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Collaborative Praxis: Unbinding Neoliberal Tethers of Academia

"Why write collaboratively?" This was the question posed by three researchers - Farnush Ghadery, Shaimaa Abdelkarim and Rohini Sen - as they began their discussions for this piece.

In the course of our conversations in conceptualising this piece, we agreed on three things – a) we adapt to no form of homogeneity, b) we hold space for each other and b) we ponder on various forms of collective and collaborative working. In using each of these terms as our thinking praxis, we have tried to illuminate facets of academia as it

displaces us (in the form/identity we inhabit). We open our discussion with the neoliberal conditions that inhibit our agencies in the university. For instance, neoliberalism forces us into an isolationist, individualist conception of labour where structural inequality is made invisible and a politics of care untenable. Similarly, unpacking our positionality illuminates the creation of *value and worth* through gender as a colonial social construct. "If woman and black are terms for homogeneous, atomic, separable categories", writes Maria Lugones, "then their intersection shows us the absence of black women rather than their presence". Worth and value, then, are located in the bodies that are most proximally institutional, if not the institutions themselves.[1] Denial of worth and value, together with isolation, invariably leads us to an urgency to create community and collectives – things that are integral to feminist movements. And in centering these communitarian and collective praxes, we also come in direct existential confrontation with academia itself. To find what resonates to our experiences that are distinctive in themselves, but communicative on a common struggle.

In this piece, we hope to rage through these sites of disenfranchisement and other fractures while simultaneously trying to imagine ways in which collaboration centers itself in academia.

Unleashing Ourselves: Feminist collectivity as resistance to the neoliberal university

'Neoliberalism seems to be everywhere.'[2] But what is it actually we refer to when speaking of neoliberalism? Neoliberalism is fundamentally characterised by free and self-regulating markets as well as greater mobility of capital.[3] It is accompanied by changing state structures which moved drastically from the idea of a welfare state to a state prioritising privatisation and privileging markets and capital.[4] With neoliberalism's rapid expansion, its ideological dominance is spreading from the economic sphere to social and political life. As Wendy Brown has argued, neoliberalism has become its own 'political rationality.' It has gone beyond the mere push for free markets and has extended its 'market values to all institutions and social action.'[5], This extension 'proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.'[6] As feminist academics, we

have not been spared by this omnipresence of neoliberalism. Indeed, neoliberalism has infiltrated both our theoretical home, feminist theory, as well as our professional environment – the university.

Starting with how neoliberalism is creeping up on feminist theory, we have to turn to what has come to be known as 'neoliberal feminism' (an oxymoron to many of us perhaps). Neoliberal feminism focuses on the economic identity of women and puts the individual, her freedoms and the use of those to succeed in the market at the forefront of her struggle for equality. As Rottenberg explains, the neoliberal feminist subject has to take 'full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care', and as such, is 'mobilised to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair.'[7] By disregarding the centrality of structural inequality and patriarchy to not only feminist theory but also the struggle for gender equality, neoliberal feminism effectively depoliticises gender inequality. As such, neoliberal feminism is asking women to change in order to fit in with the neoliberal rationality that has made its way into economic, social and political spheres, thereby allowing those neoliberal structures to extend their reach and strengthen their dominance.

These features of neoliberal feminism raise the question of whether this strand of theory can be seen or even classified as feminist.

Whilst the term 'feminism' encompasses a number of different theories and beliefs, one fundamental element of all has been the critique of structural inequalities created by systemic patriarchy. If neoliberal feminism is bereft of this intrinsic feature, how can it be classified as feminist?

However, examples such as Cheryl Sandberg's 'Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead'[8], precisely based on the idea of women just needing to 'want it more' to succeed and gain equality in the workplace, or Ivanka Trump's most recent 'Women's Global Development and Prosperity' initiative based on the three pillars of 'Women Prospering

in the Workforce, Women Succeeding as Entrepreneurs, and Women Enabled in the Economy'[9], demonstrate that neoliberal feminism has somehow become entrenched in such 'female empowerment' narratives.

It is unsurprising that neoliberal feminism has not been looked upon favourably by feminist scholars and activists.[10] Essentially, it fails to do what feminists have been engaged in since the very idea of feminism came to be: oppose the dominant power structures that are perpetuating, contributing to or failing to address existing gender inequalities. By disregarding the centrality of structural inequality and focusing on the individual responsibility of each woman instead, neoliberal feminism removes accountability for gender inequalities from those most powerful and at the centre of decision-making; thereby stripping feminist theory and activism of its very essence.

Moving on to academia, the university has been hugely affected by the spread of neoliberal political rationality. Higher education policies have changed in line with tenets of neoliberal governance, and education itself has turned into 'a means to a (purely fiscal) end where knowledge acquisition is a modality for economic reproduction and advancement.'[11] This overhaul of academic knowledge as a public good to a form of commodity for profit has transformed the modern university and seriously impacted academics. In an attempt to turn 'individual academics into rational self-interested economic agents,'[12] neoliberal discourse and rationality have transformed the basis of academic practice. What does this all-encompassing presence of neoliberalism mean for feminist academics? We find its soul-draining claws creeping over both our field of practice and our theoretical home. We focus on two specific consequences of neoliberalism for academic practice that have influenced the three of us as we try to find our way around academia – the individualisation of academia and the transformation of scholarship into mass production. And, we suggest that one way to push back is to revert to feminist collectivity as academic practice in opposition to neoliberal rationality – to illustrate the contentious role of academics in an increasingly commodified environment.[13]

Starting with the increasing individualisation of the academic profession, the introduction of neoliberal policies in the academy transformed universities' approaches to intellectual practice. With '[n]eoliberalism [finding] fertile ground in academics whose predispositions to 'work hard' and 'do well' meshed perfectly with its demands for autonomous, self-motivating, responsibilised subjects,'[14] resistance to academic practice has been less pronounced than the theoretical critique of neoliberalism as found in academic scholarship. The focus on autonomy and individual responsibility is reflected in the reality of academic practice.[15]And although individual acts of resistance against the neoliberalisation of the academy are present,[16] we suggest that we need more collective action.

Feminist collectivity brings with it the very rejection of the idea of individuality and neoliberal rationality as personified in the individual economic actor, and a turn to a practice of feminist collectivity can offer such resistance. Spaces of (real[17]) feminist solidarity have functioned as a safe space for us to be honest, to not be afraid to fail and to learn from others. These connections and spaces allow for a sincere reflection of one's academic practice in order to acknowledge that we are being subsumed by neoliberal rationality, and subsequently, collectively endeavour to resist this absorption. In fact, much of the scholarship that rejects and aims to resist the current state of academia as further falling into the abyss of neoliberalism is grounded in feminist ideas of collectivity as well and feminist ethics of care,[18] as will be discussed in later sections of this article. Collaborative writing also represents such a manifestation of collective resistance. It allows for the cultivation of exchange between colleagues and enables a broadening of our epistemologies beyond the comforts of our 'own' research and knowledge. However, the individualisation of academics naturally stifles collaborative work. The neoliberal apparatus that has become the university no longer accommodates collaborative contemplation and shared intellectual experiences.

If writing collectively is to enable us to work together and broaden our epistemic limitations then our professional environment ought to allow the time and space for this process to occur. However, instead of allowing for such intellectually hospitable conditions, the creation of academic outputs has somehow turned into mass production. Academics are expected to churn out paper after paper (published in the

most renowned journals, of course) for their own sake (securing jobs, research grants, etc.) and for the sake of their institutions (to score high in the REF[19], at least in the UK). Thus, writing has become a means to an end – the end of being published in one of the 'good' journals, the end of scoring high on the REF, the end of being able to secure a job in an already troubled market (don't let me get started on the precarity of academic positions). But good scholarship requires time. Ideas need to ripen in one's own mind and be reconsidered upon discussion with others. This is even more so with regards to collective writing.

Take the authors of this article for instance. Three early-career academics, all at various stages of their PhDs, in various research/teaching positions, trying to publish their own articles at the same time (god forbid we don't contribute to the REF!), applying for jobs/post-docs/fellowships and other opportunities, as well as managing other responsibilities that come with academic life (administration, marking, conference organisations, funding applications, student welfare, etc.) – and this does not even include the fact that we are in the middle of a global pandemic trying to survive our day to day in and out of lockdown, quarantine and various other restrictions of our 'normal' life. Even finding time for a Zoom call becomes difficult when we have to juggle these various responsibilities and coordinate our already crammed schedules (forgetting about potential caring responsibilities or self-care). This is not meant to turn into a rant (although the three of us do love a good rant every now and then), it is merely to demonstrate that the environment created by the neoliberal university means that good scholarship, which in our minds includes collaborative writing, becomes an almost impossible task. Put simply, the demands of the neoliberal academy do not allow – let alone cater to – the feminist politics of collectivity that we aspire to reflect in our academic practice.

Unmasking Ourselves: Positioning the feminist intellectual in and beyond the university

When discussing the neoliberalisation of the university, our conversations usually drift to how we perceive ourselves in those institutions. In the university, a black feminist is usually fragmented between analogous agencies with that of the white intellectual, an

afterthought non/agent, but more importantly, inaccessible and perhaps an invaluable other whose racial/gender/class configurations predetermine their un/worth. We are either hypervisible when we are 'loud' or incompetent when we do not satisfy the individualist agentic image. In *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe*, Hortense Spillers gave us a language to analyse this agentic split that black women experience in the distinction between the culturally made body and the *hieroglyphics of flesh*.[20] Through the critical language of Spillers and other black feminists, this section unmasks the positionality of the feminist intellectual in a neoliberal setting.

Central to Spillers' premise and ours is that we are not past modalities of enslavement. Rather, we continue to embody backwardness, and as such, the burden is on us to prove our worth in a neoliberal institution. Spillers observes gendering practices that have stripped the womanhood of black women. In a process of cultural unmaking, black women wonder every day with no symbolic resonance that speaks to their own experiences. The middle passage – a three-stops voyage that initiates and ends in Europe and in which Africans were exchanged and unloaded as cargo in America – stands for this cultural unmaking. It left the black captive – a 'human-as-cargo' in Spillers' language – 'literally suspended in the "oceanic"', creating a spatial and temporal rupture to an 'unknown course'.[21] The female captive, writes Spillers, appears as an 'anonymous portrayal' as a slave whose reproductive labour is 'ungendered' units and quantities as cargo.[22] The middle passage is not an event of the past. Rather, it is processual as it continues to inform our agencies in an anti-black world.[23] We see it currently manifesting in surveillance practices on black international students and workers, excessive visa-checks, normalised threats of deportation and tracking practices of whereabouts (all of which has been exacerbated with COVID-19).

Working against modalities of enslavement, Spillers employs a difference between flesh and body. Flesh is ungendered and materialised. It is a product of captivity while being the interiority that cannot be enslaved, so it is salvageable from racial relations. The body, on the other hand, is a product of normative social and cultural relations. The black body is employable to produce, categorise and be liberated (i.e. given rights, legal status and agencies). It can enter analogous relations with whiteness but without a symbolic resonance that speaks to its own-ness. The categories, flesh and body, help us

understand the violence of a fragmented subject that captivity – and precisely its afterlives in academia – continues to condition a black feminist. As a body, the black feminist appears on edge, unlocatable, either too vocal or peripheried. But as flesh, Spillers' language gives us room to be suspicious and wary of everything that flattens our agencies to racial and gendering practices.

Sylvia Wynter adopts this suspicion as a wariness against categories that differentiate and govern, while producing anti-blackness, as she writes:

It is not that I am against feminism: I'm appalled at what it became. Originally, there was nothing wrong with my seeing myself as a feminist; I thought it was adding to how we were going to understand this world.

If you think about the origins of the modern world, because gender was always there, how did we institute ourselves as humans; why was gender a function of that?

I'd just like to make a point here that is very important. Although I use the term "race," and I have to use the term "race," "race" itself is a function of something else which is much closer to "gender."[24]

Wynter evokes the confines of positioning the black feminist in a (white) institutional movement. What she alludes to is how gender – a colonial construct in itself – becomes central to feminist thinking. Feminism as an institutional movement conforms to institutional demands and white power that classify our critical agencies according to an individual value while reproducing the exclusivity of the -ism. Its ableist, can-do narrative excludes those of us who simply lack its set of qualifiers that nurtures ableism in the university. Such ableism that speaks only to white power is seen in Athena Swan agendas (that is a Charter that was established by the UK Equality Charge Unity and includes a framework to ensure gender equality in higher education in the UK) that dismiss the operations of racism in gender inequalities. Categories like gender and race arise as stabilised and normal qualifiers for institutional excellence. With those agendas, conformity becomes not a demand of the institution but a desire by the feminist, to be seen and heard as part of the table. The question here is what is it that we are actually

giving up for recognition that ticks the box? It's not that I am against feminism – Wynter positions herself within and beyond its -ism – I'm appalled at what it became – a coding for an automated agency that takes gender and race as a natural category of identification.

It is not as if we do not have black intellectuals who have already given us critical languages that denaturalise those categories. But they are simply not read in context as their contributions are instantly positioned to be on 'Africa' or the 'Third World'; ones that do not affect the inclusivity of the neoliberal academy.

For example, Oyèrónkè Oyěwùmí traced the colonial structure that produced gender as a modality of governance.[25] For Oyěwùmí, gender is a social and colonial construct that came to represent biological determinism. She traces the construction of the body in Yorùbá social relations that negate Western gendering practices. Like Spillers and Wynter, Oyěwùmí observes the afterlives of colonial governance in forming current social realities and gender constructs. In those realities, 'woman' is a predetermined and fixed category situated against 'man', and subsequently 'white' woman. The determination of 'woman' in western gendering practices comes with a biologically determinate scale in which suffering is only recognised when the criteria of 'womanhood' is satisfied. This criterion reflects white social referents while, at the same time, ungendering black womanhood as it informs everyday living through continuous gendering practices.[26] Oyěwùmí signposts the centrality of the biological body in western social relations and the reproduction of social identities that are universalised and, as such, interpellate different African societies. Those biological categories are not natural; they reflect certain attributes that are socially conceived to determine the role of both sexes. Against gendering practices, Oyěwùmí offers the term 'anatomic' to expose the construction of gender and the minimal differential characteristics between anatomic male and anatomic female in precolonial Yorùbá distinctions.[27] In Yorùbá tradition, the body (as gender-specific) does not constitute the basis of social hierarchisation. Rather, societal relations determine the role of the subject. Pregnancy, for example, was ungendered as it did not extend beyond the reproductive process to domesticating the role of 'woman'.[28] Instead, it marked a distinct role for the body in the reproductive process while biological differences had no function in identifying

social status, unlike in Western gendering practices that categorise and rank. Oyěwùmí's premise suggests that the role of feminist thinking is to decenter 'woman' as a naturalised social category, which we will detail in the next section.

So if gender and racial categories are rooted in institutional feminism, the black feminist operates beyond an -ism to organise, collaborate, strategise and care for each other. The positioning of black feminists in neoliberal institutions is usually seen as disturbing white power. And we feel it viscerally in passive aggressive encounters or dismissive acknowledgements of our needs for more support in statements from white colleagues like 'I understand where you are coming from but, this is not a problem that affects me'. Yet black feminists have surpassed this 'disruptive' position. Their thinking transcends the conscripts of individual agencies (the 'me' that is entrenched in white power) and the demands of an -ism by practising actual care. It seeks the work that needs to be done. For that, in collaborating, we give each other our time and care to listen but not to appropriate each other's experiences. Listening with care attends to the nuances in our positionalities that are different in themselves but resonate to a common struggle. It is a practice of meshing and interlacing different experiences and documenting them. We met in institutional spaces that do not define us, nor do they necessarily welcome us. Oscillating between an afterthought and hypervisibility, our experiences have no referents that validate them. Yet, in thinking together, our experiences become meaningful and graspable to simply validate that we exist. And many have already given us languages to practice our own-ness beyond the conscripted role of a white academic. We also listen to and think through them attentively.

Sharing the Emotional Labour: Collaboration and Relationship-making as Feminist Methods and Praxis

As three women of colour in academia, we are always destined to be the hamsters on the wheel unless we give up our sense of self or the hard-earned ground we stand on. But we are not here to be expunged into oblivion, and we wish to fight back by dissolving/diffusing the system itself. Most of us in academia can attest to the fact that institutionally, academia presents itself as a solitary enterprise. This isolation of/in academia – be it identitarian, locational and/or institutional – compels us[29] to create

communities and feminist collectives. Some are institutionally permitted in the form of 'reading groups' and 'discussion groups'. But most are extra-institutional and relational, slotted as social categories (female friendships) or gendered spaces (where women vent to others as a coping mechanism). These operations map on to the convenient binaries of public and private[30] where the social and relational are seen as things that happen outside of institutions and are somehow disconnected to the individual that is constructed through these modes. *Almost as if the 'academic' in the institution is a stand-alone creature to be assessed and valued based on objective, normative standards.*

The ill-conceived foundations of normative standards in academia are not only made invisible by the oppressive forces but are also presented as desirable. This academic normativity creates two layers of suppression:

- It offers white, male, Eurocentric hegemony as universal standards of excellence, putting it always out of the reach of those who are none of those things or even one.
- It then isolates us in a system that is predatorial to the labour of the community and simultaneously, makes all forms of labour invisible.

This structure offers the illusion of a fulfilling, solitary, intellectual that erases signs of care (in all forms). It denies the truth of knowledge/knowledge making as a communal experience and suggests that only solitude, as opposed to community, can facilitate high thinking[31]. It encourages objectivity as aspirational for scholarly calibre – objectivity being some absurd, bird's eye view of things, away from our own moorings and realities. Not only is objectivity the prerogative of the privileged, but this form of academic posturing also effaces positionality (almost berates it!) which forms the very basis of our intellectual positions and claims.[32] One can be objective if one *is* the normative. Thus, the female scholar from anywhere in the global south is expected to clarify their tone (colony speaking to hegemony), their position (whether we self-identify as TWAIL, feminists and such). But the white man that *is* academia is simply representative of objective, universal scholarship.[33] This normative personification remains unchanged, no matter what the discipline. And the fact that we are expected to carry on as if this is to be is not unsurprising but still, incredible.

To be clear, some distance from one's work (which is distinct from objectivity) may be helpful to see how many voices one assumes in the process. But, to say that one occupies a position of universal objectivity is farcical and impossible. In addition, there is much to be said about such anxious scholarship and whether exercises such as creating distance from one's work and constantly looking for blind spots are helpful modes of scholarship at all.[34] As feminists, we seek reparation through denouncing this normative and by invoking collaboration as a form of praxis. And, in centering these communitarian and collective identities, we also come in direct methodological and existential confrontation with academia itself. In this segment, we unpack the role of relationship-making as praxis and method when forming collectives and communities institutionally or otherwise.

Relationship-making as Feminist Praxis and Methodology

Feminist movements, like most forms of resistance to oppression, find strength and ground in collectives and communities[35]. Historically,[36] feminist collectives across the globe have grown out of counter-culture movements as part of wide-ranging challenges to established orders. Often springing from grassroots socialism, they were devoid of hierarchies and frequently working in collaboration with other grassroots movements.[37] Like any collective and community, they are marked by ruptures[38] and divergences. However, what sets the feminist movements apart, in our understanding, is a feminist ethos.[39] Through feminist ethos, we speak of practices that go beyond the visibility and participation of 'gender' in disciplines, and this is not limited to women. Feminist ethos is a dynamic, jurisprudential, lived conduct[40] and it lives beyond written scholarship. It speaks to an everyday praxis of *relationship making* and *care* through *emotional labour* – acts that are neither visible nor valued by institutions. As discussed in the context of the neoliberalisation of the academy, institutions locate our value in outputs[41] whereas the generation of these tangible outputs rests heavily on varying notions of tangibility and intangible – through the relationships we make and the care we practice every day.

While feminist ethos is the praxis of relationship-making and care, both of these enactments rest on ideas of what we call *feminist honesty*.[42] This is predicated on emotional labour[43] (and other forms of labour) that allow us to hold space.

Feminist honesty is a gaze that is directed inwards as often as it is directed outwards to better understand our location and complicity in the structures we challenge. It also allows us to be vulnerable and ask for vulnerability in return.

Be it the disproportionate impact of childcare, the risks of rupture through sexual harassment, violated (intellectually and/or physically) as a gendered body, objectification, denial of agency, refusal of labour, erasure of presence – through each of these iterations we see each other, protect each other and support each other. We devote time to be an ally, to understand voices across epistemologies, and to hold space for each other when we are unable to sustain ourselves in this isolationist system. We do these either by demanding institutional accountability or, by wedging these relationships into institutional spaces. In doing these, however, we earmark something very significant – the work is always processual and always elsewhere, in 'extra-institutional' terrains.

If the feminist method is one of ethical relationship making, then, it becomes equally pertinent to examine the relationship within the elements of the movement itself. Our[44] relationship to the academe and institutions are marked with exclusion and hostility. And we negotiate that terrain by forming communities (relationships) across identities and differences. The success of this ethos and praxis rests not only on how well we coalesce, but also on how we manage our anger (at) and differences. Here, we wish to situate this reading in two specific context – a) intergenerational: the divergences between younger and older feminists and b) intersectional: the divergences as between different identities/locations. And, both (a) and (b) blend with each other as well. We intend to read it in a manner we think is significant for a feminist legal praxis of our times marked by fractures, caustic animosities and diffused loyalties. Feminists across the spectrum understand the importance of resisting oppressive power structures (like the state, patriarchy, neoliberalism etc.). However, we are yet to think through properly about "how

to relate ourselves with those who are located within the same power structures we seek to resist, but think of it differently; with whom we might disagree on certain points, but do not necessarily see as our adversaries".[45]

This is possibly because never before have we inhabited an ecosystem where identities are increasingly fluid and diverse. The sheer possibilities of the many ways of being call to question how we relate to those ways of being as well. Conflict and difference of opinions are not new to feminism. Multiplicity of views clarify and strengthen the feminist position as opposed to weakening them. However, these axes speak to a very different form of disagreement than the ones we have seen before.

(1) The Intergenerational chasm: Oftentimes located in the new expressional home of younger feminists – social media (and technology), this is marked by vanguardism and a norm of expulsion when faced with contrary views. Something akin to what is termed "cancel culture".[46] The underlying impulse appears to be the crystallisation of anger, denial of heuristics and an inability to speak across this difference in lived experience. And much like the speed of their vehicle of choice – technology – there is an almost instantaneous formation of position and rage. Traditional institutions, however, remain the bastion of older feminists (who are often at their helm) and this has created a turf war of sorts where we seem to be fighting each other in addition to (and sometimes, as opposed to) the structures that are setting the terms of the debate.

(2) The intersectional chasm: Much like the intergenerational chasm, this rests on a notion of differential lived experiences. However, instead of occurring in a particular plane or beyond a particular moment in time, this is as old as the earliest feminist movements themselves. At the heart of this chasm lies not just a civilisational discourse, but the questioning of the very categories of 'gender', 'race', 'feminism' themselves. Institutionally, this is marked by the affinity to racial alliances at par with feminist ones, and sometimes, overshadowing the latter. And for structures that assign values based on proximity to the normative, who one chooses to align with and on which matter can have grave consequences for the rest.

To speak across these differences requires some precognitive and fundamental acknowledgements of contexts, relative privileges, anger and vantage points. It is only when we hold space for each of these can we move on to safer, well-constructed terrains from where action can emerge. And doing these requires us to successfully deploy the processual methodology of relationship making with time and care.

This processual enactment of relationship making and care is very much a methodological construction. But a host of structures, including the public-private distinction, misconstrue these as dispensable to institutions and scholarly approaches. This makes one wonder if the task is to dismantle institutions as they are or, to radically collapse the distinction of 'inside' and 'outside' and, if in some ways they are one and the same. While there is much to dismantle in academic institutional practices[47], there are ways in which academia can (and is) able to immediately accommodate such praxis. For written scholarship, it could mean reparative reading, mindful references that do not prioritise 'male-ness'[48] and breaking away from normative (claims of objectivity can be interrogated on the grounds of being Eurocentric as well as chauvinistic) styles and contents. In writing this piece the way we have and, in allowing us to write in this way, we (the authors and Feminista Journal) demonstrate the expansive capacity of collaboration in breaking ranks of form and content. Similarly, for teaching, one may see it as a pedagogic performance of care and awareness of silences and spaces. Talking about teaching entails constantly navigating its human-centric design which, unlike scholarship, is an engaged act of trust. And in extending our time and labour (against every institutional tool designed to take them away and not reward them) to these acts, we inadvertently reveal and challenge the anti-feminist turn academia has taken.

Conclusion: Collaboration as Care

In our imagination of collaboration, the output is complemented by the process. Yet, the output here is not a tangible shift but an attentive practice of care and listening. We initiated the discussions for this piece with a single question: why write collaboratively? In answering that question, we demand more than just surviving within neoliberal conditions. The piece – in itself an exercise – highlights writing collectively as a practice of resistance through connecting struggles, while working against homogeneity and

naturalised racial and gendering modalities of relating to each other. "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" cautioned Audre Lorde. So, with our own tools we chip away at the system until it transforms to accommodate us (and not the other way round!), or until there is nothing left of it to oppress us with.

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Photograph from the work of Aida Muluneh, titled 'For All They Care' (2016) [Copyright Aida Muluneh Photograph: Aida Muluneh].

Endnotes

[1] While white, male Eurocentric academia is the normative, it has been observed through global feminist movements that white women are likely to lean towards racial solidarity over other categories (however implicit). This is also emphasized by the fact that categories of gender are racially produced, as is discussed in our second segment.

[2] Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, 'Neoliberalizing Space' (2002) Antipode 380, 380.

[3] Genevieve LeBaron and Adrienne Roberts, 'Toward a Feminist Political Economy of Capitalism and Carcerality' (2010) 36(1) Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 19, 24.

[4] Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell (n 2) 385/386.

[5] Wendy Brown, 'Neoliberalism and the end of liberal democracy' in Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton University Press 2003), 39/40.

[6] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press 2005), 2.

[7] She further exemplifies this by referring to examples such as Cheryl Sandberg's book as well as philosophy 'Lean In'. Catherine Rottenberg, 'The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism' (2014) Cultural Studies, 420.

[8] Cheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (Alfred A Knopf 2013).

[9] 'Women's Global Development and Prosperity' (*whitehouse.gov*) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wgdp/> accessed 10 January 2021.

[10] *See for example* Lynne Huffer, 'It's the economy, sister' (*Al Jazeera*, 18 March 2013), <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/03/20133188564497784 8.html> accessed 03 April 2019; Julia Zillah Eisenstein, '"Leaning in" in Iraq: Women's rights and war?' (*Al Jazeera*, 23 March 2013), http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/03/20133231411495573 91.html> accessed 03 April 2019; Jodi Kantor, 'A Titan's How-To on Breaking the Glass Ceiling' (*The New York Times*, 21 February 2013), <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/22/us/sheryl-sandberg-lean-in-author-hopes-to-spur-movement.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0> accessed 03 April 2019.

[11] Zeena Feldman and Marisol Sandoval, 'Metric Power and the Academic Self: Neoliberalism, Knowledge and Resistance in the British University' (2018) 16 tripleC 214, 218.

[12] Thomas Brorsen Smidt and others, 'Expanding Gendered Sites of Resistance in the Neoliberal Academy' (2020) 10 European Journal of Higher Education 115, 116.

[13] Hester Baer, 'Redoing Feminism within and Outside the Neoliberal Academy' (2014) 30 Women in German Yearbook 197, 201.

[14] Rosalind Gill, 'Breaking the Silence: The Hidden Injuries of Neo-Liberal Academia' in Róisín Flood and Rosalind Gill (eds), *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections* (Routledge 2009) 243.

[15] Feldman and Sandoval (n 11) 215.

[16] Mary Heath and Peter Burden, 'Academic Resistance to the Neoliberal University' 23 Legal Education Review 379, 381.

[17] Not every feminist space exhibits these values. Particularly, predominantly white feminist circles (or those predominantly run by white women) struggle with addressing their own unequal power dynamics.

[18] See for example Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Transnational Feminist Crossings: On Neoliberalism and Radical Critique' (2013) 38 Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society 971; Gill (n 14); Alison Mountz and others, 'For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University' (2015) 14 ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies 1235; Brorsen Smidt and others (n 12).

[19] The Research Excellence Framework is the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. It ranks higher education institutions in accordance with their academics' output and impact of such.

[20] Hortense J. Spillers, 'Mama's baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', (1987) Diacritics, 64-81.

[21] Ibid 72.

[22] Ibid 73.

[23] Saidya Hartmann, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors", Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society, 2016, 166-173.

[24] Sylvia Wynter, 'PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter – Greg Thomas' (2006)

[25] Oyèrónkè Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[26] Ibid xii., 10.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid 36.

[29] By 'us' here, we refer to women, particularly feminists.

[30] Here, we refer to both the gendered public and private as well as the neo-liberal public and private. See generally, Thornton, Margaret. "The Public/Private Dichotomy: Gendered and Discriminatory" (1991) *Journal of Law and Society*, 448–463; A.E. Davis, *Public/Private Divide. In: The Evolution of the Property Relation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[31] This not only makes solitude desirable for an idea of success, but it completely obliterates the relational value of community for such forms of solitude.

[32] Much like Eurocentric international law's claim to universality. See generally the body of scholarship known as Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL).

[33]I (Rohini) have unpacked this in my work here which also contains references that discuss this personification:https://www.afronomicslaw.org/2020/09/24/teaching-international-law-in-asia-the-predicated-pedagogue?page=1

[34] Eve Sedgewick, Reparative Reading is a good place to start this conversation.

[35] Kaplan, Temma. "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918." (1982) *Signs*, 545–566.

[36] History is not linear, and this account is simply to clarify the characteristics and scope of organisational challenges to oppressive structures.

[37] See generally, Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990* (1997); Brenda Cossma and Ratna Kapur, *Subversive Sites: Feminist Engagement with Law in India* (SAGE, 1996); Sarah Crook "The women's liberation movement, activism and therapy at the grassroots, 1968–1985", (2018) Women's History Review, 1152-1168.

[38] Including ruptures on what the movement should be framed around – example, gender as a colonial category.

[39] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Echo", in *The Spivak Reader*, Donna Landry & Gerald Maclean eds. (Routledge, 1996) 190; Margaret Davies, "Ethics and Methodology in Legal Theory: A (Personal) Research Anti-Manifesto", (2002) Law, Text, Culture 7, 9.

[40] Debolina Dutta, "Another story of the Open Letter: an inheritance of relationship-making", (2018) Jindal Global Law Review, 181–201.

[41] Typical outputs recognized by universities are based on ranking parameters and are usually along the lines of publications, teaching hours, awards, grants etc.

[42] Feminist honesty, like any other way of life, is open to all so, I'll skip the redundant caveats on performing gender.

[43] While this work does not speak of 'extra-institutional' labour in that sense, much of it is premised on a certain form of academic fatigue that alludes to this. But more than that, it is a brilliant resource that one must read Pereira, Maria do Mar, "'You Can Feel the Exhaustion in the Air Around You': The Mood of Contemporary Universities and its Impact on Feminist Scholarship" (http://www.scielo.mec.pt/pdf/aeq/n39/n39a12.pdf) (2019) *ex aequo*, 171-186.

[44] Here I focus particularly on people of colour and women of colour.

[45] Dutta (n 40) 4.

[46] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/what-to-listen-to/cancel-culture-did-begin/ (https://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/what-to-listen-to/cancel-culture-did-begin/) (accessed 8 Feb. 2021).

[47] Structural collapse, diffusion and overhaul are always ongoing, mundane processes as opposed to single moments/events of massive transitions.

[48] B. Poggio, "Gender Politics in Academia in the Neoliberal Age" (2018).