in our cheeks, the

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[2] Given that one of the multiple ways in which discourse has been defined is as "language in context" (Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990; Wetherell et al., 2001), in this case I could use language and discourse interchangeably. This is especially true because, drawing from some of the work focusing on discourse, I agree with the consideration that "an approach to language as an object divorceable from its context is ill-equipped for an investigation of affective dimensions of language" (Besnier, 1990, p. 429). Yet, I center my discussion on language rather than discourse to avoid confusion with the multiple other ways in which discourse has been defined, which, depending on how it is described, may or may not include the other elements of language that I consider in my exploration of the relationship between affect and words.

trembling in our hands, and the fleeting waves of pressure or pain moving in our chests when we interact with words would just not be there. If affect was not present even in the materiality of some channels, there would be no handwritten journal entries, newspaper clippings, baby shower invitations or airplane tickets along with the photographs we paste in scrapbooks. If affect was not present in the acoustic phenomena of speech, we would not immediately whisper or raise our voice when our interlocutor does, and we would not teach children to use their 'inside voices.' If affect was not present in language's formal forms, there would be no lyrics in songs. If affect did not stick to words, there would be no old love letters hiding in our drawers, no family recipe notebooks, and no children's first words displayed on fridges. Neither would academic degrees be hanging on offices' walls. "No one will ever look at the credentials behind my name and know the challenges, struggles, and triumphs that they carry. However, for me, this is the story my degree tells, and it is so much more than a piece of paper or a Dr. title." If language was not deeply entangled with affect, these words accompanying the graduation picture of someone I follow on Instagram might never have been written. If affect did not have the power to attach itself even to the words that we do not say, there would not be messages that remain unsent. If language did not have a heart and did not occur in the context of everyday life (Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989), medical records with life-altering and life-threatening diagnoses would be just that. And if I was concerned only with the cognitive transmission of information instead of deciding to let my writing be guided by the conviction that the words and the order that I choose for them have the potential of transporting affect from my fingers to the page and from the page to you, I would have arranged this section in a different way.

The Linguistic-Affective Approach and its Possible Contributions

Bringing together the arguments I have made in this chapter so far, along with the insights of existing work exploring the relationship between affect and language that I described in the previous sections (Ahmed, 2015; Wetherell, 2012, 2013), I now introduce the linguistic-affective approach. Continuing with the streams of thought that reject making distinct separations between mind and body, and affect and cognition (Ahmed, 2015; Blackman, 2012; Cepeda, 2017; Leys, 2011; Wetherell, 2012, 2013), this approach explores the intricate relationship between affect, cognition, language, and the body. Specifically, it considers that abstract experiences such as affect and cognition are

connected to the body, and that this tie can be recognized in and through language. Maintaining that language mediates affect and is itself affective, the linguistic-affective approach that I present here and follow in this dissertation is based on the consideration that affect can and does involve language and reason, but not exclusively. It is more-than, rather than other-than language and reason, because it precedes, includes, and exceeds them. Hence, this approach understands affect as a relational, more-than-cognitive, and more-than-linguistic experience; a never-ending, messy, entangled, and highly complex combination of felt sensations that we may or may not recognize, which comprise embodied reactions, energies, perceptions, impressions, intuitions, memories, feelings, emotions, gestures, and symbolic systems that move within and between us when we interact with ourselves, each other, and our surroundings.

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Some authors have explored experiences related to wellbeing and health such as happiness (Ahmed, 2010b), fear (Ahmed, 2000), optimism (Berlant, 2011), depression (Cvetkovich, 2012), trauma (Cvetkovich, 2003), and violence (Mandolessi et al., 2022) from an affective perspective. This work has demonstrated some of the advantages of adopting an affective approach when addressing these terms by uncovering how they are perceived and expressed in everyday life, and by showing that they can present themselves in ways that fall outside of existing dichotomies and dominant models. The nuanced understanding of affect proposed by the linguistic-affective approach draws from and continues with this legacy.

The linguistic-affective approach also draws from the insights of research and therapeutic methods using different elements such as photography (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997) objects (N. Brown, 2018a, 2019b), everyday activities (Pink, 2004, 2005, 2009b), and felt sensations experienced in and through the body (Gendlin, 1978) as entry points to invite people to reflect on their experiences. Similar to these approaches, the linguistic-affective approach leverages multiple interconnected realms (e.g., embodied and affective sensations, linguistic descriptions, cognitive contemplations) in order to recognize felt sensations that may have remained unnoticed and bring them into full consciousness to reach new insights and represent them in extra-linguistic ways. In doing so, it also draws from the contributions of community-engaged and participatory research and communication approaches addressing the production of knowledge as a collaborative endeavour rather than as an individual quest (Dutta, 2008, 2011; Dutta et al., 2016; Grain, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2021; Pink, 2009b; Schubotz, 2020; Vacchelli, 2018), as well as from authors advancing the Latin American notion of 'sentipensar' as a research method (Cepeda, 2017). These authors explain that doing so:

> requires the non-pretentious facticity of the encounter with others, listening next to the fire, learning with humility from the indigenous, the farmer, the *taita,* the grandfather, the popular wisdom, paying attention respectfully to their *saying*, just as respectfully as we read a scientific paper, without despising, without that rude lust of he who believes he is the holder of the objective truth, of he who blindly believes that the whole truth is in the small scientific truth…You only understand while you are being. To understand is to be one with the other, one with others (Cepeda, 2017, pp. 6, 15).

Inspired by these recommendations, the linguistic-affective approach aims to create opportunities for researchers and participants to converge and co-explore embodied and emplaced sensations as they occur in everyday environments and activities and, through horizontal dialogue, make sense of them.

The theoretical and methodological foundations of the linguistic-affective approach are also deeply intertwined with phenomenology. They share common positions and interests, such as the consideration of the body beyond its biological and physical characteristics, and their attention to situated experience and everyday life (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Several key authors I cite (e.g., Sarah Pink, Mariana Ortega, Sara Ahmed) work with phenomenology, and their arguments and insights have greatly influenced my own. I borrow from their contributions because I

believe that combining multiple perspectives can lead us to more interesting reflections, practices, and findings than those we may attain if we confine ourselves too rigidly within the constraints of one specific discipline, field, or tradition. Still, I have decided to situate myself closer to affect than phenomenology for several reasons.

First, while phenomenology pays attention to the body, it tends to focus more on already describable and identifiable emotions, thoughts, and experiences. This emphasis may not have allowed me to explore intangible expressions of wellbeing and health that have not yet been recognized, expressed, classified, or conceptualized to the extent that I intended. On the other hand, with its focus on felt sensations or intensities, affect and, more specifically, the linguistic-affective approach, opens the space for the exploration of more subtle sensations that can be recognized and brought into full consciousness through dialogue. As such, it enables us to reach and share knowledge that is even more elusive than emotions or embodied and situated experiences.

Moreover, depending on the tradition within the field, phenomenology has focused more on subjective individual experiences and the first-person point of view (Smith, 2018). While I did want to start by exploring personal experiences, my goal was to connect them with broader social and structural factors shaping people's lives, wellbeing, and health to avoid reproducing the lack of attention that some existing models pay to these conditions, as described in the Introduction. Affect's emphasis on relationality and the passage of affect between bodies allowed me to focus not only on individuals, but on their relations with others and their environments as well, thus making these connections more accessible and apparent.

Finally, as a decolonial project, I wanted to distance myself from well-established (and, often, arguably highly problematic) Western traditions as much as possible to open more space for the voices and experiences of the Global South. While both phenomenology and affect are based on Western thought to a certain degree, I did not first decide that affect would be the approach to follow in this dissertation by reading about it, but by sensing it during fieldwork. I felt that the way in which the people who participated in this project experienced subtle sensations of wellbeing and health, as well as how my community partners conceptualized and implemented their work, was affective and, as such, could be better understood through an affective framework. By following this approach, closer to grounded theory, I privileged the experiences and

sensations of the people with whom I conducted this research rather than a particular theoretical orientation. I have also addressed my engagement with existing literature as a political and decolonial act by choosing to rely mainly on the work of authors from the Global South, and Latin America specifically. I have done so to contest Western's privileging of Western thought, and to draw from knowledge that may be more appropriate for this work due to its cultural, historical, and geographic proximity. In doing so, I draw from Andean concepts, such as the notions of 'Sumak Kawsay' (Cachiguango, 2011; Hermida Bustos, 2017; Simbaña, 2012) and 'sentipensamiento' (Cepeda, 2017). Both concepts emerge from the local, emplaced knowledge of people in Latin America and greatly inform my understandings of topics around wellbeing, health, the interconnectedness of different realms (such as mind and body, and humans and the environment), and research itself. As Juan Cepeda H. explains in his article titled "The problem of Being in Latin America: Approaching the Latin American Ontological sentipensar" (Cepeda, 2017), ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically, the path followed in Latin America "starts with corporal experience, with material experience, with the affective-sentimental attitude of *feeling* the feet on the ground. To feel ourselves one with each other, palpating us naturally, affectionately, spiritually: brothers and sisters of the stone, the river, the tree, the air, the thunder, the *huacas* and the spirits, the mountains and the skies, starting from the natural interconnection of one with each other and everyone to everyone, under the horizon of *sensing* sensitivity which, as a starting point is basic and fundamental, irreplaceable…This is the *first wisdom* discerned by Latin American philosophy, a *philosophy* which knowns how to listen to ancestral wisdom" (Cepeda, 2017, pp. 6–7, 15). Following an affective approach that paid attention to relationality and the interconnectedness of multiple realms felt natural (almost obvious) and spontaneous given this regional tendency and context.

While this study draws from this decolonial knowledge existing outside the Global North, it does contribute to Western traditions such as phenomenology, and the phenomenology of medicine more specifically. While this subfield has several ramifications, a significant amount of effort within this domain has been dedicated to the analysis of lived experiences around health-related topics (Zeiler & Folkmarson Kall, 2014). This project adds to these endeavours by tracing novel theoretical and methodological paths to explore wellbeing and health more in-depth, which have been

overshadowed by the examination of the experience of illness and disability, probably because they are easier to feel, identify, and describe (Welsh, 2022).

I am aware of how messy and complicated my pursuit can be. Yet, I remember the poster my mother gave me when I was a teenager. It portrayed a cat covered in paint stains along with the legend: "You are not messy; you are creative." To be honest, she gifted me this poster as a joke because I am, in fact, messy, and she was always begging me to clean my room. Still, with the memory of this poster as a guide, I accept the invitation that others have offered of not letting the potential messiness of new approaches to research deter us (Law, 2004; Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015, p. 3). As I describe in the following chapters, embracing the complexity of this process can lead us to ask new questions and invent novel ways to address and make sense of them, find different answers that may open previously unexplored paths towards more wholesome and healthier lives, and experiment with unusual ways to communicate these findings within academia and beyond. This will allow us to contribute to work aiming to bring affect from theory, where it has mostly resided so far, into the empirical world.

3.   A Zone of Inventiveness

Pains, fever, chills, fractures, scratches, bruises, shining eyes, and runny noses. These are just a few examples of the tangible, describable, and measurable imprints that illness leaves in our bodies. But how do wellbeing and health present themselves to us? As others have argued, "health operates as a back-ground state from which we attend to the other events, issues, desires, and ambitions we have in our lives. Unlike illness which directs us back to the body; health often takes us away from the body toward experiencing the world with others" (Welsh, 2022, p. 29). This poses a challenge to the exploration of wellbeing and health. How can we investigate something that cannot always be seen, touched, quantified, or easily expressed?

By considering the intangible as a crucial, if overlooked, component of existence, affect opens the ontological opportunity to recognize and pay attention to material that may have been rendered as non-existent or unimportant, hence ignored or discounted by existing approaches focusing exclusively on perceptible or readily describable elements. As such, affect allows for a search toward expressions of wellbeing and health outside existing dominant definitions and indicators. Similarly, affect's contemplation that life's intangible forces are experienced by and through the body enables us to return to knowledge and ways of knowing that have been systematically portrayed as less valid by hegemonic approaches, thus redeeming the body as a vital receptacle of information. This epistemological shift opens the opportunity to come back to the body and view it not only as a physical structure that needs to be cured, as existing biomedical approaches may believe, but also as a site of knowledge from where to look for insights regarding wellbeing and health. This change of perspective may help recognize subtle embodied and affective expressions of wellbeing and health that are experienced daily, which can lead to the creation of models more relevant to specific contexts and realities than the existing ones. Moreover, this focus on intangible and embodied considerations can open the opportunity to recognize and value the spaces and alternative ways that communities historically excluded from mainstream platforms of communication and decision-making may have found to express their perspectives, needs, and demands (Conquergood, 2006; Dutta, 2011; Febres-Cordero, 2015).   Therefore, due to its ontological and epistemological contributions, centering my work on affect allowed me to start searching for expressions of wellbeing and health that may be outside existing

theories by concentrating not on what has already been measured and defined, but on intangible forces that can be sensed by and through the body instead.

While centering my work on affect enabled me to shift the perspective on what to focus on when exploring wellbeing and health and opened the possibility to search for ways in which they may be presenting themselves outside existing theories, it did not give me the methodological tools to identify them at first. For this, I turned to my affective-linguistic approach, introduced in the previous chapter.

Like other authors working with affect, when I started designing my research project, I faced the challenge of finding appropriate ways to grasp affective sensations that are difficult to describe because they often precede (and exceed) the formation of meaning (de Antoni & Dumouchel, 2017; Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015). Like them, I found that traditional qualitative and quantitative methodologies did not always offer the means to capture affect and study it in an empirical way. However, I followed the recommendation of not letting these difficulties discourage me but rather consider them as an opportunity to advance creative solutions and alternatives.

> Instead of being overwhelmed by the challenges, we argue that the development of methodologies for affect research should be regarded as an interesting zone of inventiveness, a zone raising reflections about what 'the empirical' produced tells us about the world and about the research setting, and a zone allowing us to generate new types of empirical material and perhaps to collect material that has previously been perceived as banal or unsophisticated"(Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015, p. 3).

Following this invitation, I wanted to find a way to identify subtle expressions of wellbeing and health that might be presenting themselves in ways that could be sensed through the body in migrant women's daily lives, even if they had not been recognized as such just yet. This could not be done by asking participants straightforward questions such as "are there sensations of wellbeing present in your daily life that you have not recognized?" How could they describe them without having perceived them first? I needed a different approach. To address this limitation, I was inspired by work that has found interesting connections between the senses and emotions (e.g., clean laundry's fresh smell linked to satisfaction) (Pink, 2004, 2005), and by the argument that affect is

"a thing of the senses" (Schaefer, 2016). These insights allowed me to ask if methods that include the senses, such as those employed in multisensory ethnography, could offer an entry point to uncover affective sensations that have not yet been put into words.

Multisensory ethnography is a critical methodology that is part of the sensory turn that has taken place within the humanities and social sciences in the last decades (Howes, 2011, 2020; Pink, 2009a). As its name suggests, multisensory ethnography starts from the premise that humans are "embodied, multisensory beings." For this reason, it turns the attention to the intertwining of the senses in research and representation (Elliot & Culhane, 2016; Howes, 2011; Pink, 2009a; Vidali, 2016). Multisensory ethnography argues that although Western culture has historically privileged sight, being alert to the interrelation of multiple senses, including those not recognized as such in the Western world, could offer "the potential benefit of more in-depth and complex analyses of otherwise untapped data" (Harris & Guillemin, 2012). Hence, it departs from ethnography's traditional methods of conventional interviews and participant observation to open space for other ways of knowledge and knowledge production that involve all the senses rather than focusing exclusively on words and sight. By doing so, it aims to gain access to knowledge that may not be entirely describable during interviews or visible through participant observation, but experienced in and through the senses and the body. Rather than advancing specific research methods, multisensory ethnography advocates for the exploration of multiple avenues to approach research as a reflexive and experiential process. As such, it pays attention to participants' and researchers' sensory, affective, and embodied experiences throughout the research process (Howes, 2020; Pink, 2009a). This awareness "often leads us to the normally not spoken, the invisible and unexpected –those things that people do not perhaps necessarily think it would be worth mentioning, or those things that tend to be felt or sensed rather than spoken about" (Pink, 2009a). By turning to extra-cognitive information that might be felt, sensed, and experienced, but not necessarily easily described, multisensory ethnography is concordant with the linguistic-affective approach, as it opens the possibility of discovering knowledge and ways of knowing that might have remained unexplored (Pink, 2009a).

Different disciplines, including health, have started to recognize the potential of sensory approaches to both research and practice (Elliot & Culhane, 2016; Harris &

Guillemin, 2012; Pink, 2009a; Sterne, 2001). However, existing work has not always considered an integrative perspective of affect and the senses (de Antoni & Dumouchel, 2017, p. 92). Yet, I wanted to see if delving into the interconnection of the senses (as multisensory ethnography invites us to do) could turn the senses into an entry point for the study of affect, and if this approach could offer an avenue to recognize and articulate previously unnoticed and unexpressed affective forces moving within and between bodies when they interact with themselves, each other, and their surroundings.

While interviews have traditionally been approached as a verbal research method focusing exclusively on participants' narratives, some scholars have considered them as affective and multisensory events (Harris & Guillemin, 2012; Pink, 2004, 2005, 2009a). Starting from the premise that knowledge is generated and circulated through participation in the world and engagement with social, sensory, and material environments and, as such, it is situated, relational, and continuous (Pink, 2009a), interviews following a multisensory approach often move beyond the traditional question-answer format and its exclusive emphasis on talk. Instead, multisensory interviews are "a process though which verbal, experiential, emotional, sensory, material, social and other encounters are brought together" (Pink, 2009a). In this way, interviews become emplaced events where participants and researchers come together in time and space to reflect on their mutual sensory, affective, and embodied experiences as they occur in their research encounters. This process turns interviews into reciprocal interactions that facilitate knowledge sharing and co-production. Informed by these considerations, multisensory interviews can occur in different settings and employ original methods to evoke sensory, embodied, and affective reactions (Zuurbier & Lesage, 2016). For example, researchers may go to participants' homes and invite them to conduct daily activities that induce sensory experiences and responses (e.g., doing laundry), which can grant access to profound insights about different ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Pink, 2004, 2005), or they can turn to diverse strategies such as the use of sensory questions, probes, prompts, activities, objects, materials, images, sounds, smells, and metaphors to elicit sensory, embodied, and affective reflections (N. Brown, 2018a, 2019b; Harris & Guillemin, 2012; Pink, 2009a; Zuurbier & Lesage, 2016).

Previous health-related studies have recognized the relevance of involving sensory and embodied elements in research interviews as an avenue to reach novel findings that provide a more holistic perspective of illness; enhance people's experience

when participating in health-related projects, which can touch on sensitive or uncomfortable topics that can be difficult to discuss through other approaches; and enrich the analysis and dissemination of results (N. Brown, 2018b, 2018a, 2019b; Harris & Guillemin, 2012). Authors working within this tradition have maintained that "using the senses as triggers in interviews can unlock memories, and provide participants with a language with which to articulate their beliefs, feelings, and insights about a range of illness experiences" (Harris & Guillemin, 2012). Informed by my consideration that language mediates affect and is itself affective, I wanted to explore if this could also be the case with wellbeing and health, which, due to the lack of physical symptoms, could be even more challenging to identify and communicate through more conventional interview methods (Welsh, 2022). Following this objective, I conducted individual sensory, embodied, and affective evocation interviews with 36 internal migrant women. Their ages ranged from 19 to 71 years old, and they self-identified as Mestizas (i.e., mixed European and Amerindian descent), Montubias (i.e., Ecuadorian of mixed descent from the rural coastal region of the country), Afro-Ecuadorian (i.e., African descent), and Indigenous (i.e., Amerindian descent).

My approach to interviews in my research design was significantly informed by previous studies advocating for a sensory approach to health research (Harris & Guillemin, 2012) and by Sarah Pink's work exploring laundry as a case study to examine how people conceptualize cleanness and its broader relation to the construction of identity, morality, and gendered experiences, attitudes, and perspectives (Pink, 2004, 2005). Considering homes as pluri-sensory contexts, to conduct her interviews, Pink goes to participants' homes and asks them to show her how they do their laundry. She approaches these seemingly mundane interactions as opportunities to reflect on the "relationships between bodies, minds, and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment" (Pink, 2009a), and as an avenue to obtain deeper insights regarding people's thoughts, feelings, and actions (Pink, 2004, 2005). Inspired by this method, I originally planned to conduct the interviews at internal migrant women's houses. Similar to Pink's participatory approach, I intended to use our senses and the physical space as an opportunity to reflect on people's daily lives with questions such as: " Can you please take me to the part of your house that you like the most?" "Why do you like it?" "How do you feel when you are here, and why?" My goal with these kinds of questions was going to be to try to bring attention to the environment and elicit sensory descriptions and

considerations that could help us identify subtle expressions of wellbeing and health that may have been presenting in women's daily lives but remained unrecognized until then, and bring them to full consciousness through dialogue during our time together.

I conducted just a few interviews in this way before the COVID-19 pandemic obliged me to stop all fieldwork activities. After realizing that I was not going to be able to resume in-person research encounters any time soon, I decided to conduct the remaining interviews via Zoom despite my hesitations to do so because of my fear that we could not approach the senses and the physical space in the same way, and that affect would not travel through online mediums as it did during in-person interactions. Pressured by the passing of time, I modified my questions while still drawing from the insights of interview methods evoking sensory, embodied, and affective responses (N. Brown, 2018a; Harper, 2002; Harris & Guillemin, 2012; Pink, 2009a; Zuurbier & Lesage, 2016) to reflect on sensory aspects present in women's daily lives and migration processes. Informed by previous reflections on methodological concerns around video-conference interviews in health-related research (N. Brown, 2018b), I also took additional ethical and practical steps to make virtual interviews as engaging, respectful, and accessible as possible (e.g., paying for connectivity costs to address the potential challenge that limited Internet access –a common problem in the study site– may have represented for participants, discussing confidentiality issues during online conversations).

Like others (N. Brown, 2018b), I found that conducting interviews online frequently facilitated a less intrusive way of 'sharing' the space with participants while still allowing us to have a meaningful and reciprocal interaction. During virtual interviews, most people had their cameras on, and they often moved to the places we were discussing so that I could see them. When our Internet quality did not enable us to keep our cameras on, women often sent me pictures of their homes through WhatsApp messenger so that I could see the setting we were talking about. They also described other sensory elements (e.g., sounds, smells, materials) from their homes. While these interactions, which occurred organically and without my planning, did not allow me to have a complete multisensory immersion in the space, they did elicit answers that naturally evoked the senses in the women I met.

Drawing from the contributions of sensory ethnography (Pink, 2004, 2005, 2009a) and from affect's consideration of the movement of affect in-between bodies, I did not approach interviews with me as the seeker of knowledge and women as informants. Instead, I saw these encounters as shared experiences that we co-created together to explore a common subject, and as an avenue for novel insights to emerge for both of us during our interactions. Moreover, inspired by affect's consideration that we all affect and are affected in every one of our encounters, including those research-related, I did not follow a specific guide too closely. Instead, I used questions just as initial invitations, letting each interview develop uniquely.

As shown in the excerpt from my conversation with Nathy shared below, all the steps described so far helped to elicit answers that evoked the senses:

Belen: How is the place where you were born? Is there something that you remember the most?

Nathy: The atmosphere. I remember the atmosphere, I don't know how to explain it, but it's like you can breathe over there. You feel…it's like…it's more pure, more peaceful.

Belen: Peaceful, how?

Nathy: The noises you hear are not..not the same. They are not like here. I don't know if you can listen to it, but there is a lot of noise in my house right now. Over there, there are no car noises, honks, stressed people's voices, all those things. Everything is tranquilito calmer over there. You can decide to be in silence and actually be in silence. You don't listen to anything else, except maybe some birds singing, doing tic, tic, tic. It's lovely in that sense. That's what I love the most about that place. It has a sense of peace that you just can't find over here. It can't be compared with anything else.

Motivated by the consideration that affect "sticks" to objects (Ahmed, 2010a, 2015) and, as such, can be used in research to elicit questions and encourage self-reflection (N. Brown, 2018a, 2019b), I also included questions focusing on objects during interviews. Some of these queries were: "Did you bring an object that felt special to you when you moved to Quito?" "Why did you bring this object in particular?" "What is the story of this object?" "How does this object make you feel now?" I also asked them the question I asked you, the reader, on the first page of this dissertation: "If you could choose something that represents what wellbeing and health are or feel like to you, what would that be and why?" My goal with these questions was to evoke some affective

memories and sensory and embodied experiences where wellbeing and health might be sensed but not fully acknowledged or recognized, to then bring them into full consciousness with language as the mediator so that, together, we could make sense of them during the interview process through dialogue. The excerpt of the interview I held with Valeria, a 23-year-old woman who migrated to Quito to attend university, is an example of how these dialogues developed:

Belen:	Did you bring something special to you when you first moved to Quito?
Valeria:	When I moved to Quito, my grandmother told me that I should take something of the people I love so that I don't miss them so much, and I love my mom, so without telling her, I took a pink coat that smelled like her.
Belen:	And how did you feel when you wore it?
Valeria:	Oh my God! I felt so good with it. I felt like my mom was with me. It reminded me of my home and my mom's things. It reminded me of my family, and what we used to do together. But I lost it, and I cried for days! And it was not about the coat, right? It was such an old coat. I cried because I felt that with it, I had lost a part of my mom, my land, and my childhood as well.

While, as shown in the excerpt above, these questions did provide an effective avenue to evoke affective and sensory memories and experiences in women as I intended, this was not a straightforward process. In fact, at first, I found that these questions came with a critical epistemological struggle that I needed to address. In the early stages of my fieldwork, I sensed that migrant women did not always feel confident about their answers to the questions involving the senses and the body and did not spend as much time on them as they did with questions and answers that did not relate to them. Some expressed their doubts with remarks such as: "I don't know how this will be relevant to you" or "I hope at least something of what I share is useful." My consideration that language is itself affective let me recognize these comments as important affective markers. To me, they indicated that we were accessing knowledge that had not been fully described or conceptualized before, which people often considered unimportant; thus, not even worth mentioning (Pink, 2009a). Yet, this kind of knowledge is precisely what this project is interested in exploring. However, the hesitations that women expressed when answering these questions suggested to me

that the uncertainty of not knowing if this information was relevant may have been stopping them from diving deeper into these topics.

To address these concerns, I decided to start each interview with a detailed explanation of the reasoning behind my questions. I said that every single experience, including migration, is lived by and through our bodies, and that I believe that these experiences leave visible and invisible imprints on our bodies, even if we ignore them. Yet, noticing them may help us reach all the knowledge I think they carry. I saw a radical shift in women's willingness and openness to answer the sensory, embodied, and affective evocation questions that I asked after this explanation. The experiences we explored together were much more affective than those that emerged without this clarification.

This approach was also challenging for me at first. I was just starting to learn to pay more attention to sensory aspects and embodied sensations, both others' and my own. Hence, in the beginning, I had to constantly remind myself to do so. With time, this care started to come more naturally. Now I feel more attuned to my body and my senses, not only during research encounters, but also in my day-to-day life.

I also tried to make the interview process as sensory, affective, and embodied as possible through different techniques. For example, when the interviews were conducted in person before COVID-19, I brought some appetizers with me. This food served multiple purposes. First, it was a small but tangible way of thanking women for their time. I also used this food as an anchor to remind both women and me to pay attention to our bodies and senses during conversations. Finally, because sharing food is an essential and familiar component of community-building in Ecuador, I also viewed it as a facilitator for developing affective relationships with the women I met.

In addition, following the ethical consideration that sensory elicitation methods can potentially cause emotional harm by bringing up difficult or traumatic memories or sensations in participants (Harris & Guillemin, 2012; Pink, 2009a), I always explained that the interviews might spark emotional or affective recollections, descriptions, and emotions for both of us. I said that I felt comfortable if that was the case because I consider myself a highly emotional person, and I always deal with my own big emotions. I also encouraged them to ask me to pause or stop the interview or the recording if they

were overwhelmed by what they were feeling or remembering at any point. I asked them to do the same once the interviews were taking place if I felt they might be experiencing distress or discomfort because of the topic we were exploring at that moment. Moreover, I constantly emphasized that I saw the interview process as something we both created together, and that there were no set rules we needed to follow to make it 'successful' or 'useful.'

Affect's consideration that bodies are defined by "their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect," (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 2) also informed my approach in seemingly small but extremely profound ways. Following this consideration, I paid close attention to the interactions between human and non-human bodies (such as the voice recorder, which I tried to locate in strategic places given that I sensed that it intimidated some women), as well as the interactions between women's bodies and my own. For example, to challenge possible power dynamics between women and me in an embodied way, I always sought to sit at the same level as the person I was talking to, which is not always a given in Ecuadorian contexts, where sitting on the floor or small stools or cushions is a common practice, especially among some Indigenous communities. Paying attention to the interaction among all these sensory, affective, and embodied elements allowed us to co-create powerful affective moments during our encounters which, at least for me, were meaningful and even healing by themselves. In addition, it often enabled us to build lovely friendships that we still maintain.

I particularly remember the interview with Rosa, a 62-year-old self-identified Indigenous woman who migrated to Quito from a rural community located in Ecuador's Highlands when she was a child. We held our interview at Rosa's family business. When I arrived, she set up a chair for me and a small stool for her. I told her I preferred to sit on the floor, but she refused. "You are not Indigenous; you are not used to sitting like this; your hips will hurt," she said kindly but emphatically. My explanation of the fact that I have always preferred to sit on the floor regardless of my ethnic identification did not convince her at all. Since I wanted to respect the boundary that she was setting, I agreed to sit on the chair, and we started the interview.

I first asked her about her migration journey. She told me how she had run away from her house when she was 12 years old to escape the extreme violence that she

faced at home. Then, she narrated the horrible acts of discrimination and racism that she has endured throughout her life as an Indigenous internal migrant woman in Quito. At a particularly sharp point in her story, we both started crying. I immediately asked her if she wanted to stop the interview or the recording, to which she replied: "No, I am not afraid of tears. Tears are my friends, and now I can see that you were honest when you said they are your friends too. Come, give me a hug, and sit on the floor if you want. Now I can tell you really listen and understand with your heart." So, I finally sat on the floor, and we held hands for the rest of the interview after that. This interaction with Rosa illustrates how paying attention to the subtle sensory, affective, and embodied elements present in research interactions allowed me to approach them with care and respect, turn the encounters into affective moments that flowed honestly and spontaneously, and build stronger relationships with the women I met.

I also resorted to my consideration that language is itself affective in letting the affective elements present in speech guide the conversations during the interviews. In these interactions, I paid particular attention to communicative activities (e.g., laughing, weeping, silence, dysfluency, inarticulateness, interjections), non-verbal and embodied cues (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, bodily posture, movement, eye gaze), and acoustic phenomena (e.g., tone, intonation, volume, pitch speed) that accompanied the words spoken both by women and myself. Informed by the consideration that abstract concepts and experiences may be materially grounded and activated through the senses, and that these intangible sensations are often expressed through sensory metaphors and descriptions (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; McLuhan, 1964; Pink, 2004, 2005), I was also especially attentive to metaphors or words evoking emotions or felt sensations (e.g., warm hugs), and I used them as cues to inquire further into the topics that were being addressed when they appeared in people's speech. Finally, I made an effort to notice the embodied and affective reactions that women's accounts elicited in me, and to let these reactions guide my questions and responses, even if this meant that I could not strictly follow the interview guides that I had prepared beforehand.

Despite my initial worries that affect would not travel through online mediums, I could sense affect moving even when the interviews were conducted virtually. In fact, to my surprise, I did not find much difference in the richness of affective responses or affective relationships that emerged during virtual interactions compared to in-person

encounters. For instance, when the Zoom interview with María Eugenia, a 61-year-old Afro-Ecuadorian ancestral healer who migrated to Quito from the country's coastal region ended, we both said goodbye by hugging our computer screens. Once COVID-19 guidelines allowed in-person gatherings, she invited me to her house to meet her family. We have collaborated on different projects and maintained regular communication since then. This strong relationship that we were able to forge (even though most of our encounters have occurred virtually) may suggest that language can mediate affect regardless of the medium used.

Bringing Affect onto the Page

I wanted to ensure that all the affective intensity that the methodology implemented had moved and evoked would not be lost in the succeeding stages of the research process. While considerations around the relationship between affect and text are certainly not new in fields like typography (Farias, 2021; Velasco et al., 2015), when reading existing work following multisensory ethnography, as well as affective and other methodologies involving the body in one way or another, I often found that the attention that researchers had paid to affect, the senses, and the body during the data-gathering phase of the project was not apparent in their analysis and writing. It was like all the creativity and care they had put into developing their methods was dropped once they reached the page. As a result, I felt their interpretation and dissemination of research results did not always do justice to what they had found in previous steps. I sensed that this could be prevented, at least to some extent. After all, as I argue in this dissertation, language has the capacity to carry affect, so why would it be absent when brought from the outside world into the text? But as soon as I sat down to transcribe my first interview, I started to doubt myself, and a series of questions assailed me: How *exactly* does language carry affect? Can language carry *this* much affect? Maybe my whole argument is wrong? But I *do* experience how language *moves* me deeply every day. Can I find a way?

I realized that if I wanted to bring at least some of the affective elements present during fieldwork onto the page, the first step I needed to consider carefully was transcription. As a journalist, student, and researcher, I have transcribed for different projects and multiple purposes in the past. On more than one occasion, I was explicitly hired to transcribe. In all these cases, I approached this activity rather uncritically, and I

resorted to verbatim transcription, thus typing out every word I heard in the recordings. I initially considered doing the same this time. However, in this case, I found that even if I transcribed every word, I was not capturing the affective intensities and embodied elements that were present during fieldwork interactions, and that I was listening to in the audio files. In fact, I felt like I was reproducing the shortcomings that some authors have found in transcription, arguing that it is in this process "that embodied voices are often rendered mute and are lost to analysis/interpretation" (Chadwick, 2017, p. 60). Then, I started exploring other alternatives.

I first encountered interesting work that aimed to capture embodied and sensory elements in narratives and transcripts (Brooks, 2010; Chadwick, 2017; lisahunter & emerald, 2016; Luff & Heath, 2015; O'dell & Willim, 2013). These endeavours drove me to consider transcription as something more than a transparent, straightforward, and mechanical process, as I had previously regarded it. Instead, it led me to view it as a critical, but often overlooked and taken for granted, step of the research process (Bird, 2005; Brooks, 2010; Chadwick, 2017; Oliver et al., 2005). This work also inspired me to pay attention to the embodied, affective, and sensory cues that I could hear in the recordings –as well as to the embodied, affective, and sensory reactions and memories that they elicited in me as I listened to them– and approach them as potentially important information that needed to be considered and portrayed on the written page. The argument that moments of contradiction, dysfluency, incoherence and ambiguity can offer essential insights into qualitative research, made by some authors working in this field (Chadwick, 2017, p. 65), invited me to pay attention to the moments in which these elements presented themselves in participants' accounts. Rather than neglecting them or leaving them out so that the text would look 'clean' or 'polished,' as I had done in the past, I started to consider them as crucial information that should be included in the transcripts. Finally, this work invited me to realize that there are different ways in which texts (and, in some cases, images or drawings) can be organized and presented in transcripts to better represent different visual and embodied elements, such as cues present in speech; participants' positions, actions, or conduct while talking; and people's visual orientation or gazes during research interactions (Luff & Heath, 2015; O'dell & Willim, 2013).

I found similar insights from work on ethnomethodology, which explored the intricate relationship between multiple aspects, including everyday language; context;

cognition; meaning; interpretation; representation; and bodies' orientation, gestures, gazes, and actions (Goodwin, 2000, 2004; Suchman, 2007). This work often approached transcription as a detailed and technical process that aims to capture these multifaceted elements present during different interactions (Goodwin, 2000, 2004; Suchman, 2007). As such, it motivated me to pay close attention to the small details and multifaceted information present in recordings, and to consider questions around context, representation, and human interaction during research encounters. Because, sometimes, authors working in this tradition also included visual elements such as images, pictures, charts, video captures, comic strips, and drawings in their transcriptions (Aarsand & Sparrman, 2021; Goodwin, 2000, 2004; Suchman, 2007), they also opened the opportunity for me to consider that transcripts can contain other elements besides traditional text. However, like others (Aarsand & Sparrman, 2021; Chadwick, 2017), I found that the transcripts created following this approach could sometimes be complicated and challenging to interpret and understand by non-expert audiences like me.

I also drew inspiration from work conducted within ethnopoetics (Blommaert, 2006) and psychology (Gilligan et al., 2003; Gilligan & Eddy, 2021). Although the work I found from these two fields focused on narrative and qualitative analysis rather than transcription, it was highly relevant to my search. Ethnopoetics invited me to consider the importance of the sensory, performative, cultural and contextual elements present in speech; and to pay attention to narratives' possible poetic structures and people's own "ways of telling" (Chadwick, 2017, p. 65), contemplating them as relevant, revealing, and unique. On the other hand, the work from psychology, and specifically, the Listening Guide, developed as a method for uncovering different planes of information in qualitative interviews (Gilligan et al., 2003; Gilligan & Eddy, 2021), allowed me to notice multiple levels of expression, meaning, and interpretation in the recordings, including my own positionality and reactions to what I heard while transcribing. In this way, this approach also drove me to question the consideration of transcription as a detached and objective endeavour. Instead, it encouraged me to see it as a subjective and relational process also involving me and my decisions about how and what to transcribe (and what to leave out). As such, this approach coincided with, and strengthened, my affective view of research as a relational experience. Thanks to it, I realized that relationality was

present even in the steps of the research process where I was alone, such as transcription.

While all this work inspired me and enabled me to have these multiple reflections, it did not give me a practical way to incorporate these learnings into the transcription process that would satisfy me. Pushed by the constant pressure of time passing by, I decided to resume my transcription even without a definite plan. At some point in the recording of the first interview, the woman I was talking to said something funny, and we both laughed, so I wrote "(laughs)" as I had seen in other texts and transcribed my own interviews in the past. But this was not a usual laugh. It was a belly-pain, laughing-tears kind of laugh. I felt like the short "laughs" word in parenthesis was not doing justice to the great moment that we had shared nor to the affective memories and sensations that the recording was provoking in me again, so I erased what I had written and replaced it with "(hahaha)." Better, but still not great. Then, almost as if moved by a life of their own, my millennial fingers intuitively erased that "hahaha" and entered this instead: 🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣. Just like that, an affective transcription method was born.

While emojis are widely used to convey communicative activities and non-verbal and embodied cues present in speech, they have barely been used in academic circles (Danesi, 2019; Fleerackers, 2019). Yet precisely because they are already widely accessible across several groups and settings, they can offer an appropriate medium to transport at least some of the affective elements present in research encounters into academic written texts. Following this consideration, along with my reflections on the different affective aspects embedded in language, I resumed my transcription process, which again presented several challenges that required me to make some decisions and compromises.

The first question I encountered was how to translate the interviews, given that I conducted all my fieldwork activities in Spanish, Ecuador's official language. First, I tried to simultaneously translate, transcribe, and add the emojis to bring the affective and embodied elements present in speech onto the page. However, this approach proved to be extremely demanding, as it required me to listen to each sentence multiple times to translate the words from Spanish into English in my head, write the English version onto the page, and add the emojis, all at the same time. I soon realized this method would

not be feasible, so I changed my approach. Instead of trying to do everything at once, I just started by transcribing the interviews and gatherings in Spanish, without translating or adding the emojis yet. I did, nonetheless, write down the sensations, feelings, thoughts, and memories that emerged in me as I transcribed to aim at grasping not only participants' embodied words but also how they affected me as I engaged with them. Inspired by the invitation to approach interview transcripts as soundscapes (Harris & Guillemin, 2012), I also paid attention to the sounds I heard in the background of the recordings and took notes about them. In addition, I wrote down the memories and sensory, embodied, and affective reactions that they often provoked in me. In this way, the recordings became "evocative of the environment in which the interview took place" (Pink, 2009a), while the written words on the page both continued and reflected the relational encounter between the people involved in the synchronous components of fieldwork, as well as the contexts and environments in which these interactions took place. This experiment led me to agree with other authors who have argued that although transcription is often seen as an objective process, it is actually a subjective interpretation of an encounter and, as such, it requires thorough political, ethical, and self-reflexive considerations (Aarsand & Sparrman, 2021; Bird, 2005; Brooks, 2010; O'dell & Willim, 2013).

When I had all the Spanish transcripts ready, I used them as raw materials for preliminary data analysis. Once I identified the main topics emerging from these transcripts, I listened to all the recordings again. On this occasion, I translated the key components of the conversations into English. In doing so, I tried to pay as much attention as possible to the word choices that I was making. While I knew that some of the meaning and affective intensities that each language carries were going to inevitably be lost or modified in the translation process, I tried to choose the English words not only because of their meaning, but also based on the words that I felt better expressed each person's unique "ways of telling" (Chadwick, 2017). However, given that English is my second language, I realize that I may lack at least some vocabulary that would have allowed me to make better choices. When I simply could not find a word that satisfied me, I left the term in Spanish and added the best option that I could think of besides it, or an explanation of its meaning, use, and tone in English as a footnote. Once I had these excerpts translated into English, I listened to those parts of the recordings again, and proceeded to add the emojis to try to bring the affective and embodied elements present

during fieldwork interactions into the text. Like other authors experimenting with embodied transcription (Brooks, 2010), my process was somewhat similar to the one followed by simultaneous translators. Rather than listening to a long section of the recording and then adding the emojis that I felt went with what I could remember of what I had heard, I worked with a few words at a time. I often replayed each section multiple times to ensure that I was not neglecting to include anything, and to confirm that the emojis I had chosen were the ones that I believed best represented the affective and embodied cues I was getting from the recordings. Although this process was still much slower than more traditional approaches to transcription, I found this second method much more feasible than my initial attempt.

When adding the emojis, I used the ones I have seen more regularly employed to represent communicative activities (e.g., 🤣 to express laughter, 😢 to mean crying). I also chose emojis that I felt represented participants' non-verbal and embodied cues, including facial expressions, gestures, bodily postures and movements, and eye gaze: 😊, 😡, 🙆, 🙄. To represent acoustic phenomena such as tone, I used emojis that I felt transmitted some of these elements. For example, I used a 💗 to express a caring or friendly tone of voice, and a 🍭 to portray a sweet one. I also used bold, italicized, and underlined text to communicate emphasis; spaces between words and characters to communicate speed; and font size to communicate volume and intonation.

While I followed some structure in this process, especially when deploying emojis widely used to represent something, I tried not to let this dictate the whole process. Inspired by existing reflexive, embodied, and creative approaches to data analysis (N. Brown, 2019c), I tried not to think much about which emoji to use in each case or to remember how I had represented something before. Instead, I let this process be as intuitive and affective as possible, allowing each moment and recording to "speak" to and through me in its own way. In doing so, as other authors experimenting with embodied transcription (Chadwick, 2017), I aimed to respect and represent the uniqueness of each person, experience, story, and interaction, and to depict them in a way that made sense to me. As a result, every transcript looked different and showed how each person and each interaction was unique as well, as can be seen by comparing the two interview excerpts shared below.

The words of Sisa Carolina, a 27-year-old woman who self-identifies both as Indigenous and as Mestiza, are the first example of this method of transcription:

I have never felt discrimination, but I have noticed that when you are Indigenous, you don't have the option to be mediocre because **everyone** is watching 🙄. I have never felt discrimination, but it's like **everyone** knows your name, **everyone** knows who you are, and in the precise moment when you do something wrong, you get a bad grade, for example, they jump to conclusions and say: "**she is Indigenous, OF COURSE she is STUPID** 😡". So, you just can't give that impression; you **must** be good, you **must** be. You have no option.

In this example, this transcription method allowed me to find some aspects hidden between the lines of what was said, which may point toward sensed or embodied experiences that have not yet been fully formulated as narrations or ideas. For example, while Sisa Carolina's words stated that she had never experienced discrimination at a textual level, her intonation, volume, and pace (as I have tried to depict in the transcription above) communicated otherwise. I also found this transcription method to be more embodied for myself. It often forced me to repeat participants' words or facial expressions to interpret them in the written text as accurately as possible. This process often evoked similar emotions in me to the ones described by participants. Their words passed through my body in a way that other transcription processes have not invited me to do. Like other authors experimenting with alternative methods of embodied transcription (Brooks, 2010), I found that repeating participants' words myself led me to interact with their accounts in a more embodied and affective way which, in turn, enabled me to find deeper insights in their stories. As such, this transcription method did not only permit me to convert speech and sounds into text, but also served as a data analysis tool and became a crucial aspect of the analytical process. As others have maintained, this suggests that "the analysis of experiential, imaginative, sensorial, and emotional dimensions of ethnography (and of research more broadly, I would assert) is itself often an intuitive, messy and serendipitous task" (Pink, 2009a). At the same time, this method allowed me to transport at least some affective elements from research encounters and recordings to me, then from me to the page and, hopefully, from there to the reader engaging with the text. This transcription method may organically produce a more affective and embodied relationship for readers as well, as shown in the following example:

It's like they say NO. You are a woman 🙄🗨, *an*d little women should be in their **little houses.** Little women <u>do not go</u> to parties. And I am like   like women <u>did not use</u> to do that but now we certainly do 😂😂 there is also a point where they tell you that, but why. And in that sense my dad has always been a person supeer   like it doesn't matter what they say, like he always said: take care of yourself   You have to hang out with the people that <u>you knOw</u> will take care of you. 🗨🙂 but don't let those things inhibit you. But yes, there are still **a lot** of things that are like   little women to the kitchen and men to work **little women** take care of others little women do this little women do that.   It's like my mother   she tries to leave those things behind but all of the sudden she says things like: and what are you going to do when you get married. <u>Your husband</u> this and that and I am like **WELL I don't even know** 😂 **if I want to get maa**😂**rri**😂**ed**😂

In this excerpt, I used a smaller font size to represent a lower voice and condensed text to convey a faster pace of speech. These modifications make that part of the text harder to read in a similar way in which a lower volume and a more rapid pace make speech harder to hear. This might force the reader to reread the sentence or to come physically closer to the text in a similar way in which we might need to ask someone to repeat what they said or come closer to them if they are speaking at a low volume. The opposite is also true; the bigger font size makes the text easier to read and to see from afar in a similar way in which a higher volume makes speech easier to hear from a larger distance. In addition, the visual elements accompanying the written words can cause a more engaged and affective reaction than plain text. Thus, this experimental transcription method can be an effective avenue to address the previously identified need to approach the transcription process reflexively, critically, and creatively (Bird, 2005; Brooks, 2010; Chadwick, 2017; Oliver et al., 2005), and to mediate affect in research and extend the affective web of relations woven during research encounters into the written text. Therefore, I agree with other authors working with embodied transcription maintaining that "a larger degree of sensory (and I would argue, embodied and affective) awareness can help us compose very different types of transcriptions that may be able to open and understand the cultural world around us in new (or at least underdeveloped) ways" (O'dell & Willim, 2013, p. 329). As such, this transcription technique can contribute to the field of embodied and alternative transcription methods

and to work exploring the interrelation between typography, affect, and the senses (Velasco et al., 2015). It can also add to efforts highlighting the need to decolonize typography and design and think outside Western hegemonic parameters and practices (Farias, 2021; Khandwala, 2019; Tunstall & Agi, 2023).

However, it also presents several challenges. First, while more creative approaches to transcription like the one I have presented here may grant more opportunities to evoke the affective, embodied and sensory aspects present in speech, I also recognize that "the transformation of sounds and utterances into words on a page will always be limited, flawed and partial re-productions" (Chadwick, 2017, p. 64). Therefore, they still cannot fully capture all the elements of verbal encounters. In addition, it takes considerably more time than regular transcription, possibly making it non-feasible. This time requirement may be balanced, at least to some extent, by the fact that it blurs the boundaries between transcription and analysis, thus making a separate step of data analysis and, depending on the project, data analysis tools (e.g., NVivo), less arduous or even relatively unnecessary. Analyzing fieldwork data in this way also opens the space for a more affective, sensory, and embodied approach to this component of the research process than when it happens through already printed texts. Unlike those cases, it does not separate these evocative elements in the recordings from the interpretation of participants' words (Pink, 2009a).

Another possible limitation of the transcription method that I have introduced in this chapter is that it may be challenging to replicate in larger projects involving multiple transcribers, given that it makes the subjective nature of transcription more obvious (Aarsand & Sparrman, 2021; Bird, 2005; Brooks, 2010; O'dell & Willim, 2013). As such, it does not eliminate, and could even exacerbate, the power imbalances that occur when the person who transcribes decides how to interpret and portray participants' words in written formats. With this transcription method, another layer of external interpretation is added. Besides words, the affective and embodied elements present in people's speech are being construed. This is even harder when transcriptions are presented in a different language than the one in which fieldwork was conducted (as in this project in which I carried out fieldwork in Spanish and translated the material into English) because it adds another layer of nuance and interpretation. Future projects could explore other ways of presenting translated interview transcripts, such as situating the original and the translated transcript excerpts side by side, as other authors have done (Goodwin, 2000).

They could also address transcription as a collaborative and critical process, and as an ongoing opportunity to discuss and reflect on the approaches undertaken and the project's findings (along with their possible implications) as they emerge (Pink, 2009a).

An additional shortcoming of this method is that not all readers might be familiar with emojis, which may make the transcripts challenging to read and understand. Similarly, the meaning attributed to each emoji may be different among individuals, cultures, or people based in different geographic locations, which could lead readers to interpret transcripts in a way that does not correspond with what interviewees intended to say (Aarsand & Sparrman, 2021). Finally, while some readers might find it more engaging than traditional methods, others may consider that it makes texts slower and more tiring, messier, and more difficult to follow than regular fonts. This could be especially true in longer documents such as this dissertation, mainly because I decided to share longer excerpts than what is usually presented in quotes using traditional transcription methods to try to capture the whole affective flow of what was being said in each encounter. Even if that is the case, it is an experiment worth exploring. Affect does tend to make things more interesting but slower, tiring, messier, and more difficult at times after all, doesn't it? As such, this transcription method might help readers experience this approach not only in a cognitive, but also in an affective and embodied way. How do YOU feel?

Identifying Subtle Expressions of Wellbeing and Health

Even with the limitations previously described, the techniques followed provided internal migrant women and me with an effective medium to start to discover some alternative expressions of wellbeing and health that may have remained unnoticed otherwise. While each interaction was unique, the following dialogue with Mariana, a 71-year-old woman who migrated to Quito as a teenager, illustrates how this was the case:

Belen: What part of your day do you like the **most**?

Mariana: Oh, my love 🫤. I've had **cancer twice,** and I have **completely** **lost my sight**. So many parts of my day now are sad and lonely. I mostly cry and cry

Belen: I am **SO** sorry to hear that 🙁

59

Silence.

Mariana: But now that you make me think about it, I **DO** like being in my garden 😊. I have many plants, and I **love** being with them. As I can't see them, I touch them, and I say to myself: '**Oh!** 😵 This one is blooming already, *woooow!* It feels like the leaves are shaped like an **umbrella** now'. So, I touch them, and I think: This is **marvelous! Ooohhh!!** I am filled with emotion, I am filled with *pleasure* and I don't want to, I **DON'T want to** move away from there.

As this excerpt shows, questions about participants' routines often sparked sensory, embodied, and affective evocations that suggested that wellbeing and health were present in the daily lives of migrant women, even when they had not recognized them as such until then. Hence, it demonstrates how language can mediate the felt sensations of wellbeing and health that the women partaking in this project may have experienced in their bodies but may have remained unnoticed until then and bring them into full consciousness through description. The dialogue shared above also depicts how letting the interview be guided by affective elements present in speech, such as silence, helped elicit novel and affective responses that may not have occurred if I had rushed to ask questions instead of making the effort of acknowledging and respecting these affective elements, despite the sometimes uncomfortable affective and embodied reactions that doing so meant for me. In addition, this interview excerpt is an example of how the linguistic-affective approach allowed internal migrant women and me to recognize alternative expressions of health and wellbeing that occur outside of existing theories and in the presence of limiting factors, such as the sadness, the blindness, and the cancer described by Mariana.

Conducting these interviews with 36 women enabled me to see that Mariana's was not an isolated case. On the contrary, in multiple instances, the linguistic-affective approach allowed internal migrant women and me to uncover subtle expressions of wellbeing and health that existed outside of current dominant paradigms. For example, while existing models often equate mental health and wellbeing with 'positive' emotions,

such as happiness, my attention to the affective components of language allowed us to recognize subtle ways in which wellbeing was presenting itself in women's lives and bodies, even when they had not been formulated as specific emotions yet. Like other authors exploring metaphors, probes, and the senses (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Logan, 2022; McLuhan, 1964; McLuhan & Carson, 2003; Pink, 2004, 2005), I found that people often used embodied and sensory terms or allegories (e.g., light, energy, vibration, sensitivity) to refer to these subtle sensations and other abstract concepts and experiences. This suggests that these intangible experiences may be materially grounded and activated through the senses, the body, and everyday actions and interactions (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022).   As shown in Tatiana's interview excerpt presented below, paying attention to these verbal cues and other affective elements present in speech allowed the people I talked to and me to identify some of the subtle ways in which wellbeing was presenting itself in women's lives in ways that they had not fully conceptualized yet, and bring them into full consciousness through dialogue and description:

Tatiana: I love dancing. It's like it calls me 😊, I'm fa 😂 scinated by it 😂😂, I'm really fascinated by it 😊

Belen: 😃 Mhm😃. And why is that? How does dancing make you *feel?*

Tatiana: It makes me feel as if my body has a life of its own. It's so beautiful 😃. I play a s o n g , and my body just **follows** 🧘, really 😊. My body just moves 😊. And I **feel** 😃 … I feel **AMMAZING, amazing**! 😃😃 And it's funny because everything hurts, but it's amazing at the same time. I really don't know how to explain it. It's a wonderful energy, you see.

Belen: Mhm 😊

Tatiana: 😕I don't know 😊😊😊 It fills you right HERE (❤️). Your body **VIBRATES** 😂😂.

Belen: 😂😂

Tatiana: 😂😂 You are so full. It's beautiful, it's beautiful 🧘 😊 It's a sheer delight, it is sensitivity, it's **MAGIC!** That's what it is 😃 ‼️Magic‼️

Belen: Mhm 😊 that's beautiful 😊

Silence.

Tatiana: Going back to the topic that we are exploring, maybe this is what wellbeing is for me 😂😂

Belen: MMHMM!!!! 😃 😃

Tatiana: It has **nothing** to do with *development* or happiness or those other things that they teach you that wellbeing is, you know 😐 ? **DANCING.** That vibration, that energy, that… I don't know…*flow* ❓ **THAT'S** what wellbeing is for me.

Like the findings of other authors conducting sensory interviews (Pink, 2004, 2005), and as the conversation with Tatiana presented above portrays, paying attention to the affective, embodied, and sensory descriptions and metaphors that emerged during our interactions enabled the women who participated in this project and me to reach deeper insights about people's daily lives and discover the subtle ways in which wellbeing and health were presenting themselves in this context. In this process, we were able to recognize intangible expressions of wellbeing and health that may have remained overlooked by other approaches and did not quite fit into existing definitions of these terms. As such, these expressions that emerge from the felt sensations, bodies, knowledges, and lived experiences of people from the Global South who might not have had access to hegemonic platforms for communication and participation could contradict, complement, or expand current dominant understandings. As Tatiana's interview excerpt also demonstrates, the novel sensations that emerged during research encounters add to decolonial efforts arguing for new approaches to wellbeing and health that exist outside Western paradigms and their focus on development and economic growth as the sole avenue towards a wholesome and healthy life (Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Escobar, 1995; Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021). These sensations also respond to the arguments made by other authors exploring wellbeing through an affective lens, who have detailed the dangers of understanding wellbeing and health (and their absence) only through binary 'positive' or 'negative' emotions or experiences, such as happiness

or depression, thus exposing the need for new ways of conceptualizing and approaching these terms (Ahmed, 2010a, 2010b; Cvetkovich, 2012).

The possibility of reaching such original understandings also became apparent through the dialogues around food that the internal migrant women and I had, which was one of the topics that came up the most during the interviews. As depicted in the excerpt from the conversation I had with Manuela, who self-identifies as Indigenous and migrated to Quito from Ecuador's rural highlands region when she was 12 years old, the sensory, embodied, and affective evocation interviews conducted as part of this research allowed us to realize that internal migrant women's considerations of the role that food plays in their wellbeing and health surpassed dominant paradigms:

Belen:	What part of your house do you like the most?
Manuela:	Mmm The kitchen, maybe. Well, actually, not the whole kitchen, the **stove**. We have a wooden stove that I really like.
Belen:	And why do you like it so much 😊?
Manuela:	I like cooking whatever I have in there. Fish, pork, whatever I have, I cook it in there. It doesn't matter what it is, as long as <u>we are all,</u> we are ALL there. I love having all my five kids besides me, *hehe* 😀I love how we are all juntitos, together, apretaditos, crammed in there, around the stove😊
Belen:	And it was important for you to have a <u>wooden </u>stove?
Manuela:	Oh, of <u>course!</u>
Belen:	Why is that?
Manuela:	It's just **so** different from other stoves
Belen:	What makes it different?
Manuela:	Mmm…maybe that you can *s e e t h e f i r e .* I don't know, <u>I don't know</u> what it is 🧑 My kids tease me because they say that it makes too much smoke 😂😂 but I tell them: "this is **mine, <u>mine!</u>** None of you have a say on this!" 😂😂
Belen:	😂😂 And the smoke doesn't bother <u>you?</u>

Manuela:	Mmm…no 🙅 I don't mind it. The thing is that food's flavour is really different when you cook on a wooden stove. <u>So much better.</u>
Belen:	Mhm.　　Does that **flavour** remind you of something?
Manuela:	Oh!! 👏 Of course!!Of course!!Yes! 👏👏👏 We didn't have any other types of stoves in the rural place where I grew up 😂😂 I think I 've stayed with that…with that… flavour ❓ in me ❓ I feel like…when I cook with the ***wooden stove*** ❓ 🙅, I am… everything is like in my town, the <u>**little**</u> chairs around the *stove*, everything, everything. <u>**Then**</u> I feel like I am in my childhood house, with my parents 😂❤️😂 It's <u>just like</u> being in the countryside 😂😂 So close, so nice.

As this interaction with Manuela illustrates and like other authors exploring multisensory methods have found (Elliot & Culhane, 2016; Pink, 2004, 2005, 2009a), the women who participated in this project and I noticed that the conversations we held around the physical spaces they inhabit, along with the daily activities they perform and sensory experiences that these actions bring with them, often let us access memories and emotions from women's pasts and bring them to full consciousness during our encounter. Through this process, we discovered that internal migrant women in this study considered food a crucial component of their overall health. However, the importance they placed on food was not only based on its nutritional value (as most existing dominant approaches do). As the example of Manuela's interview presented above, approaching language and dialogue as the mediator of affect, the linguistic-affective approach allowed us to notice that women also considered that food was a crucial component of their health because of the affective and relational components they felt certain food carried with it. As Manuela realized during our conversation, this role was especially significant for internal migrant women because food connected them with their memories, people, and places of origin. These memories and insights gained particular importance in the context of internal migration, where food represented a closeness to their families in the context of social isolation that they sometimes felt because of migration.

Recognizing the affective and relational value that women placed on food allowed us to start exploring health under these terms, surpassing the purely biological focus existing dominant paradigms still have. Yet, these discussions did not only let us begin expanding the current understanding of wellbeing and health. In addition, they enabled us to consider the specific context in which these considerations emerged. For example, Sisa Carolina said that for her, "health is being able to eat what her abuelitos grandparents used to eat." As such, her words showed the affective and relational component that she attributed to food. However, delving into the meaning that this food had for her allowed us to recognize that she considered that this type of food was not accessible to her in her life as an internal migrant in Quito because of contamination and lack of access to food and land that she considered as being healthy.

Hence, the linguistic-affective approach did not only allow us to start recognizing subtle expressions of wellbeing and health that are outside of existing theories. In addition, it let women and me begin realizing how these alternative expressions of wellbeing and health exist in the specific context of internal migration in Ecuador. In this way, this approach started to address some of the shortcomings of dominant theories by exploring wellbeing and health through the body and the lived experiences of people outside the Global North, leading to findings that were more contextual and situated than existing ones. Moreover, the expressions of wellbeing and health that started to emerge through this approach did not only detail what these would look like under ideal conditions. The linguistic-affective approach also enabled us to recognize the limiting factors that shaped them in this specific context, such as the context of internal migration and contamination that women felt reduced their access to food that they considered healthy. Identifying these limiting factors, in turn, allowed women and me to consider some of the strategies that they developed to circumvent these limitations, at least to some extent. For example, after remembering how food connected her with her childhood memories, Manuela narrated:

> I feel like the food in Quito makes me sick because everything, everything, everything, is contaminated and full of chemicals**. FULL of chemicals.** It's not like the food that I grew up with. My parents grew our own food when I was a girl, but I don't have access to **any** healthy land in Quito. Everything is contaminated over here. That's why I bring my own food every time that I go to my hometown. *I bring chickens, I bring rice, I bring beans*, I bring everything, everything I bring

65

over here😂😂 If I run out of beans, <u>I run back</u> to my hometown to bring more. I may have not anything else, but **I need to have** my beans 😄. I bring the beans and I sit down and *thresh, thresh, thresh* them for *h o u r s .* 😊 I thresh and thresh and remember how my mom, my sisters, and I also used to sit down together and thresh beans when I was a little girl ❤️

Although Valeria and Victoria were much younger than Manuela and each of them migrated to Quito from a different Ecuadorian region, they also recounted the affective meaning that bringing food to the capital city had for them:

Valeria:

When I come back to Quito from my hometown, I bring the **sack** of things that my mom sends with <u>me.</u> Since the first time I came to Quito she has sent me food, <u>and my dad too!</u> But my **mom** especially is one of those people who always make me cry when I leave home. I always forget everything, but she always packs everything, everything, everything, everything she packs. Even things I would never think of. She even sends me **eggs!! EGGS!!** 😂😂😂 I'm not lying to you 😂😂😂. It's an 8-hour bus trip from my hometown to Quito, and she sends me eggs 😄😄😄. She packs them <u>so well</u> that they arrive intact, <u>I swear!</u> 😊😊 And the food she sends me itself is not so important. What matters is the **gesture,** do you know what I mean? The **gesture** and the fact that she knows <u>everything</u> that I need, including the things that I didn't think I wanted, she thinks of **EVERYTHING**, do you know what I mean?

Victoria:

My Mommy Rina, my grandmother, used to send me food. She was always worried about me **eating.** I used to tell her that I was eating properly in Quito just so that she would stop worrying, but she knew I wasn't, she just <u>knew.</u> She used to make some stews for me, freeze them, and send them to me. And they were <u>so good</u>. Then, I used to cook the rice E X A C T L Y <u>as she taught me to</u>. Those moments made me feel like… like… like I had a little piece of HOME   👈 **I am so spoiled!** <u>Oh!</u> As I talk about this, I realize this and say: **"Shoot! You are still <u>SO</u> attached to home!"**

The excerpts above show how bringing food from their hometowns connected women to their memories and allowed them to access the food that was important for them even when the context of internal migration posed a limitation for them in this regard. In this way, these excerpts show how the linguistic-affective approach enabled

us to notice some subtle ways in which wellbeing and health presented themselves in women's everyday lives, even in the presence of limiting factors.

It is crucial to highlight that noticing wellbeing and health under adverse conditions should not be understood as a romanticized consideration, but as an activist one. Recognizing such subtle expressions of wellbeing and health under limiting factors should be used as a step to open paths to leverage communities' agency to strengthen the conditions that support wellbeing and health in specific contexts, and to challenge those that hinder them. As shown in the excerpts above, the linguistic-affective approach allowed us to recognize some of the ways in which women's agency could be leveraged to support their ability to live a life that they considered wholesome and healthy, even in the presence of limiting factors that stalled this possibility in the specific context of internal migration in Ecuador.

Overall, in this chapter I have described how the linguistic-affective approach can open the opportunity to address the research process as a zone of inventiveness to explore alternative expressions of wellbeing and health. By considering the body and the senses as an entry point for the study of affect, this approach enables us to start to recognize subtle expressions of wellbeing and health that differ and are more contextual and situated than those traditionally advanced by existing dominant theories, and bring them into full consciousness through dialogue and description. The linguistic-affective approach also allows us to distinguish how these novel subtle expressions of wellbeing and health can present themselves even in the presence of limiting factors, which are also unique to each context. In turn, identifying these limiting factors opens the space to start considering mechanisms to support people's agency to enhance wellbeing and health in each context. However, this method alone may still replicate a critical shortcoming of existing approaches to wellbeing and health, as it still strongly focuses on individual experiences and sensations without connecting them enough with the broader structural factors shaping people's lives in each setting. To address this limitation, I implemented additional steps, as described in the following chapter.

4. Towards a Compañeras Exploration of Wellbeing and Health

The sensory, embodied, and affective evocation interviews described in the previous chapter allowed the women who participated in this project and me to start to recognize how wellbeing and health were presenting themselves in women's daily lives, and how they occurred in the specific context of internal migration in Ecuador. However, this method alone would have still replicated one of the shortcomings of existing approaches to wellbeing and health by focusing too much on subjective experiences without connecting them with one another and with broader social and structural factors shaping people's lives in this specific context. To avoid this possible limitation, I complemented the sensory, embodied, and affective evocation interviews that I conducted with the internal migrant women with semi-structured interviews run with a total of 22 health and migration local experts. These additional interviews provided me with a more in-depth understanding of the local context and the meaning and significance that the internal migrant women's accounts represent under these precise conditions.

Yet, even with these interviews, I could have still risked following the strong individual focus of existing efforts. For this reason, I also aimed to determine if the individual expressions of wellbeing and health sensed by each woman could help us raise possible avenues for identifying and addressing the structures shaping migrant women's lives as a group. In addition, I wanted to see how affect might be present in group meaning-making processes, if at all. In other words, I wanted to try to find a way to sense not only the affective forces that move within bodies, but also between them when people engage with others and with different elements of their surroundings.

Informed on this occasion by decolonial methodologies (S. Wilson & Mulrennan, 2016), by critical and participatory approaches addressing health communication as a collective process aimed at identifying health-related problems and solutions (Airhihenbuwa & Dutta, 2012; Dutta, 2008; Gumucio-Dagron, 2010; Lupton, 1994), and by my previous work on participatory and community communication in Ecuador (Febres-Cordero, 2015, 2017), I decided to complement the individual interviews with

68

encuentros (gatherings) to explore wellbeing and health with the internal migrant women as a group. To hold them, I collaborated with El Churo (www.elchuro.org), a communication NGO and online community media outlet in Quito, with which I have partnered in different projects since 2013.

Guided by El Churo's participatory approach, which is informed by the considerations of diverse Latin American authors focusing on alternative communication and communication for social change (Barranquero, 2011; Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006; Waisbord, 2014) and, in particular, by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and his reflections on dialogue as an avenue for liberation and social transformation (Freire, 1970), El Churo and I wanted this to be a deeply collaborative process. The linguistic-affective approach played a crucial role in achieving this objective right from the start. Even the decision to call these meetings encuentros (which I have translated as gatherings) was cooperative, and it was based on my considerations of the relationship between affect and language and, more specifically, on my argument that affect sticks to words. We had initially planned to call them grupos focales (focus groups), but we decided against this term, perhaps more expected within academia, because we considered that it could be unfamiliar to most women in the Ecuadorian context and that it could hinder the participation of those who knew it by carrying a level of formality that we were not seeking. Then, we thought to call them talleres, (workshops). However, when I mentioned this name to Yanay, one of the women I interviewed in the previous stage of the project, she asked me what we would teach attendees. When I explained that the idea was not for us to teach them anything, but to explore the concepts of wellbeing and health together instead, she suggested that we call them encuentros (gatherings), as she rightly pointed out that this word better communicated our goal.

Once we decided on this name, we created a virtual card to invite women to be part of the gatherings. Drawing from previous work focusing on typography, affect, and the senses (Velasco et al., 2015) and on the decolonization of typography and design (Farias, 2021; Khandwala, 2019; Tunstall & Agi, 2023), along with my own consideration that words, fonts, size, colour, and visual elements are all important mediators of affect, we paid close attention to each one of these elements when creating it. After seven previous versions, we agreed on the style below:

69

Figure 1. **Virtual invitation for the encuentros (gatherings) that El Churo and I held as a part of this project**

El Churo and I wanted the invitation to be purple (the colour used by feminist groups in this and other settings) to communicate the feminist approach of this project. In our first versions of the invitation, we used purple pastel tones, but then we decided to change them to brighter ones because we considered that people in Ecuador tend to be more amenable to intense colours, so these could be more engaging in this context. With this change, we followed the recommendations of work on the decolonization of design to respect and reflect the aesthetic preferences of local settings, which may differ from those endorsed by dominant Western parameters (Khandwala, 2019; Tunstall & Agi, 2023). In addition, we used the inclined lines of different colours aiming to portray the idea of intersectionality and connection, and to make a reference to weaving. As an

important traditional and ancestral activity among women in Ecuador, particularly Indigenous women, weaving is often used as an affective and embodied metaphor for collaboration and connection in this setting. We also included the image of the hands in different colours to communicate cooperation and hint at the close attention to the body we were planning on having during the gatherings.

Once we agreed on the invitation, I sent it to each of the women I had previously interviewed one-on-one, along with a WhatsApp voice note personally inviting them to the gatherings. Contacting each of the 36 women that I had interviewed in this way took considerably more time than sending a group invitation would have required. However, I felt that it was important to send a more personal invitation to increase engagement and show care in each person's participation, especially because my fieldwork activities were significantly delayed due to the pandemic and illness in my family, and several months had passed since I had interviewed some of the women. I feared this delay would have interrupted momentum and diluted people's interest in the project. Based on these considerations and existing recommendations, El Churo and I were expecting a dropout rate of at least 75% from the individual interviews, and we originally planned to have one in-person gathering with a maximum of 10 attendees (to be honest, I was not expecting more than four). However, we had more community interest than we anticipated. Most women confirmed their attendance almost immediately after I contacted them, and some of them asked me if they could bring along friends or family members who also wanted to participate in the project. To respond to this community interest while still respecting all the COVID-19 guidelines in place at the time, we ended up having not one, but four gatherings, two of which were conducted in-person following COVID-19 protocols, and two were conducted online via Zoom. Overall, a total of 59 women attended the gatherings, and El Churo and I feel that our close attention to the affective details during the invitation process was at least partly responsible for this good response.

The linguistic-affective approach, together with El Churo's vast experience with fostering participatory spaces, continued to guide us during the gatherings themselves, both when conducted in-person and online. While necessary, we were worried that all the COVID-19 protocols (e.g., social distancing, masks) would decrease our ability to create an affective atmosphere during our gatherings. For this reason, we made an extra effort to generate one by paying close attention to the senses. Similar to the individual interviews, we approached them as an entry point for affect. In addition, we used the

conditions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to reflect further on our bodies and senses.

We held the first in-person gathering at a local museum that provided us with an open space, and the second on a community patio that one of the women who participated in the gatherings facilitated for us. While we did not have much control over these spaces, we decorated them with flowers and tablecloths to start creating an affective atmosphere. We also arranged the chairs in a way that we felt allowed for affect to travel more effectively while still maintaining social distance. Moreover, we used the multiple reminders to maintain social distance that we gave throughout our in-person gatherings as opportunities to reflect on the sensations in our bodies, and on the role that embodied affective expressions, such as the hugs that we were not able to give or receive at the time, had in our overall sense of wellbeing and health. We also implemented other activities involving the body without requiring physical contact (e.g., eye contact, words, smiles) to try to nurture a sense of camaraderie and connection while maintaining social distancing. In addition, we served some food to share, which is a crucial affective and sensory aspect of community building in Latin American contexts. As with the individual interviews, we used the food as an anchor and reminder to pay attention to our bodies and senses at specific moments throughout the gatherings. Moreover, we played songs to welcome women to the gatherings and at other carefully chosen moments throughout the events. We picked these songs based on their affective intensity. Some of them were created or performed by artists from the Ecuadorian regions represented by the people we knew would attend. Paying attention to smell, we chose to use rubbing alcohol that we bought from a community member evoking calendula, eucalyptus, and chamomile, which we felt would be more affective than other scents, while still following COVID-19 guidelines. We used it as an opportunity to reflect on the role of plants, natural medicine, community economy, smell, and other senses in our discussions around wellbeing and health. Paradoxically, these extra efforts that we made due to the COVID-19 pandemic context may have enabled us to create an even more affective atmosphere, as well as richer and more embodied discussions, than the ones that we would have created under other circumstances, which may not have driven us to consider these affective and sensory elements with so much care and attention, especially during in-person gatherings.

Because we were worried that affect would not travel to the same extent through online mediums, we made even more effort to foster an affective and embodied atmosphere during our virtual gatherings. To start, we welcomed women with the following slide that I prepared in advance, which aimed to recreate the atmosphere of our in-person encounters:

Figure 2.   Virtual table shared with internal migrant women during online gatherings

With the same welcome song which opened the space during the in-person gatherings playing in the background, as soon as each person connected to the call, we asked them to "take a seat" at our shared virtual table by writing the name or pseudonym by which they wanted to be called, as shown in the image above. In addition, we invited women to have something to eat and drink so that we could feel that we were sharing food. In this way, food served the same role that it did in our in-person gatherings.

Continuing with our objective of creating an affective and embodied atmosphere, we started all the gatherings by lighting a candle. During the in-person gatherings, I lit the candle together with one of the women in the room to honour the energy, the space, and the collective and ancestral knowledge to be shared through each person's words and presence. For the online gatherings, the members of El Churo and I lit our own candles at each of our homes, and we encouraged attendees to light a candle along with

us if they felt inclined to do so, which many of them did. In addition, we implemented several activities throughout the gatherings (e.g., dancing, breathing) that were not designed for collecting or generating information for the study, but for evoking affective sensations and returning the attention to the body and the senses instead. Trying to make them as embodied as possible, we included even more of these activities during virtual gatherings. To maintain connection of these activities to the research topic, we used them as an opportunity to reflect on the fundamental role that bodies play in every aspect of human life, and on the discussions around migration, wellbeing, and health that we were having.

Moreover, while El Churo and I prepared the activities beforehand, following affect, we also decided to let the energy of the room and the people involved move us. We often changed or modified the exercises we had initially planned, as well as the pace at which we carried them out, to respond to how we felt people were being affected by them and to what we sensed the group needed or wanted at each moment. As a result, every gathering was unique, and the affective atmosphere at each one of them was created by every single person who was present.

The linguistic-affective approach also informed the role that the members of El Churo who facilitated the gatherings with me and I decided to take. As with the individual interviews, we wanted to be careful not to overshadow women's experiences with ours. At the same time, affect's consideration that we all affect and are affected at every interaction that we partake in made us conscious that our presence in the gatherings would inevitably shape them, which encouraged us to adopt a self-reflexive approach. We constantly reflected on how our presence at the gatherings might affect the interactions with and among the group. We often shared these reflections with the attendees. Remembering the argument that "it is the *refusal* to acknowledge the importance of the differences in our identities that has led to distrust, miscommunication, and thus disunity" (Martín-Alcoff, 2006), we also openly discussed our intersecting social locations, along with the privileges they carry, and how we were being affected and nourished by the research process and the experiences shared. Finally, after some deliberations, we decided to contribute to the gatherings both as facilitators and as participants. Doing so allowed us to generate more honest, open, affective, and vulnerable encounters than the ones we could have created if we had adopted a more detached position.

The attention to affect, the bodies, and the senses we paid when striving to create an affective atmosphere was just as present in the activities tailored explicitly for exploring the research questions. For example, in one of the methods followed during our in-person gatherings, we gave each woman a piece of cardboard that we had previously cut out in the shape of a petal, and we asked them to write down on the board phrases or stories that illustrated what health felt like to each one of them. While they were writing, we gave each of them a cookie in a flower shape, and we invited them to eat it and use it as a reminder to pay attention to their senses and bodies while crafting their reflections. Again, we played a song at this time. Once all the reviews were ready, we gathered them and placed each "petal" together, forming a "flower," as shown in the image below. Then, we invited women to verbally share what they had written down if they felt comfortable doing so.

Figure 3.   **Collective flower shape formed with paper petals carrying phrases or stories illustrating what health felt like to the women participating in in-person gatherings**

As such, we used these collective material metaphors as symbolic, visual, affective, embodied, and cognitive avenues to reflect on convergences and differences in women's individual sensations of health. We also discussed the intersecting structural factors that shaped these experiences as a whole. Moreover, we reflected on how each story related to people's shared experiences as a group (just like each petal relates to the flower as a whole), even when individual intersecting identities and life trajectories were highly diverse in many ways.

While it took a substantial amount of time, effort, and back-and-forth conversations, the attention that El Churo and I paid to affect, the body and the senses before and during the gatherings allowed us to achieve our objective of fostering an affective atmosphere. Conmovida (moved), bienvenida (welcome), acogida (supported), sensible (sensitive), and inmensamente agradecida (immensely grateful) were just a few of the words that women used to describe how they had felt during both the in-person and online gatherings. Similarly, they mentioned that they took ternura (tenderness), calidez (warmth), hermandad (sorority), admiración (admiration), paz (peace), amor (love), buenas vibras (good vibes), linda energía (nice energy), acompañamiento (accompaniment), fuerza (strength), unión (bonding), sabiduría (wisdom), conocimiento (knowledge), and bienestar (wellbeing) from our time together.

The affective elements that these gatherings elicited could have stayed in these descriptions, and in the pleasant sensations I experience in my own body every time I remember them. However, the linguistic-affective approach's consideration that language mediates affect enables me to notice and value these affective sensations within me and bring them into full consciousness through writing. This process lets me make sense of them and cognitively theorize them, which only increases the affective intensity with which I experience them.

The Rise and Theorization of the Compañeras Heterogeneous Identity

The attention that the linguistic-affective approach pays to the affective components of language drove me to notice that women constantly used the word compañera to refer to one another during the gatherings. "Como dijo la compañera (as the compañera said)", "igual que la compañera, (as the compañera)", "a diferencia de la

compañera, (unlike the compañera)", were common sentences during the gatherings, both when conducted in-person and online. The term compañera could be translated into English words like "partner," "friend," "mate," "comrade," "colleague," or "pal." However, none of these words fully captures the affective significance that it has in some Latin American contexts, including Ecuador. In this location, this word is often used to refer to people you consider like you, especially when they experience similar sociopolitical struggles and inequities, have the same political views, and lead equal political fights.

However, the women who attended the gatherings were not homogeneous by any means.   Ecuador's diverse populations and this study's focus on internal migration opened the opportunity for people with different backgrounds to converge. The intersecting social locations that shaped the identity of the 59 women who participated in these gatherings were highly diverse in terms of age, class, income, level of education, occupation, sexuality, marital and family status, cultural background, race, ethnicity, city of origin, political affiliation, religion, language, and (dis)ability. Given that most of the women who participated in the gatherings were the same women who I had previously interviewed individually, the characteristics of the compañeras were similar to the people previously described. They self-identified as Mestizas, Montubias, Afro-Ecuadorian, and Indigenous. They spoke three different languages and had roots in 17 of the 24 provinces of Ecuador and three of the country's four regions. They were leaders, students, heads of household, domestic workers, politicians, communicators, advocates, poets, writers, filmmakers, teachers, educators, university professors, entrepreneurs, photographers, embroiderers, researchers, cosmetologists, acupuncturists, podiatrists, lawyers, nurses, midwives, and healers. Some compañeras had visual and physical disabilities. The youngest was 19 years old; the oldest, 71; and every decade between these extremes was represented by at least one of them. Their political views, perspectives, and experiences were just as distinct.

Their use of the word compañera, even in the presence of these differences, suggested that women were experiencing a sense of camaraderie and belonging to the group that is not often achieved in a few hours, especially among people who are so dissimilar. The care we put into cultivating an affective atmosphere during the gatherings, together with El Churo's extensive experience with holding participatory and respectful encounters with diverse communities, may have contributed to the creation of

77

this collective sensation. The presence of the word compañera in this context led me to think that, although that was not my initial objective, a compañeras group identity was emerging from the gatherings. Delving into the affective formation and significance of this group identity is necessary and important because, as affect scholar Lisa Blackman says, "our theorizations of affect require attending to the models of subjectivity that we implicitly and sometimes explicitly invoke in our reinventions of the human, the body, politics and life" (Blackman, 2012, p. 2). Latinx feminist thought has much to offer to this objective.

Although not always known or taken into enough consideration, especially outside the region, Latin American feminist thought offers important contributions. There are different traditions within this body of work, each with its unique characteristics and inputs (Espinosa Miñoso et al., 2014). Still, questions around identity have been a common preoccupation among some of these lines of work. Different Latin American feminisms –including decolonial, Indigenous, and Black feminisms from the region– have often emphasized the importance of resisting a one-dimensional sense of identity when aiming to understand and represent the diverse experiences of Latin American women. As such, they have discussed in depth the need to unpack the multilayered dimension of identity that exists in the region and the power dynamics that are entangled with it, which operate within multiple overlapping systems of oppression, including colonialism, racism, heterosexuality, classism, ableism, imperialism, and patriarchy (Rivera Berruz, 2021).

Latinx feminisms follow this tradition and offer a unique perspective in this regard. Although they are also composed of several diverse voices, each with its distinct characteristics and points of view, Latinx feminist theories have mainly been developed by scholars with a Latin American background living in North America, particularly the United States (Ortega, 2015; Rivera Berruz, 2021). The themes they address are broad. They discuss topics such as borderlines, migration, race/ethnicity, (de)coloniality, gender, sexuality, communication, language, spirituality, resistance and activism, political collaboration and coalition, trauma, exclusion, and belonging, to name a few (Anzaldúa, 2007; Keating, 2009; Lugones, 2010b, 2010a; Martín-Alcoff, 2006; Ortega, 2016; Rivera Berruz, 2021). However, on this occasion, I draw specifically from their insights on identity.

Often influenced by the groundbreaking work of Gloria Anzaldúa –Chicana queer feminist scholar, writer, poet, and activist– and reflecting on their own experiences of living between geographic locations, languages, and cultures, Latinx feminist authors offer a novel take on selfhood and identity (Anzaldúa, 2007; Keating, 2009; Martín-Alcoff, 2006; Ortega, 2015, 2016). Traditionally, identity has been recognized as a single, fixed, absolute, objective, or comprehensible unity. However, Latinx feminist scholars challenge this assumption. For example, in her book titled "Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self," Linda Martín-Alcoff describes identities as "positioned or located lived experiences in which both individuals and groups work to construct meaning in relation to historical experience and historical narratives" (Martín-Alcoff, 2006). For this reason, she argues that "identities are best understood as ways in which we and others around us represent our material ties to historical events and social structures" (Martín-Alcoff, 2006). This argument illustrates Latinx feminism's broad approach to identity. While each author has a unique perspective on this topic (Ortega, 2015), generally, they do not understand identity as a definite set of individual characteristics, but as a process of "becoming-with" others (Ortega, 2016). Hence, they regard identity as being relational, contextual, deeply complex, contradictory, multi-voiced, multilayered, plural, ambiguous, antagonistic, fluid, mobile, open-ended, and/ or hybrid (Anzaldúa, 2007; Lugones, 2010b; Martín-Alcoff, 2006; Ortega, 2015, 2016; Pitts et al., 2020).

Although Latinx feminist scholars have mostly developed these conceptualizations to describe and make sense of their experiences and identities in the specific context of Latinx people living in the United States (Ortega, 2006; Rivera Berruz, 2021), this identity construction resonates well with what some internal migrant women in Quito described in the context of this project. For example, Sisa Carolina, who self-identifies both as Indigenous and as Mestiza, revealed that identity is a process for her, just as it is for some Latinx authors, as described above. Additionally, she expressed how she experiences her identity in the context of internal migration in Quito, which also corresponds to the complex, multilayered, plural, fluid, and hybrid understandings of identity developed by Latinx scholars:

Sisa Carolina: I have a Kichwa name and a Spanish name. The complexity of my identity starts from there😂😂. My mom always self-identified as Indigenous, and her

79

mother tongue is Kichwa, but my dad **NNNO.** So, they gave me both names so that I could <u>decide</u> which world I wanted to **embrace.** In that sense, they always gave me the opportunity to decide to which <u>**world**</u> I want to belong, or if I want to complement both, they have no *issue* either 🤷.

Belen: Mhm

Sisa Carolina: I did go through a time, though, around the teenager years, where it is like you **don't want** to be different. I remember that **I DID NOT LIKE** my name because **NO ONE ELSE** was called Sisa, at least not here, **NOT** in Quito. In the countryside, mine and my sister's names are some of the most common ones 😂😂 but NOT here, **NOT** in the city. So there was a time where I used to say: 'No, my name is Carolina, only Carolina.' **BUT** I started a process around two years ago, three years ago, where I started to properly learn Kichwa, and surround myself with other Indigenous young people living in the city. It was a process that lasted around a year. It was **SUPER** hard, it demanded a lot of unlearning and self-analysis on my part, mmm but it was worth it 😂😂

Belen: Mhm 😊

Sisa Carolina: So, for me, identity is not fixed. Rather, it is a <u>process</u>; a process, <u>a decision</u> to stop hiding, to stop trying to be unnoticed or to blend in with the majority. It is a process of deciding to be who you <u>truly</u> are, even if others don't understand or approve of it.

Several of the women who were part of this study explained how being able to maintain this mobile, complex, multilayered, plural, fluid, and hybrid sense of identity described by Sisa Carolina and Latinx feminist authors was a crucial component of their wellbeing, especially in the context of internal migration in Ecuador, where this right was often denied to them. For example, Tatiana, a 31-year-old woman who self-identifies as Indigenous, said:

Identity and culture are fluid, mobile 🤷. They are not static. We, as Indigenous people, are **NOT** pieces in a <u>museum</u> 😐. The problem is that people are not used to a more complex view of identity. They want to put you in

boxes. They want to <u>tell **YOU**</u> <u>who **YOU**</u> <u>are,</u> and what or who you <u>can</u> or <u>cannot be</u>, according to their own views, according to **THEIR** own perceptions of **YOU** 😐.   And that is hard. That is **<u>REALLY</u>** hard.   Learning how to live in two worlds when others constantly tell you that you belong to none of them is **<u>HARD,</u>** but you <u>HAVE TO</u> find that **power** within you, because it is your right to decide who you are and where you belong. **YOU** can **free** yourself from the *boundaries* that **OTHERS** try to <u>impose</u> on **YOU.** Because others want to speak for us, but I think that their voice can't be stronger than mine. I can still ask: <u>Who are you</u> to tell **me** who <u>I can and cannot be</u>**?** **Who do you think <u>YOU</u> are**? 😂👉😠👉You <u>CAN'T</u> take my own identity away from me.   Knowing that I can have **that freedom, that   power** to… to define and express who I am ❓ that is really, *really* important to me.

Several women who were also part of this project also considered that expressing their identity and sense of self was an important aspect of their wellbeing, and they often did so in embodied ways. These modes of self-expression were particularly important in the context of internal migration in Ecuador, where women – mainly those who self-identified as Indigenous or Black– often experienced dreadful instances of discrimination, racism, and erasure from hegemonic spaces, which were frequently also expressed and experienced in embodied and affective ways.

 For example, Yani, who self-identifies as Indigenous, shared how racism and discrimination affected her life, and how embodied and affective-linguistic identity markers represented wellbeing for her in this context:

> As a little girl at school, I didn't u n d e r s t a a a n d w h a t I w a s , **<u>WHO</u>** I was, culturally speaking. I knew I was **<u>different</u>**, right? Different from those around me. For me, it was a little bit weird that <u>NO ONE</u> would give me an answer about **<u>WHY</u>** my mom was different from my classmates' **<u>mothers.</u>** She suffered A LOT of discrimination for being who she is, for being Indigenous, especially when she spoke the Kichwa language. And I feel so bad to say this, but she suffered a lot of discrimination, even from <u>me</u> 😔.   I remember that when I was **<u>little,</u>** when I listened to her speaking the Kichwa language, which was **<u>VERY</u>** few times, only when she spoke with her family, I don't remember very well, but she told me that once I told her to stop speaking like <u>that</u> 😔 that she speaks <u>horribly</u>, and that here, in Quito, **<u>no one</u>** speaks like that. 👉👉
>
> What I am saying is **<u>horrible</u>**, but I used to feel **ashamed** of my origins and of my mother, for being 'Indians,' as they call us 😐. I didn't like my mother coming to <u>school</u> wearing our traditional clothing. I felt

ashamed in front of my classmates because my mother didn't wear the same clothes as theirs. I don't know how to describe this, but I could just *sense* how they looked at us. They looked at us w i t h   *c o n f u s i o n* , w i t h   *d i s b e l i e f* ,   w i t h   *d i s a p p r o v a l* 🙅 And in a way, I understand them because I never dressed like my mother. I wore a uniform like the rest of the kids. I only wanted others NOT TO KNOW who I was. That was the **only** thing I cared about. I thought my mom didn't realize how I felt u n t i l l a t e r   o n   s h e   c o n f e s s e d   t h a t   s h e   n o t i c e d   m y e m b a r r a s s m e n t : **'You didn't need to SAY anything; only with your   ATTITUDE   I could tell that you were ashamed of me,'** she said 🥺**.**

But when I went to college, it wasn't like that anymore, because I didn't have ANYTHING to hide anymore 🙅 🙅 . When I began college, I had the opportunity to learn more about my cultural identity and to **empower myself** with the help of friends who came from processes similar to mine. And there was **NOTHING ELSE** to be ashamed of. Everyone knew who I was from day one. To this day, I have NOT stopped wearing my traditional clothing to go to college and anywhere else. I feel **VERY PROUD** because I no longer hide my identity. **It feels so good!** Another thing that fills me with great joy and pride is that I have legally changed my name to a Kichwa one. This is something I will never, ever regret.

Brittany, Marisol, and Jaqueline, all of whom self-identify as Black women, also described the different instances of racism and discrimination that they endure in their daily lives in Quito, and the role that their embodied identity expressions, especially through their hair, play in their sense of wellbeing and health in this context:

Brittany:

I am 19 years old, and I just graduated from school. I was always by myself at school. My classmates used to say: '***Nooo*, no no no** 😠**,** we don't want to hang out with **you** because you're like that, negrita Black, and you **don't comb your hair**.' Others always think that they are better than you. 🙅 It is always like that, but I have never minded about that. I have always loved my hair. Ever since I was a little girl, I used to love my hair. I never cared what others said about it 😊. I always, **always** loved my hair. My mom always wanted to comb my hair because at school they told her that I needed to tame my hair, but I used to run out of the house with my natural hair and say: 'I'm late, I'm late, I have to go,' but it was only to avoid combing it 😂. I **love** my hair. I look at myself in the mirror and say: 'How **beautiful** I am.'

Marisol:

In Quito, you live with racism *ingrained* in your life. You're constantly being *observed*, judged. Even when you are looking to rent a room, they tell you to your face: 'We don't rent to Black people. 🙍' You go to a *shopping mall* or anywhere else, and you *overhear* people saying things about you. You're in a line at the *bank*, and they ask you to keep your distance, but they ask this only of **you**; they don't say anything to *anyone else*. They always think that they are better than you. However, **nothing** can defeat me anymore. Racism can't defeat me. Discrimination can't defeat me. I am a strong woman and I know that they may exclude you from some spaces, but it doesn't matter, you create your **own** 🙍. I couldn't be with my natural hair in a mainstream TV channel, but I can create my own spaces that are SO MUCH BETTER because they are spaces where I can feel respected and valued for who I am, for my ideas and for the work that I can do for communities.

Jaqueline:

Even if you were born in Quito, if you are Afro-Ecuadorian, you are subjected to a huge social **stigma** in the city. The **stigma** of being Black. In here, you **feel** that you are Black. You feel this **CONSTANTLY**. *EVERY* DAY and *EVERY* NIGHT. This doesn't happen if you live in a community because you are surrounded by people who **look like you**, everyone is the same, no one blames you for being Black 🙍. Over there, you don't find yourself, like here, being part of a city that is yours because you were **born** into it but still *only has a marginal space for you*. **It's really tough** to live in a place that should also be yours but **isn't**. It's a form of **CONSTANT UPROOTING**, of **CONSTANT REJECTION**.

So you ask me what health is for me in this context, and I would say that you can HARDLY be healthy and whole without embracing your fights 😅 and your identity, without recognizing WHO you are and **WHAT** you are too 😐. Health, then, has to do with our fights and the physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing that comes from our own, deep-rooted ways of living and relating to our grandmothers, ancestors, and own Gods. We understand health from **there;** from being whole, from being complete, from *recognizing* ourselves in the people *behind us* and also in those *ahead*. In this sense, health and well-being mean recognizing WHO I am, and my **hair** plays a CRUCIAL role in that sense. My hair has always been a symbol of resistance for me. In women's hair, enslaved people wove the maps to escape, and they kept the gold nuggets to pay for and sustain their freedom. Hair also has to do with knowing yourself in a very particular way. It has to do with recognizing

yourself, wearing it naturally, and knowing that you can look **beautiful** regardless of existing stereotypes 🙆. It has also been a **VERY** SIGNIFICANT part of our **fights**.   When you see, through *history*, these Black panthers, you couldn't EVEN envision their fights without their natural hair. This has MARKED the role that hair plays in my life as a way of resistance, but also of re-existence, and as a symbol of unique forms of beauty. We are not part of the majority but rather search for our **own** identity. Hair says a lot about ME. It says a lot about this fight. I don't know 😀🙆 I look myself in the mirror and say: 'Today we're **killing** it!', and my hair says: 'Today we're **killing it!**' as well." 😅😅😅

Together, these accounts show the relation between identity markers with situated, contextual, historical, social, and structural inequalities and constraints, as well as people's and communities' personal and shared agency in resisting them. As such, these experiences illustrate what the Latinx feminist author, Linda Martín-Alcoff, argues when she states that "identities are embodied horizons from which we each must confront and negotiate our shared world and specific life condition" (Martín-Alcoff, 2006).

More broadly, the similarities between the experiences expressed by Latinx feminist authors living in the United States and by the women who participated in this study also suggest that, at one level, the complex, fluid, and multilayered view of identity developed by Latinx feminist scholars is also relevant for understanding the diverse experiences of first-and second-generation internal migrant women in Quito, as well as the embodied and affective ways in which wellbeing and health might present themselves in women's daily lives in this context.

However, the contributions of this view of identity in this context are themselves multilayered. At a second level, this view of identity may also help to understand complex and contradictory group identities, such as the compañeras heterogeneous identity. Although Latinx feminist theorists originally developed their considerations around selfhood and identity to describe and make sense of their individual experiences living in the United States, their understanding of identity as something complex, multilayered, contradictory, and fluid can help me describe and make sense of the compañeras heterogeneous identity that emerged in the gatherings, which was also complex, multilayered, contradictory, and fluid.

The complex, multilayered, contradictory, and fluid characteristics of this heterogeneous identity were evident throughout the gatherings. For example, it became noticeable through the different accounts women shared of their way of experiencing and making sense of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although all the compañeras were all going through the same experience, it soon became apparent that we were facing it in unique, and often complex and even contradictory, ways.

For example, while Margarita shared that she was unafraid of the virus, Tamia said that she and her family had experienced limiting fear throughout the lockdown. Similarly, Marisol and Jaqueline (both of whom self-identify as Afro-Ecuadorians) mentioned that the pandemic had posed great economic hardships for their communities and themselves. In contrast, Paula and Luisana (both of whom self-identify as Mestizas) were able to build their own houses during this time. Yet, Luisana shared another family difficulty that depicted the intersectionality and complexity of women's experiences:

> My family and I were SO lucky because we were able to build our own house during the pandemic, which had been our **dream** for such a long time. So, in the middle of the mess, I achieved my **dream,** which was to build my **own house!** 😮 . However, in the **MIDDLE** of the pandemic, we also had the diagnosis of my youngest son. We found out that he is on the autistic spectrum. Now I can talk about this in a somewhat *calmer* way 🤷, but this was **really hard** for all of us. My husband and I had to learn **SO MUCH!** And all therapies were suspended, so we were on our own, online therapies did not work too well for us, so we really were on our own, and that was so hard, so hard. At some point, we just wanted to say: 🤷🤷 'OK! I give up' 😅😅. I really wanted to say that, but we kept going; we didn't give up. I am still processing it all. I am still learning from all of this. We lived so many things in such a short time!

Likewise, Tatiana, Cristina, and Belén C.L. said that spending more time with their families due to the lockdown was difficult for them, while a few others felt that doing so was a great blessing. Similarly, Killari and Mabe told us that the pandemic gave them a chance to reconnect with themselves, nature, and their families, while others felt trapped.

These are just a few examples of how complex, multilayered, fluid, and often contradictory the perspectives, sensations, and experiences of the compañeras were. Following a decolonial and Latinx feminist approach, we did not try to reconcile these differences or reach homogeneous or unifying conclusions in our gatherings. As Latinx

and other authors theorizing about group formation and complex power dynamics in Latin America (Ortega, 2016; Williams, 2002) and abroad (Lorde, 1984), we believe that doing so would have unjustly simplified the different experiences and would have flattened diversity into one, single, and homogeneous group identity that simply did not exist. Instead, we embraced radical difference and irreducible heterogeneity (Williams, 2002). In other words, rather than striving to create a unitary community based on similitude, we embraced contradiction, complexity, ambiguity, fluidity, and hybridity. Doing so opened the opportunity to connect affectively with one another instead of trying to reduce the group's diversity to a non-existent, homogeneous whole (Ortega, 2016; Williams, 2002). In doing so and following the emphasis on relationality that both Latinx feminists and affect theorists discuss, we took the different accounts of individual experiences as an occasion to consider the intersecting ways in which they relate to one another and to the overlapping systems of power and oppression that shape them in this context. This permitted the compañeras heterogeneous identity to remain complex, contradictory, multilayered, ambiguous, and fluid. As such, this collective identity was formed not because of commonality, but because of the relational passage of affect between differences. Because of this, differences did not divide us. Far from it, we deeply valued the opportunity to share the time/space with women who were so different from one another and openly discuss these differences in an affective and honest way. This is particularly important because, due to its colonial history, Ecuadorian society continues to be profoundly racist and divided, and spaces for diverse people to converge in a friendly and horizontal way in this context are overly scarce. Carla, Mabe, and Gema are just a few of the women who expressed gratitude for this opportunity:

Carla:

I am so grateful to be part of this space for **women**. The truth is that I feel happy about being able to share with people a little bit… I mean 😊 I am just 19 years old 😅😅 and it's so lovely to talk so openly with women who, in a way, represent my mom and grandma, and I feel **happy** about that 😅😅.

Mabe:

I was listening to everyone's stories, and I feel really   **MOVED.** It is a *pleasure* to be able to be here and listen to each and every one of you. As the compañera said, this is **such** a diverse group, and being able to share this space is **incredible** because these spaces are sadly not common at all in our current environment.

86

Gema:

I don't know   I feel like sometimes God puts us in front of people at specific times and places, and at first, we don't understand why, but then everything makes sense. I feel like this is one of those times.   I feel so thankful for being part of this space, which is SO, **SO** beautiful because it brings together these women who are **SO** amazing, who have stories that are **SO** different and that have taught me **SO** much and have inspired me to keep pursuing my dreams, and this is something **REALLY** beautiful. The pandemic has made us feel <u>so</u> alone, but this virtual gathering has allowed us to come closer and keep learning from people who are **SO DIFFERENT** from us, and now I feel like it is precisely this difference that enriches each of our experiences, so THANK YOU ALL, my heart is **SO** whole ❤️.

Overall, the affective atmosphere that we co-created during the in-person and virtual gatherings, together with El Churo's previous experience fostering participatory encounters, let us embrace radical difference and opened the space for the compañeras heterogeneous identity to emerge. Doing so permitted us to share and discuss different perspectives while allowing such differences to remain distinct. As such, we were able to embody Audre Lorde's words when she says:

> "Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged. As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change" (Lorde, 1984).

As described in the following section, embracing radical difference as an opportunity for change instead of approaching it as a reason for estrangement allowed us to consider expressions of wellbeing and health that were as complex, contradictory,

fluid, and ambiguous –as well as affective and embodied– as the people and context through which they emerged.

Wellbeing and Health for the Compañeras

The affective, embodied, and cognitive process that led to the rise of the compañeras heterogeneous identity contributed to our collective exploration of wellbeing and health in two main ways. First, affect's attention to relations and the passage of affect between bodies enabled us to continue to expand current understandings of the term while tracing the intricate relationships between different individual experiences, and between these personal experiences and the structural factors and power dynamics that exist and shape the context in which they take place. Second, this process allowed us to enact wellbeing and health, which drove us to experience them in an affective and embodied (rather than just cognitive) way.

The Relational Exploration of Wellbeing and Health

The complex process that allowed for the compañeras heterogeneous identity to emerge enabled the women who were part of the gatherings, the members of El Churo who fostered these spaces with me, and myself to recognize that wellbeing and health are created with others. Just as one cannot be a sibling alone, being a compañera is only possible with another person, and just as being a compañera is only achieved with others, we discovered that for the compañeras, the sensations of wellbeing and health can only be created in community and can only be understood when situated alongside each another. This became particularly apparent during some of the activities we held in the gatherings, such as collective collage-making.

Like other embodied approaches, collage-making has proven to be an effective method for working with migrant groups in previous studies because it can be less intrusive than other approaches and because it can provide a creative avenue for migrants' self-expression (Butler-Kisber, 2008; Vacchelli, 2018). However, in this case, we were not interested in the artistic or aesthetic component of the method. Instead, informed by the consideration that affect "sticks" to objects (Ahmed, 2010b, 2010a, 2015) and that this "stickiness involves a form of relationality" or a "chain of effects" by which the stickiness of one element transfers onto another one, thus bounding them

together (Ahmed, 2015, p. 91), the goal of employing this method in this project was to, literally, place objects that carry individual affective expressions of wellbeing beside each other and, in this process, consider how they might relate to each other and broader structural factors shaping migrant women's lives, wellbeing, and health as a group. In other words, we wanted to see if affect could "jump" from object to object, story to story, and felt sensation to felt sensation, and in this way, help us build a web of relations that would allow us to make sense of our collective experience.

To implement this method in our virtual gatherings, we invited women to take a picture that represented what wellbeing was or felt like to them. Then, we asked them to share the photo with me via WhatsApp messenger, and I pasted them on a virtual board we had prepared beforehand. To try to replicate the materiality and embodiment of in-person encounters, we chose to portray this board as if it was made with brown paper, which is often used in in-person group activities, including our own. The result was a virtual collage, such as the one below:

Figure 4.   **Collective collage created with internal migrant women living in Quito, Ecuador, during one of the virtual gatherings held for this project**

Once the collective collage was ready, we asked each person to describe the image that they had shared and explain how it helped represent what wellbeing is or feels like to them. The members of El Churo who facilitated the gatherings with me and I also shared our images and descriptions with the group.

Following multisensory ethnography's invitation to interrogate "not only what is not known but the ways in which not knowing is experienced"(Pink, 2009a), we intentionally gave women little guidelines in choosing their pictures so that they could take the activity in any direction they wanted to, and they did. Some women, like Yanua and Dánely, used the images as visual metaphors (N. Brown, 2019b):

Yanua:

My picture represents wellbeing because, for me, wellbeing is **all** about connection. It,   it cuts across everything; it's not something **isolated**. I shared that picture of the **guayusa plant.** For us, for my community, the guayusa is something e x t r e m e l y important. It is a plant that always, and I mean **always,** has been with **us.** It brings my community together. Drinking guayusa creates the space for us to come together and talk, laugh, share our dreams, share our **stories**, make work plans, and learn to listen to each other. So, it is meeting space. It is a space for connection. So, the guayusa plant is wellbeing for me because it is transversality, it is connection.

Dánely:

I shared a picture of a suitcase because wellbeing is something that we **carry** with us, that we **carry** with us, and it is filled with *memories*, that we may not see at first sight because they are WITHIN us. So, wellbeing is something that doesn't remain static, but that **travels** with us. It is that suitcase filled with memories, filled with **learnings**, of the good times, of the bad times, that ARE THERE, and they exist, but, but we may not pay attention to them, but we need them to keep moving forward. Something like that 🤷‍♀️😅 I don't know 🤷‍♀️😅😅😅.

As the last words and expressions in Dánely's quote, and as Gema's and Victoria's accounts shared below suggest, the process of finding the image and the means to describe them was not always easy:

Gema:

🗨🗨 I don't know, I found it *extremely* hard to find something that encompasses everything of what wellbeing is for me. I wanted something that would represent every aspect of wellbeing, and it was **extremely** hard and, and, I even had a fight with mom 😊 because I told her: "Mom, where are the keys because I need something?" 😅😅😅. And my mom was like: "But what do you want? I don't *understand*" 😦😦 😅😅 And I

was like: 😕😕 "<u>Should </u>I put my house keys because the house means wellbeing, because my <u>family </u>is here, because my <u>sisters </u>are here, because my <u>nephews</u> are here with <u>me</u> 💨💨?" Or… I didn't know, I was having a dilemma, and that is why I took so **<u>long </u>** 💨.

Victoria:

Mmm   Wellbeing   Wellbeing   I wouldn't know how to describe what wellbeing is for me, but I certainly know how it **feels.** There are things that cannot always be explained, just felt, and well-being is like that. You **<u>FEEL </u>** it   right **<u>HERE</u>**, in your chest. It is **like** ❓   that <u>comfort</u> that you feel when you **<u>hug</u>** someone you love. That **<u>warmth</u>**.   😊🧩 It kind of smells like the beach to me ❤️.   It reminds me of how I feel when I am returning from a day at the beach ❓   at 5 pm. The sun is starting to set. I am listening to a song with my **family** 😊 We are all together. We are not necessarily talking   or   <u>chatting</u>; we are just <u>there</u> 🧘.   Just feeling that **warmth**. 😊   Wellbeing is like these **candid** photographs that you cherish 😊 because they carry that **<u>warmth</u>** that you were experiencing the exact **moment** when you <u>took</u> them 😂. They are **REAL** photos of **REAL** people. <u>Oh. </u> 💨💨 🙂 I really don't know how to say this, there are things that just can't be explained, you just have to feel them, yes.

The linguistic-affective approach allows me to view the inarticulateness and difficulty with finding the words to describe the images and their meanings, often experienced in this process, as a possible indication that this method was offering an effective avenue for women to tap into affective sensations that they had not identified yet. As such, this method was informed by, and serves as an example of, the linguistic-affective approach's belief that affect mediates language and is itself affective, and that linguistic elements like sensory metaphors, such as the warmth that Victoria describes, can indicate the existence of intangible sensations anchored in the body that could be recognized and brought into full consciousness through dialogue (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022; McLuhan, 1964; Pink, 2004, 2005). The difficulty that women like Dánely, Gema, and Victoria expressed suggests that this method invited people to recognize the affective intensity of something and capture it in an image to share and describe among the group. In doing so, and similar to what happened during the individual interviews, this method enabled women to distinguish subtle expressions of wellbeing that they had not necessarily recognized before and bring them into

91

consideration through language. In this way, language became a medium for affect to travel from women's images and descriptions to the group that was listening to them.

In this process, we invited women to also pay close attention to these and other affective elements in speech. For example, as illustrated in the excerpt below, we noticed how words, images, and objects all caused multiple affective and embodied reactions in the group, such as silences, laughs, cries, and the desire to give and receive hugs. We used them as anchors to return to our bodies and our senses, and also as opportunities to reflect on these affective elements' role in our collective sensations, understandings, and experiences of wellbeing and health. In this way, we could sense affect moving not only between individual pictures and stories, but also among them. For example, as depicted in both Gema's and Vicky's accounts, family ties and relationships with friends and communities were among the affective topics that connected multiple individual images and stories with each other. Noticing these connections, along with affective and embodied sensations that the words describing them often carried with them (such as also illustrated in Male's quote below), allowed us to realize that they were a crucial component of the compañeras' overall wellbeing:

> I I I shared two pictures 😅 that are besides each other. One is the picture of the <u>rosary beads</u>.   And the second one is of my <u>s o n .</u> 🖐️🖐️ The rosary beads, to me, represent <u>**everything**</u> that we **have**, right ❓ It is everything that God **gave us.** Soo for me it is very important, I am <u>super,</u> **super** religious. I believe in God <u>**SO MUCH**</u>. For me, He is the **<u>engine</u>** of my <u>life.</u> With Him, I don't, don't, don't go anywhere, to be honest. He is who *g u i d e s* me. He is who has made e v e r y s i n g l e o n e of DREAMS c o m e t r u e , w h o h a s g i v e n m e m y *f a m i l y*   When I am sad, God is whom I <u>come to</u> <u>first to talk</u> 🙍 🙁. <u>He is like my best friend</u> 🥺🥺 aand Stefano 🥺 who is the **gift t**hat **God** <u>gave me</u>. The **<u>BIGGEST</u>** <u>gift.</u> **My** 🥺**greatest** 🥺 **love**. And that is all 🙍 🥺🥺 I got sentimental 🥺😅🥺😅.

On the one hand, Male's description of her images allowed us to talk about religion and spirituality. This enabled us to notice that the beliefs of the compañeras were highly diverse. Some women were Catholics (Ecuador's primary religion), while others were Evangelic, or had their own interpretation of Black and Indigenous beliefs and religions. Yet others expressed that maintaining spiritual contact with their ancestors

92

was important for them. These different accounts showed us that spirituality and its multiple manifestations were essential components of wellbeing for the compañeras.

On the other hand, Male's description of the picture of her son and the affective elements that accompanied this description helped us confirm the critical role that family, friends, and communities played for the compañeras. However, the linguistic-affective approach did not only let us trace the relationships between different images and stories. In addition, as Sara's description below suggests, it allowed us to notice how they related to, and occurred within, a specific historical, social, political, economic, and geographic context:

I chose something that means a lot to me, which is a picture of my grandmother, my father, and mother. There are so many things in here. **SO, SO, SO** many things in this picture. As you can see, there is a **cake** 😊 in this picture. It is **a graduation** cake because my dad was graduating. It was my grandma's dream, and my grandma has worked **sooo haaard** so that her kids could study. She worked at a Hacienda, and as a lingering result from colonialism, she almost didn't have any rights whatsoever. These non-harmonious ways of life come from a **looong** time ago, right? But she lived it, she lived that, and she told me what she went through. For my dad, this is a big triumph too. It was so difficult for him, and he studied so hard. And my grandmother used to go to Quito, she used to go to Quito every week, around 4 days a week, to sell potatoes with pork. She was an expert at selling 😊 and she did everything to bring some money for my dad's studies. And this is how this relationship led to the achievement of this shared **dream.** My mom supported my dad too and, together, they were able to reach this. This **dream.** These relationships have always been my support too, and for this reason, I am the first woman who graduated from school in my family. My grandma and mother didn't study at all, they didn't finish high school, but I am the first generation of women who graduated from university, and I hope to keep going. *I think* that this picture represents this for me, so much history, so much, so much **love** ❤️ I believe 👫 😊. So many close **relationships** ❤️ in an image that hangs on the living room's wall of my house and that represents **it all** ❤️, all my life, I think 😊😊 all the influence in everything I do ❤️.

As shown with Sara's description, the linguistic-affective approach allowed us to connect individual stories and still maintain their uniqueness while relating them to the

context and the systems of power and oppression (e.g., poverty, unequal access to resources, coloniality, patriarchy) in which these ties take place and acquire their full meaning. The fact that we ended up holding four gatherings enabled the members of El Churo and me to confirm that this was true in every case. For example, during the second virtual gathering that we held, we created the collage below following the same steps previously described:

Figure 5.   **Second example of the collage created with internal migrant women living in Quito, Ecuador, during virtual gatherings**

In this case, we sensed affect jumping between the pictures of the beds, along with some of their descriptions:

Rocío:

I shared the picture of **my bed** 🙍 😅😅 the parents' bed. My daughter is there in the picture, and she <u>covered</u> herself 😅😅. I think that the parents' bed is like _nest_ for the kids. I took this picture because it is the **corner** in my house where my kids and us as the parents feel more comfortable. We might be there watching at TV or show or, or something in Youtube, it doesn't matter, what matters is that we are there, **together.**

Helen:

Like the compañera, I shared the picture of my bed 😅😅. Well, my **son** and **I** are of those people who are **always** in the bedroom, on the bed. The bed for us 😊 is the best, the most divine part of our house 😊 the 😅 bed 😅. Because there, laying down acostaditos, warm calientitos 😊 we watch a movie, or, or the p h o n e or anything else, so the part of our house that is m o o r e e **comfortable** is the bed.

Well   to be honest   the bed is also where I have at least a little bit of **time.** 😐 Time that I can give to myself, and not necessarily only to my family. We are always giving time to others, but we forget about ourselves, right? As women, we tend to forget about ourselves. During the pandemic, I felt like I was taking care of **everyone**, everyone, and the bed was the **only** little space that I had for myself. This might sound really selfish 😐 but I think that the time that we can give to ourselves is very important as well.

Rocio and Helen's images and descriptions showed that family ties were also extremely important among this group. Helen's last sentences also invited us to reflect on the affective labour of care for others that most women performed during almost every context and stage of their life, including the pandemic. In doing so, Helen's account also demonstrated how this method opened the space for multilayered considerations and insights. At a different level, her words indicated that, just like routine activities such as doing laundry, paying attention to everyday places and objects (e.g., beds) can lead us to recognize the gendered nature of some social actions (Pink, 2004, 2005). In this vein, these contemplations allowed us to notice that in this context, women valued the small pockets of self-care and rest that they could carve for themselves, which some aimed to capture with the images of the beds. This invited us to reflect on how this was a shared experience among women who were otherwise highly different from one another, which enabled us to identify gender norms existing in the context of patriarchy as a structural factor limiting the wellbeing of diverse women in the Ecuadorian context. As such, this was an example of how paying attention to the way in which affect moved between the images of the beds allowed us to notice the subtle expressions of wellbeing that the beds represented for some women, and see how they related to one another and to the structural conditions that hindered this possibility of wellbeing in this setting, and how these occur in specific contexts, such as geographical context and the pandemic, which exacerbated the responsibility that women felt for caring for others. This enabled us to talk about the radical structural changes urgently

needed to resist and contest the gender norms that make the small pockets of self-care and rest just a subtle expression of wellbeing for some of the compañeras.

However, we did not recognize affect jumping only between images that depicted similar objects. We also noticed how women often used different images to represent and discuss related topics. For example, Delia shared a photograph of a kitchen and explained that she shared that picture because that is where she spent most of the time during the pandemic, cooking for her sons. Just as in the images of the bed, Delia's photo of the kitchen, along with her descriptions, allowed us to continue to reflect on the gender norms as a structural factor shaping women's lives in this context, and the critical role of care that is placed on women. However, as Delia explained, she was not in her house while attending the gathering. As a palliative nurse, Delia was caring for Margarita, who was terminally ill. We also invited Margarita to share her experiences if she felt inclined to do so, which she did:

> 😭 I am dying 😭 😭 and I am sad 😭 If I shared a picture of what wellbeing is for me right now, it would be of **Delia.** Although I live alone, I haven't despaired because of her. Thanks to **Delia** 😭 because she has been my **strength.** In my *sickness*, in my *loneliness*, 😭 she has been with **me** 😭 She has been everything for me in these days, that I know that are my last, and I thank God because I have her. Thanks 😭 ❤️

To hold this deeply affective moment, we invited everyone to stop, drink some water, breathe, close our eyes, and –since it was a virtual gathering– give ourselves a self-hug. Then, we considered how subtle traces of wellbeing and health can be present, even during illness and in the last stages of life, and the crucial role that affective relationships play in each and every one of such stages. For example, Delia said:

> We often see death and illness as the enemies, but 🙆 **no!** They are our friends😅. We are so afraid of death but **no!** It is the **normal cycle of life** 😊 We start dying from the day that we are born, **from the day that we are born,** we start to die 😊. And this is just the way it is, it doesn't have to be sad. No one has promised us to live forever 🙆. If we kept this in mind, we may learn to optimize our **time** in a better way.

This view of death and illness differs from current understandings of the terms, which often conceptualize them as being antagonistic to wellbeing and health. For the compañeras, wellbeing, health, illness, and even death could coexist because, as

96

Margarita and Delia suggested, for some of them, wellbeing and health had more to do with strong relationships than with the lack of pain or disease and, as they demonstrated, such strong relationships can be forged at every stage of life. This understanding of wellbeing and health differs from current definitions and –just as the compañeras heterogenous identity– it is complex, plural, and multilayered.

Viewing the compañeras heterogeneous identity in this way also allowed us to see contradictions and complexity in women's experiences, even when the images appeared to be relatively similar. For example, as Delia, María Eugenia shared a picture of her kitchen and, specifically, the dinner table. However, contrary to Delia, for María Eugenia, this image portrayed the relationship and deep connection she had with her family because, as she said, "there is always more than one person around the table. It is there where the entire family comes together and –along with food– shares opinions, experiences, ideas, worries, laughter, memories, and beautiful moments." In a similar way, Alexandra explained that her picture of the corn had a relational and affective meaning:

> I have a physical disability, and I realized that during the pandemic, things got *really hard* for a lot of people with disabilities. Other women with disabilities and I came together, and we found a way to provide some food, like the corn from my picture, to those who had nothing to eat. Being able to help other people with disabilities, **THAT** is what wellbeing and health are for me 😊.

These accounts suggest that, as also mentioned in the previous chapter, the compañeras considered the affective and relational component that they attributed to food as an essential component of their wellbeing and health, which go beyond dominant understandings of food, seeing it solely for its nutritional value. Like what happened during the individual interviews, talking about food during the gatherings also led us to notice the close connection that women see between wellbeing and health. In addition, it allowed us to discuss how migration and extraction projects, often conducted in the name of 'development' and 'progress' (Arteaga-Cruz et al., 2020), hinder women's possibility of accessing food that they consider healthy in Quito. In this way, these decolonial considerations contradict and exist outside of hegemonic discourses and initiatives that often frame extraction of resources in terms of objective dimensions of wellbeing and health, depicting it as economic advancement within the modernization project. As Erika Arteaga-Cruz, one of the local health experts I interviewed for this

study, put it: "these projects come and tell people that extraction equals modernization and that modernization equals progress and wellbeing, but, at the same time, they destroy the land, and with it, the possibility of having a truly healthy life."

We also sensed affect jumping from these considerations around food, migration, and extraction, to the pictures of trees, mountains, flowers, and terraces. Even though they were all unique and, alone, they illustrated only the individual embodied and daily experience of the person who shared each picture, when placed together, they enabled us to recognize that contact with nature was a crucial way in which subtle expressions of wellbeing and health were presenting themselves in several of women's lives, even when they and their lives were highly diverse otherwise. For example, Tatiana said:

> The picture of the mountains that I shared represents wellbeing for me because I am from <u>there</u>, right? It's my community *a n d* I don't know 🧝‍♀️ it makes me feel **well** because I share this <u>space</u> with my community and my family. When I am close to the mountains, I feel like I can breathe I don't know how to explain it. I feel in *harmony* ❓ when I am here. It is not like being in the city in the middle of **ALL** that <u>chaos.</u> I don't know, I just love it. I always say that they are my <u>protective mountains</u>, my protective spirits, who take care of me 🐿️. They are what brings me back to my <u>roots,</u> and back to myself. They are just so beautiful 😊😅😊.

Tatiana's words reminded us of the Indigenous concept of Sumak Kawsay, which envisions wellbeing and health as having a harmonious relationship with everything around us, including nature (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Cachiguango, 2011; Hermida Bustos, 2017; Simbaña, 2012). This led us to consider how the sensations of wellbeing and health emerging during the gatherings were more in tune with other alternative considerations around these terms than with the dominant ones. Moreover, paying attention to the passage of affect, not only from image to image, but also from description to description, also allowed us to recognize the relationship between the different experiences that women shared. Doing so, in turn, led us to consider how contact with nature is not always possible in the urban city of Quito. As such, this process did not only enable us to see the connection between images and descriptions. It also let us situate these experiences in the context of life in Quito and enabled us to reconsider the role of migration in the compañeras' possibility of having this contact with nature. In addition, this allowed us to consider how the images portraying people's

gardens or backyards showed us that there are ways in which women can still have at least some contact with nature, even in the presence of the limitations that we had just discussed, which invited us to think about what other strategies women could implement to increase this contact with nature in their lives in Quito.

In addition, looking at the two virtual collages alongside the descriptions also enabled the members of El Churo and me to notice affect moving between gatherings. Although each gathering was unique, there were topics in common, such as the images and descriptions of family and nature in both cases. This allowed us to sense affect jumping not only within each gathering, but also between them. But even more, given that I also conducted the interviews, I could sense affect moving between methods as well. There were common themes between interviews and gatherings, such as the contact with nature, the affective and relational aspects of food, and the importance of forging and maintaining strong relationships as crucial aspects of wellbeing and health.

Overall, these reflections enabled us to recognize a sense of wellbeing and health that might not always have been noticed and bring it into full consciousness through description, see how these experiences relate to others' even when these others are different from us, observe how these also relate to the context in which they occur, and discuss the broader factors that shape collective experiences in this context. In addition, they allowed us to consider alternatives to support the subtle expressions of wellbeing and health that we had recognized even under adverse conditions, and to challenge the structural factors that hinder them. Therefore, by following affects' emphasis on relational experiences, the linguistic-affective approach permitted us to sense how affect, in fact, jumped between people, words, objects, and images, thus letting us notice that even embodied and individual experiences do not occur within the individual alone, but through a web of relations that emerges through the interaction of broader aspects of community and social life, all of which gain further significance when they are understood as bodies that co-participate in the passage of affect and that shape people's sensations of wellbeing and health in multiple, intricate ways. In other words, in this process, affect jumped from image to image and from story to story. This enabled us to realize that although each image and story were unique, when placed together, the uniqueness of each experience shared led us to sense what wellbeing and health were and felt like for the compañeras as a group. In doing so, it allowed us to identify the social and structural factors that influenced their wellbeing and health in this context.

Therefore, the first way in which the affective, embodied, and cognitive process that led to the rise of the compañeras heterogeneous identity contributed to our collective exploration of wellbeing and health was by permitting us to continue challenging and expanding current understandings while tracing the intricate relationships between different individual experiences, and between such individual experiences and the structural factors and power dynamics that exist and shape the context in which they take place. As we will see in the following section, this approach also contributed to our shared quest by driving us to enact wellbeing and health.

The Collective Enactment of Wellbeing and Health

The affective, embodied, and collective formation of the compañeras heterogeneous identity did not only allow us to trace the connection between individual experiences of wellbeing and health, and between these and the structures and systems of power and oppression within which they operate. The second way in which this process contributed to our collective exploration of wellbeing and health was by enabling the compañeras, the members of El Churo, and me to co-create a sense of wellbeing and health in our encounters, which replicated and led us to experience (rather than just cognitively conceptualize) what wellbeing and heath were for us as a group.

The linguistic-affective approach's understanding that language mediates affect and is itself affective started to make this apparent to me. Thanks to this consideration, I could recognize how affect jumped not only between images, but also between words that were used repeatedly during the gatherings. For example, this attention to the affective components of language drove me to realize that Tatiana's reference to the sense of 'protection' that she mentions when she talks about the image of the mountains that she shared during the virtual gathering that she was part of (which is the last quote from the previous section of this chapter) made me realize that, although they used them to describe something different, words referring to protection were also common among women when they participated in a similar activity during in-person gatherings.

To create the collective collage during in-person gatherings, we asked people beforehand to bring an object representing what wellbeing felt like to them. To respect the great affective value that these objects often had for participants, we did not paste them or modify them in any way. Instead, we invited participants to place their objects on

a table where we had put a tablecloth and some flowers aiming to affectively portray the importance that we were giving to these objects. In this way, we created a momentary 'collage' where all objects were presented beside each other, as shown below:

Figure 6.   Momentary 'collage' created with internal migrant women living in Quito, Ecuador, during one of the in-person gatherings held for this project

As with the virtual collages, we then asked people to describe their objects and images and explain how they helped represent what wellbeing is or feels like to them. Again, following affect's consideration that we all affect and are affected in and by every one of our interactions, the members of El Churo and I also shared our objects and stories on this occasion.

As with the virtual collages, several women described their objects in the image above and mentioned their families. For example, Brittany explained that she brought the mask because it represents the fun that she has with her family, and how she feels she can count on them for anything. Others also said that family represented love, understanding, tenderness, "protection," "strength," "confidence," and "safety." Along these lines, one of the compañeras said:

> 👏👏 I want to start by saying   that today I am feeling very strong and I don't want to cry because I am feeling very strong and I am very excited and confident although I don't know you all. I want to share something that, that I haven't shared with anyone but today, being surrounded by women, I feel really **safe** 😢. More than a year ago, I suffered sexual violence 😢. I suffered abuse and I continue to be abused by this person until now 😢. The pandemic helped me realize that this is not OK 🙍 and I decided to look for help. I realized that although this is something very personal, I need the **support** of someone else to overcome this.   And that is why I brought this picture of my 😢 family because what happened to me made me really afraid of the city of Quito, I am afraid of leaving my house, especially when I am alone, so I am sharing a picture of when I used to live in my town of birth because I feel really safe over there because I have my family over there, and they protect me from everything when I am with them😢😢.

At this moment, we paused the activity. Belén Cárdenas Landázuri, one of the people from El Churo who facilitated the gatherings with me, and who has tremendous experience in group facilitation processes, invited us to stop, breathe, stand up, and move around. Then, she encouraged us to recognize how we had all been affected by this compañera's story, and to tend both to her words and what they may have evoked in each of us. Because we were conducting the gathering amid the pandemic, we could not hug each other as we would have done otherwise. Yet, Belén invited us to place our hands on our own hearts and feel how much we wanted both to give and receive hugs at that moment, and we all imagined that we were all receiving a group hug. Then, we played a song and invited everyone to let any feelings they had to move them as they needed to, and many of us cried and offered our support to the compañera. In addition, following the recommendations of the Research Ethics Board that approved this project, we gave her an information sheet listing local resources and places where she could go for help. We only resumed the activity when she told us that she was ready to do so.

The strong affectivity that emerged in this activity showed us multiple things. First, it demonstrated that while each picture depicted different people and unique bonds and experiences, when placed together, they allowed us to instantly recognize that family plays a crucial role in the sense of wellbeing for the compañeras, which we also noticed during our virtual gatherings. However, my consideration of the relationship between language and affect also allowed us to go deeper. Paying close attention to each person's words let us recognize that, in this specific context, the family offered the compañeras a sense of "safety" and "protection," which became more apparent in the account shared above. This exercise enabled us to simultaneously recognize what wellbeing was for the compañeras (e.g., family and a sense of safety, protection, and support), and how they occurred in the context of the structural factors (e.g., violence) that limited that sense of wellbeing in this setting. In addition, this activity shows how we strove to create a sense of safety and support from the exercise itself, which allowed everyone to feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Then, we sought to support each other when these difficult experiences were shared, such as in the case previously described. In this way, our attention to affect and the body, along with the decision of holding the gatherings in close collaboration with local experts like Belén Cárdenas Landázuri and the other members of El Churo, allowed us to go beyond the institutional recommendations on how to respond to harrowing stories and emotions during fieldwork in a way that is not only ethical, but also affective. I do not believe that my academic and previous professional background by themselves would have enabled me to sustain difficult and strong affective moments such as the ones that we experienced during the gatherings as we did thanks to the invaluable support, input, and guidance of Belén and the other members from El Churo. For example, when the compañera shared her experience with sexual violence, we did not only provide her with the sheet with resources as my institution's Research Ethics Board recommended. El Churo's experience and the affective approach of this project also allowed us to hold the space and care for her and each other in an affective and embodied way, even when following social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, we were not only describing what wellbeing and health were for us as a group in a cognitive way. In addition, we were all creating a space where we were able to experience precisely the sense of wellbeing and health that we were exploring with images, objects, and words (e.g., safety, protection, support) in a way that was also profoundly affective, embodied, and authentic. Therefore, through the research activities that we implemented following the

linguistic-affective approach, the gatherings became sites where we brought into being an affective and embodied sense of wellbeing and health that replicated and allowed us to experience what we were cognitively exploring and describing.

Overview

Overall, along with Latinx feminist considerations, the linguistic-affective approach enabled us to reach new ways of addressing wellbeing and health that emerged from the collective creation of the compañeras heterogeneous identity. This identity was formed thanks to our close attention to the multilayered affective elements present throughout the research encounters, and to El Churo's vast experience with fostering participatory, respectful, and affective spaces.

The expressions of wellbeing and health that emerged from this process were deeply relational, affective, embodied, and situated in the specific context of internal migration in Ecuador. Like the heterogenous identity that Latinx feminist authors describe, they were also ambivalent, complex, fluid, and multilayered. Opposing the West's inclination to homogenize (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Escobar, 1995), we allowed them to remain as such instead of striving for unity, coherence, and cohesion. This contributes to the need for creating ways of understanding wellbeing and health that break with existing dichotomies, a need highlighted by Xavier Maldonado, one of the local health experts I interviewed for this project. Some of the dichotomies that current dominant approaches mark are those between thought and emotion, body and mind, wellbeing and unwellness, health and illness, life and death, and individual and structural factors shaping them. Instead of replicating these dichotomies, informed by Latinx feminists' contributions, the linguistic-affective approach explored these terms in more nuanced ways, and it let them remain complex. It did so by tracing the intricate relationships between wellbeing, health, individual experiences, and these experiences with the structures and systems of power and oppression in which they take place.

The linguistic-affective approach also allowed us to recognize how wellbeing and health can present themselves even under adverse conditions. It is crucial for this consideration to be taken as an activist (and not romanticized) one. Recognizing intangible sensations of wellbeing and health under limiting factors opens the possibility of considering how these subtle expressions could be leveraged to further increase

people's wellbeing and health in these conditions, and to evaluate and implement the radical social and structural changes required to diminish or eliminate such limiting factors. Hence, the linguistic-affective approach offers possible alternatives to existing dominant understandings of wellbeing and health, which focus either on individual or structural factors shaping them, but do not connect these two enough; are often created without considering the specific conditions of contexts outside the Global North, and without leveraging local knowledge and lived experiences of the people who inhabit global settings; and do not take into sufficient consideration the limiting factors and social structures hindering wellbeing and health in each location, so they do not always provide sufficient alternatives to address them.

These findings coincide and complement other decolonial frameworks of wellbeing and health that exist outside, and often contradict, Western dominant paradigms (Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021). Similar to these frameworks, the experiences and sensations shared by the women who were part of this study suggest that more intangible elements, such as community life; collective interest; solidarity; a strong sense of identity and belonging; and harmonious relationships with oneself, others, the environment, spirituality, and every stage of life, including death, are some of the expressions of wellbeing and health that have not been recognized or considered by existing hegemonic models and that surpass biomedicine's sole focus on the physical, individual body. Some compañeras, especially those who self-identified as Indigenous, in fact, framed their considerations of wellbeing and health under the Andean philosophy of Sumak Kawsay, which conceptualizes health as relational harmony, or as a complete acceptance and integration of all facets of life (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Cachiguango, 2011; Hermida Bustos, 2017; Simbaña, 2012). They did so in an explicit, and more commonly, implicit way. Like this and other models existing outside Western paradigms (Cachiguango, 2011; Simbaña, 2012; D. Wilson et al., 2021), the compañeras' accounts suggest that rather than focusing on the individual or the structural determinants of wellbeing and health, new approaches could emphasize relationships, which are contextual and specific to each group. This focus on relationships also shifts the attention that biomedical and neoliberal agendas place on the individual. Instead, they pay attention to the affective relations and conditions that help construct wellbeing and health, while recognizing the contextual and intersecting structures and systems of power and oppression that hinder them in each setting. Finally, the findings of this study

add to these decolonial alternatives to wellbeing and health by demonstrating that although some critics have argued that the values and principles on which these models are based are too idealistic and difficult to materialize (Domínguez Martín & Caria, 2014; Viola Recasens, 2014), they are, in reality, already experienced and expressed in people's everyday lives, even under imperfect circumstances.

In addition, the linguistic-affective approach focuses on relationships not only outside, but also within the research process itself. In doing so, it demonstrates that research activities can become the site where we can enact and bring into being the topics that we study. In this way, research focusing on wellbeing and health can become the place where these concepts come to life not only cognitively, but also in a deeply embodied and affective way. As such, research activities can offer a space from where to experience the social change that we are working towards, even if momentarily, which, in turn, can allow us to recognize and discuss the radical shifts that are required to achieve and sustain this transformation outside of fieldwork activities.

Informed by Latinx feminist work, the linguistic-affective approach also problematizes how we think about relationships and difference. Instead of posing a challenge for group formation, for this approach, difference is what enables us to recognize the intricate connection between wellbeing and health, as well as the relationship among individual intersectional experiences, and between these experiences with the structural factors shaping the context of power and oppression in which they operate. In other words, the complexity, contradiction, ambivalence, hybridity, and fluidity of heterogeneous groups are what allow for alternative sensations of wellbeing and health that are just as complex to emerge. Supportive of the arguments of some Latinx feminist authors who challenge the widespread notion of difference as a challenge to unity, communication, and alliance (Martín-Alcoff, 2006; Ortega, 2016), this discovery drives me to consider that novel approaches to wellbeing and health can arise from and because of radical difference, and not despite it.

The linguistic-affective approach adds to existing efforts embracing difference by detailing possible steps to create the conditions for affective bonds to emerge in a heterogeneous group. Contrary to my initial fears, these affective processes and bonds can be equally fostered in virtual and in-person encounters. While these ties may start to rise rapidly and organically in both cases, and although during the encounters they

106

are co-created with and by every single person present, cultivating an affective space that allows these bonds to rise starts much earlier than the meeting itself. As I have discussed in this chapter, nurturing affective atmospheres takes vast amounts of collective effort; time; and attention to detail and the complex interplay between affect, embodiment, cognition, place, language, materiality, and the senses, both before and during the encounter. However, with language as a mediator of affect once more, making sense of the process through the writing of this chapter has enabled me to realize that every effort; every hour, day, week, and month; and every long back-and-forth conversation with community partners and local experts is worth it because the combination of all these elements is what allows the creation of an affective encounter where affective bonds can start to emerge. As community-engaged research highlights (CERi, 2023; Mahoney et al., 2021), taking the time and effort that building strong and trusting relationships in research processes requires, is valuable and essential. I now think this is true, even when capitalism and academia's pressure for productivity and speed has tried to make me feel (quite often successfully) otherwise. These affective bonds can open the space where we can value, examine, and even enact and bring into being a collective sense of wellbeing and health, with people who have little or nothing in common with us. In this process, heterogeneous groups and the different expressions of wellbeing and health that arise from them must not be reduced to homogeneity. Diversity and nuance must not be flattened into a single, cohesive, coherent (but fake) whole. Instead, complexity could be used to deeply consider and affectively discuss the intersecting structures of power and oppression in all the messiness with which they operate in real life (Martín-Alcoff, 2006; Ortega, 2016). However, while important, this is not enough. As the Latinx feminist author, Mariana Ortega, points out, a project that aims to do justice to the insights offered by Latinx feminist approaches and to the complex way in which they experience and theorize identity and selfhood must also consider the complexity of multiplicity itself, which also includes its transformative potential (Ortega, 2016, p. 174). Following this consideration, in the next chapter, I explore how Latinx feminist theories, along with the linguistic-affective approach, informed the steps that we took to start to challenge, contest, and address the structures and systems of power and oppression that hindered the wellbeing and health of the compañeras, identified through the steps described so far.

5.   Communication through the Linguistic-Affective Approach

Karina:

<u>HOW</u> could we be <u>healthy</u> in a sick world full of **<u>injustices</u>** ❓

Margarita:

Often, what makes us sick is the pain that we carry inside us, <u>a n d   t h i s   p a i n   i s   **n o t**   o n l y   **p h y s i c a l**</u>. This pain may come from <u>violence</u>, from <u>resentments,</u> from <u>frustrations.</u> THAT PAIN is what makes us **<u>sick</u>**. It is these <u>human</u> and <u>social</u> pains that we must also <u>heal.</u>

As detailed in the previous chapter and as Karina and Margarita's quotes above illustrate, in contrast to existing dominant paradigms, the women who participated in this study did not conceptualize wellbeing and health as occurring inside the individual physical body exclusively. Instead, they viewed these concepts as taking shape and gaining significance at a social level. For this reason, they did not believe that wellbeing and health could be achieved individually. Instead, they considered that the social conditions that hindered their wellbeing and health in their lives as first- and second-generation internal migrant women in Quito needed to change. In other words, they felt that for them to be truly healthy and well, society needed to be healed as well, and they viewed communication as being a crucial component of this endeavour.

 After detailing how the multiple roles that the compañeras attribute to communication relate to critical approaches to health communication and community-engaged research, in this chapter, I describe how the linguistic-affective approach can open the opportunity to collaborate in the collective creation of media content to start to challenge, contest, and address the structures and systems of power and oppression that shape communities' collective wellbeing and health. Then, I discuss how the

linguistic-affective approach can inform communication and dissemination efforts not only outside, but also inside academic environments.

Communications' Multiple Roles

A few of the compañeras who joined this project considered that communication contributed to their wellbeing and health through health information. However, most viewed communication as having several complex roles in their wellbeing and health. For example, Yanay referred to how some ancestral healers in Ecuador use words, chants, and songs as avenues to promote healing, and she compared these to the ways that she considers everyday words can also become healing channels in other areas of life. Similarly, some compañeras, especially those who self-identified as Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian, saw in communication a path for visibilization and self-representation through which to reclaim their presence, existence, and perspectives in a context that has historically and systematically denied them of this right:

Sara:

If you see pictures of Indigenous Peoples in Ecuador, they are mostly portrayed in the countryside. This gives a specific idea of Indigeneity that is **not** complete. Through photography, I want to show that there <u>ARE</u> Indigenous Peoples living in the city 🗨 and that there are **many** complexities in our identity. Indigenous Peoples were **erased** ❗ from <u>p h o t o s</u> and <u>p o s t c a r d s</u> of Quito because it was considered that we did not fit with the <u>aesthetics</u> of the… idea 💁 of the CAPITAL CITY they wanted to create, that was … **terrible** 😐. That was the **purpose** of **removing** Indigenous People from the **scenario** ❓ of Quito that they wanted to build, even though much of Quito's architecture was built by Indigenous Peoples, but they were relegated to **anonymity.** I think that this contributed to create the current <u>notion </u>that there are no Indigenous Peoples in the city 😐. The belief that Indigenous Peoples only are present in the **countryside** was built in this way, but this is NOT TRUE at all 🗨. This **undermines </u>**my voice as an Indigenous woman who lives in the city 😅 but I do not think that their voice should be   **strong enough** to silence my <u>own voice</u> 😐, which I can use to tell my own stories from my <u>own point of view.</u>

Jaqueline:

We, as Black Peoples, have not only been denied a physical space to have a decent **l i f e   i n   Q u i t o**. **This** city h a s   a l s o d e p r i v e d   u s   f r o m **our own HISTORY !** 😡 . And this erasure and deep racism goes back to the **COLONIAL ERA.** Black Peoples in Quito have been rendered invisible, along with our h i s t o r y , our c u s t o m s , our contributions 😠 . We haven't had the opportunity to learn about **our own history** in our s c h o o l s , in our h i g h s c h o o l s , **not even** at **university** our history is being REFLEcted 😠 ! It is **INCREDIBLY** challenging to live in this **c o n s t a n t** denial of our **existence** 😠.

If others don't know about this erasure and our thoughts and feelings about it, it would be very hard for them to take a stance about this 😐 . For this reason, communication is **essential** in this regard, and not only academic or formal communication, but also that which emerges from the s t r u g g l e s of our communities; those struggles that have not been seen, those struggles that have been hidden and that must be told, those struggles that we must vindicate from our own spaces, which are the result of our own collective feelings and ways of being.

The sentiments shared by Sara and Jaqueline exhibit the perpetual erasure of the knowledges, perspectives, and even presence of subaltern groups –including Indigenous and Black Peoples in Latin America– that decolonial authors expose (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Escobar, 1995; Mignolo, 2010; Quijano, 2000). Jaqueline's following reflection also demonstrates the homogenizing nature of hegemonic paradigms of wellbeing and health that decolonial work critiques (Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021). As she explains, for her, communication is an avenue to determine what these concepts mean to her and her communities when external definitions and steps to achieve them have continuously been forced onto them:

One of the things that others have ALSO historically done **A LOT** is imposing upon us the notion of what it means to be well, and… and…it would look like being well is a **standard** that **homogenizes** us all. But, surely, being well for you is not the same as being well is for **me.** Probably, being well for a Black woman like me doesn't have much to do with material things that are usually

linked to the notion of wellbeing 😅😅😅😅 a profession, a house, a dog, a car and a kid, of course 😅😅.

However, I can see how that…l o g i c … of having   the possibility of acquiring things…that for us keep being **limited**, cuts across everything. Of course, being impoverished, as us Black women in Quito are,   puts you at a disadvantage in many ways, but, certainly, I think that wellbeing is N O T   necessarily <u>just</u> having material things.

For me, wellbeing has more to do with making my own decisions and assume them as mine. It has to do with having the freedom of **choosing** the things that I fight for, of **choosing** my spaces, of **choosing** where I want to be, **with whom** I want to be, and **HOW** I want to be. And it also has to do with the freedom of **choosing for myself** WHAT being well means for me and how to achieve **THAT** instead of pursuing the things that others tell me that I should want.

The compañeras also considered that conversation and dialogue could start healing the social issues that they felt negatively impacted their wellbeing and health. For example, many of them viewed dialogue as a possible avenue to start healing the racist and discriminatory ideas and attitudes that continue to be deeply embedded in contemporary Ecuadorian society and that affect them greatly on a regular basis. Similarly, as María Belén and Irma expressed, the compañeras considered that communication could be an outlet to liberate that which hurts, foster collaboration and articulation, and demand social change:

María Belén:

Sometimes, people have so many feelings <u>imprisoned,</u> and the soul **screams** inside. I am quite a shy and reserved person, and writing has been one of the best ways to <u>heal</u> myself. Many young people don't like to read, but being 20 years old, ❤️ I love books, poetry, and public speaking. I have learned that poetry can be used for **social critique and demand** for equality, and to change certain aspects of life. I want to use poetry to talk about **many situations** 🤷, such as v i o l e n c e a g a i n s t w o m e n and the <u>vindication of cultures</u>. Sometimes, we see **injustices** 😠 and are outraged for <u>not being able to do anything</u>, but we can try to do at least something through **words**, to promote change through **words.** Of course, we can't change the world at once, but we can indeed change **some** aspects of daily life.

Irma:

I like poetry because it is like…poetry is like… w o r d s   f o r   t h e
s o u l ,   right? It is like…like having something   s w e e t   and <u>bitter</u> at the
same time. There are words that **sweeten** and **transport** you towards the
pleasure of happiness, but there are others that   **reopen** the
wounds you have and that <u>**HURT**</u> 😠 you. But it heals as well 🫦 I
mean, it leads you to healing, right? Because words make you *r e f l e c t*
and help you <u>let go</u>. There are words that make people shed their tears
or start thinking differently.   Words are a **mighty weapon** when
it comes to defending human rights and the rights of communities 😐. I
use them a lot in that sense. I use them to transmit knowledge. I use them as
a medium for saying: 'Your actions <u>**HURT**</u> me, as it hurts me that you
don't reflect, and that you don't change 😠.

Despite the crucial roles that the compañeras attributed to communication, they
felt they did not have access to enough spaces where they could enact these roles in the
Ecuadorian context. Many considered that –far from offering them a space to converge,
articulate, and voice their needs and social demands– most mainstream media in the
country either ignored them or replicated harmful stereotypes that negatively affected
them and their communities. In addition, they stressed the urgency of the need for this to
change. As described below, the observations shared by the compañeras, along with
the insights offered by critical health communication and community-engaged research,
informed the project's next steps.

Critical Health Communication and Community-Engaged Research

The experiences and perspectives around communication shared by the
compañeras are concordant with critical health communication and community-engaged
research. Broadly defined as "an active area of inquiry concerned with the role of
human interaction in health and the health care process" (Kreps, 1989), health
communication is an interdisciplinary field that bridges knowledge from the social and
health sciences intending to generate strategies to improve people's health and
wellbeing (Kreps, 1989; Lupton, 1994).

Informed by the biomedical model, the dominant approach to health
communication has traditionally aimed at challenging individuals' health behaviour
through the dissemination of medical information created by healthcare experts. As

such, it has focused on the vertical transmission of expert knowledge from medical authorities to audiences. Conceptualizing audiences as passive content receivers, the main goal of this approach has been to change individual behaviour through health information. The assumption underlying this objective has been that if provided with the appropriate health information, people will adopt healthier attitudes and behaviours, which will, in turn, lead to improved health outcomes (Dutta & de Souza, 2008; Gumucio-Dagron, 2010; Lupton, 1994; Waisbord & Obregón, 2012, pp. 14–20). Under this premise, communities from the Global South have often been seen as passive receivers of information in need of education and to be persuaded into Western values and behaviours so that they can achieve development, modernization, wellbeing, and health as understood by the West (Waisbord, 2020). In this way, this approach has distributed discourses of self-empowerment and self-care, encouraging people to follow the ideas of rational self-management and self-control central to neoliberal citizenship (Keane, 2014; Welsh, 2022).

While this approach to health communication remains dominant, critiques questioning the assumptions on which it is based have emerged. As detailed in previous chapters, the essentialist claims of biomedicine that focus exclusively on individual behaviour have been challenged and contested by various disciplines, pointing out their colonial and imperialist nature, as well as their failure to consider and address the social, cultural, and structural determinants of health. Emerging approaches in health communication have responded to these claims. They have argued that information aiming to change individual behaviour is insufficient to improve health outcomes, and that social and structural changes are needed to truly and sustainably support people's health (Waisbord & Obregón, 2012). Questioning the modernization emphasis of the dominant paradigm of health communication, these approaches have also argued that historically, the cultures, values, and understandings of subaltern groups and people living outside the West have been marginalized and framed as deviant, abnormal, primitive, and/or underdeveloped, which has served to impose dominant, often Western, understandings and practices on these groups (Dutta, 2007, 2008).

Informed by these considerations, the field of health communication has taken a critical turn, increasingly questioning the inequalities and power relations embedded in different areas of society, including medicine and communication. As a result, health communication has started to shift from a vertical transmission of medical information

towards the creation of more collaborative and community-engaged projects in which people participate in collective processes to share their knowledge about their health and improve their wellbeing. Supporters of these approaches maintain that far from being empty vessels to be filled with expert medical information, people are cultural beings with beliefs and practices that shape how they receive, interpret, and put health messages into practice. In addition, critical approaches argue that people have the capacity to both understand the contexts in which they live, and enact their own agency to resist and change the cultural and socio-structural factors that shape such contexts. In fact, they consider that community members know best both the problems present in their contexts and the solutions to address them. As such, they place the ability to address the health challenges and inequities present in a particular context, not on outside experts as the dominant approaches to health communication do, but on community members themselves (Dutta, 2007, 2008; Dutta-Bergman, 2005).   However, they recognize that communities rarely have access to platforms where they can identify and address the factors that hinder their wellbeing and health. Critical decolonial approaches have maintained that dominant narratives about health are often imposed on non-Western groups by Western understandings of health and development, and that these narratives tend to tell a dominant set of stories and ideas while silencing alternative ways of knowing (Dutta, 2008; Lupton, 1994). Yet, such alternative narratives have the power of "redoing the script," and can provide new avenues for understanding and experiencing health (Dutta, 2008). Therefore, these approaches strive to listen to the voices and ways of knowing that have been excluded from hegemonic platforms for knowledge production and dissemination by generating spaces for dialogue where communities can circulate their own narratives and understandings about their health, and discuss ways to resist the dominant narratives and to change the structural factors that constrain their lives and health. Moreover, these efforts aim to understand the meanings and values that people attribute to health, illness, medicine, and the body, and to co-create with them a type of health communication that emerges and responds to these understandings so that people can collaborate with health experts to find their own ways to change the structures that hinder their wellbeing.   In this way, critical approaches urge health communication projects to nurture participatory spaces where communities that might have been historically silenced by dominant paradigms can articulate their meanings around wellbeing and health, identify the social structural factors hindering wellbeing and health in their context, and actively participate in the

114

creation of alternatives to address them (Dutta, 2007; Dutta-Bergman, 2005; Gumucio-Dagron, 2010; Lupton, 1994; Waisbord & Obregón, 2012).

Similar considerations around the role of communication and dissemination in research projects have taken place. Communication and dissemination of results are often considered as later steps of the research process, and they are traditionally viewed as the responsibility of researchers exclusively. This is frequently true even in participatory initiatives, which tend to include community members in the data collection phases of research but exclude them from the analysis and communication stages (N. Brown, 2021; Schubotz, 2020). However, approaches addressing participation critically – such as community-engaged research– have maintained that excluding community members from these steps can result in participants' experiences being understood and represented in ways with which they disagree, and which do not benefit them (CERi, 2023; Mahoney et al., 2021). To avoid this risk, critical and community-engaged approaches argue that reciprocal, sustainable, and trusting relationships should be the core of research projects. Following this consideration, they maintain that community members should be involved as equal partners in all stages of the research process – including research design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of results– and that research methods, outputs, and dissemination channels ought to respond to the needs and interests of the community. As such, critical and community-engaged approaches encourage researchers to foster participatory and dialogical spaces, embed dissemination plans throughout the research design, and actively collaborate with community members in the dissemination of research in ways that are meaningful and accessible to the community, which may go beyond traditional academic outlets (Grain, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2021).

Equally informed by these insights of critical approaches to health communication and research projects, and by the perspectives shared by the compañeras, El Churo, the compañeras, and I continued our collaboration. This time, we came together to create collaborative media content. Just as in the earlier stages of the project, detailed in the previous chapters, El Churo's experience and the linguistic-affective approach deeply shaped this collective process. As described in the following section, this focus allowed us to expand the perspective of current critical approaches, which concentrate primarily on fully formed ideas, narratives, and discourses regarding wellbeing and health.

115

Writing as a Collaborative and Affective Endeavour

Writing is often considered a mainly cognitive activity. However, following the linguistic-affective approach, El Churo, the compañeras, and I addressed it not only as an intellectual, but also as an affective and embodied endeavour when we came together to write "Words that Heal," a journalistic series of feature stories. This series is composed of journalistic articles explaining the current dominant understandings of wellbeing and health, the reasons why we need other ways to approach these terms, the alternatives suggested by the compañeras, and how we created this content.

Initially, this series was published in Spanish (https://wambra.ec/palabras-curanderas/) and English (https://wambra.ec/words-that-heal/) at **Wambra** (https://wambra.ec/), El Churo's digital community media outlet. However, the consideration that language is itself affective invited us to expand our reach. Paying close attention to the affective elements of language allowed us to recognize the strong affective attachment (McElhinny, 2010, p. 314) that several women had to the Kichwa language, one of the 14 languages currently spoken in Ecuador (FLACSO, 2011). As Sisa Carolina explained in the account shared below, due to the historical discrimination and erasure that those who speak this language have endured in Ecuador, the Kichwa language often represented a form of resistance and provided a sense of purpose and belonging to some of the compañeras:

> 😐 My parents decided not to teach the Kichwa language to my siblings and me because they didn't want us to suffer the **horrible** acts of violence and discrimination that they have faced all their lives for speaking it. **BUT** when I grew up, I decided to learn it anyways. 🪱 🪱 Ohhh and learning Kichwa has been one of the main turning points in MY LIFE. It helped me understand what I want 😄 🪱, how I want my life and my **family** to be, and who I want to be **surrounded with**. I don't know how to explain, but I feel **SO** great when I speak in Kichwa. I feel so **strong** and protected at the same time. It is like Kichwa represents resistance and belonging at the same time. Having learnt Kichwa 😊 is definitely one of the brightest **LIGHTS** in my life 😄😐.

Several women described an affective attachment to Kichwa similar to the one detailed by Sisa Carolina. Noticing this, we decided that it was crucial that we disseminated the research in Kichwa as well. I have been studying Kichwa for three

years now, so we contacted my teacher, and he translated some parts of the series. As a result, we created a graphic story in Kichwa (https://www.instagram.com/p/CXUgSViN0Hb/), Spanish (https://www.instagram.com/p/CWbDb8-L8pE/), and English (https://www.instagram.com/p/CXeAdIrrzj8/) that became part of the series. To increase our reach, we shared the three versions of this graphic story through Wambra's Instagram and Facebook accounts, along with an invitation to visit Wambra's website to read the complete series.

Although far from perfect, the "Words that Heal" journalistic series of feature stories is a concrete outcome that contributed to this project by becoming an avenue to embed dissemination efforts throughout the research design and implementation; collaborate with the compañeras in the preliminary analysis of results; and share research findings in ways that are meaningful, affective, and relevant to the community, as recommended by critical and community-engaged approaches (Grain, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2021). In addition, it is a visible product that reflects women's contribution to the project, which can support the creation of reciprocal and trustful relationships in the research process. Hence, it simultaneously adds to relationship-building and dissemination efforts, both of which are crucial components of critical and community-engaged research (CERi, 2023; Dutta, 2007, 2008; Grain, 2020; Lupton, 1994; Mahoney et al., 2021).

However, the contributions of the "Words that Heal" journalistic series of feature stories are not only related to the final product described above, but also to the creative, embodied, and affective exploratory process undertaken to write it, which was enriching in multiple ways.

The Making of an Affective Practice

 Considering writing as a cognitive, affective, and embodied activity (Elliot, 2017; Escrituras Colectivas, 2022; Gibbs, 2015), we approached the collective creation of the "Words that Heal" series as if we were making something. This process started with the consideration that doing so requires tangible materials. It would be possible to think that these tangible materials are not present in writing, often considered an exclusively intellectual activity. However, our bodies and affective elements are still present in the

117

writing process, even when we are not paying attention to them as we write. For this reason, we saw words as the raw materials we were working with in this process. Thus, we imagined them having the capacity to be malleable, sculpted, carved, and reshaped, just as –for example– wood or clay.

This required us to reconsider conventional methods of journalistic writing. Traditionally, media content is written by a single person: the journalist. In this case, El Churo, the compañeras, and I wanted to approach it as a collaborative endeavour. Conscious of people's time, I used my background in journalism to write the first drafts of the "Words that Heal" series. These drafts were based on the insights from the individual interviews and the gatherings that we held with the compañeras, as well as from the semi-structured interviews that I had with local migration and health experts to gain a deeper understanding of the local context.

Drawn by the linguistic-affective approach, and more specifically, by my argument that affect has the capacity to move between senders-messages-channels-receivers- in intricate ways, I strove to create an affective atmosphere when writing these drafts, just as I did when I was transcribing the interviews and gatherings. In doing so, my goal was to remind myself that, even when we write, we are emplaced, affective, sensory beings. As Sarah Pink puts it (Pink, 2009a), "we do not simply retreat into our minds to write theoretical texts, but we create discourses and narratives that are themselves entangled with the materiality and sensorially of the moment and of the memories and imaginaries." Following this consideration, I lit the same candle we used in our gatherings, I played the recordings of fieldwork in the background while I wrote, and I placed on my desk the objects that I collected during this time. I also wore the earrings and necklaces that some women gifted me, and I often drank the tea and coffee that I bought during my time in Ecuador. By approaching writing not only as a cognitive activity, but as an affective and embodied endeavour as well, with these efforts, I hoped that at least some of the affective forces present in my fieldwork encounters would travel from these interactions to the version of myself involved in the writing process, from there to the text, and from the text to the readers who would later engage with it.   During this time, I also kept remembering the following words from Gloria Anzaldúa, one of the Latinx feminist writers who informed my work:

118

> "It's not on paper that you create but in your innards, in the gut and out of living tissue…There is no need for words to fester in our minds. They germinate in the open mouth of the barefoot child in the midst of restive crowds. They wither in ivory towers and in college classrooms. Throw away abstractions and the academic learning, the rules, the map and compass. Feel your way without blinders. To touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked –not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat" (Keating, 2009, pp. 33–34).

I also read the transcripts from the fieldwork multiple times throughout my writing process. As described by other scholars working on embodied methodologies, this approach felt like "a truly iterative spiral leading deeper and deeper into meaning" (N. Brown, 2019c, p. 40). In this process, I did not only pay attention to participants' narrations or descriptions, but also to the embodied and affective elements present during these verbal interactions–such as laughing, weeping, silence, facial expressions, gestures, bodily postures, tone, volume, and speed. I also paid close attention to the affective words evoking emotions and sensory events from women's accounts, as well as to the embodied and affective reactions that they elicited in me during the writing process. In this way, I tried to notice women's affective expressions and ways of talking, which may not be considered as data by other methods, including the ones that I myself have used in the past. For example, I paid close attention to phrases indicating indecisiveness, dysfluency, or inarticulateness, such as "I don't know how to explain this," or "I wouldn't know how to put this into words," as these were often pointers of affective or embodied felt sensations. Instead of ignoring them or considering them as banal or too complicated to form cohesive arguments as most approaches do, I saw these "moments of disconcertion" as crucial data (Chadwick, 2017; MacLure, 2013).

In addition, I let myself be moved in different ways each time I immersed myself in the transcripts, and I often had affective and embodied reactions similar to the ones that I experienced when these encounters originally took place. I both laughed and cried more times than I could count. Although this was not an outcome I had considered when implementing the linguistic-affective approach, it turned out that this process left definite imprints inside me. Like other authors following affective, embodied, and creative approaches to data analysis (N. Brown, 2019c), I find that women's words, unique

experiences, and characteristics are extremely present and distinct inside me. Maybe because of the sensory components of the linguistic-affective approach, I vividly remember how their voices sounded, how their hands felt when we touched, how their eyes sparkled when they talked about certain topics, what made them or both of us laugh or cry during our interview, where we were when we conducted it, what colours and materials we were both wearing, the weather of the day when we met, and if and what we ate during our encounter, just to name a few examples. Although this project involved 59 people, I also remember who said what and how I felt about those words. I feel like I still have a strong relationship with these words and with the people who said them. I feel different than I did when analyzing data for other projects. In those cases, although people's stories impacted me when I heard them and again the first time I read them in the transcripts, they started to get blurred in my head after a while. I could not have remembered each person's name, age, self-identification, occupation, and personal characteristics when analyzing research data, but in this case, I can. This has driven the whole process to be more affective for me as well. I also have these sensory and affective memories of the online interviews and gatherings, which suggest that this methodology can be effective in the passage of affect even when implemented virtually. Hence, while this method took significantly more time than more traditional approaches, overall, it did allow me to have a more affective, intimate, embodied, and profound engagement with people and their words.

Once I completed the first drafts that I wrote following these steps, I circulated them among the members of El Churo and with each of the 59 compañeras through WhatsApp Messenger. To ensure that everyone felt comfortable with making changes to these documents by adding, deleting, or moving content around, I explained that I saw these drafts only as the raw materials we would use to create the final product together.

All the compañeras knew how to read and write, but they had different levels of literacy comfort. Hence, they offered me their feedback either by writing on the drafts I had shared with them or by telling me the changes they wanted me to make via WhatsApp voice notes. Due to people's other commitments, and especially, because of the limited Internet access that women had in the research site, this process took several weeks. However, every single person involved in the previous stages of the project ended up participating in this collaboration. Once I had everyone's feedback, I

incorporated all the changes into a single document, which was the final product and the published version of the series.

This embodied and affective process felt very similar to solving a huge and complicated puzzle for me. It took a total of nine months from when I started writing the first drafts until the version in each language was published. Working with all the people involved in the creation of these publications while incorporating the feedback of the members of El Churo and each of the 59 compañeras required high levels of commitment, organization, and attention to detail. Making this deliberate decision to prioritize the co-creation and co-dissemination of knowledge beyond academia delayed other aspects of the research process, such as the writing and publication of more traditional academic outputs, including this dissertation.

Despite this limitation, the linguistic-affective approach I followed created an incredibly enriching process that embedded dissemination efforts throughout the research project and bent the boundaries between data collection, analysis, and dissemination. As such, it provided the compañeras, the members of El Churo, and me with the opportunity to explore the research questions together beyond our synchronous encounters and continue strengthening the affective relationships we had built in previous stages of the research process. As recommended by critical and community-engaged research (Dutta, 2008; Mahoney et al., 2021), this method also challenged the power dynamics often present in research initiatives by inviting participants to be active agents in the data analysis and dissemination phases of the project. Overall, this process allowed us to co-create an avenue to enact or bring into being the multiple and complex roles that the compañeras attributed to communication. For example, as Yenny expressed, this approach offered an effective and affective medium for self-representation, which was one of the roles that the compañeras considered that communication could play in the process of challenging, contesting, and addressing the structures and systems of power and oppression that hindered their wellbeing and health in the Ecuadorian context:

> **Most times** you talk to   journalists or people doing research ❓ and then you **never find out** what they did with what you said, or they write things that you did not say <u>at all</u>, but in **THIS** case, 😊 I feel <u>happy</u> 😊 because I see that the words shared here <u>truly</u> reflect my **feelings**

and my views. They say **<u>exactly</u>** what I wanted to **say**. <u>These words</u> are really <u>**my own**</u> 😊 🧩 .

Reconsidering Established Approaches and Practices

As a project greatly informed by critical health communication and community-engaged research, my objective was to explore research questions together with the compañeras, and to co-create a space to share, discuss, and communicate the diverse experiences and perspectives of the community involved. This goal required us to question several topics and established practices critically.

Objectivity –a topic of interest in journalism and research– was one of the subjects we needed to reassess. Both researchers and journalists have traditionally considered that objectivity, neutrality, and detachment from participants and information are required in order to study or tell the 'truth' (American Press Institute, 2022; Letherby et al., 2013). However, new approaches in both areas have argued that these are, in fact, unattainable and unrealistic pursuits, given that both endeavours are conducted by humans with their own perspectives, conscious and unconscious biases, opinions, values, and interests. For this reason, some researchers and journalists have concluded that recognizing these preferences openly and reflecting on their possible impacts on an ongoing basis might strengthen rather than hinder their efforts towards creating rigorous and accurate information, which –far from detached– should be deeply committed to generating positive impact in the communities involved (Behar, 1996; Finlay, 2002; Headlee, 2021).

We followed these considerations when writing the "Words that Heal" series. All the accounts and information included in this journalistic series of feature stories are factual. At the same time, this series is a mosaic that expresses the experiences, perspectives, and affective sensations of those who created it. Informed by affect theory's focus on relationality, I recognize that my own positionality is inevitably part of this endeavour, and that it is impossible for me to be detached from it. For this reason, I decided to include some of my perspectives in the texts, and we also added quotes from the members of El Churo who participated in the creation of this series, along with those expressed by the compañeras. By doing so, we acknowledge that we are all part of the process and that our presence in the project impacts it in multiple ways (Finlay, 2002;

Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). Approaching the process of making collaborative media content through the linguistic-affective approach did not only allow me to explore research questions together with the compañeras; but it also provided me with the ongoing opportunity to critically consider my positionality in relation to both the people involved and the project itself, and to continuously reflect on how I simultaneously affect and am affected by research and research interactions (Febres-Cordero, 2021).

The process of making collaborative media content also raised critical considerations regarding authorship, anonymity, and consent. I did not want the participation of the compañeras to be reflected only in the texts that we wrote together. I considered it crucial for the time they spent collaborating on the project and the knowledge they shared to be explicitly acknowledged in the credits as well. However, this conflicted with some established practices.

Traditionally, authorship is granted to a single person, anonymity is assumed as the norm, and consent is obtained once before starting research activities. Yet, this approach did not respond to the collective process of co-creation of media content followed in this project, nor to the values and priorities of some of the women who participated in it, who often had a more community-oriented view of authorship and wanted their collective effort to be publicly recognized. For these reasons and again keeping in mind the recommendations of critical and community-engaged research, we took a different route.

To acknowledge the combined work of everyone involved in the creation of the "Words that Heal" series, we adopted a collective rather than individual authorship, and we signed on as a group. While this collective signature challenges the more common practice of individual authorship of journalism and research, it better responds to the communal view that most participants hold of knowledge and the knowledge-creation process.

In terms of anonymity, the compañeras had varied perspectives. While some regarded anonymity as a protection of their privacy, others considered it an erasure of their contributions to the project. For this reason, I decided to ask each of them how they wanted to be identified, after explaining the possible risks of revealing their identities and participation in this project. Some women chose to remain anonymous or to use a

pseudonym, others used only their first names, and yet others chose to use both their first and last names. Some compañeras also decided to include their ethnicity, age, occupation, and/or other personal characteristics along with their quotes, and I respected the individual decisions that each one of them made. As Killari explained, this was particularly important in the deeply racist and discriminatory Ecuadorian context:

> I would **NEVER, EVER** choose to use a **name** other than **my own**. Here, people see that you are wearing your traditional clothing, and they automatically start calling you **María.**   **María!**   Even when that's NOT your name, and that is what ***b o t h e r s***   me the most. In that context, 'María' has a racist connotation because they don't even bother to call you by your real name, with respect 😒 . They feel entitled to call you whatever they want. 👿🤷 You simply become *'Maríaaa, the* **Indian.***'* It's racist. It's racist and sexist at the same time 😫. And that's what bothers me. It is such a lack of respect. 🙁 And THAT is why, for ME, my own name is SO important and **represents wellbeing**, because I am the one who decides **what** to be called.

To make sure that women agreed with how they were being identified throughout the different stages of the project, I did not approach consent as a single event, but instead as an ongoing process. Before each interview and group gathering, I explained that we would write a journalistic series of feature stories and that they could choose whether or not to participate in that phase of the project. In addition, I asked women what they wanted to be called both before starting the activities and again at the end once they knew what we had talked about. When the interviews and gatherings ended, I asked women if they wanted me to include parts of our conversations in the journalistic series, and if they agreed to be contacted again to partake in the collective creation of this content. When I reached out to them for this objective and shared the texts and quotes with them, I asked them once more how they wanted to be identified in these outputs, if at all. In this way, I tried to make sure that women's participation throughout the project was recognized in a way that felt safe, comfortable, respectful, and appreciative of each one of them.

Producing an Affective Reaction

All the considerations and steps described above were intentionally employed with the objective of producing an affective reaction, which is another crucial component of making something (Woodward English, 2022). While traditional journalism aims to report issues in a detached and emotionless manner (American Press Institute, 2022; Headlee, 2021), emerging initiatives coming from community, alternative, and feminist media –informed, to an extent, by affect theory– have sought new and creative narrative techniques to communicate factual and accurate information in a more connected, affective, and engaging way (Febres-Cordero, 2015, 2017; Muntané, 2019; Wambra, 2022; Zobl & Drüeke, 2012). Following these considerations and the linguistic-affective approach, we did not want to appeal only to the reader's reason, but also to their embodied and affective responses in order to increase the impact of the stories shared. To achieve this goal, we addressed the narrative structure in an affective way as well.

Informed once more by the decolonial and Latinx feminist theories detailed in the previous chapters, we were not looking to simply replace existing understandings of wellbeing and health with new ones. Instead, we wanted to keep the different experiences and perspectives shared by the compañeras in the previous stages of the research process just as diverse, contradictory, multilayered, and complex when presenting them in a written form. This is particularly important in Ecuador, where the voices and experiences of diverse groups, including women and internal migrants, have been historically silenced and falsely homogenized (Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Barboza & Zaragocín, 2021; De Sousa Santos, 2014; Eguiguren, 2017; Valdivieso Vega & Armas, 2008).

This pursuit presented the question of how to avoid reducing the diversity of experiences shared by women to a single voice when aiming to craft a comprehensible narrative. Due to the great variety of perspectives and life trajectories of the women who were part of this project, this was not an easy task. To honour and reflect this diversity, we resorted to affective, creative, and multimodal styles of storytelling. We wrote all the stories of the "Words that Heal" series in the first-person plural voice, weaving into this narrative individual quotes from each participant.

We included an average of three quotes per person throughout the series. I let the process of deciding which quote to choose from each compañera to be embodied and affective as well. As I read the transcripts of women's accounts, I paid close attention to embodied and affective reactions that their words elicited in me, and I chose the quotes that moved and affected me the most and that I felt better portrayed the main message that each person wanted to share. Once I had selected the quotes from each person, they became part of the raw materials I shared with each of them so that we could work on them together, as previously described.

To make the stories easier to read while including multiple perspectives from each of the 59 people who were part of the project, we incorporated text boxes with their quotes throughout the articles. These boxes were designed in an interactive way that allowed readers to move through different quotes by clicking on an arrow. Our hope with this narrative structure was to increase engagement by inviting audiences to interact with the text actively, and to resist Western historical propensity to privilege some voices over others (De Sousa Santos, 2014) and its traditional focus on rationality and linearity at the cost of a more comprehensive approach that includes emotionality and complexity (Stinson, 2018). With this narrative structure, we also defied certainty and finality as other authors experimenting with multimodal and creative writing styles have done (Cvetkovich, 2012; De Castell & Droumeva, 2022; Droumeva, 2020). As Sarah Pink explains, embracing not knowing "is important because our awareness of it enables us to acknowledge the gaps and voids and significantly the *uncertainties* that are part of the way that life is lived" (Pink, 2009a). As such, an intricate and open narrative style like the one we adopted allowed us to enact (and not just describe) the diversity and openness to new possibilities that the text we created argued for.

While we did aim for the articles to be understandable, following these considerations, we did not want to write a cohesive story at the expense of merging multiple perspectives into one or choosing just some of them. The complex, integrative, and non-linear narrative structure we designed enabled us to include several quotes per person while still writing comprehensible texts, thus showing that collective stories are an amalgamation of individual experiences, all equally valid, relevant, and worthy of attention and respect. Again, we paid close attention to the embodied and affective reactions that the individual stories elicited when put together. Based on affect theory's emphasis on relationality, we considered how these individual quotes related to one

126

another not only from a cognitive, but also from an affective perspective, and we put them together based on that. We also complemented participants' accounts with quotes from poems and songs that we believed contributed to increasing the affective reactions that the text could bring, and this was present right from the start in the narrative structure. Even the title "Words that Heal" is based on a local song that we felt encompassed much of what we wanted to share:

Caresses are healers,

 Songs are nurses,

 Hugs are great doctors.

Fernando Chávez, Ecuadorian singer-songwriter

Following previous considerations around the relationship between affect and typography (Velasco et al., 2015) and the decolonization of design (Farias, 2021; Khandwala, 2019; Tunstall & Agi, 2023), together with the linguistic-affective approach's argument that language is itself affective, we also paid close attention to the font size, colour, and visual elements that went together with the written text. We accompanied these words with illustrations made for the series by a community member, Andrea Venturini. As shown in the examples below – which are excerpts from the "Words that Heal" series – these images worked together with women's self-descriptions and quotes, which, in this case, we transcribed in a more traditional way than the transcription method that I developed for other elements of this research, as describe in Chapter 3. We decided to do so to avoid adding yet another layer of complexity to this already complicated stage.

We believe that the affective elements that we did include in this series increased the affective reactions of readers engaging with it. As shown below, this method allowed us to discuss and affectively communicate some of the main intersecting social and structural factors that the women who participated in this project felt hindered their wellbeing and health the most in the context of internal migration in Ecuador, as well as alternative expressions of wellbeing and health in this context:

I came to Quito with my mother when I was three years old. We were always together. She worked very hard to get ahead, and always, in all her jobs, my mom was with me.

**Helen, 53 years old, nothing but smiles**

I was born in Quito, but my mom is from another province in Ecuador's Highlands. She has always felt like a tiny tree that, because of life's circumstances, was ripped from its soil.

Paula, 27 years old

I was born in a rural community in Ecuador's Highlands, where I attended school until my mother could no longer pay for it. Out of nowhere, one day, my mom came to my sister and me, changed our clothes and shoes, and led us out onto the street where a pickup truck had parked. It was my uncle. He looked at us and said: 'OK girls, ask your mom for her blessing,' which we did. He then ordered us to get on the back of the vehicle, and he drove each of us to a different house and left us there to

work as maids. We didn't know what was going to happen to us. Back then, some parents gave up their little girls just like that. We were just given away.

Linda Mariana, 71 years old, brave woman
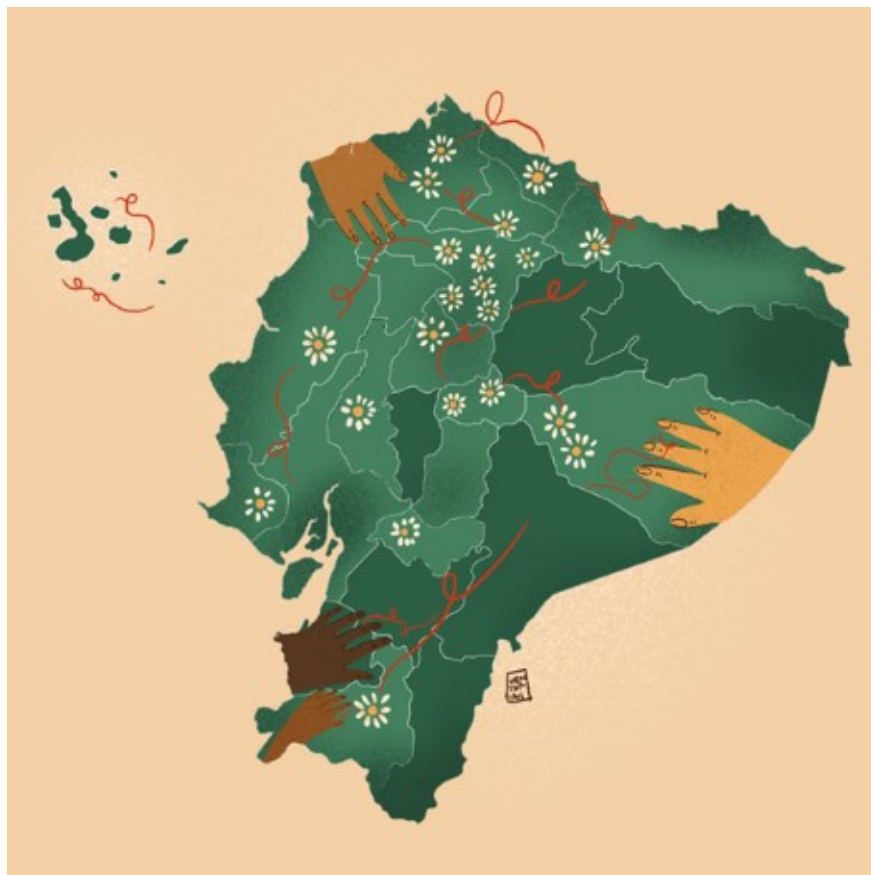
When I was a child, there was so much violence at home that I ran away. I was walking by the bus terminal when I heard the driver yell: 'Going to Quito, to Quito,' and I just hopped aboard. I had never travelled anywhere before, not even to nearby places, but I could no longer bear the violence, so I left. I didn't have any money on me, not even for the bus ticket, and no other clothes than what I was wearing.

Anonymous

I came running away from my husband. He was chasing me to kill me.

Anonymous

Ignorance leads some people to view us as insects, as if we were trash to them.

Manuela

Racism is like diminishing a person, and that's what hurts the most. You can't walk in peace because there's always someone who doesn't want you to come near them or who makes you feel like you annoy them, as if you were contagious and as if you were going to transmit them some disease. You genuinely feel awful because it feels like they are judging you, and no one likes to be treated with such contempt. They know nothing about all that you carry in your heart, and still, they judge you like that. I don't want anyone to go through what I've gone through because I know how difficult it is to experience this kind of rejection. It's preferable to receive a slap in the face than this tremendous humiliation.

Anonymous

As hopefully shown with these examples, all the steps followed to make the "Words that Heal" series worked together to produce an intellectual, affective, and embodied reaction. Like other multimodal writing styles (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022; Droumeva, 2020), this approach provoked readers and invited them to engage with the text in multiple and overlapping ways, thus increasing the possible impact the stories shared could have on them. We believe that we achieved this goal to some extent because of some of the comments that we received from audience members, such as the one shared below:

> The Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa used to say that literature should be poisoned with life, and that is what I feel about this work. It distills experiences, humanity, emotion, energy, and reality. You have managed to write something of great quality, and I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart because your words have moved me in a way that I haven't been moved by other texts in a long time. This is not something that is seen or read every day.

> **Reader's Comment**

Contributions

The linguistic-affective approach expands the field of critical health communication by focusing not only on the health-related accounts and experiences that communities can readily describe and articulate, but by identifying the subtle expressions of wellbeing and health that they may have not recognized yet and bringing them into full consciousness through dialogue and description. In this way, it offers a broader and more nuanced perspective of how wellbeing and health might be presenting themselves in each context, while opening affective, embodied, and cognitive paths for communicating these sensations to broader audiences. As shown by the example of the creation of the "Words that Heal" journalistic series of feature stories, the linguistic-affective approach allows fostering collaborative spaces from where to implement the multiple and complex community-identified roles that communication can play in wellbeing and health, including self-representation, articulation, collaboration, dialogue, and voicing of group needs and social demands. In this way, adopting this approach leads health communication projects to follow the decolonial and community-engaged recommendation of ensuring that research initiatives directly respond to the self-identified needs of the communities involved, and of creating avenues to reflect their contributions to the study and to disseminate research findings with them (Grain, 2020;

131

Mahoney et al., 2021; S. Wilson & Mulrennan, 2016). In short, the linguistic-affective approach opens the opportunity for health communication projects to co-create communication strategies and outputs where knowledge and affect are mobilized collectively, and in doing so, move from a consideration of subjects and communities as mute bodies that hurt and need to be educated or healed (like dominant approaches to medicine and communication might do) to bodies that feel, think, and speak.

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This process was beautifully illustrated in Yanay's words when she said:

😊 Words can **heal.** At least, they have healed me, they have <u>saved</u> my life 🥹🥹. All kinds of words have this <u>power,</u> not only the poetic and literary ones, such as music and sounds, but also the words that we use in our **everyday lives** 🧑‍🤝‍🧑. Often, people who do not know about our lived experiences p e r c e i v e us as… as… an **inert body** 🙁, a s s o m e t h i n g … how can I say this… as something strange, as something that is incomplete and that is lesser than them 😐. However, if we manage to make them u n d e r s t a n d our story and everything that we carry deep inside us through words, they may say: "*Ooo ooh!!* They **<u>DO</u>** feel!" 😅 And they may stop putting our existence, and more than that, our <u>mere humanity,</u> in **doubt.**

This contribution is particularly significant in places with colonial histories and imperialist interventions like Ecuador, where platforms for communication and dissemination such as this one have been historically and systematically denied to some groups, including diverse women and internal migrants.

In addition, the co-creation of outputs following the linguistic-affective approach allows to build and maintain stronger affective relationships with research participants and collaborators. In the case of this project, this approach strengthened the relationships between the compañeras, the members of El Churo and me because it

provided us with the opportunity to keep collaborating in the exploration of the research topic through participatory data analysis and dissemination of research findings. Moreover, it opened the door for additional encounters. For example, once the series was published, El Churo and I held one more virtual gathering to "launch" it. We invited the people who collaborated in the creation of this series in different stages, including the compañeras and the health and migration experts, as well as those involved in later stages, such as translators and the person who illustrated the series, to participate. Overall, more than 100 people collaborated in the creation of this series in one way or another.

In this gathering, we paid the same level of attention to affective elements as we did in our previous encounters. Again, we opened the space by lighting a candle to honour the people present and the collective moment we were about to build together. In addition, we invited a local singer to perform songs throughout the gathering, some of which were the same ones we had played during our previous encounters.   Following my consideration that affect sticks to words, we also included the following song, which specifically mentions the word compañera:

Tenemos que seguir, compañera	We must carry on, compañera
Miedo no hay por el camino cierto	There is no fear on the right path
Unidas para crecer y andar	Together, we grow and walk
Vamos a repartir, compañera	Let's share out, compañera
El campo y el mar	The fields and the sea
El pan, la vida, mi brazo, mi pecho	Bread, life, our arms, our chests
Hecho para amar (…)	Made to love (…)
Y vamos a sembrar, compañera	And let's weave, compañera
Con la verdad	With our truth
Mañana, frutos y sueños	Futures, fruits, and dreams
Y un día acabar con esta oscuridad	And one day, we will finish with this darkness
Vamos a preparar, compañera	Let's prepare, compañera
Con ilusión	With hope
Un nuevo tiempo de paz y abundancia	A new time of peace and abundance
En el corazón	In our hearts

We also used this space as an opportunity to thank everyone for their participation in the project once more, and to share our collective feelings regarding the process and the final result of the series.

I could sense how affect was moving between us in multiple stages of this interaction. For example, some of us cried at specific moments. Perhaps one of the most potent exchanges occurred when one of the people who collaborated in the creation of the series at the later stages shared how she had felt when learning about women's experiences, as this enabled the compañeras to know the impact that their participation in the project had already had on some of the people interacting with their words. As expressed by Yenny in her excerpt shared earlier on in this chapter, this is not something that happens often in research projects, where, as she stated, "you never find out what [journalists and researchers] did with what you said."

Another instance where I could sense affect moving between us was when Victoria, one of the internal migrant women who participated in the project, asked to sing a traditional song from her place of birth, which according to her, she had not sung in years. This moment was an example of how we let affect flow organically and move us during this interaction, and of how we created the affective atmosphere together, which contributed to keep strengthening the relationships that we had formed in earlier stages of the project.

Following the linguistic-affective approach can also increase the impact of research projects. The "Words that Heal" journalistic series of feature stories that we created following this approach opened opportunities that we had not anticipated. Once it was published, I was contacted by someone from Museo de la Ciudad, the local museum where we held one of our in-person gatherings. They told me they had read the series and wanted to invite us to participate in a collective exhibition about alternative approaches to health in Ecuador that they were putting together. They explained that the exhibition would be held for a total of ten months at the museum and that approximately 75,000 people visit the museum each year, which would significantly increase the project's reach. El Churo and I were ecstatic about this unexpected opportunity, which

we accepted without hesitation, even though we knew it would represent additional work that we had not foreseen.

To partake in this exhibition, we created a print version of the Spanish version of the series. Consistent with the insights of existing work focusing on typography, affect, and the senses (Velasco et al., 2015), and on the decolonization of typography and design (Farias, 2021; Khandwala, 2019; Tunstall & Agi, 2023), we placed great emphasis on the affective elements of language, particularly font, size, colour, and visual elements accompanying written text:

Figure 7. **Example of layout and design of the print version of the "Words that Heal" journalistic series of feature stories**

In addition, we used our participation in this exhibition as an additional opportunity to meet again. The members of El Churo and I invited the people who collaborated in creating this series in one way or another to the exhibition's opening. We also encouraged the compañeras to bring their family members and friends with them if they wished to, and some of them did so.

On the day of the opening, we visited the exhibition together. El Churo and I found it rewarding to witness how excited the compañeras were to see their words printed and displayed in a museum and share this experience with their families and friends. Then, we held one more gathering where we shared food and experiences and read some of the quotes from the journalistic series of feature stories. Again, affect was profoundly present in this interaction. Perhaps the most powerful moment was when Maria Eugenia, one of the compañeras, asked if she and her family could perform a traditional dance that they had prepared for us. Then other women decided to share other songs and dances with the group as well. In this way, the exhibition allowed us to increase the impact of our collective work in ways we had not expected, and to keep strengthening the affective bonds we had established during our previous encounters.

Limitations and Strengths

The collective creation of research outputs following the linguistic affective approach has both limitations and strengths. Perhaps its most significant limitation is the time and effort it can take to create this content, which can delay other aspects of the research process. Another related limitation of this approach is that affective collaboration can make it challenging to create quality content in a reasonable timeframe. The "Words that Heal" series is not perfect by any means. Despite the attention we tried to pay to its affective components, such as narrative style and visual elements, I do feel that the final result could have been more polished if we had more time and resources. In addition, as an experimental, preliminary, and collaborative effort toward data analysis, I consider that the overall arguments it presents could have been more robust if we had written the series once the analysis of results was more advanced. Yet, the process of creating it offered crucial contributions, perhaps more important than the final product itself.

In addition, the collaborative making of content following the linguistic-affective approach has broader limitations that should also be contemplated. For example, it can only be employed with literate people, which restricts the population groups with whom it can be used. To abate this difficulty, creative ways of collaborating with community members with different literacy levels can be explored. Offering the option to participate orally instead of in writing –or creating podcasts or radio content instead of texts– can be alternatives to consider. Yet another limitation of this process is that the people involved

need to speak the same language, while other non-verbal mediums may not face these linguistic boundaries. To diminish this challenge, it is possible to translate content into multiple languages. Yet, this can be difficult due to time and resource constraints. At the same time, linguistic outputs are easy to 'transport,' which can contribute to disseminating the research and its findings simultaneously and across geographic boundaries.

To fully unlock the potential of collaborative journalistic writing as an embodied and affective endeavour that follows the linguistic-affective approach, the boundaries of what counts as knowledge, who gets to disseminate it, and through which mediums, must continue to be pushed in both journalism and academia. Due to their participatory nature and often innovative approaches to content creation and dissemination of information involving under-represented communities, alternative, community, and feminist media outlets could be suitable options in which to publish affective and collaborative content. For their part, researchers could consider open-access journals in addition to non-academic publications, and could participate in both academic and non-academic conferences, conventions, festivals, or exhibitions. They could also contemplate not one but rather a collection of outputs and the possibility of creating some of their own. These could include media outlets or academic journals that challenge current understandings of language as an entire intellectual endeavour and embrace it instead as an affective, embodied, and complex component of our eclectic encounter with life. Adopting such an affective and embodied approach can potentially increase the engagement of diverse audiences, including decision-makers who may take actionable steps to improve the conditions shaping the lives of the communities with whom research is conducted (Pink, 2009a).

Moreover, following the linguistic-affective approach to make collaborative content in a feasible, safe, meaningful, and respectful way requires constant self-reflexivity, creativity, and flexibility.   However, this does not erase the possible problematic dynamics present in the research itself. Like others, I am aware that "even with all these words, I know that I am making a career out of them" (Lather, 2001, p. 221). For this reason, we need to keep questioning our positionality concerning our research projects and the people who participate in them. Finally, as set out in critical and community-engaged research (CERi, 2023; Dutta, 2008; Grain, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2021), this endeavour also entails balancing academic requirements with the needs

and interests of the community, which could conflict with some instances, such as timelines, priorities, and ethical perspectives on such topics as authorship, anonymity, and consent.

Because of the emphasis that I placed on the dissemination of research beyond academia, I complemented the "Words that Heal" series with blogs (Febres-Cordero, 2021) and other journalistic articles (Febres-Cordero, 2022a, 2022b) published in Global Voices, a transnational media outlet that shares stories rarely told by other media, and translates them into more than 40 languages to reach a global audience. While, again, doing so required more time and effort on my part, I feel they were important mediums to continue to build and maintain relationships with the people who participated in the project, and to communicate the research in ways that were relevant and important to them, thus continuing to leverage communication as an avenue to challenge, contest, and address the structures and systems of power and oppression that hinder wellbeing and health. Hence, the possible contributions of content creation as a multimodal and embodied and affective endeavour makes it rewarding to look for avenues to overcome its challenges. One of its strengths is that it blurs the boundaries between data collection, analysis, and dissemination, and challenges existing practices and power dynamics in research. In doing so, the linguistic-affective approach can open an effective channel to build and maintain equitable relationships in research projects, work alongside communities in all the stages of the research process, and disseminate research findings in ways that are meaningful, relevant, and impactful for communities, researchers, and audiences alike. This adds to communities' self-representation efforts of both critical approaches to health communication and community-engaged research.

Because it is created alongside community members, it can also contribute with different or more nuanced narratives of diverse topics. As stated by Giulanna Zambrano, one of the migration experts I interviewed for this project, this can be particularly important in the context of internal migration in Ecuador:

> As often happens elsewhere, the existing national discourse tends to talk about migration as a crisis, thus approaching this subject matter from a perspective that criminalizes migration, and there is so much that remains unspoken. There is so much to say, for example, about migrants' own experiences, solidarity in migration processes, the right to migrate, and all the contributions migrants bring to destination settings. However, most existing media outlets mention almost nothing about these topics.

138

Considering these limitations of existing narratives focusing on migration in Ecuador, Giulianna added that "we need to create spaces where people can tell their stories from their own perspectives. We must problematize how we tell stories to such an extent that the way in which we tell stories becomes an act of resistance in itself." This is precisely what we tried to do with the "Words that Heal" series through the linguistic-affective approach. However, while I agree that it is crucial to critically consider how we disseminate research findings and leverage communication efforts beyond academic circles, we must not neglect to also question how we approach writing within academia.

> "We must problematize how we tell stories to such an extent that the way in which we tell stories becomes an act of resistance in itself" Giulanna Zambrano, migration expert.

Heating Things Up

> "Imagine your writing as being both research and documentation, method and theory, dialogue and monologue, poetry and prose, objective and subjective" (Elliot & Culhane, 2016).

As in journalism, writing in academia has mostly been approached as a purely intellectual activity. I have found that this is often the case even in texts dealing with affect. However, I believe I cannot write about affect in a non-affective way. For this reason, following the linguistic-affective approach, in this dissertation I have tried to address writing as a mediator of affect and accept the invitation to liberate ourselves and our writing from the restraints and dichotomies that dominant conventions dictate (Elliot & Culhane, 2016).

I have also paid close attention to the sensory, affective, and embodied components present in language and the writing process, hoping that they are also apparent and embedded in text that I can craft and that they spark similar reactions in the readers who may engage with it. Adopting a non-linear and open narrative style, including my own lived experiences, and incorporating the boxes with the quotes that have moved me the most throughout the text was a conscious decision toward this goal. When writing this dissertation and other academic outputs, I also replicated the same affective atmosphere I tried to create when transcribing and writing the journalistic series

of feature stories described in the previous section. The candles, the sounds, the music, the fieldwork objects, the gifts, the tea, and the coffee were all present in the hours I devoted to this endeavour. I have also approached writing as a mediator of affect by using it as an opportunity to reconnect with research participants and community partners. Reviewing fieldwork materials and writing about them on these pages often elicited affective memories in me, which were deeply intertwined with the internal migrant women and the members of El Churo who lived these experiences with me. When I felt inclined to do so, I contacted them to let them know that I was thinking about them and to ask them how they were doing. In this way, writing became an opportunity to keep strengthening the relationships we had built in previous stages of the research process.

Although these considerations allowed me to approach the writing process as an affective endeavour, I feel I could have taken things further. For example, I could have started this dissertation like this:

AFFECT is the **RELATION** -------- the **bridge** --------- the hyphen ------- the glue---------

Affect is in the space between **AL**   **YOU**

L   of

ALL

of   and

ME
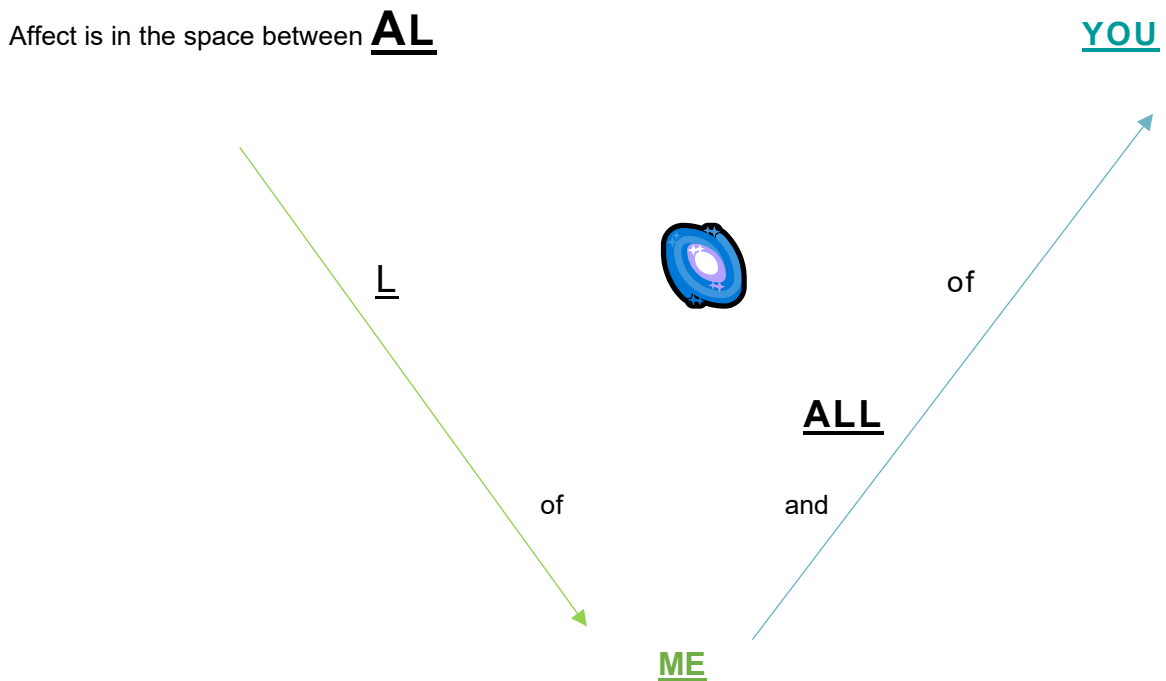
…and between *all* the aspects present in the place where we both are at:

Fun music, good food, warm weather (**finally!** 😃**),** and that obnoxious guy behind me whose laugh is too loud *(am I* <u>*actually*</u> *saying that?)*

By the way,

I'm having *fun*

AFFECT:

We **SENSE** it in our **BODIES (❤️)**

Even if we don't always pay attention to it.

It becomes apparent in what we…   t r y t o h i d e 😬 .

…subconsciously…

(really?)

Am I going crazy?

Is somebody going to get me?

Does this make any sense?

We create affect and we shift 🌀 it.

Together.

With all of what we bring to every single one of our interactions

Including **THIS** one

[Grab your reader's attention with a great quote from the document or use this space to emphasize a key point. To place this text box anywhere on the page, just drag it.]

Because (sadly---*maybe?*) we can't get rid of our bodies and of our

\-

selves.

Of our memories,

Our hopes,

 Our traumas,

The deep wounds that we carry, and we judge

(I'm not telling you <u>THAT!</u>)

Our worries,

Our debts,

Our menstrual cramps and headaches,

Y las iras en la barriga que sentimos por el 😡 que se nos cruzó cuando estábamos parqueando fuera del lugar donde nos acabamos de encontrar.

(Why did this bother me so much?)

 Affect is in what we sense and feel,

but we don't *quite* ---

Don't *fully*- ---

Don't *yet* ---

-----Understand

Wellbeing and health might be in the midst of this …

(I don't know how to represent this with arrows)

… chaos (?)

IN SHORT

AFFECT IS

RE

LA

TIO

NAL

AND WELLBEING AND HEALTH

MIGHT BE

HIDING

IN

BETWEEN

THE

LINES

This dissertation may have been different if I did start by describing it like I just did here, but to be honest, I have repeatedly questioned my approach. I have mostly been worried about not being understood and centering the argument too much on myself. As is probably apparent by now, I am affectively involved in this project in multiple ways. Yet, I definitely do not want this entanglement to overshadow all the contributions that the women who were part of it have to share. However, every time I tried to increase my distance, the insight and example of some Latinx feminist authors like Gloria Anzaldúa stopped me. Her words which I included in the introduction of this manuscript echoed back at me more than once as I wrote it.

"The meaning and worth of my writing is measured by how much I put myself on the line and how much nakedness I achieve."

"The meaning and worth of my writing is measured by how much I put myself on the line and how much nakedness I achieve."

"The meaning and worth of my writing is measured by how much I put myself on the line and how much nakedness I achieve."

Anzaldúa's multimodal and creative style –which aims to move and transform the reader by incorporating a fantastic array of innovative elements such as profoundly personal and intimate reflections; poetic and metaphoric language; embodied and sensory allegories; multilingual writing; reference and reverence to diverse cultural traditions, knowledges, notions, and worldviews; unusual design and organization of words on the page; unapologetic and striking descriptions and arguments; and visual representations like drawings and sketches of the ideas and concepts that she introduces in her texts (Anzaldúa, 2007; Keating, 2009)– also guided me and gave me the freedom to be bolder. Her letter to Third World women writers pushed me even further:

"How hard it is for us to think we can choose to become writers, much less feel and believe that we can. What have we to contribute, to give? Our own expectations condition us…I say mujer mágica, empty yourself. Shock yourself into new ways of perceiving the world, shock your readers into the same. Stop the chatter inside their heads… Write with your eyes like painters, with your ears like musicians, with your feet like dancers. You are the truthsayer with quill and torch. Write with your tongues of fire…" (Keating, 2009, pp. 33–34).

I was also inspired by the work of other women of colour who have challenged traditional academic canons by incorporating diverse methods in their writing, including personal narratives, fictional accounts, self-reflexive theorizations of lived experiences, and a combination of multiple literary devices (Ortega, 2015). The work of feminist authors stating that the first step to writing affectively is to allow ourselves to be affected, even if it is by the self-doubt or even shame that the writing process might entail, also was highly revealing (Escrituras Colectivas, 2022; Probyn, 2010). "We must accept that our own affect is also a source of information," (Escrituras Colectivas, 2022), they state, and I agree with them. We need to challenge academic writing and make it more embodied, engaged, personal, and affective. We must talk about how difficult, but also how gratifying and even healing the practice of writing can be, and we ought to invite readers to also engage with words in novel forms. In this way, more than just a medium to disseminate knowledge, academic texts can become spaces that replicate the uncertainty and relationality of life itself (Pink, 2009a), and that can turn into sites of

encounter where authors and readers meet and let themselves affect and be affected by each other and the text.

Although they are not the majority, some scholars have indeed explored inventive ways to bring affect and embodiment onto the page by incorporating elements such as poetry, drawings, satire, humour, and diverse experimental methods (e.g., collaborative Twitter essays) into academic writing (Elliot & Culhane, 2016). For instance, in "Ordinary Affects," Kathleen Stewart breaks with the traditional structure of a book. Instead, she shares a series of seemingly unrelated narrations of mostly auto-biographical everyday moments to reveal the capacity to affect and be affected and to "reflect on how intimate experiences of emotion, the body, other people, and time inextricably link us to the outside word." In doing so, she exhibits (rather than argues) that the ordinary is a crucial platform for culture and politics (Stewart, 2007).

Similarly, Ann Cvetkovich challenges conventional academic styles and advocates for a process-based approach to writing. In doing so, she experiments with non-traditional methods involving embodied sensations, affect, and cognition, which can lead to unexplored ideas, connections, and accounts, as demonstrated in her book titled "Depression: A Public Feeling" (Cvetkovich, 2012; Elliot & Culhane, 2016). Along with her theoretical discussions, in this text, Cvetkovich draws from personal experiences and reflections, and includes visual elements like drawings and pictures, to demonstrate that depression should not be considered merely as a medical disease that occurs at an individual and biological level, but as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon instead.

 Another academic text that experiments with creative ways to turn reading into an embodied and affective experience rather than a purely cognitive exercise is the book titled "Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good" (A. M. Brown, 2019). In this example, Adrienne Maree Brown invites readers to orgasm before starting the book and each of its sections. As such, she encourages a felt experience of pleasure instead of just an intellectual contemplation of this topic when engaging with it in her work.

Marshall McLuhan's multimodal writing is yet another case. McLuhan's multimodality should not be interpreted simply as an incorporation of interacting images and sounds into text, or as a replication, adaptation, or multiplication of virtually the

> "I have always found questions more interesting than answers, probes more exciting than products. All of my work has been experimental in the sense of studying effects rather than causes, perceptions rather than concepts" (McLuhan, cited in Theall, 2001).

same content on different media platforms and formats (e.g., movies, books, games). Instead, it ought to be understood in terms of convergence, or "a discursive and conceptual space where ideas, modes, and forms of presentation can co-occur, intersect, clash, inform, complement, or battle each other" (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022, p. 10). In other words, McLuhan's multimodal writing can be described as a medium to provoke audiences and invite them to engage with media and text in multidimensional and interconnected ways, which include multilayered modes of thinking, feeling, and relating with content (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022; Theall, 2001). Through elements such as probes, parables, poetic and evocative language, verbal repetition, sensory metaphors (e.g., hot/cold media), humour and satire, design (e.g., typography, images, presentation of text on the page), and juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated ideas and meanings, McLuhan incites readers to let themselves be affected by his writing and connect with it in multiple, overlapping extra-cognitive ways, which include physical, affective, and sensory interactions with the text (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022; Droumeva, 2020; Logan, 2022; McLuhan, 1964; McLuhan & Carson, 2003; McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988; Theall, 2001). In doing so, he contests West's focus on rationality, linearity, certainty, and finality (Droumeva, 2020; Logan, 2022; McLuhan, 1969; McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988; Stinson, 2018), and opens the space for other types of narratives and approaches to language within academia. Like the linguistic-affective approach, McLuhan's writing style does not assume the reader as a passive receiver of merely cognitive data, but as an active agent whose mind and body can be deeply engaged in the writing-reading process. Far from a vertical transmission of information, this process is a relational collaboration that involves several actors, including the writer, the reader, the message, and the medium where it is portrayed. As such, both McLuhan's multimodal style and the linguistic-affective approach introduced in this dissertation leverage and appeal not only to reason, but to the totality of human sensibility. In doing so, they do not focus exclusively on the content shared, but on the **experience** of engaging with this content as well (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022; Droumeva, 2020).

Perhaps because, like McLuhan (McLuhan, 1969; Theall, 2001), I am deeply drawn to art and literature, I am convinced that to enhance the experience of engaging with text, scholars could learn from artists and writers who are not constrained by the rigidity of academic boundaries. The conceptual artist Jenny Holzer and the Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar have been some of my most inspiring examples.

Holzer approaches language beyond words by combining multiple components – including text, mediums, materials, images, and space– throughout her work. For instance, in her series "Lustmord" (Sexual Murder), Holzer reports violence against women in Bosnia. As part of this series, Holzer used ink mixed with blood donated by Bosnian women to write the sentence "I am awake in the place where women die" on the front page of a leading newspaper. As a result, readers were touching women's blood while reading about the violence committed against them.

Concordant with McLuhan's consideration that the medium is the message, Holzer also writes simple phrases that acquire different meanings not because of the materials used to write them, but because of the locations where they are presented. For example, she shares sentences like "Men don't protect you anymore" in different ways, such as projected on jail facades or printed on condom wraps. As such, the phrase changes its meaning according to where it is located and who interprets it as well as the historical, cultural, and political background of both the place or object where it is presented and the reader. She also has museum installations where words are constantly moving on LED signs or are projected into audiences' bodies and the whole room where they are. These words move fast and are not easy to read because Holzer's goal with these installations is not to disseminate content, but to turn language into an immersive and embodied experience (Coulthard, 2006; Holzer, 2023; S. Jackson & Yau, 2007). In this way, she plays with the relationship between meaning, text, mediums, settings, materials, and audience members, and opens the space for multiple analyses, reactions, and ways of relating with words.

Julio Cortázar's "Rayuela" (Hopscotch) also is an invitation to play. Alluding to its title, this novel can be read in at least two ways: in order or by skipping from chapter to chapter following a guide provided by the author. The story changes entirely according to which way it is read. Besides this non-traditional order, a beautiful writing style, and multiple cultural references, Cortázar includes several provocations and

152

games throughout the text. He does so without any warning or instructions. It is up to the reader to discover how to solve the puzzles he presents. Although almost twenty years have passed since I first read this novel, I still remember the enchantment I felt when I discovered that I could not find in the dictionary the words I could not understand from one excerpt because they did not exist. In that chapter, Cortázar had decided to invent a new language. However, the context let me grasp the sexual connotation of what he described on those pages. I felt the same delight again when I realized I was not comprehending another chapter, not because I was tired as I initially thought, but because he was writing "in between the lines." It took me some time to decipher that this chapter needed to be read twice: one focusing on the even lines and another on the odd ones because two stories were intercalated between them.

The playfulness of this novel made me re-experience the excitement that I had felt as a child when finding mystery books that I needed to read curled up on the bathroom sink countertop so that I could reach the mirror and read not from the pages but from their reflection because they were written backwards, or with the "Choose Your Own Adventure" series. The fact that the same words printed on the same pages could lead me to different outcomes that I could select on my own made feel as if I had finally fulfilled my dream of owning Mary Poppins' bag, which seems normal but is able to hold unlimited potential. To be honest, this writing style still seems like magic to me.

Sadly, I have rarely experienced this level of delight and enthusiasm when reading academic texts, regardless of how interesting I may have found the arguments they present. To me, this suggests that, as some of McLuhan's work hints (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022; McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988), because of their attention to typography and their use of drawings and illustrations –along with their different narrative styles, candidness to play, and often creative ways of presenting text on the page– children's books can also be an inspiration for a more affective and embodied approach to writing. This attempt may contest, shift, and expand the techniques employed in traditional adult texts, including academic ones. If we are keen on creativity and playfulness in writing and reading when we are kids, why would we abandon them when we grow up? Why did we let the West's focus on detachment and rationality convince us that our message loses its value if it is personal, human, affective, and engaging?

As McLuhan did (Theall, 2001), I think we need to challenge this assumption and strive for enjoyment, creativity, inventiveness, messiness, exploration, imaginativeness, and playfulness in adult texts (and in adulthood more broadly, but I diverge).

> "My motives…are simply an intellectual enjoyment of play and discovery" (McLuhan, cited in Theall, 2001).

I have extended myself with these examples not only because my fascination with them makes it difficult for me to stop writing, but also because I feel they can be highly revealing when thinking of creative ways to engage with words in academic texts. However, learning from insights from non-academic conventions, such as the artistic and literary practices shared above, requires us as scholars to be humble and open enough to recognize that traditional academic approaches to knowledge production and dissemination may not be the only valid ones and that we might have much to learn from other domains. The same level of openness and humility is needed to approach writing with curiosity and willingness to experiment and be wrong (Stewart, 2007). We must be ready to test, question and, if necessary, modify or abandon our practices in favour of better, and probably more widely accessible, options (Elliot & Culhane, 2016; McLuhan, 1969). In this way, writing can turn into an affective, collaborative, imaginative, personal, and political endeavor through which to challenge (mostly Western) narrative styes and conventions that have become the norm (Elliot & Culhane, 2016).

Moreover, turning into affect, the senses, and daily life can contest hegemonic narratives not only in relation to form and style, but also content. This focus opens the possibility of writing about topics that have previously been rendered as trivial; thus, unworthy of our attention (Elliot & Culhane, 2016). It also allows for more experimentation and imagination to emerge in the writing process, which can lead to novel and unexpected embodied and intellectual connections, observations, and outcomes (Cvetkovich, 2012; Elliot & Culhane, 2016).

However, academic conventions and practices restrain this creative approach to writing. While I have been lucky enough to have a committee that not only supports, but even encourages me to pursue this type of work, I have found other challenges. For example, once I justified them, the university enabled me to include some of my efforts of incorporating multimodal components into the document, such as the text boxes and

154

the transcripts with emojis that I have presented in this dissertation, which I have used as an experiment to bring affect onto the page, and to invite you, the reader, to interact with this manuscript and the multiple elements that it encompasses in overlapping, extra-cognitive ways. Yet, the university did not let me use a different font for the text. They explained that they require all students to use either Times New Roman or Arial in their theses and dissertations because they consider that these fonts are easier to read and understand, and they want to maintain consistency throughout all submitted work. These arguments may suggest that they are not contemplating if, in fact, these fonts are easier to read throughout peoples and cultures (Khandwala, 2019), thus highlighting the need to think more critically about the role and relevance of typography and design in academic texts such as these, and to potentially work towards decolonizing typography and design within the university's guidelines (Farias, 2021; Khandwala, 2019; Tunstall & Agi, 2023). I also encountered technical difficulties when writing this dissertation. For example, the text boxes I included throughout the text caused some glitches that changed the formatting of the whole manuscript. At some point, I simply could not add more boxes because everything collapsed if I did. More times than I could count, I had to rearrange the entire document and compare paragraph by paragraph with previous versions to ensure everything was still there. However, despite my best efforts, I am not sure if I always succeeded and, along with time and my patience, I may have lost sections of the text.

The fact that I faced these challenges may suggest that the university has not considered more creative narrative styles that include extra-linguistic elements and designs when creating the template where every manuscript must be submitted. More broadly, these examples indicate that a more inventive, affective, embodied, personal, and political approach to engagement with Western texts has not yet been widely examined, spread, or accepted within academia. In most cases, I have found this to be true even among work dealing with affect and emotions. As the anthropologist James M. Wilce states, "perhaps to many Western authors, emotion is like revenge – best served up cold" (Wilce, 2009, p. 19). However, we must decolonize this assumption if we want to approach communication as an affective avenue to challenge, contest, and address the structures and systems of power and oppression that shape life not only outside academia, but also within. It is time to heat things up.

6.   Conclusions

The project I have described in these pages emerged from the consideration that the current dominant approaches to wellbeing and health have critical limitations. For example, they have mostly been outlined in the West, with little regard for the unique contexts, experiences, and knowledges of other global settings. As such, they do not always respond to the needs and realities of these sites. Moreover, they have a strong focus either on structural or individual factors, thus leaving the link between the two largely unexplored. In addition, they describe what an ideal state of wellbeing and health would look like, which is not always achievable, and they do not clarify what wellbeing and health could mean in the presence of limiting factors. Following these considerations, this project asked if wellbeing and health could present themselves in ways that are outside existing dominant theories and, if so, how these could be identified.

Influenced by existing work on affect, decoloniality, and Latinx feminist theories, in this study, I introduced the linguistic-affective approach, and I leveraged it as an avenue to explore wellbeing and health with 59 first- and second-generation internal migrant women in Quito, Ecuador. Understanding affect as a relational, more-than-cognitive, and more-than-linguistic experience, this approach argues that language mediates affect and is itself affective. As such, it coincides with the consideration that abstract concepts and experiences are materially anchored, and that paying attention to language, and more specifically, to the affective, embodied, and sensory cues present in speech, can help us identify and start to make sense of them (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; McLuhan, 1964; Pink, 2004, 2005). This consideration opens the opportunity to distinguish subtle affective and embodied sensations that may not have been recognized yet and bring them into full consciousness through dialogue and description. As such, it contributes to the previously identified need for designing methodologies for the empirical study of affect, which has mostly remained in the theoretical domain so far (Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015).

Informed by previous work on multisensory ethnography (Pink, 2004, 2005, 2009a), the linguistic-affective methodology produced for this project resorted to methods involving considerations around the senses, the body, physical spaces, and

daily routines as an entry point for studying affect and as an opportunity to access profound insights about people's lived experiences. Following this methodology allowed the internal migrant women who participated in this study, the research collaborators from El Churo, and me to turn to local knowledge and identify intangible sensations of wellbeing and health that exist outside –and broaden, complement, and often contradict– dominant approaches. Specifically, this process enabled us to recognize subtle sensations of wellbeing and health that exist in women's bodies and daily lives, which may not have been acknowledged before, and together, bring them into full consciousness and make sense of them.

Following the insights of decolonial and Latinx feminist authors (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Escobar, 1995; Keating, 2009; Lugones, 2010b; Ortega, 2015; Pitts et al., 2020), we resisted the Western tendency to flatten diversity and homogenize, and we embraced complexity, contradiction, plurality, ambiguity, antagonism, fluidity, and hybridity instead. As other authors approaching writing as a multimodal and creative process (Anzaldúa, 2007; Cvetkovich, 2012; Keating, 2009; McLuhan, 1969), we also defied linearity, certainty, and finality. We did not seek to reduce the multiple subtle expressions of wellbeing and health that we identified and discussed into single definitions that replaced the existing dominant ones. Doing so would have risked reproducing one of the limitations of the current theories, as it would have created broad umbrella classifications without taking into enough consideration the local contexts, realities, needs, and knowledges of the places and peoples from settings outside the research site. Instead, we aimed to explore various experiences and perspectives with a diverse group of people within Ecuador and allow the novel sensations of wellbeing and health that emerged from this investigation to remain distinct, complex, contradictory, malleable, and fluid. For example, existing paradigms tend to equate mental health and wellbeing with broad "positive" emotions, such as happiness. In contrast, the linguistic-affective approach enabled us to recognize various subtle ways in which wellbeing and health presented themselves in women's lives and bodies, even when they had not fully formulated them as particular emotions yet. Doing so allowed us to problematize the meaning of 'positive' and 'negative' emotions, and to consider them in relation to the social, cultural, political, economic, and historical context in which they occur and acquire these meanings. These findings support the insights of feminist authors questioning the notion of 'the good life' from an affective perspective, who argue for

more complex and social, cultural, and political (rather than exclusively individual, biological, or biochemical) understandings of terms such as happiness (Ahmed, 2010b), fear (Ahmed, 2000), optimism (Berlant, 2011), depression (Cvetkovich, 2012), and trauma (Cvetkovich, 2003). Similarly, existing theories may consider food an important health component because of its nutritional value. Yet, the linguistic-affective approach broadened this consideration by noticing that the compañeras who were part of this project also linked food's contribution to wellbeing and health to the affective and relational components they felt some food carried with it. This role was especially significant in the context of internal migration in Ecuador, in which women often experienced social isolation. They considered that food connected them with their memories, people, and places of origin. In this way, the expressions of wellbeing and health that emerged following the linguistic-affective approach were more complex and positioned in the local reality than those advanced by current hegemonic paradigms. As such, these expressions contribute to other decolonial efforts because they rise from previously excluded local knowledge, and exist outside the dominant narratives of modernization and development as understood by the West (Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Escobar, 1995; Ortega, 2016, p. 145). In addition, they shift the focus that biomedical and neoliberal models place on the individual and purely cognitive components of wellbeing and health, paying attention instead to the affective relations and conditions that help construct them in each specific setting.

Moreover, affect's focus on relationality also allowed us to notice that although the subtle expressions of wellbeing and health that we started to recognize occurred individually in each person's bodies and daily lives, and the process of bringing them into consciousness was unique to each participant, these expressions were often connected through some shared notions of wellbeing and health once we made sense of them collectively. In this way, we found that women's understandings of wellbeing and health went beyond existing parameters to define and measure them, including subjective individual assessments, objective and quantitative indicators (e.g., economic growth), and biological conditions. While the women who were part of this project admitted that in the current world order, aspects such as economic stability and equal access to resources are, in fact, fundamental components of their overall wellbeing and health, they appraised them as surpassing these determinants. Sometimes, they even felt that pursuing external goals such as economic development alone hindered rather than supported their

wellbeing and health. As such, their considerations around wellbeing and health often challenged current approaches.

Instead of these determinants –which they frequently considered as being established and carried out without enough consideration of their realities, values, inputs, and needs– the compañeras who were part of this project placed the basis of their wellbeing and health in relationships. These included relationships with oneself, others, nature and the environment, spirituality, and every stage of life, including death. These results support other approaches to wellbeing and health that also emphasize the crucial role of relationships in people's wellbeing and health, such as the Indigenous Maori-centered model for relational health (D. Wilson et al., 2021) and the Sumak Kawsay from Ecuador, which conceptualizes health as relational harmony, or as a complete acceptance and integration of all facets of life (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Cachiguango, 2011). In addition, these considerations complement and are aligned with the efforts of work from other disciplines (such as medical anthropology and the phenomenology of medicine) that also search for alternative avenues to address these concepts (Fischer, 2014; M. Jackson, 2011; Page-Reeves, 2019). Likewise, they complement initiatives like the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, which aims to go beyond purely objective and isolated factors and tracks multiple quality-of-life domains, including community vitality, democratic engagement, education, environment, healthy populations, leisure and culture, living standards, and time use (Canadian Index of Wellbeing, 2023).

Paying attention to the relational passage of affect in group encounters also enabled us to trace the intricate relationships among the embodied and affective sensations of wellbeing and health that the compañeras experienced individually, and between these individual sensations and the broader context in which they operate. In doing so, we were able to identify some of the complex and multilayered factors that both hinder and support internal migrant women's wellbeing and health in the specific context of internal migration in Ecuador, while also recognizing the subtle sensations of wellbeing and health that exist even in the presence of some of the limiting individual (e.g., sadness, disability, sickness) and structural (e.g., discrimination, racism, poverty, unequal access to resources, coloniality, patriarchy, violence) factors that shape people's lives in this context. In this way, we made connections between personal accounts and structural determinants of wellbeing and health, which existing dominant approaches often leave unexplored.

Identifying these traces of wellbeing and health, even under adverse conditions, enabled us to notice some of the strategies that women have developed to enact their agency and contest or circumvent these limitations, at least to some extent. In addition, it opened the possibility to consider how these subtle expressions could be leveraged to further increase people's sensations of wellbeing and health in these conditions, and to evaluate and implement the radical social and structural changes required to diminish or eliminate the limiting factors that shape this context. Through the linguistic-affective approach, we could realize that for the compañeras who were part of this project, communication played a crucial role in this regard, as they viewed it as an avenue for visibilization, self-representation, dialogue, collaboration, articulation, and social demand. Deeply guided by the compañeras' wishes, knowledge, and input, we embarked on the collaborative creation of media content. We approached this process as a medium to voice women's experiences and requests, as a multimodal form of critical inquiry to challenge established practices and analyze the role of participatory processes of content creation in health communication and community-engaged initiatives following the linguistic-affective approach, and as an opportunity to mobilize affect collectively and continue to strengthen the relationships that we had built in previous stages of the project while expanding its reach.

Throughout the different phases of the research process, we found that the linguistic-affective approach does not only allow for novel understandings that can address the limitations of current dominant versions to emerge. In addition, this approach has the potential of rendering critical health communication and community-engaged research projects into sites where a collective sense of wellbeing and health can be co-enacted and co-experienced in an affective and embodied (rather than just cognitive) way, and where communities can converge, share their diverse experiences and perspectives, ignite dialogue and collaboration towards self-representation, and communicate their experiences and requests on their own terms. This process can enable us to move from considering subjects and communities as mute bodies that hurt and need to be educated or healed (as existing dominant approaches may do) to bodies that feel, think, and speak. This view of the body is consistent with other emerging approaches within different disciplines, such as phenomenology, which also invite us to move from considering the body an objective structure to seeing it as a living subject (Carel, 2011).

Limitations and Challenges

This process has some limitations that need to be considered. For example, the transition from a body that hurts to a body that feels, thinks, and speaks is created with others. In other words, a body that speaks requires a body that listens, but it is a specific type of listening that is needed. It involves an affective and embodied way of listening that is willing to collaborate in the collective enactment of wellbeing and health. It is also a type of listening that embraces difference, discomfort, vulnerability, and honesty, and that is open to affect and be affected during the interaction. This type of listening takes a considerable amount of time, which might make this approach challenging to implement within academic timelines, requirements, and standard practices. There are also some limitations around language that should be pointed out. For instance, the linguistic-affective approach, as I have described it in this dissertation, does not consider sign language. I see this lack of attention to sign language both as a limitation of this work and as a potential route for future studies that might take up this approach. In addition, there is an increased risk of possible misinterpretation and misrepresentation of participants' accounts, mainly due to added layers of interpretation, such as the transcription method using emojis that I have introduced in this project, and the translation that was required, given that fieldwork was conducted in Spanish and most research outputs so far have been written in English. Future studies could explore collaborative and decolonial ways of involving participants in their transcription and translation phases, and approach them as possible avenues for inventiveness outside of Western paradigms, as well as mediums to generate dialogue around the interpretation, and possible misinterpretation, of what participants wish to communicate throughout the different stages of the research process. A third limitation around language that this approach presents is that although it offers a channel to access some of the affective and embodied elements present in people's lives and accounts, I agree with authors who maintain that it is impossible to transcribe all these components into the written text (Chadwick, 2017). As a result, some of them will inevitably remain unexplored.

The execution of this project also presented some challenges. A cross-cutting difficulty I have faced throughout the implementation of this initiative has been that operationalizing affect and inventing mechanisms to study it empirically is challenging and time-consuming. Despite knowing that building affective relations and fostering affective spaces and interactions (including those that take place on the written page) cannot be rushed, I have constantly felt the internalized urge to make the project move at a faster pace. However, community-engaged research's reminder that prioritizing relationships and communities' interests "often requires that we let go of our expectations and allow the unexpected to happen in ways that require patience, openness, humility, and a sensitivity to what the

> "Conventional research does not usually emphasize collaboration with communities. Community-engaged research (CER), on the other hand, puts academic and community partnership at the centre. Bringing together these partnerships—which include different sets of priorities, experiences and skills—is not a straightforward or quick process" (Mahoney et al., 2021, p. 6).

community needs" (Mahoney et al., 2021, p. 6) has helped me ease this anxiety, at least to some extent. Yet, my concern over time was also exacerbated by the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic started right at the beginning of my fieldwork, which caused significant delays and added additional steps (e.g., several ethics applications instead of one). However, this context also made the need for finding alternative expressions of wellbeing and health under adverse conditions more pressing and relatable than before, which may have contributed to increasing people's interest and participation in the project. Conducting fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic also offered opportunities and learnings, especially around the possibility of implementing affective, participatory, and community-engaged work remotely. Perhaps the most critical insight in this regard was that, despite my initial fears and hesitations, I discovered that affective, meaningful and long-lasting relationships with participants and community partners can still be built and maintained even when research is completed online, provided that enough attention and time are devoted to this goal.

Finally, epistemological considerations that view the body as a site of knowledge are still not widely spread, and this presents another challenge. As other authors have

maintained (N. Brown, 2019a, 2019c), affective and embodied work can be viewed as lacking rigour within some academic disciplines and circles. However, the novel contributions that they can offer suggest that we should continue to challenge established views and practices both within and outside academia. As hopefully shown with this project, doing so could allow us to arrive at interesting insights that may have been overlooked or rendered unimportant by other approaches.

Strengths and Broader Implications of Research Findings

Along with the limitations and challenges described in the previous section, this project has strengths that can contribute to different areas. First, the linguistic-affective approach introduced in this dissertation can start to address some of the limitations of current understandings, and open the space for more situated, contextualized, complex, and nuanced expressions of these terms to emerge. These alternative expressions of wellbeing and health can add to similar quests carried out from other disciplines, such as medical anthropology and the phenomenology of medicine (Carel, 2011; Fischer, 2014; M. Jackson, 2011; Page-Reeves, 2019; Svenaeus, 2001, 2019; Welsh, 2022).

In addition, this study contributes to the previously identified need to turn to diverse forms of context-specific knowledge outside the dominant Eurocentric approaches of health and wellbeing to work towards achieving healthy and thriving societies according to local standards and needs (Loewenson et al., 2020). Emerging from the affective and embodied sensations and the daily lives of people living in the Global South, the findings of this project add to decolonial perspectives that circumvent and surpass Western hegemonic paradigms, such as the Andean concept of the Sumak Kawsay (Arteaga-Cruz, 2017; Cachiguango, 2011; Hermida Bustos, 2017; Simbaña, 2012), the African notion of Ubuntu (Nolte & Downing, 2019; Prinsloo, 2001), and the diverse Indigenous and decolonial health models existing in places like New Zealand (D. Wilson et al., 2021), India (Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021), and Canada (Graham, 2010; Wenger-Nabigon, 2010), to name a few. This study coincides with these decolonial efforts and adds to them by demonstrating that the core values and principles they share (e.g., wellbeing and health beyond the individual, relationality, community, collective interest, solidarity, harmony and balance with all aspects of life) are, in fact, already expressed and experienced in everyday life, even under limiting factors, despite arguments stating that they are too idealistic and challenging to implement (Domínguez

163

Martín & Caria, 2014; Viola Recasens, 2014). As such, the insights of this project can join these and other decolonial approaches in the search for the formulation and implementation of policies, initiatives, and healthcare systems that embrace local ways of feeling, thinking, and being, and are more adequate for the specific realities of each context than those advanced by existing hegemonic initiatives(Arteaga-Cruz & Cuvi, 2021; Loewenson et al., 2020, 2021; D. Wilson et al., 2021). In this way, they can directly benefit the wellbeing and health of the internal migrant women who were part of this study while informing possible strategies to attend to the perspectives and address the particular needs of other excluded groups facing similar struggles both inside and outside Ecuador.

By taking a decolonial approach and following the principles for decolonizing research –which include conducting research that is community-defined, collaborative, and meaningful for the communities involved (S. Wilson & Mulrennan, 2016)– this project also contributes to the theory and practice of decolonial research and the advancement of decolonial methodologies and representation approaches that leverage local knowledge and privilege the diverse voices of the communities with whom research is conducted.

In addition, this study adds to affect and feminist theory. The linguistic-affective approach introduced in this dissertation offers crucial theoretical and methodological contributions that facilitate the empirical study of affect, which has been identified as an essential need within this field (Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015). At the same time, the linguistic-affective approach contributes with theoretical considerations to multisensory ethnography, which has focused more on methods. Moreover, it offers alternatives for analyzing sensory materials and representing affective results, which are under-explored topics in current academic literature (Pink, 2009a). In doing so, it experiments with creative ways of delving into 'the unknown,' which has been recognized as a future possible direction the field could take (Pink, 2009a). Together with Latinx feminist theories, the linguistic-affective approach also problematizes how we understand diversity and group formation. In this way, it theorizes and enables affective collaboration among individuals and communities with little or nothing in common, which could contribute to intersectional feminist work (Martín-Alcoff, 2006; Ortega, 2016).
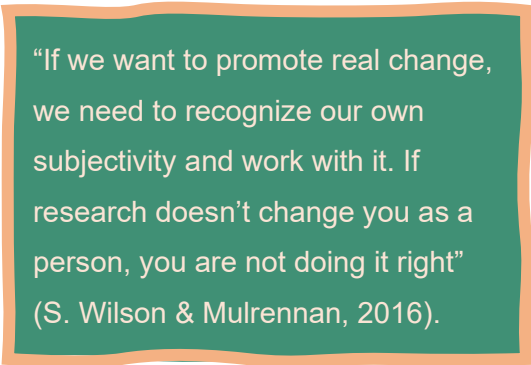
This project also contributes to health communication projects and community-engaged research initiatives. Currently, health communication focuses on discourse, narratives and fully formed ideas. The linguistic-affective approach shifts this focus to more-than-cognitive and more-than-linguistic affective and embodied elements that may not have been entirely conceptualized or described yet, and brings them into full consciousness through dialogue. As such, it expands what can be communicated and, in doing so, it broadens the purpose and scope of health communication as well. Rather than only producing and sharing health-related content, projects following the linguistic-affective approach can aim at creating relational, embodied, and affective spaces and interactions to mobilize affect and co-explore alternative sensations related to wellbeing and health that may have remained unnoticed, invent ways to describe and make sense of them, and only then, try to find avenues to communicate them to a broader audience in more affective, engaging, and impactful ways. Like other authors working with multimodality and creativity (e.g., Marshall McLuhan, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ann Cvetkovich), the linguistic-affective approach challenges exclusively rational, lineal, distant, and enclosed writing styles (De Castell & Droumeva, 2022; Droumeva, 2020). Instead, it argues for relational, affective, personal, engaging, sensitive, playful, creative, complex, open, and inventive ways to address narratives and texts. Thus, the documents produced following this approach can become opportunities for communities' convergence, dialogue, collaboration, articulation, visibilization, self-representation, and expression of social demands. The connection that this approach encourages is not limited to scholars and participants; it involves the potential readers of research outputs as well. It maintains that these documents can become meeting sites that replicate the uncertainty and diversity of reality (Pink, 2009a), and invites authors and readers to converge and let themselves affect and be affected by each other and the text. While I have focused on written words in this dissertation, the same argument can be made when other mediums are employed.

The linguistic-affective approach can modify and expand the practice, meaning, and goals of research encounters and processes as well. The relational, embodied, and affective spaces and interactions fostered following the linguistic-affective approach can become sites from where to co-create a collective sense of wellbeing and health, and to experience these concepts in an affective and embodied –and not just cognitive– way. These spaces can be platforms to enact, build, and replicate the relations and social

changes that critical projects might strive and fight for, which, in turn, can contribute to community-engaged efforts. The process of fostering spaces for the enactment of wellbeing and health in research projects following the linguistic-affective approach provides insights that inform the creation and implementation of effective, meaningful, and impactful strategies to build and maintain profound and horizontal relationships and collaboration with participants and community partners throughout the research process; prioritize local leadership, knowledges, interests, and needs; challenge and contest power dynamics in the research process; and communicate research findings both inside and outside academia in decolonial ways that actively involve and directly serve the communities that are part of the project (S. Wilson & Mulrennan, 2016), and that exist outside dominant Western discourses and narrative construction models. This approach opens the door for creativity, messiness, playfulness, and inventiveness, and it invites us to problematize and reconsider the impact of those aspects of the research process that are often viewed as insignificant, banal, mechanical, straightforward, or unquestionable, such as recruitment methods and communication channels, research settings and (physical and metaphorical) bodies' positions within them, transcription, translation, objectivity, authorship, anonymity, and consent, to name a few.

Finally, the linguistic-affective approach can turn the research process into a healing experience in itself. As repeatedly expressed by the compañeras who were part of this project, converging in affective encounters; building caring relationships and friendships; sharing diverse experiences knowing that they are listened to, respected, and validated; recognizing subtle expressions of wellbeing and health even under adverse conditions and discussing strategies to strengthen them; and participating in communication endeavours that express diverse perspectives and demands –including our own– can be freeing, therapeutic, and invigorating.

Being part of this process can be healing and impactful for community partners and researchers as well. It has certainly been for me. The relationships I built with the people who embarked on this study, along with the time and insights they so generously shared with me, transformed me in multiple ways and shifted my perspectives and

"If we want to promote real change, we need to recognize our own subjectivity and work with it. If research doesn't change you as a person, you are not doing it right" (S. Wilson & Mulrennan, 2016).

practices around wellbeing, health, life, and even death. Moreover, carrying out fieldwork during challenging times that included the COVID-19 pandemic, my dad's cancer, and my mother-in-law's sickness and passing sustained me. In turn, writing about this project with these affective and embodied memories as the background has helped me to recognize them, bring them into full consciousness, make sense of them, and release them.

I wish that the altering and soothing potential of the linguistic-affective approach, and this project specifically, does not end here. I hope that your interaction with these pages has provoked and moved you too, at least to some extent, and that it has inspired you to look for alternative expressions of wellbeing and health in your own body and daily life, to see where they might be hiding. I also hope that the imprints some of the words I have shared in this dissertation may have left in your body continue to flutter within you and extend to whoever you may encounter because, as Clare Hemmings (Hemmings, 2015, p. 157) says, "we cannot think (and –I would argue– *feel*) through affect and remain the same."

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