

CLiViE

Cultural Literacies' Value in Europe



Filmmaking as a Space of Belonging and Becoming

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Research focus

This paper examines:

How **filmmaking as an art-based method** fosters **belonging among culturally and linguistically diverse students**

Focus:

school context

creative collaboration

multimodal expression





Why Filmmaking?

Filmmaking as an arts-based practice enables:

Creative collaboration

shared authorship and negotiated meaning-making

(Yuval-Davis, 2011; Allen et al., 2021)

Multimodal expression

combining visual, textual, and embodied forms of meaning

(Kress, 2010; Cummins & Early, 2011)

Expression beyond linguistic constraints

creating space for participation despite unequal language proficiency *(Norton, 2013; Hirsh & Macleroy, 2020)*

Collective identity work

students position themselves as creators and participants *(Hull & Katz, 2006; Gauntlett, 2007)*

Filmmaking creates a **participatory, multimodal space** where belonging is **performed, negotiated, and experienced** *(Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011)*

Conceptualising Belonging

Antonsich's (2010) **place-belongingness** and Yuval-Davis' (2006, 2011) **politics & performativity** of belonging

Belonging is

emotional ("feeling at home")

relational (connectedness with others)

spatial (attachment to places)

dynamic (becoming)

Belonging is not a fixed state

It is a process of becoming

It is performed through practice

It is negotiated in context

Belonging is a **fundamental human need** and crucial for

participation

identity formation

learning

Belonging is **fragile** and shaped by language, culture, social relations



Research Context

Lower secondary school in Lithuania

Over **25 different ethnic groups** are represented among the students. The community includes students from various countries and cultural backgrounds, such as Russians, Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Roma, as well as students from families originating from post-Soviet countries like Uzbekistan, Armenia, and Georgia. There are also students from the Middle East (Syria and Iraq) and Africa (Nigeria).

Bilingual instruction: **Lithuanian and Russian**

Student population:

- multilingual and culturally diverse
- includes minority (Polish, Russian, Roma) and **Ukrainian refugee students**

Russian as:

- primary language of communication
- language of home and community

Lithuanian as:

- institutional and public language
- linked to participation and integration

The school represents a **linguistically stratified and culturally complex environment**

Belonging is shaped by: language hierarchies , migration experiences, everyday school interactions

Research design

Participatory, arts-based qualitative research

In educational research, participants encounter, interact, and interpret art materials (Tian , 2023)

Arts-based research connects performativity, psychodynamics, materiality, and embodied experience, allowing research participants to externalise and project their feelings through art materials.

“The researcher is co-creating knowledge about the research topic together with the research participants by providing visual stimuli (e.g. art materials), thought-provoking open questions, and an emotionally safe space” (Tian, 2023, p. 17)

Methods:

participant observation

visual artifact analysis focus groups (4 groups, 12 students)

informal conversations

Data:

films (4 films)

emotional maps (1 group map)

life timelines(13 drawings)

Filmmaking Process

Filmmaking as a **multimodal, participatory process of belonging and becoming**

Students engaged in a **multistage, participatory creative process:**

emotional mapping (spatial–affective reflection)

life-line drawing (temporal identity narratives)

collaborative scriptwriting (negotiating meaning and roles)

filming in urban spaces (situated, place-based practice)

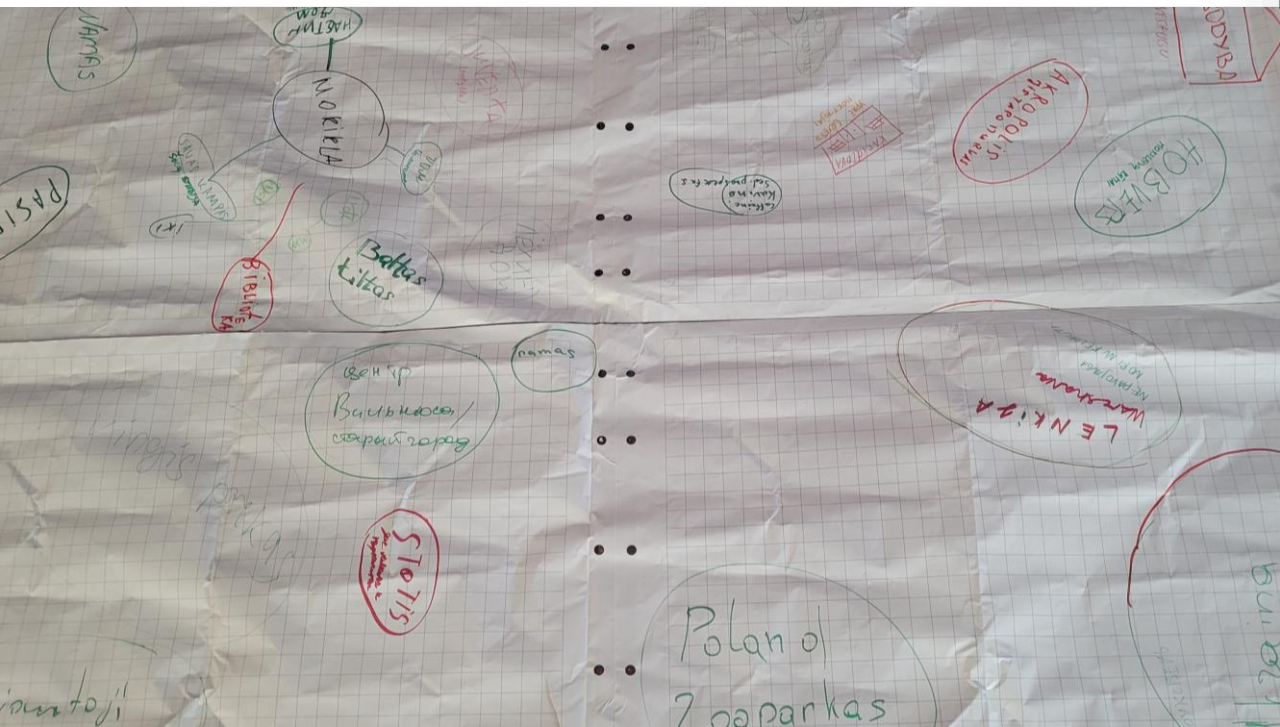
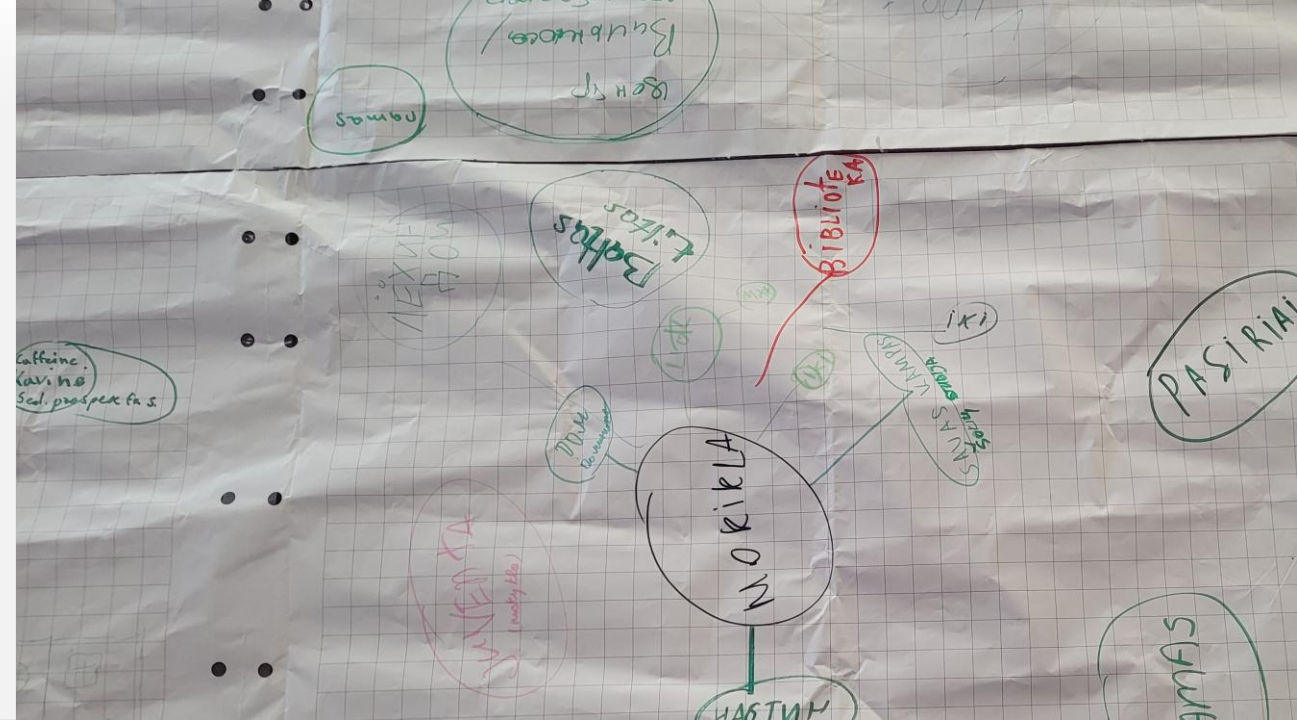
editing (narrative construction and authorship)

public presentation (performative enactment of identity)

A shift from **personal reflection** → **collaborative meaning-making** → **public performance**



From Drawing to Filmmaking



Drawings function as **pre-narrative stage** and **emotional mapping of identity**

They inform genre choices (e.g., horror, drama) and spatial choices (empty vs crowded spaces)

narrative themes (fear, friendship, belonging)

Transition - **inner reflection** → **collective storytelling**

Belonging Through Visual Narratives (Drawings)

13 students created **life-line drawings** 'past-present-future'

emotional maps on safe/unsafe places

Visual artefacts as:

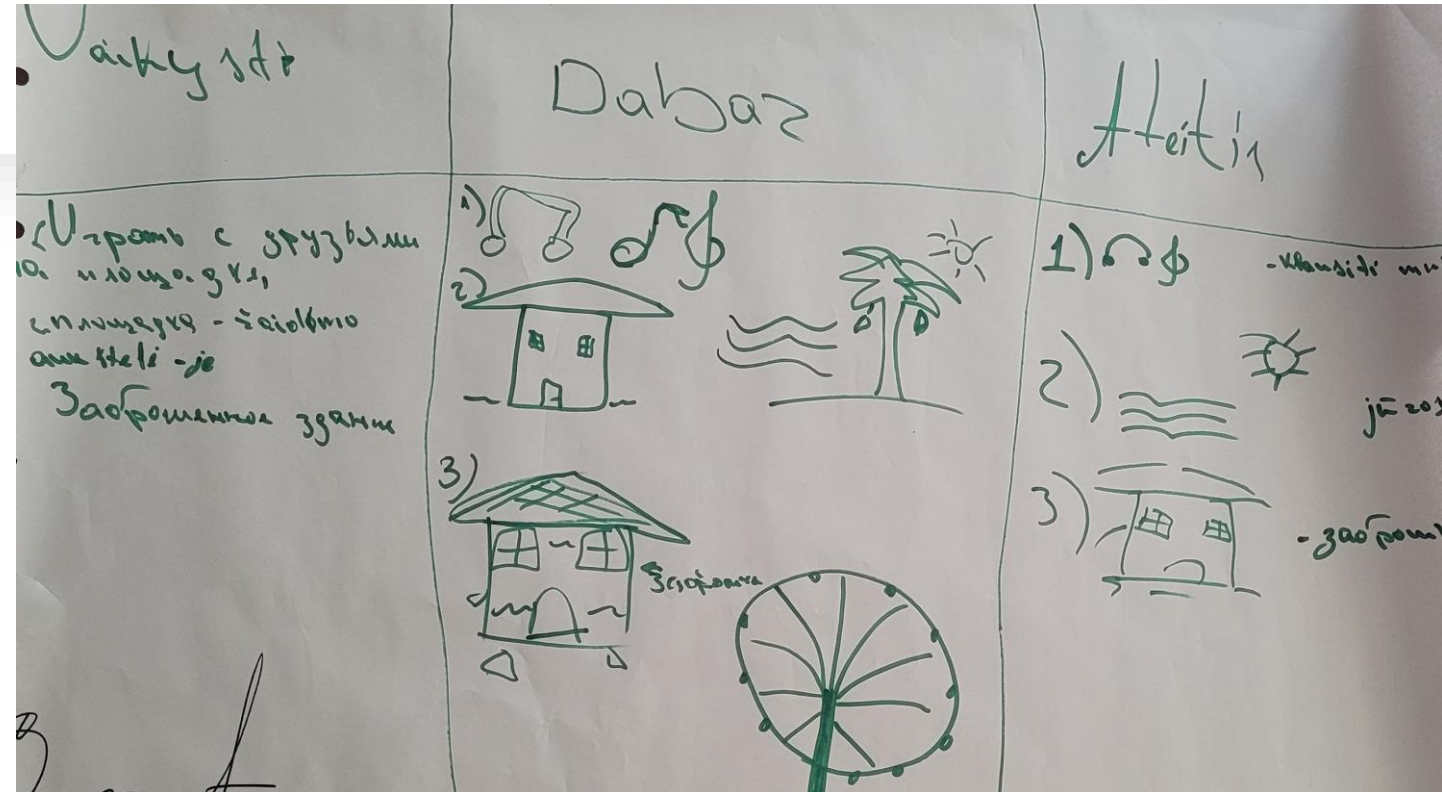
multimodal identity texts (Cummins)

affective narratives of belonging

Enable expression beyond linguistic constraints

The drawings included images and texts in three languages: Lithuanian, Russian, and Polish. The main elements of the analysis were the images, texts, colours, and symbols.

We recognised about **40 visual segments** and **more than 50 symbols**.



Vaikystē

• Я люблю гулять с друзьями,
Бегать по полям с нашими животными
оставать у бабушки с дедушкой, гулять на
улице.

Смогу там же жить бабушка и дедушка.

• у меня не хватает сил пойти
в школу в школу потому что боюсь
что меня упродят.

Рабас



Ateitis



What drawings reveal about identity

- safety, care, family

school - ambivalence (activity vs obligation)

future - education, mobility, uncertainty

war (Ukraine) - fear, rupture, instability

Belonging as:

emotional

temporal (past-present-future)

fragile and disrupted

Belonging as stable and safe



Belonging in the Past (Childhood)

Direct Representations

Interpretation of Belonging

Playing with friends

Strong **social belonging** and peer attachment

Family, home

Emotional safety, care, stability

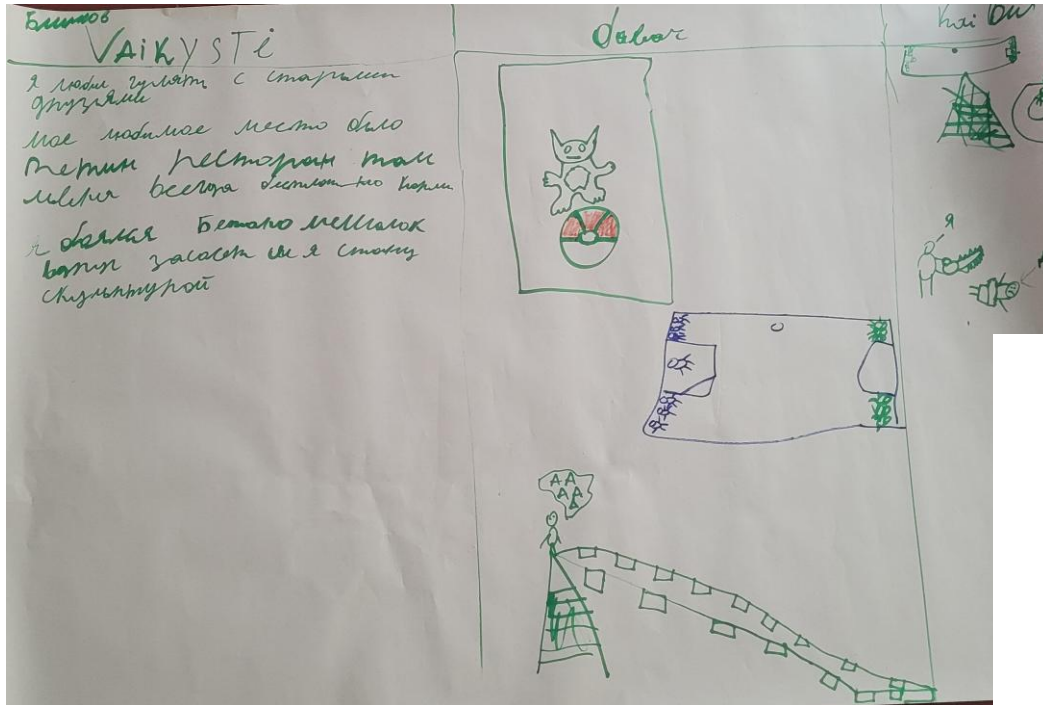
Familiar environments (yard, school)

Everyday, **taken-for-granted belonging**

Positive activities (play, joy)

Belonging as **natural and secure state**

Belonging as negotiated, fragile, and situational



Belonging in the Present

Direct Representations

School buildings, classrooms

Friends, classmates

City spaces (streets, districts)

Abandoned / empty places

War elements (Ukraine)

"Apleistas namas" (abandoned house)

Interpretation of Belonging

Institutional belonging (often ambivalent)

Relational belonging through peers

Negotiation of public belonging

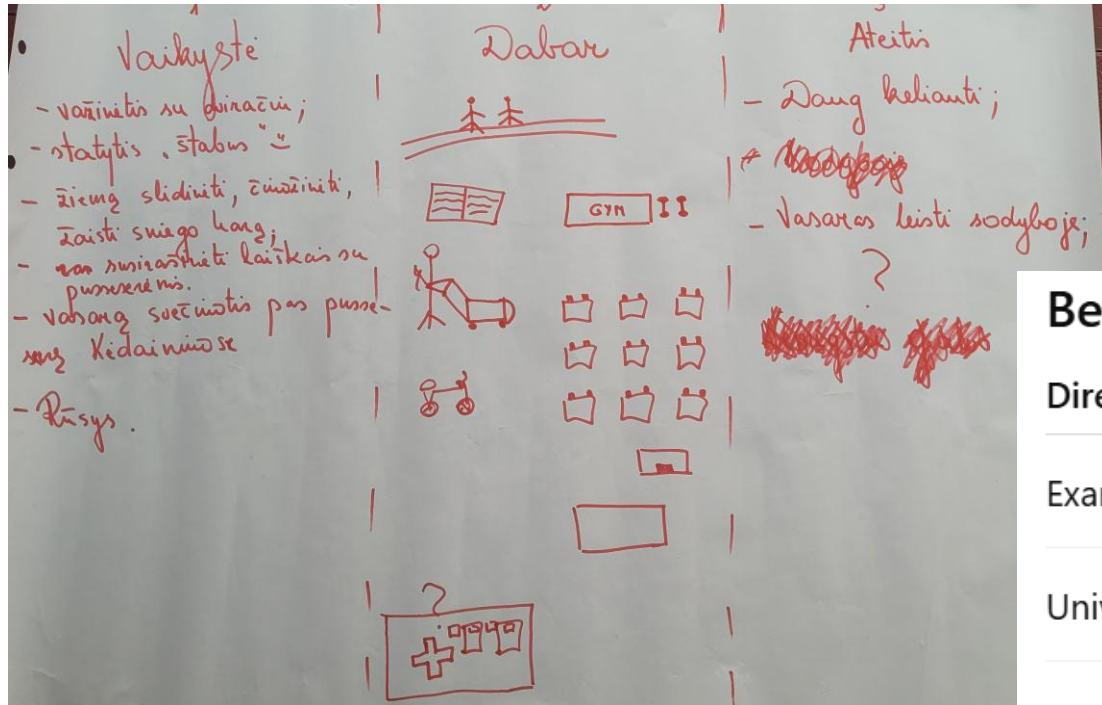
Feelings of isolation, uncertainty

Disrupted belonging, insecurity

Symbol of instability / in-between state



Belonging as aspirations, mobility and uncertainty



Belonging in the Future

Direct Representations

Interpretation of Belonging

Exams, graduation symbols

Belonging through education and achievement

University symbols (e.g., column)

Aspirational institutional belonging

Passport, travel symbols

Mobility and transnational belonging

Flags (Lithuania, Spain, etc.)

Multiple and shifting identities


Migration trajectories

Belonging as movement, not fixed place

War imagery (planes, explosions)

Persistent uncertainty and fear





Spatial & Symbolic Representations in students' drawings

houses, schools, cities

flags, passports, migration symbols

exams, education, aspirations

war imagery (explosions, weapons)

Combine **real places, imagined futures, trauma and hope**

Belonging = **negotiation between stability and uncertainty**

Belonging Through Places

Students articulated **place-belongingness** through:

home - safety, intimacy, emotional attachment

school - participation, relationships, activity-based belonging

city spaces → ambivalent experiences (visibility vs insecurity)

Also identified:

sites of non-belonging - crowds, hostility, emotional discomfort

Belonging emerges as **affective, spatially differentiated, and situational**

Places function as **emotional and social landscapes of inclusion/exclusion**





Real & Imagined Places

Filmic spaces:

empty parks → *controlled visibility, safety*

busy urban sites → *public exposure, interaction*

abandoned buildings / prisons → *marginality, confinement*

ghosts / horror settings → *symbolic otherness, fear*

Real + imagined spaces as **affective-symbolic landscapes** which reflect

identity positioning

insecurity and vulnerability

desire for safety and control

Place as **mediator of belonging, fear, and imagination**

“Well, of course, I chose what I like, sitting at home and so on.” (student Alex)

“There are some angry teenagers there... I wouldn't want to film there.” (student Robert about public space)



Belonging Through Relationships

friendships as relational anchors of group formation

collaboration as generator of new social ties

withdrawal/drop-out - limits of imposed participation

Belonging as:

relationally constituted

voluntary and contingent

continuously negotiated in practice

“I liked the fact that Marat and I are very good friends.” (student Alex)

“My friend and I started working.” (student Kristina)

“We are very good friends.” (student Simona)



Reconfiguring Teachers

Teachers as: co-creators, collaborators, performers

Students reframe teachers as creative, affective subjects

recognise their humanity beyond institutional roles

Shift from hierarchical authority → relational, co-present
belonging

Reconfiguration of teacher–student boundaries through
shared creative practice

“Well, I discovered that they're not really that old... They made a cool film... The teachers revealed a completely different side of themselves.” (student Robert)

“Before the project, teachers were just teachers to me... but through the project I learned that they are people too, with feelings.” (student Rita)

“They try so hard to make these projects interesting for us, and I am very grateful to them.” (student Viktorija)



Belonging Through Language

Dual linguistic dynamics:

Russian → affective belonging, identity, expressive fluency

Lithuanian → institutional participation, visibility, legitimacy

Practices during filmmaking project:

bilingual interaction

subtitling

public presentation

Belonging as linguistically negotiated positioning

Movement between comfort (insider) and participation (public belonging)

Language and Space

Students chose places where: language interaction is easier or avoid interaction

Language + space are interconnected
Belonging is both spatial and linguistic

“Perhaps one of [film director’s name] strong points was that he tried to speak Russian. For that, he deserves a lot of respect.” (student Robert)



**Belonging as
Becoming**

Creative identity

Creative process

Students repositioned themselves as: writers, directors, editors, creative agents; from participants to authors of meaning

“We would be directors... difficult to imagine”

Identity as processual and emergent

Belonging enacted through participation, agency and creative decision-making

From doing tasks to becoming creators

Students chose genres, negotiated ideas, solved problems

Developed agency, voice and ownership

“We had an idea, we filmed it” (group reflection)

“Something still happened... there is a result.” (about group work)



Discussion


Belonging is spatial, relational,
linguistic and performative

Filmmaking integrates all
dimensions

This study contributes by showing
how **arts-based methods reveal
belonging**

how students **perform belonging
through multimodality**

how schools can become **spaces
of becoming**





Discussion

Filmmaking and interviews reveal belonging as performed, negotiated, and relational practice

Spatial belonging (Antonsich)

films: real + imagined places (parks, abandoned spaces, city)

interviews: safe vs unsafe spaces → emotional positioning

Relational belonging

friendships as anchors of participation

Collaboration - creation of new ties

teachers - reconfigured as co-creators

Linguistic belonging

Russian - comfort, identity, expression

Lithuanian - participation, visibility, aspiration

bilingual practices - negotiated belonging

Belonging as becoming (Yuval-Davis):

students as writers, directors, creators

identity shifts through creative agency and participation

Belonging emerges as a **dynamic, lived and co-created process**



Discussion

Drawings function as **multimodal identity texts** - visualising experiences beyond language

Belonging as **temporal**: past is stable, secure; present is negotiated, ambivalent; future is aspirational and uncertain

Affective spatial belonging (Antonsich):
home as safety; school/city shows mixed attachment; war/abandonment shows disruptions

Politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis) -
inclusion/exclusion through space, mobility, and language; multiple and shifting attachments (flags, passports, migration)

Fragmented belonging (migration, war)

Imagined futures (education, mobility, insecurity)